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punctum books earth, milky way

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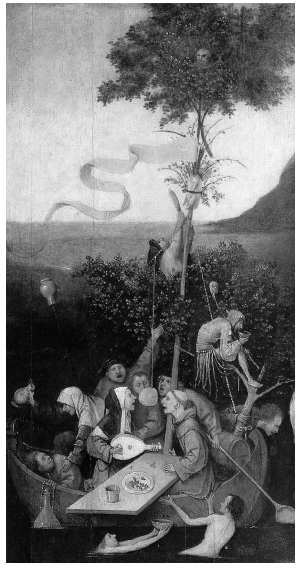

Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490-1500)

This book is dedicated to the memory of Mika Šušnjar,
Milka Vinčić, Nikola Vinčić, and Stoja Žabić.

Acknowledgments

The following pieces, as they are in this book or in different versions, have appeared in these publications:

"Meet Satan" in *Copper Nickel* 9 (2008) and reprinted in *COIN* 1 (2011)

"My Dad's Lens, Borovo Naselje, 2004" in *Little Red Leaves* 2 (2008)

"Neo AFŽ: Revolution without Premeditation" in *Feminist Review* 99 (2011)

"Factory Girls" (excerpt of "*Neo AFŽ*: Revolution without Premeditation") in *Neo AFŽ* 1 (2001)

"revolution without premeditation" and "the amount of serious love-sickness" (excerpts in "*Neo AFŽ*: Revolution without Premeditation") in the book *Po(jest)zija/Po(eat)ry* by Ivana Percl and Snežana Žabić (SKC NS, Novi Sad, 2013)

"Failing Haibun" in *Wreckage of Reason II: Back to the Drawing Board* (Spuyten Duyvil Press, 2014)

"Why Wichita" (excerpt of "Failing Haibun") in *Marco Polo Arts Magazine* (2012)

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Withering

Recently on the phone, my mom proclaimed she was still a Communist.

"I ran into our old neighbor, MM. Remember her?" she said.

"Vaguely," I told mom. It's been over twenty years since I'd seen this particular neighbor; she moved with her family to a different part of town even before wars broke out.

"Well, anyway," mom continued. "MM and I talked for a while, and she had this white blouse on and a kilo of golden necklaces, but no bra. That's in poor taste. I still believe in the old 'From everyone according to their abilities, to everyone according to their needs.' She needs a bra."

Yugoslavia ended in 1991 with the secession of first Slovenia, and then Croatia, followed by the Serbian retaliation and its attempt at conquest. While the Yugoslav Army warred with the newly seceded Slovenia for only ten days, during the somewhat unimaginatively named Ten Day War, the war between Croatia and Serbia lasted from 1991 to 1995. Croatia and Serbia were also involved in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995, when NATO intervened. Meanwhile Kosovo was percolating, and the war erupted there in 1998 and lasted—NATO intervened there too—until June of 1999. Fast forward to 2008, and Kosovo is the last one to become an independent state. Now

there are seven states in place of Yugoslavia: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Macedonia.

But what happened right before the break-up? Before the break-up, the Yugoslav state was in the process of withering away.

What a poetic term: withering away. Yet it's an actual term Marxists use to describe the second phase that happens en route to communism. In the first phase, right after the revolution, the state takes on mighty, mighty strength to nationalize most important branches of industry previously held in private hands, (finance, transportation, manufacture of producer's goods, agriculture) as well as to squelch any dissent. There you have it, the first phase, a.k.a. the dictatorship of the proletariat, Yugoslavia 1945-1974—check. Then comes a time to ease up on the state control, and to oversee a gradual, but determined withering away of the state. The second phase, a.k.a. worker's self-management, Yugoslavia 1974-1990—check. The third phase marks the time when the new society emerges: there is no state, no remnants of old class divisions, nobody owns or lacks anything, there's no currency, no hierarchies. The third phase, a.k.a. communism, a.k.a. "from everyone according to their abilities, to everyone according to their needs," a.k.a. never happened in Yugoslavia or any other nation state.

We spent Yugoslavia's final years in an economic crisis, learning about our growing external debt, experiencing gas and other shortages, dissent coming from all sides, but especially from the well-funded and seductive ethnic nationalist ideologies. Some say the withering away project was so successful that the state became too weak to fight nationalism and prevent the break-up and the war.

Around 1987, when I was just thirteen, some strange new graffiti began appearing in my hometown of Vukovar, declaring pride in murkier, ancient parts in the history of the graffiti hacks' ethnic groups. Those strange retrograde symbols soon covered up the older kids' hippie peace signs and punk anarchy signs already

fading on the façades. Still, it was also a couple of years before the local police began looking like robocops, before the kiosks of two competing state-owned newspaper companies were blown up down the street from me, before the façades turned ugly with the explicit graffiti like: "Croatia to Croats!" Or the one on the post office: "This is Serbia," under which someone sprayed: "This is the post office, moron!"

During peacetime, my teenage years had been unfolding just as they were supposed to, a textbook case of a slightly mal-adjusted, self-conscious, budding semi-nonconformist. On weekend evenings I'd go to Mala Sala where a DJ was spinning the Eurodisco Top-40 music I refused to dance to. My brown hair was big and spiky, I often wore washed-out jeans and an over-sized striped sweater on my then-100-pound shadow of a frame, and equally oversized red-rimmed glasses. About 98% of the teens at the time wore jeans paired with jean jackets. I look at a picture of a group of kids circa 1988, standing on an Adriatic beach one sunny, early spring day, and the jean-clad bodies are blending with the blue backdrop to the point of vanishing.

I was a pretty good kid. I would cut class every once in a while, but it was usually in order to practice or perform with the local poetry club, which equaled automatically excused absences. With my teenagehood came a bit of a chill between my parents and me: mom, dad, and I were learning the fragility of trust. Their faces wore a film of worry. I know now it was the 22-billion-dinar debt and the 200% inflation; it was the decreases in the production at the factory, and the missing bonuses, and the threat of bankruptcy and joblessness already happening in other companies; it was politicians spinning their spider web speeches to disgruntled workers and farmers; it was the TV saying more lies; it was my dad's traveling for work; it was my mom's quiet. But at the time, when I read worry in their eyes and in the new lines on their faces, I read my name over and over again.

I was as dramatic a teenager as they come, and I remember walking with a few of my high school friends across the tracks to go catch the bus to school, the time I said out loud that I wasn't even certain there would be a city here in the near future. I was talking about the boredom I was feeling, as I was acquiring quite a record collection (mostly through mail-order), but almost no bands I liked ever played in Vukovar. I could say now that, at

that tender age, I understood the Yugoslav crisis and what that crisis had to do with economic policies world-wide, and how it would all result in madness and in Vukovar being bombed to dust, but that would be bullshit: in my teenage melodrama and self-centeredness, it was simply the provincial outlook of my hometown spelling no less than doom.

I wasn't the only one feeling this way. In 1990, my brother's band recorded a parody of "Tonight Belgrade is Burning" by an underground rock band called Grč (Cramp; not to be confused with the US band The Cramps). My brother's band called their parody "Tonight Vukovar Is Burning," and the inspiration came from the monotony of our hometown's entertainment selection. The song opens with the simplest of pre-programmed synthesizer beats. Cue a phone call: my brother calls his friend Saša, they talk about their plans for the night, complaining about the lack of options. In the background, Saša's family is arguing while washing out bottles for home-made tomato juice bubbling in large pots, I imagine, on the stove set to medium fire. Next, with a simple synthesizer beat as the only accompaniment, the vocalist chants:

Noćas se Vukovar pali	Tonight Vukovar is burning
Ponoćni mračni grad	That midnight dark city
Preko rijeke bujica smrti	Across the river a deluge of death
Noćas se vratovi režu	Tonight throats are slashed
Iako nema svjetla	Although there's no light
U ovom gradu sahranjen ležim	In this town I lie buried
Ribe plaču na dnu Vuke	Fish cry on the bottom of the Vuka
Mašine posustaju	Machines grow weary
Magla pada	Fog falls
Iz pepla u pepeo	Ashes to ashes

Vukovar!
Vukovar!

Next, a smattering of sampled bits of songs by The Ramones ("I Don't Wanna Be Buried"), Satan Panonski (wailing menacingly "The messenger will come"), Mano Negra ("The beat-beat-beat of the song-song"), Zabranjeno Pušenje ("I didn't know so

many mice gathered here"), Nick Cave (crooning "Foi na cruz"), Let 3 ("Mother, I'm a sheriff in New York"), and a distorted voice of the biggest 1970s singing sensation of Yugoslavia, Zdravko Čolić, "I will go to the forest!"

When I wasn't hanging out with friends, most of us trying our hand in various arts out of pure teenage boredom, I was filling my free time with endless walks, exploring the town as if to make sure there was indeed nothing interesting happening on its tranquil streets. (The tranquility was deceptive, I know, I know now.) I'd start my walks at the broad, white-and-green three-story apartment building on the main street where I lived with my parents and my brother. I'd walk down the smooth, concrete street between the birch-tree-filled Tito's Park and the row of stores, and across the intersection highlighted by two newspaper kiosks. I'd turn right and walk to the flat box of the movie theater, passing a Legoland of red brick buildings from the 1930s, each surrounded by miniature gardens, and on the other side I'd pass the park with the local high school nested behind it. And yes, there would be the chauvinistic graffiti: ignorant peasants, I thought, while I was so superior and untouchable, with my superb selection of music in my Walkman. From our building to the movie theater: five minutes or The Pixies' "Bone Machine" and "Break My Body." The music blocked the noise (mundane, I thought foolishly) of the little city and filled my ears with guitars, drums, and vocals screaming-singing words of which I understood no more than forty percent and thus naturally assumed were profound and beautiful. From the movie theater to the tennis courts—"Something Against You" and "Broken Face." From the tennis courts to the railroad—less than a hundred steps. Up the gravel, ("gigantic!") I'd skip over the tracks ("gigantic!"), down the gravel ("a big big love"), turn left, walk to the Workers Club ("a big big love"), and see the Danube, bending slightly, rolling in its broad bed, just the water and the sky, no more city. Across the broad, bending river I'd detect either a sandy beach, or willows knee-deep in the water and mud, depending on the water level. There's never been a bridge.

Much of my Vukovar high school experience took place in the interlude between the time when the Berlin Wall fell and the

time when the new walls between ex-Yugoslavs arose. Remember that interlude? Operation Desert Storm happened? In January 1991, Sean Ono Lennon and Lenny Kravitz scrambled together a bunch of pop stars to re-record "Give Peace a Chance" Band-Aid-style to protest the first onslaught of bombs over Baghdad. The video rotated daily on TV in Yugoslavia for months, even after the US soldiers came home after the Desert Storm debacle, and after, in May 1991, the war had begun in our region. It was May 2 when paramilitary troops in Borovo Selo, a village next door to my neighborhood, clashed with the police, people died, and after that the conflict began feeling more and more like war, even though war was never declared. Just a few days later, I was at school, and one classmate said we should start singing "Give Peace a Chance." So people started chanting, and at some point, I began doing a bad impression of Lenny Kravitz's soul vocal styling, which made my classmates laugh.

I was a bit of a class clown, which didn't come naturally to me. I think this role for me was established one day about two years before the "Give Peace a Chance" performance. It was still nominally socialism, and we were sitting in a classroom, waiting for our Defense and Protection teacher to show up. Defense and Protection was a socialist Yugoslav school subject that was supposed to prepare us school kids for the defense of the country should either the Soviet Union or the United States attack; Yugoslavia was non-aligned during the Cold War, and belonged neither to NATO nor the Warsaw Pact, so who else would guard the motherland if not us teenagers. In any case, we were waiting for the teacher to show up, and then someone brought up ethnic identity, as a conversation piece, to kill time. One by one, my classmates self-identified, flashed their metaphoric ethnic membership cards, some with proud bravado, some with solemn dignity, and some with shrugging shoulders. My turn came and my story went (I paraphrase):

> Back in the thirteenth century, a Saxon man came to Bosnia to work in silver mines. He was very adventurous. Once he got bored with mining the ore, he sailed with the Vikings across the Atlantic. Having reached what's today America, he fell in love with a Native American woman. They had children. The man was however homesick for

> Europe, and thinking about the money he could make in the silver mines there, so he and his family went back to Bosnia. They are my ancestors. I am part Saxon, part Viking, part Bosnian, part Native American—thus the nose.

I removed my glasses dramatically and showed everyone I had the same nose that the Indians in American westerns had; I guess none of us had heard at the time that Italians and other Mediterranean types played "Indians" in the movies.

My classmates listened with rapt attention, and it took me a few seconds to realize that they had taken me seriously. I had to stop and say I was deadpanning them, and then laughter tore the suspense into pieces, and I earned my reputation as a hoot of a girl.

Where we lived, no ethnic group had discernibly different-sounding names (not from kids' perspective at least), or different accents, mannerisms, food, coloring, or even different customs and holidays, with so few people practicing religion. The generation of those born in the early '70s, at least in my city, grew up conceiving of ethnicity in geographic terms: I was, just like my parents, from the Republic of Croatia, a part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, and therefore I was Croatian and Yugoslav. My maternal grandparents were the same, and my paternal grandparents were Bosnian and Yugoslav, since Bosnia-Herzegovina is where they grew up. But when I got down to the details, I found out that my maternal grandparents were actually Croatian Serbs; that my other grandma was a Bosnian Serb, and that my other grandpa was a Bosnian Croat, which made me one-half Croatian Serb, one-quarter Bosnian Serb, and one-quarter Bosnian Croat. This litany of ethnicities, I felt, made me simply a walking Monty Python joke.

Now that I am in the second half of my thirties, and time passes by faster than it used to, it's hard to comprehend the speed with which things deteriorated in Yugoslavia more than two decades ago. I had first heard about soccer fans my age or a little older getting into fistfights over their ethnic identity back in 1987.

Then I heard of scarier, older hooligans brandishing chains and torches, targeting regular guys of a different ethnicity. I brushed those off as isolated incidents. "How do you declare ethnically?" was an increasingly frequent and grave question, and I'd say "I'm undeclared," and I continued to rapidly replace my old posters of Madonna and Wham with the new ones of The Pixies and The Fall. I began carrying around poetry books and plays, short story collections and anthologies, and especially all kinds of novels, like my favorite Kurt Vonnegut, so I can read them during class time, on the bus, at grandma Milka's and grandma Stoja's apartments, everywhere. I went to see Beatrice Dalle going insane in *Betty Blue* every night the movie played in our local theater, finding the movie so romantic, and not disturbing at all. On warm evenings I'd meet my friends by the first streetlamp on the west end of the promenade, and I'd stand there with them beneath the milky glass ball of the lamp, my sneakers firmly on the concrete smoothed out by millions of other rubber, leather, and wood soles and heels. The promenade was like real-life reality TV before there was reality TV: you'd see couples fighting or making out, or both; sometimes a celebrity passing through the town taking in local color or being carried to a car wasted; questionable or admirable fashion choices paraded; all on one channel, or rather, you were on the show as you were watching it.

In winter, my friends would come over and we'd hang out in my room, within earshot of my parents. Every time we got together, dad would peek in at some point and send us all to the basement so we could bring wood up to the kitchen, where the furnace was. We'd complain all the six flights of stairs down. Each of us would grab a three-pack of sawdust briquettes in their plastic wrappers, a pack under each arm, and then up the stairs. The more athletic boys would try to carry as many three-packs as possible in a pile in their arms, and our dad would admire their strength to manipulate them to go back and get more.

That same basement was where I was supposed to hide with my brother and my parents one night in the summer of 1991 when the Serbian artillery surrounding the city decided to aim for the

residential area, in one of the first orgies of naked military power in the arms of men unanswerable to anyone but themselves.

That night, we had gone to bed having firmly shut, as always, our double-paned windows and wood blinds. My brother and I played music on our stereo as loud as possible, and for once our parents did not tell us to turn the volume down. Bands like Hüsker Dü and The Minutemen, with their perfect combination of noise, melody, and rhythm, had the best sound to muffle the war intensifying outside. But as the explosions in the night overpowered the guitars and drums pouring from the speakers, and no sleep came, my parents got me and my brother out of our beds and told us to sit on the floor with them in the hallway. The narrow hallway ran down the middle of our top floor place that had sets of large windows plus a balcony on each of the apartment's side lengthwise. My parents considered going to the basement, which was half-way below the ground, and it too had windows, but in the end they decided the apartment's hallway was safer. What did they know about surviving artillery attacks? Defense and Protection didn't cover that topic. We sat on the floor during all the hours, minutes, and seconds of that midsummer attack.

Even before the dawn, the attack was over, and we heard that one shell had hit a building close to ours. While my brother and I were catching up on our sleep, dad went out and got for us kids some newly established passes that would allow us to get the fuck out of dodge. Dad had to convince the man who was in charge of deciding who can leave, that we were too young, unable to defend the city. I was seventeen and a girl, so that wasn't a problem, but my brother was eighteen, so who knows what would have happened to him had the official not been a childhood buddy of my dad's.

By late August 1991, I was in a small town of Vrbas, Vojvodina, in the one-bedroom apartment of strangers who took me in as a refugee. My hosts were a late-middle-aged married couple with no kids. The deal was that I would help them with their chores in exchange for sleeping on their couch and being fed. But the

woman—what was her name?—felt sorry for me, and she liked me, so she let me listen to my walkman, read, and write all day. Each day, while the husband was at work or watching TV in the living room, the wife was cooking, cleaning, or also watching TV, and I stayed in their crisp, neat, sunny bedroom by myself. As I listened to Tom Waits on my walkman, I drew, and wrote poems and short stories about outsiders who lived in dingy parts of large cities unknown to me.

At that time, my parents were still in Vukovar, trying to hold on to their jobs, still hoping the war would end by fall. Later, I heard a story about what it was like for my dad alone in an urban-planning office where he, a construction foreman, was employed. There was no construction going on, and all the architects were on vacation or had fled the city. So he sat and chain-smoked by himself. One day, an armed paramilitary guy came in. He ordered my dad:

"Stand up against the wall. Stand the fuck up!"

The man didn't pull the trigger, but pointed his gun at my dad's head, asked some inane questions, and finally left without harming him, without stealing anything. This scenario happened to a friend of my dad's and a friend of mine later that year, in the fall, except in those two instances the murderers pulled the triggers.

At that time, mom was one of the last two in the import-export office where she worked as a secretary. Her boss was still there too, but that's it, everyone else was out of town. The boss urged her to go on vacation, to leave the city, told her that it was too dangerous for her to stay. The streets were now completely empty but for armored Croatian police and army vehicles, and the city was almost completely enclosed by Yugoslav Army and Serbian paramilitary troops, their barricades, tanks, and artillery. Many of those who stayed, who had never dreamed of arming themselves, were volunteering to defend the city, but my parents didn't know whom to defend from what, except their family and themselves from the incomprehensible and multifaceted War. For my parents, it came down to either getting out too and joining me and my brother as refugees in Serbia, or staying and hiding in the basement, waiting for peace and hoping not to get hit by a bomb, or worse. I guess there was another option, the one a sixteen-year-old friend of mine picked: he refused to be called a

refugee and decided he was "an intellectual in exile."

One night, my parents hid in the hallway, with artillery hitting random targets all around our apartment building, but sparing them. The next day, they secured the exit passes from the same guy who issued the passes for my brother and me and again he didn't ask too many questions. My parents then drove away, but not before paying all the bills that were due: rent, electricity, water and sanitation. Soon after we all got together in Belgrade early in September of 1991, I began to understand that anyone who had money in their savings accounts, including my French class that had deposited some hard currency to a savings account meant for our trip to France, were denied access to any of that money as banks collapsed, and both the new states and the new owners (private this time) claimed no responsibility to those old accounts. Now, that's broke. As for my parents, they didn't owe any money, but they didn't lose their savings either, since they didn't own any savings in any account. And I still live like that, debt-free and savings-less, which just shows how financial habits get instilled as deep as any other.

We were the lucky ones, "in exile," but unharmed, all reunited in Belgrade, just one of thousands of refugee families in the capital of disintegrating Yugoslavia. Mom and dad cashed the last checks they could, and we rented a tiny, smelly, unfurnished house in the outskirts on the city, on the wrong side of the bridge over the Danube. Instead of a paved street leading from the main road to our new abode, there was dirt. There was a dog howling and barking in a backyard every day I walked to the bus and back, a dog I would never see, belonging to a neighbor I would never meet. Another neighbor played "Enter Sandman" by Metallica over and over.

War raged, and politicians on TV hustled "democracy" like another cheap commodity. "Democracy" meant, in brief, that we all got what the 51% wanted, no matter how horrible their choice was, no matter how far it was from John Lennon's "Imagine," which to me was the only acceptable party platform. But John Lennon was dead and wasn't running for office anyway, and I was too young to vote. It was 1991. It was time for the good old-fashioned dictatorship of militarist autocrats in cahoots with the organized crime, which had also profited from the death of the former state that had withered away like a consumptive romantic

poet. It was time for Vukovar (but other cities in select parts of Croatia as well) to all but perish under the Yugoslav Army bombs, and for the town's inhabitants trapped in the siege to go insane in the midst of atrocities committed by all sides of the conflict. For me and my family, it was time to adapt to the state of refugeehood.

I still had the walkman, and a shoebox of tapes, as a start. That first year of the Balkan wars, I'd be the lucky one, the one who escaped. I'd go to theaters and clubs for cheap or free, ride public transportation anywhere I needed to, and even take trains out of Belgrade to the bucolic mountains for free with my refugee ID. The second year of the Balkan wars, I'd still be the lucky one: I'd pass the exam and enroll in Belgrade university, major in Czech Studies. I'd dream during the rest of the Balkan war years of escaping the suffocating city of my refuge—suffocating under Milošević and in turn smothering me. And I'd move to Prague, but not before 1999. Once there, I'd only want to move across the Atlantic, but that wouldn't happen until 2002. Once in the small-town American South, I'd only want to move to Chicago. Once in Chicago, I'll only want to stop wandering.

Memories of [State]

☞ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6463761.stm

As part of our series on [State]'s future, we asked for their memories of life there before and after the 199_ war. Here we publish some of their accounts.

> *Note:* These are not native speakers of English (though now they have settled in English-speaking states around the world), and this language was not widely used in either [State] or [Former State] before [State's] independence. Their language proficiency varies, and therefore in some cases we corrected spelling and punctuation and occasionally syntax for the sake of clarity. If you would like to submit your own memories, please fill out the form below.

Name:
E-mail:
Phone Number:
Town and Country:

Comments:

Memory of [State] # 1

Comments:

When I was growing up, I had a [Different Ethnic Group] neighbor with whom I shared a similar taste in music; we came to know each other by reading each other's backpacks which contained printed names of different rock bands. We became friends through music and we used to share albums of U2 and learn the lyrics together. But all this ended in the late 1990s.

Meet Satan

Satan Panonski's show in Vinkovci, Croatia, April 1989, imagined.

Satan groans in his rudimentary English: *Dis is not a-punk, dis is not-a rock, dis-is-dis-is-dis-is-dis-is hard blood shock.* He wears black eyeliner. He has burned his eyebrows so many times already that there are no hairs left, just the black-penciled lines. He is the protagonist of an underground comic book, and he's come alive after eight years in a mental institution. He's filled out, and his hairline is receding.

Everyone's make-up is melting. The condensation of sweat and beer is dripping from the low ceiling, de-baptizing the crowd of maladjusted angels, intermediaries between the underworld and earth.

Satan starts wailing about a child who is crying behind a wall, and his two-piece band eases into a middle-eastern rhythm vaguely reminiscent of the town's Ottoman past. The drummer's T-shirt is drenched. His sweat trickles onto the drum kit, and as the sticks hit the snare drum, tiny drops spray the cymbal. The gaunt bass player gazes ahead as if trying to look through the basement windows painted black. Outside, street lamps are swarming with unseasonable snowflakes melting as soon as they touch the ground.

Satan takes a knife out of his back pocket and slashes his naked, scarred torso covered with DIY tattoos. Blood runs down his belly. Everyone is beyond the threshold of pain.

My walkman route. Vukovar, Croatia, April 1989.

A stray dog walks around the monument depicting wounded World War Two partisans. The main square is wet and there are too many unusual smells leading in the wrong direction.

I walk across the bridge over the Vuka river swollen with rain. I hurry up to the bus stop. I can hear the bus pulling up, and I should run, but I don't feel like it. The driver waits; he recognizes me from my daily rides to and from school with the pack of my classmates. He likes us even though we're too loud and laugh all the time. He lets me on. He asks me something as I show him my bus pass, but I can't hear, so I just smile and nod. The driver smirks and dismisses me with a wave of his hand.

In my headphones, Tom Waits croons about a girl from Johnsburg, Illinois, about "a world going on underground," about soldier's things. We pass the museum, the hospital, and the Danube harbor warehouses. I get off at the stop near the construction site of the future power station. It's three or four stops before my neighborhood, but the sun is shining again, and I feel like walking along the railroad. I put another tape in my walkman: Hüsker Dü, Sonic Youth, the Minutemen, a more suitable soundtrack for this industrial setting.

My sleeve brushes against the tall wire fence between the railroad and the factory. But this complex is anything but an industrial wasteland; it was designed as a Bauhaus-inspired experiment, the buildings are red brick cubes with white trimmings, harmonizing with the greenery planted everywhere. I can even glimpse the Danube regally flowing in the background. Everything is so quaint, it makes me want to scream.

My neighborhood opens up like a fan and spills from here to the west and to the south. Vinkovci is just seven miles down a narrow road surrounded by sunflower fields.

Twins of Pannonia, late 1980s.

This is how I imagine a promotional campaign for the cultural offerings of the towns of Vukovar and Vinkovci, Croatia. In the nearby chocolate factory, two tons of delicious candy are produced. Special candy boxes are designed and assembled as well. A portrait of the self-mutilated Ivica Čuljak, a.k.a. Catcher

II, a.k.a. Satan Panonski, adorns the candy box design that represents Vinkovci. For the candy box representing Vukovar they might as well choose my baffled fifteen-year-old face.

In other words, Vukovar, my hometown, doesn't have much to offer. Vinkovci at least has the drugs and the gritty garage punk rock, numerous bands, mostly short-lived, mostly pretty bad. But sometimes those acts are so bad, they are good. Like Satan Panonski, Satan of Pannonia. If Vukovar and Vinkovci are twin towns, Vinkovci is the evil one.

Vinkovci was transformed from a village to a town only two hundred years ago, when the Hapsburgs built the railroad to that far eastern part of their Empire. A hundred years ago, the Orient Express was marooned in a snow drift near Vinkovci, closer to Istanbul than to Paris, and a murder took place—that is, in the novel by Agatha Christie.

At least Vinkovci has some tangible presence in the world's imagination. Vukovar is the birthplace of a forgotten Nobel Prize winner Lavoslav Ružička, who was lauded in 1939 for his pioneer research on sex hormones. But Lavoslav left town when he was four. Before Lavoslav won his prize, the second congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party took place in 1920 in Vukovar, the last congress before the party was outlawed and its members went underground. And a few millennia before the Second Congress, the center of a large bronze era culture was near today's Vukovar. We know that because of all the settlements, pots, tools, and weapons excavated in the last few decades. Other than that, not much has been going on.

As a child, I planned to become a scientist, an underground revolutionary or an archeologist. I was an 'A' student and an exemplary Tito's pioneer. When we recited the pledge in first grade, I repeated "I shall be a loyal and honest friend" and meant it. In the picture taken at the time, I look serious and authentic with my white shirt, navy blue skirt, my red scarf and my cap with the red star. For a long time, I showed promise. But now in high school, the only promise I'm showing is that of getting adjusted very poorly.

Ivica Čuljak also showed promise when he was growing up back in the 60s and early 70s. An A student, an exemplary Tito's pioneer, plus maybe an altar boy. Something snapped in him when he was seventeen. I don't know what happened, but it must

have been bad because he spent three whole days and nights in an institution. After that, he began dressing as a "punk specter," as he liked to put it, and he started fronting a band called Pogreb X (Funeral X). It wasn't until he was already twenty-one that he killed a man.

Satan's rise to cult status. My multimedia projects, 1988-1990.

Satan is freed, after eight years of serving time in a mental institution, and he begins recording and performing punk rock interpretations of his poems, touring all over former Yugoslavia. In Belgrade, an independent press publishes his poetry collection. In Zagreb, an independent label puts out his cassette tapes and an LP. In Sarajevo, his "hits" are in pretty heavy rotation on the popular Omladinski Radio. His breakthrough is a song about "handsome Mario" or "lepi Mario" who contracted syphilis by nibbling on a clitoris.

Satan plays in small venues where you can see him, up close and personal, wailing his lyrics, from hard core gay erotica to humorous to apocalyptic, while cutting his face, arms, and chest with various sharp objects, or else plunging himself onto the ground, headfirst. The drummer and the bass player, often strung-out or drunk, play with blank faces, and the audience cheers the band on or stands in shock. Punks and young intellectuals go to his shows, and I know only one kid like me who has gone once.

Meanwhile, I'm reaching the peak of my own artsy pretension. I was in the hospital due to the oral herpes I contracted while I was eating my lunch in unhygienic conditions in the cornfields. All the high school students have to work once a year in the cornfields. It is called "praksa" or "practice," a part of the Marxist upbringing I guess—it's great, a week off from boring classes, plus you can slack off in the fields as much as you want. Anyway, in the hospital, while recuperating from my herpes, I come up with the plan for a performance: my friends and me, reciting excerpts from "On the Road," intertwined with the lyrics by Joy Division, Television, Jimi Hendrix, and Jim Morrison. Yes, it is that random. I also plan to include performances of local bands. It's really a collage of text with the title: "Flying with Dean Moriarty." After getting out of the hospital, I assemble my

ensemble and begin rehearsing.

But to my astonishment, no one learns their lines, and the "rehearsals" always turn into parties. We are total amateurs, and I am no leader.

Satan is an amateur, too. But he is an outlaw. When he was twenty-one, in 1981, Ivica went out with his brother, wearing a leather jacket with Sex Pistols buttons, jeans that were blood-circulation-stopping-tight around the calves, spiky hair, DIY tattoos, make-up, and glittery scarves. Somewhere out there in the mean streets of Vinkovci, some thug assaulted Satan's brother and Satan grabbed the knife he had on him and stabbed the man dead. Just hours before that, Satan had been cutting his own torso with the same knife while on stage with Funeral X.

One time, Satan and I bumped into each other—on the radio waves.

How did that meeting happen? My brother has this DIY "band" that makes cassette tapes with "songs" that showcase very little musical talent, but plenty of tongue-in-cheek humor and an utter disrespect for the little thing called copyrights. Here's how my brother created one of his "hits." He taped the first rehearsal of my "Flying with Dean Moriarty," edited it into a 3-minute spiel featuring mostly my voice, interspersed with the voices of my "actors," and simply pasted that over the Art of Noise version of the Peter Gunn theme. He titled the piece "Flying with Peter Gunn." Along with other song-like compositions of various appropriated materials, my brother sent this track to Omladinski Radio Sarajevo, to a show called Radio Fanzine, a show dedicated to "nebulous" music and Pythonesque comedy. To our surprise and delight, Radio Fanzine actually played a few tracks! What's more, they used "Flying with Peter Gunn" as the background to their interview with Satan Panonski.

Despite his elaborate "hard-blood-shock" stage persona and his criminal past, there is something naïve, almost tender, about Satan's reflections on life and art. He is insane, of course. But he says things like: "I'm a friend by profession and I declare ethnically as a punk rocker," and, "My grandma taught me how to tear out weeds in my potato field with absolute perfection." He comes off as respectful of the journalist who interviews him, and you don't get the feeling that he is boasting even when he talks about his art; it's neither boasting nor feigned humility, he just seems

at peace with it all. He talks about how much effort and dedication he dispenses in whatever he does: songwriting, poetry, performance, fashion, gardening. He has the energy and focus of a toreador.

How did I feel when I heard Satan talking over the background of my voice? I was happy with the way our voices complemented each other. Also, I was proud of my brother. I'm not envious that he had his "project" featured in a cult radio show, while "Flying with Dean Moriarty" remained in the early stage, immortalized on his tape and never fully realized, due to the utter lack of motivation on the part of my friends, some of whom are focused more on obtaining an occasional joint to smoke or a pill to pop, which is, granted, not the easiest task in our little city with a well-organized network of parents, where if you run away from home, they find you the same afternoon. As for my more sober friends, they probably know on some level that my ideas for performances are not workable. Me? I am too busy planning my new endeavor.

I watched Miloš Forman's movie *Hair* about one hundred times, and then wrote my own version of the musical in Serbo-Croatian, with the same plot taking place in New York during the Vietnam War, but *without* singing and dancing. I am particularly pleased with the last scene: when we stage it at the end of the school year, a hundred of my schoolmates in army uniforms will enter the theater from the street, march to the stage and disappear behind a black screen. I can't wait.

The war, 1991-1992.

So Satan does what most men in his family do, what most of his friends do: he enlists in the Croatian army. He is driven by the same instinct that awoke in him in 1981 when he killed that man: he wants to protect his family. Some of my friends enlist too—on the Croatian or the Serbian side, with the same family-protecting logic. So now they are shooting at each other and each other's families, imprisoning and torturing each other and each other's family members, certain that the other side has started it all.

Other men are drafted. Some, like my brother and my dad, refuse to fight on either side, deciding that the only sane defense strategy is to keep away from any army.

What would the enemy soldiers do to Satan if they captured him, with his mohawk and tattoos, his jewelry and scarves, self-designed accessories he wears on top of his uniform? Everything Satan did to himself on and off stage combined would not compare to what they would do to him.

I flee Vukovar at the beginning of the war. My hometown is reduced to rubble. It resembles all the other cities ever sacrificed, from Dresden to Beirut. Vinkovci is in a slightly better condition, the buildings are standing and there aren't as many dead. But the years when the garage punk misfits shocked the town folk out of their sleep are the years of innocence now.

Satan, remembered.

There is no one to testify how Satan died, out there on the Eastern Slavonian front on January 27, 1992, though he was not killed in battle.[1] He was found near a frozen pond outside of Vinkovci, with a fatal gun wound in his chest. One version has it that he was skating on the pond, and the gun he was holding went off by accident. But no one actually saw it or heard it. The official version: dead of a self-inflicted wound.

Satan's old label is making a decent living by reissuing his and his label mates' cult records in the CD format. I suppose that the former Yugoslav diaspora has spread the word about Satan, over the years, among non-Yugoslav collectors of auditory obscurities. There are people still discussing Satan in online forums where I lurk, but don't comment: he was a genius/he was a lunatic, he was overrated/he was underrated, he was flamboyant/he was gaudy, he gave his life for Croatia/he committed war crimes, he was a brave gay man/he was a self-loathing gay man . . . .

Little Ivica, Vinkovci, Croatia, late 1960s.

Every April, Ivica grows red, yellow, and white potatoes in his grandmother's garden. He knows how to spot the tiniest bit of weed and to pluck it out before it harms the garden. After the

[1] Slavonia is the Pannonian region of Croatia, not the be confused with the state of Slovenia, Croatia's neighbor to the West.

new potatoes are harvested every July, Ivica helps his mom wash them and prepare them in many delicious varieties.

Ivica doesn't play soccer or partisans and Germans with the other boys. But watch out. Dare to even whisper (Ivica is an s.i.s.s.y.), and Ivica's oldest brother the body builder will smash your head against the nearest piece of concrete.

Ivica is the youngest son in the Čuljak family. He is quiet and shy. He likes to play with fabrics, and he knows how to sew. In winter, he wears a scarf he knitted himself. It's colorful and long, and when Ivica walks to school, the frills at the both ends brush the piled-up snow along the street.

Memory of [State] # 2

Comments:

I did not grow up in [State] but traveled a lot and had many friends who lived in [Capital] and other cities. Driving through [State] it was scary during the night because of kidnapping or the great chance of being killed.

I also remember while I was in [City] I met a [Different Ethnic] girl who was beautiful and I wanted to make a relationship with her and she liked me a lot. However, she told me that her family would kill her and me if we continued to see each other, she went home crying and I never saw her again. She married somebody that her family wanted even though she did not like him, but that is family tradition and rule. I was very sad and soon after that problems arose in [State] and I stopped visiting friends and they moved to [Different State] to save their lives. Those are my memories from [State] and I think [State] is beautiful especially the area we call [Region]. On the one side mountains and on the other clear rivers and a nice landscape.

CARAVAN 2002

In a color snapshot from 2002, my friend Dubravka and I pose against the background of an off-white wall, shadowed by something outside the frame. She's forty years old, wearing aviator sunglasses with a cute smile on her round face framed by a curly salt-and-pepper bob. Twelve years Dubravka's junior, I look serious, with my everyday wire-frame glasses and cropped brown hair, although it's as if I'm beginning to smile too. I'm slouched. My shoulder-bones and collarbones stick out, giving me an emaciated look. There's a detail of a window in the upper right corner, reflecting a patch of blue sky, and a small chimney on a red roof. The picture was taken when Dubravka, a poet from Belgrade, traveled with women peace activists in the summer of 2002 all over traumatized post-Yugoslav lands, a part of a project called the Caravan.

I stumble upon a homemade video of that same Dubravka online, and she's interviewed about the Caravan. The interviewer, not pictured, asks his question, with line-break-like pauses between certain words: "Dubravka, tell me about the Caravan that you / took / through / the area / that you live in." He's acting all artsy with his camera, tilting it, zooming in and out, but Dubravka seems at ease. Nevertheless, she hesitates as she looks for the right words in English, her second language. She goes,

> *So we travel through, uh, traumatized cities, some of them destroyed, some of them divided cities, and, uh, we were put into interaction. And, uh, it was…It was a kind of*

collective therapy. Most of the women were very frustrated, some of them had, uh, very bad war experience, meaning that they, uh, lost their sons or husbands, or, I don't know, you could imagine what could happen in the war.

I remember that in the summer of 2002, Vukovar welcomed the Caravan. But what was the official name of the Caravan? I feel like it was something more than just "Caravan" or even "Peace Caravan," it was something forward-looking and rebellious-sounding, I'm sure. First stop Vukovar, second stop probably Srebrenica, and so on. "So on" means that I don't even remember what the third stop was. Vukovar was the first one, as it is geographically closest to Belgrade, the departure city, and Vukovar is where the first massive crimes took place, starting in late spring 1991 and leading up until the city fell in November that same year, until all the fires ceased, and the UN set up camp. The crimes were committed mainly by those representing the state of Serbia, and some by those representing the state of Croatia, and also by units under the control of militarized thugs, in those times when state power and thug power were inseparable. The city itself was shelled and bombed to smithereens by the remnants of that institution from the previous system, the Yugoslav People's Army. In forty-six years of its existence, the Yugoslav People's Army went from its legacy of guerilla partisans defeating Nazis, to a berserk force destroying the cities of its own homeland and allowing affiliated thugs to rob, torture, and murder civilians. As I write this, the Croat-in-chief and the Serb-in-chief from the horror of 1991 have been dead for years. UN's International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the adjacent prison are filled with warmongers, but nationalists everywhere claim that "our" arrested, tried, and convicted war criminals are "our" heroes, while theirs have been let off the hook. And nobody is prosecuting any war profiteers, especially not the current "elite" of the transitional economies, the beneficiaries of the privatization and the free market within and beyond the post-Yugoslav region. Why do I even bother writing this?

At least there are some facts about the Caravan of 2002 that I can verify without the need to rummage through the bits and pieces of memory, because the book *Balkan Women for Peace:*

Itineraries of Crossborder Activism documents the inception and the execution of the project, and is filled with the accounts and pictures of the participants. I pick it up and find out that, to my slight disappointment, the project was simply called the Caravan. The longer name that I was looking for is just a remnant in my memory of the stenciled slogan that the activists spray-painted on the concrete of highways and bridges by the marked state borders: "Women Activists' Cross Border Actions."

We were in the hotel conference room with sepia photos of Vukovar in the time of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. I remember trying to make a point about something—who knows what—at a Caravan peace-building workshop. I know my example for that long-forgotten point was the exhibition I had seen around that time, in which local Vukovar teenagers, Croats and Serbs forced by the adult powers-that-be to go to separate schools, took pictures of our town, and wrote simple statements about what they liked and disliked about it. The kids wrote things such as, "I'm embarrassed about the horrible things that happened here during the war." As I was quoting that, I fucking started crying. It's strange about tears; even as a kid, I knew how to suppress them if I began to choke up and that way I thought I appeared tough in any given situation, such as adults yelling at me, me falling off my bike, or feeling sad for whatever reason I deemed trivial. The drawback is that sometimes, very rarely though, I'd begin weeping for a really stupid reason. For example, when we had just become refugees in 1991, but before Vukovar fell, my mom and her sister tried to speculate what would happen, mainly in order to convince themselves that there was still hope that the war in Croatia would end quickly and would not spread and that we'd go back home. All of a sudden, I pictured our collection of records and tapes we had stored in drawers under our beds before we fled disappearing in an explosion. And I broke down sobbing, and I even said something like, "I don't want to lose all the records." My mom and my aunt looked at each other, alarmed, but they didn't say anything.

Embarrassing: the war had gotten seriously ugly and those

who stayed behind were already hiding in basements, running low on food, getting by without reliable electricity, running water, or phone lines. They were out there, learning how to live through hell, as targets for any uniformed psychopath. And I started weeping over vinyl and tapes? As a contrast, when I went back to Vukovar for the first time after the town fell and I faced my bombed out hometown as an improbably sun-lit moonscape, I suppressed those tears and acted tough as ever.

Normally, I'd bawl only when home alone, and in any case, the Caravan workshop was the first time ever I broke down about the war publicly, in such a direct way, and I had to do it in front of a hundred women, most of whom I didn't know, and some of whom had suffered in the war much more than I ever did. In fact, one of them said so, after I was done, that she had lost a baby son, and that I was crying crocodile tears.

This flashes in my head even now: as she's accusing me, I recognize her melodic accent as Dalmatian, and I picture her running with an infant in her arms as shells fall and explode all around her, turning an old stone palace into rubble.

She had no way of knowing that I hadn't lost a baby. I was seventeen in 1991, technically a lot of horror could have happened to me, too. But it hadn't. I was one of the lucky ones who didn't lose a member of her immediate family, as we all escaped unharmed only three months into the conflict, before the street fighting and then the bombing began. Maybe she could tell somehow that I was not as scarred as she was, maybe victims like her can tell. Some debate or another continued as if I hadn't broken down, and I was thankful for that.

My friend Dubravka continues in the video:

> *We passed through former Yugoslavia—except Slovenia, of course, because, uh, the war in Slovenia was very short, in comparation with other parts—and we were put into interaction, so after two weeks of traveling together, uh, despite very aggressive and negative emotions that we, some of us, bring to this Caravan, something really good happened, so . . . Uh . . . the women who had the worst experience were actually very positive, because we were faced with each other not as representatives of our nations, or uh, or uhm . . . religious communities, but as human beings who suffer*

and who want to forgive to each other.

One of the participants had a bit too much to drink during one of the nights the Caravan spent in Vukovar, and at some point she climbed up some gate and tried to take off some flag: but which gate and which flag? It was a Croatian flag, of course, but where? Why can't I tell a good story here? Because I remember so little. I hoped that the book *Balkan Women for Peace: Itineraries of Crossborder Activism* would contain an account of that incident. It doesn't. I hoped I'd find more videos of women remembering the Caravan online. I could find only the one with Dubravka.

Obviously, I would have remembered more had I been a part of the Caravan myself, but I had no intention of going. The project cost one million Euros and it was designed by someone in France (well-meaning, unknown to me) who didn't herself wake up, go to work, sip coffee and smoke cigarettes with family and friends, cook, eat, shop, write, play guitar and sing, then go to sleep, all of it among sites of recent wartime atrocities. I lived my mundane life with the ruins, some of them still mere rubble, some of them patched up, others replaced by completely refurbished constructions glaringly new and whole in the broken city. I was angry at the time because the organization I worked for, that provided courses for women in Vukovar, created jobs for some of them, and cost no more than 50,000 Euros per year to run, couldn't raise funds and survive, while symbolic projects like the Caravan seemed to thrive. But what outweighed even my righteous disdain was the fact that I was not ready to travel in order to multiply exposure to morbid sites; living on one was more than enough.

At least that's what I remember. What I write down now isn't even my memory, it's a string of sentences, sentences that do not witness properly. Once I write down even the clearest of memories, I lose it; the text becomes a shady intermediary, asserting itself so strongly that the original memory is transformed without the slightest possibility of returning to its unwritten state. A memory flowing through synapses of my brain is one thing; typed up another; published yet another. I lose the memory and gain text, and I'm not sure the transaction is a very healthy one. I would make a terrible prosecution witness, my testimony full of

holes, names and faces erased or confused; it would be a field day for the defense.

If this were a movie made for festivals of world cinema, "I" would be a heroine whose participation in the Caravan in 2002 transforms her. At twenty-eight, she finds peace in a fellowship (this heroine would be vaguely religious, not a godless heathen like me) of women who went through the same shit she did. They visit sites of atrocities that had taken place eleven, six, or three years before. The bus, the road, the borders, the Caravan stops themselves become the sites of the peace activists' own, private-public conflicts and reconciliations. After each stop, our heroine delves deeper and deeper into her trauma and shame. We see her fighting a lot with one woman from a different side of the conflict in particular, and our heroine even sinks so low as to attack her Caravan nemesis. But in a climatic scene toward the end of the movie, the heroine breaks down in the middle of a gut-wrenching story she tells, and then the woman she's been fighting with and even attacking in all those prior scenes comes up to her and says something simple and profound, and hugs her for a long time. And then there is an epilogue: we see our heroine at the opening night of the Caravan exhibit in Paris. It's her first time in the City of Light—get it, light, lightness of being, personal enlightenment, and so on? She's always dreamed of Baudelaire's boulevards, Piaf's quays, Godard's corners! She smiles, she's peaceful (if pensive), no slouched shoulders, she stands upright, no glasses, her hair is long and styled as if for a shampoo commercial, she's strikingly beautiful (played by Penelope Cruz), with the caption: "she has left Vukovar and now divides her time between San Francisco and Madrid, where she writes and teaches." That's right, her new and improved life spans the widest reaches of conquistadors!

I play the video of Dubravka recalling the Caravan again. My friend's face fills my computer screen, a face without make-up, captured by a shaky hand-held camera. She tucked her bob—this time dyed black, the color of the sweater she wears—behind her ears. An orange scarf hangs around her neck, matching the spines of some of the books stacked in the shelves in the near background. Her eyes look straight at the camera one second, away from it the next, the whites a bit watery, irises a mixture of grays, greens, and browns. Someone outside the frame can be

heard typing on a computer keyboard.

The Internet site suggests I view another video of Dubravka. In this one, she's in her mid-thirties, younger than I am as I write this, and it's a video broadcast on TV—Buffalo Public Access TV—in 1997. It's an art video, very low-def, completely pixilated if I try to watch a full-screen version. But Dubravka is her best avant-garde-shaman-of-poetry self. I hear her voice humming and chanting nonsense and occasional words, as her figure—dressed in black, very small on the screen—dances in the landscape that looks like some snow-covered beach. The camera lens is covered with drops of water, and another video, of a waterfall, is superimposed, as is the sound of water and wind.

She chants,

Vetar, vetar
Wind, wind

Vetar, vetar
Voda voda voda voda voda voda voda voda

The next scene shows her dancing in front of an abstract painting of blues, grays, greens, and browns.

Another woman, an American, does a voiceover, reading Dubravka's poetry in English:

the body resumes its position on the moving map
where it was during the interval
is only history
the making of which is a face
inscribed
with the division of madness
and uproar

the separation
of angles
is permanent
for, once disconnected,
they cannot resume their shape
and geometry has no place in chaos
just as country has no place

in the division
of a face

Memory of [State] # 3

Comments:

It pains me to read these accounts of [State]. I am a [Ethnic Group Member], albeit from the diaspora, and have to say there were obvious mistakes made by the [State] authorities. My [Ethnic Group Member] uncle who grew up in a village near [City] summarized growing up there like "The Wild West," recalling constant fights between [Ethnic Group] and [Different Ethnic Group] kids, harassment of the former and so on and so on. Ultimately [Ethnic Group Members] and [Different Ethnic Group Members] must live together, whether there is independence for [State] or not, we will still all be neighbors. The comments I have read today give me some hope at least that we can live together, as long as those in power share the same views.

Refugee Funerals

In August 1995, my mom went to the funeral to witness that her grandma Mika didn't get a gravesite of her own, let alone a tombstone, and was laid to rest (the euphemism sounds especially empty in this case) in a joint grave along with other refugees and homeless people scheduled to be buried the same day. My great-grandma Mika died the day after she became a refugee and was buried in a graveyard almost 400 kilometers away from her home village in the Banija region of Croatia where she'd spent her whole life.

That August, the fighting in Croatia ended, and civilians were expelled from the liberated parts of the state, including the lush, hilly farm country of the Banija region, where Mika and her family lived. She fled Banija, and she was ninety at the time. She had survived: World War One; the abandonment of her drifter father; World War Two; the death of her husband at the very end of World War Two; breast cancer and mastectomy; deaths of two grandchildren, one son-in-law, and one son; the first four years of the Post-Yugoslav Wars, including the trip to a refugee camp in Serbia, where she died.

It took the refugee caravan several days to cover what was originally a five-hour drive. Entire families on tractors, in trucks, cars, buses, and vans, formed a caravan kilometers long, having left most of their possessions behind, fleeing to the sounds of warning sirens, the barking of dogs, and the cries of cows.

I was with my grandma, aunt, and my pre-teen cousins when the news about great grandma's passing reached us. The table

was set for a late evening dinner with plates full of cooling stew, slices of bread we picked at absent-mindedly, lettuce wilting in a bowl, sinking in the oil and vinegar dressing. Why do I seem to remember what we didn't eat that night?

I want to say that great grandma was a matriarch commanding the household from her stove, where she prepared feasts of old-school recipes, but she was too reluctant, reticent, and passive to assume that role. I remember her as a quiet peasant woman always dressed in home-made black skirts and blouses, with her obligatory calico kerchief tied on the back of her head or underneath her chin. She was illiterate and she didn't like watching TV or going to church, so she spent hours crocheting, knitting, and embroidering the days away, ostensibly for her many great granddaughters' hope chests, but probably mainly to keep busy.

Some of my earliest memories are of our visits to great grandma's when she still lived in the old wooden house, a kind of a folk-architecture chalet, and I slept with her in her big bed. In my memory snapshot of the bedroom, the place seems huge. But then, the house was torn down before I turned seven, when everything around me seemed bigger than it actually was. Inside, I seem to remember whitewashed walls and exposed dark wood beams. Or is it my mental prototype of a basic old Banija country house passing as memory? I look at the pictures of old Banija chalets I find online, and the recognition is unmistakable. That is what I remember. There is the ground floor made of what looks like stone or plaster, or perhaps wood painted white, and the rest is unpainted wood: stairs leading to the main door (I have no idea what was kept on the ground floor; perhaps that's even where the kitchen was?); a solid wood fence lining the stairs and the eave; wood columns; the wood wall of the upper floor where the bedrooms definitely were; fairly large windows; the roof with the terracotta tiles. It's plausible that I do remember the actual white plaster walls in great grandma's bedroom. One thing I believe is a real memory: me staring at the fresh quince atop great grandma's wardrobe, realizing it's there for decoration and for its scent, not for consumption. And this: I'm under the covers, the bed sheets are soft, embroidered by hand, and I watch great grandma taking off her kerchief, skirt and blouse, and her white cotton slip (finally a non-black clothing item), and then

the best part comes: she undoes her silver, waist-length braid, brushes her hair, re-braids it loosely. Then she takes off her bra, one side of it with a half-sphere insert. She puts on her linen nightgown. Also white. She never talks much, but she seems full of deep peace and wisdom. This is the way old ladies used to be, and maybe still are somewhere.

Today I wonder: is it wisdom and peace or is it passivity and defeatism of an illiterate woman enclosed in the folds of white and black linen, in the house nested in the unchanging rural landscape, while the world outside brings more sorrow than joy?

Her daughter (my grandmother) left the village for good at twenty-four, not a minute too soon. I was twenty-five when I left Belgrade for Prague in the summer of 1999, maybe too late. Grandma Milka died in April 2000 of natural causes, ranging from diabetes and heart disease to having survived World War Two and the Post-Yugoslav Wars, the death of her firstborn baby back in 1949 and the death of her youngest child in 1974 (a sixteen-year-old boy killed by a drunk driver), the death of her husband in 1982, the death of her younger brother in 1990, and her mother's death in 1995.

I was in Prague and I couldn't afford to travel to grandma's funeral. My unemployed parents couldn't pay for my trip either, as they scrambled to put together funds for the gravesite, a wooden cross, and a simple ceremony and reception. Of course, no one in Prague knew my grandmother, and I knew only the basic details about her last weeks and days. My aunt said grandma was lucid when they went to the hospital the last time. She was also completely together the last time I had spoken to her on the phone for my birthday in March. So I clung to that and chose to believe her last days weren't too painful and terrifying. I'll never fully know what it was like those final weeks of her life.

Grandma Milka lived with my aunt and uncle and my cousins in a small town near Novi Sad, Serbia, having moved there when my aunt got a job as an English teacher in the early 1990s. My cousins, a boy of fifteen and a girl of sixteen, witnessed grandma falling fatally ill that spring; theirs was a family of five refugees living in a small two-bedroom apartment, so the kids shared their room with grandma until the last day.

When I came to visit them in November 2001, after I had given up Prague and moved back to my hometown, my cousins

and I walked to grandma's grave and they told me a few things about grandma slipping away, which shattered my illusion of her leaving this world peacefully. They told me how sometimes she would confuse her grandson for her late son. How there were whole days when she didn't know she was in the same kitchen that doubled as a dining room where she had prepared almost all the meals since the family moved in seven years prior. There were days when she thought she was visiting with her brother and his wife, decades ago, and she would confuse her elder daughter for her sister-in-law and her younger daughter for her mom, and her grandchildren for her own son and daughter.

"Yeah," my cousins said, "She'd yell at us that we must never sniff glue!"

And we laughed, as we walked to the graveyard, kicking fallen leaves mixed with dirt and dust. My cousins attended a high school in a nearby town, grouped with other refugees, problem children, and a few teen moms. After having lived in the same village for more than half a decade, or a third of their lives, they had a handful of friends, but were otherwise strangers in this part of the country less than an hour-long drive away from our hometown. The graveyard stood to the east, along the outermost street in the village, and the tombstones told a bit of the history of the village that changed its name often, depending on who was in charge: Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks, or Yugoslavs, typical for this part of Pannonia. We got to grandma's wooden cross—Milka Vinčić—surrounded by strangers' graves. Beyond, there was farmland, more scattered villages and the city of Novi Sad where my cousins would eagerly move after high school.

"And sometimes she looked at Auntie Mira with such repugnance, like she hated her. That's when we figured out she was confusing her for her sister-in-law," my cousins remembered. We laughed some more.

Now, my cousins are grown-ups, and I suspect that they don't often reminisce about their formative years when they were refugees, stuck in a village without even a passport to travel outside the claustrophobic country marred by the state's war crimes. Which also probably means that they don't often think of grandma Milka. But she is the only grandparent they had that

babysat them and helped take care of them financially, despite her deteriorating physical and mental health.

Being ten years older than my cousins, I will always have memories of traveling to Banija or to the Adriatic beaches with grandma, how patient she was with me, and I'll forever recreate in my head her elaborate Sunday feasts before the war. Long before the guests came (my parents, my dad's mom, and my brother), she would begin by making egg noodles from scratch. I watched that hundreds of times because I came for sleepovers at her apartment every Saturday. She'd knead the light yellow dough in a bowl. Clear the kitchen table and sprinkle it all over with flour. Knead the dough some more on the table, and then work it into a paper-thin sheet with her long rolling pin, all the while sprinkling more flour to keep the dough dry and non-sticky. She'd roll the sheet pretty tightly and slice it—each slice becoming a long, impossibly thin noodle. The chicken parts in the soup included legs, feet, kidneys, liver, and several hearts (my favorite), fighting for space with whole parsnips and carrots and halved potatoes. The second course consisted of the bigger pieces of vegetables and meat from the soup simply covered with white dill sauce. The third course, the salad, and the dessert would vary according to the season and the cook's inspiration, but the chicken soup was the mainstay. I could never replicate even the simplest dishes she made. How about the potato salad? It's just potato slices, onions, fresh parsley, hard boiled egg slices, salt and pepper, and an apple vinegar and sunflower oil dressing? Mine ends up a big, unappetizing mess, and I can never get the right amount of the right flavor of vinegar or oil. Fried fish that goes with it? Mine is outright disgusting, mushy, oily, bland.

April 2000 in Prague was unseasonably hot. On the day of grandma's funeral I put on a slinky green silk top that she had crocheted and a skirt my mom had sewn and I read a poem for grandma at the reading series I helped organize with a few local poets. I thought of both my grandmothers in that poem, really, and my great-grandmothers, and all the illiterate women before them whose names nobody remembers, whose names probably aren't

even kept in records, because if you're a girl child born into poverty in an empire (Ottoman or Habsburg or other), your whole identity is subsumed by the man you eventually marry.

Wisdom Soup	*Supa mudrosti*
"No one can make	"Niko ne može učiniti
your mistakes for you!"	tvoje greške umesto tebe!"
said grandma out of the indigo blue	reče baka kao grom iz vedra noćna neba
I'm still	još sam
lightning blind	slepa od munje
thunder deaf	gluha od groma
and of course	i naravno
cherry pie full	sita pite od višanja
"EAT!"	"JEDI!"

There I was, a bilingual poet with a master's in Gender Studies, barely making a living as a clerk—the wonders of transitional economies!—at a bogus video rental store (registered as an "internet" company). All of my great-grandmas were illiterate, barely making a living as farmers' daughters or wives. The generations in-between made progress: my grandmothers had about five grades of education each, my mom had a high school diploma, and her younger sister a two-year college degree. I had no daughters then, I don't now, as I write this at thirty-seven, and I probably never will have any children. Those women, my ancestors, sacrificed in order to make it a little easier for each subsequent generation, and now that it is a little easier for me, I find that I'm too exhausted and pessimistic to bring another child to this world. What went wrong?

Grandma Stoja, my paternal grandmother, told me she was already ten and still completely illiterate when her father was finally convinced that he should send his daughters to school. His wife, the mother, did the convincing, as she considered her own illiteracy a kind of blindness. I suppose she (who died long before I was born) could have taken an extra step to learn how to read along with her children, but I can imagine she had no strength or optimism left for that. Be as it may, grandma Stoja learned how to read despite the odds against her. The first girl in

the history of her family to learn how to read, she was also later in her life the first one (and so far the only) in her family to get a divorce after only a year of marriage, after her guitar-playing, truck driving-husband (who I never met) cheated on her. She was the first to support the Nazi-fighting partisans in World War Two, the first to get a factory job and an income of her own, the first to retire at the age of less than fifty, and spend the rest of her life enjoying mostly good health and a mostly bright outlook. She did become a Serbian nationalist in her old age, for which we gave her much grief, given that her first and only marriage was to a Catholic, a Bosnian Croat, and that virtually all her friends were Catholic, non-Serb.

You'd hear often about people pretending to be open-minded and civil, even loving of the ethnic and cultural diversity, but whose sublimated bigotry would come out of the depth of their psyches and onto the surface under the right (or rather, wrong) circumstances. That's a very convenient way to explain the seemingly sudden rise of nationalism and paranoia in former Yugoslavia. But I sometimes think that the opposite can be true, that nationalism may be a mask that people put on when they deem it necessary. I think my grandma was an armchair nationalist out of fear.

In the fall of 1991, while the war raged in our hometown of Vukovar, my parents, grandma Stoja, my brother and I huddled around in a one-bedroom apartment with leaky roofs in a dreary apartment block in the outskirts of Belgrade. I wrote a poem that I don't have anymore, but whose shape I remember: three rhyming quatrains I wrote out on a piece of lined paper. I had a line about the speaker refusing to be "devoted to Belgrade." I don't remember how obviously the poem was anti-regime, but it was my intent to write a protest poem or lyrics for a contemporary protest song. As usual, I showed the poem to whoever was there, in this case my brother and grandma Stoja. My dad was temporarily working in the city in an architectural office, and my mom as a maid in her friend-cum-boss's house. Stoja read the poem, and I could see anxiety wiping the smile off her face, lips thinning, muscles tightening, and then she said: "Destroy it. You don't know who will see it. Even walls have ears. And eyes." Even as an angsty 17-year-old, I knew the poem wasn't that great and that the poem's and my existence was too insignificant as to

provoke Big Brother's wrath and to endanger any of us. But that reaction was typical for her. She honestly believed that even the most insignificant cog in the wheel can be targeted by the persecuting state, and that in order to survive you had to keep quiet, make no waves, and blend in with the crowd. In 1991, blending with the crowd in Belgrade meant becoming a Serbian nationalist. In uncertain times, when all bets are off and the rules are being rewritten, sane people watch what the others are doing and they try to do the same.

Stoja's own paranoia probably went back to World War Two and immediately thereafter. After the victory, when freedom was won and masses of people were lifted out of suffering and onto the path of progress, 1948 came and Stoja would see young people, fellow factory workers, totally insignificant little cogs, being arrested for their alleged support of Stalin once the top cats of Yugoslav Communist Party decided they'd strike their own path to utopia, break with Stalin, and arrest and punish those Yugoslavs who opposed the break. Stoja's best friend's husband was one of the victims, I'd heard that, but no one ever told me what happened to him exactly. Walls have ears. And eyes. And it was none of my business.

I remember the story Stoja told me about her wedding day. It was about 1948, but her story doesn't involve any details depicting danger or disruption. It's simply a story of a happy day. What happened the next day or next year is irrelevant. She and her boyfriend, her best friend and her best friend's boyfriend, all of them already rooming together, decided to get married on the same day. They lived in an apartment with a kitchen and a bathroom, a living room and two bedrooms, but there was nothing in the pantry. There was very little food you could buy for your household then, but you could eat your meals in the factory cafeteria. The story of their wedding day, set in my mind in a gorgeous black-and-white movie, is very romantic to me. They didn't go to any church, neither to Stoja's Orthodox church, nor to the Catholic church of the rest of the newlyweds. The ceremony was a no-nonsense registration, with the employees of the city hall as witnesses; in and out of the hall, independent of old traditions, in one word: modern. They didn't go to a banquet hall or even a restaurant, but straight back to the apartment, because they wanted to prepare their own dinner. All

they had were potatoes, some salt, and oil. They ate the roasted potatoes right out of the pan, passing around the spoon, the single utensil they collectively owned. Maybe it's the optimism of the young factory workers at the time, despite the poverty, despite the looming persecution, despite the fresh memories of the war horrors. Things were looking up, because, surely the horrors from a few years back could not be repeated, and also a few years back they wouldn't have dreamed they'd have secure jobs and a modern apartment all their own, in a town teeming with young people like themselves. Maybe it's the intimacy of sharing such a simple meal with a single spoon that makes me think all other wedding day stories cannot compare.

At the same time, remembering their optimism about the future makes the story of that wedding so sad. Forty years later, the brutality of the new war matched the war of their own youth, except back then they were young, and this time around they understood more and had everything and everyone to lose. Stoja's best friend lost her grandson, barely out of his teens, to the war of the 1990s.

Stoja died in 2004, but she wasn't a refugee anymore, she was back in Borovo Naselje, in the same one-bedroom apartment where she lived before the war, where she loved the most to hang out on the small balcony overlooking more building complexes and a park lined with tall poplar trees. My parents called me in North Carolina to tell me that she fell ill and they had taken her to the hospital, and that it was serious. Just like four years earlier when grandma Milka died, I was completely broke, this time getting my second master's degree, my parents were still unemployed, and there was no way for me to go home. Stoja died in a matter of days. I found comfort in the fact that she died and was buried near her home, and that her surviving siblings and many of her old friends, old ladies who'd gone to spas and played cards with her, attended the funeral. A few months later, my parents bought a simple tombstone as well.

The day before I left for the US, Stoja told me a bit more about her split with my dad's dad, and she told me about his unannounced visit in the late 1990s, months before his death. She was alone in her apartment in Borovo Naselje when he showed up, and she recognized him as soon as she opened the door, even though she hadn't seen him since a court date in the

late 1950s regarding his scant alimony payments. She let him in, and they talked about their lives over coffee. After the visit, she walked him to the bus station where he was about to catch his ride back to the little city near Zagreb, where he escaped after some Serb thugs "ethnically cleansed" his native city in Bosnia. I asked her if she had divorced him because he was unfaithful and he lied to her. She said yes, but it was obvious that she bore no grudges against him for that or for his dubious parental care of their son. There was neither anger nor regret in her demeanor, and I knew she tried to impart a lesson, though not as simple as "don't marry a skirt-chaser" or "forgive your husband's infidelities." But that's my last memory of her, and it couldn't have been better. She was still her regular healthy self at the time, although pushing eighty, short and overweight, but agile, her cropped hair thick and salt-and-pepper, and her face could easily have been that of a sixty-year-old. She scratched my back and concluded I was too skinny and "weak." She was trying to tell me two things: 1) *Niko ne može učiniti tvoje greške umesto tebe*, and 2) *JEDI*!

Memory of [State] # 4

Comments:

I grew up in [State]. I was born in 19__ and by the time I attended elementary school, everything was changing so fast that it was hard to understand what was really going on in the country.

Then in 6th grade I remember going back home and asking my parents why teacher is not coming to our class anymore but I never got an answer. I finished elementary school in my school, but when I went to high school, we had to go to an evening private school, because our real high school in [City] had refugees from other parts of [Former State].

I did not learn anything during high school, because my class was overcrowded and it was late in the evening. I also was scared that police would show up anytime and beat us up in school. It was so hard to understand what was going on.

Looking back, I don't think it was a healthy childhood at all for me, but I think since I survived, I should never look back. I really hope my teacher has survived as well and is doing well somewhere in this world.

I just wish I could meet him one day and enjoy a good conversation with him.

Draft Dodging

My brother, who is one year older than me, spent the summer of 1995 hiding in the apartment our family was renting in Belgrade. He was hiding from the draft that had intensified to the point where military police would simply pick up any young man (but refugees like us especially) on the street and send him to a battle front in Croatia or Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Another story goes that my mom's nearly-seventy-year old retired aunt, also in Belgrade, got a letter to report to the military base for recruitment. Her name, Sava, as in the river that flows through both Zagreb and Belgrade, could have been male or female, and the army bureaucracy must have misprinted her age and sex in some file they had, so she got one of their letters in one of those tissue-thin blue envelopes. She considered fucking with them, going to the base and announcing, "Sir, I'm reporting for duty!" and waving the envelope. I like to think that there was a young male Sava somewhere in Belgrade who got off the hook because the army somehow attached his bio data to the old woman's contact information.

Let's see whose sick minds were in charge of coming up with actions that hastily "trained" soldiers would have to help carry out. This is from the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), an institution that's rapidly running out of time, and so even their long list of indicted war criminals from Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina will never be complete:

CASE INFORMATION SHEET (IT-97-27): According to the indictment, Željko Ražnatović was formerly president of the fan club of Belgrade's "Red Star" football team. He used this group as a base for the establishment, on 11 October 1990, of a paramilitary organisation known as the "Serbian Volunteer Guard" or, alternatively, as "Arkan's Tigers." He led this group in fighting in the Eastern Slavonian region of Croatia in 1991-1992 and then in various locations in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. In 1993, Arkan formed the Party of Serbian Unity and put forth candidates, including himself, for national office under the party's auspices. In 1995, he led paramilitary troops of "Arkan's Tigers" into fighting in northwestern Bosnia-Herzegovina. He commanded this force while it was deployed in the city of Sanski Most during September 1995. The indictment alleged that, as the Bosnian forces ("ABiH") neared Sanski Most in September 1995, a state of panic set in among the Serb civilians and soldiers and many continued to flee in the direction of Banja Luka. Around 15 September 1995, at the invitation of local Serb leaders, "Arkan's Tigers" entered the Sanski Most area in order to restore order and to check the advance of the ABiH. "Arkan's Tigers" established their headquarters at the Hotel "Sanus" in the centre of the town, and Arkan installed himself in the office of the hotel manager. It was from this location that he directed the activities of his paramilitary troops, who set up checkpoints throughout the area and began forcibly drafting Serb men to fight against the ABiH. In addition to establishing checkpoints in Sanski Most, "Arkan's Tigers" also engaged in systematic patrols around the town, in order to identify and detain Muslim and other non-Serb men, to extort valuables from non-Serb families, and to obtain non-Serb homes for use by Serb refugees. During these patrols, the perpetration of beatings and robberies by "Arkan's Tigers" were commonplace. Many of the Muslim and other non-Serb men who were abducted were taken to the Hotel "Sanus" for interrogation by Ražnatović and his subordinates. They were subjected to repeated beatings and harassment by "Arkan's Tigers" and a large number of these detainees were imprisoned in a small boiler room, approxi-

mately five square meters in size, located in the basement of an adjoining building.

CASE INFORMATION SHEET (IT-03-67): From on or about 1 August 1991 until at least September 1993, Vojislav Šešelj, acting individually or in concert with known and unknown members of a joint criminal enterprise (JCE), planned, ordered, instigated, committed, or otherwise aided and abetted in the planning, preparation or execution of, or physically committed, persecutions of Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilian populations in the territory which was referred to by the Serb authorities as the "Serbian Autonomous Region (SAO) of Slavonia, Baranja, and Western Srem" and in the municipalities of Zvornik, "Greater Sarajevo" (municipalities of Ilijaš, Vogošća, Novo Sarajevo, Ilidža and Rajlovac), Mostar and Nevesinje in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as parts of Vojvodina in Serbia. These persecutions were committed on political, racial and religious grounds and included:

- The murder of many Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilians, including women and elderly persons, in the municipality of Vukovar in Croatia, and in the municipalities of Zvornik, "Greater Sarajevo," Mostar, and Nevesinje;

- The prolonged and routine imprisonment and confinement of Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilians in detention facilities within Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, including prison camps in Vukovar, and in Zvornik, "Greater Sarajevo," Mostar, and Nevesinje;

- The establishment and perpetuation of inhumane living conditions for Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilian detainees within the detention facilities;

- Killings and repeated torture and beatings of Croat, Mus-

lim, and other non-Serb civilian detainees in the detention facilities;

- The prolonged and frequent forced labour of Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilians detained in the detention facilities or under house arrest in their respective homes in Vukovar, Zvornik, "Greater Sarajevo," and Mostar. The forced labour included digging of graves, loading of ammunition for the Serb forces, digging trenches, and other forms of manual labour at the frontlines;

- The sexual assaults of Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilians by Serb soldiers during capture and in the detention facilities;

- The imposition of restrictive and discriminatory measures against the Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilian populations, including persons in Zvornik, "Greater Sarajevo," Mostar, and Nevesinje, and in parts of Vojvodina, Serbia (namely Hrtkovci, Nikinci, Ruma, Šid, and other places bordering Croatia), such as restriction of movement, removal from positions of authority in local government institutions and the police, dismissal from jobs, denial of medical care, and arbitrary searches of homes;

- The torture, beating, and robbing of Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilians;

- The deportation or forcible transfer of tens of thousands of Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilians from the territories as specified above;

- The deliberate destruction of homes, other public and priv-

ate property, cultural institutions, historic monuments, and sacred sites of the Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb civilian populations in the municipality of Vukovar, and in the municipalities of Zvornik, "Greater Sarajevo," Mostar, and Nevesinje;

- The direct and public denigration through "hate speech" of the Croat, Muslim, and other non-Serb populations in Vukovar, Zvornik, and Hrtkovci on the basis of their ethnicities.

In order to minimize risks, that summer of 1995, my brother hid in the apartment and wouldn't leave for weeks on end. He got his dose of sunlight out on the balcony, and his exercise by doing push-ups every day. The landlord, who lived below us, had two sons who were also hiding. There were several other young men hiding in other houses in the street, so the mothers organized a simple system of alerting everybody else in case anyone noticed a suspicious, especially uniformed, person knocking on doors. Why mothers? Most fathers, I'm sure, were also deadly afraid that their sons might end up killing and/or dying in the war, but they were confused by their fear—on paper, they were supposed to proudly send their sons off to war, if not volunteer themselves. In any case, our street wasn't marked on the city map, as the houses had sprung up illegally on a small hill between two typical Belgrade neighborhoods filled with dense apartment complexes. Nobody got drafted that summer.

I've been reading old letters my best Vukovar high school friend was sending me between 1991 and 1997; she had escaped to a peaceful part of Croatia when the war began in our city. In her first letters, she's a senior in high school, in the last one she's an English teacher. I don't have copies of my letters to her, but her responses remind me of certain details I'd forgotten. In a letter from the fall of 1995, she comments on my letter from the summer that year, when my brother was hiding, and she writes (and I translate here):

> Kudos to him for enduring and resisting all this time, I respect him so much because of that, and I admire his stance, but I know how much it cost. People like him give

> me strength to hope that things can improve. The shitty thing is that people like him have to hide, just like the little black creature sneaking around your building. Imagine that scenario: a man eligible for the draft disguises himself as a black mouse and hides in the shelter of the night from Arkan's forces of darkness. A real *Twilight Zone* all around us.

Reading passages like that bolsters my memory: the scene of the mouse scurrying past me one night when my grandma was visiting and I was sleeping on the floor. The real letters are in my parents' apartment, and I'm here in Chicago reading the scans my dad made and sent me via the Internet. I'm transported back to the time when I first opened the envelope and read the lines for the first time. I can picture us both as young displaced persons chronicling our lives in letters to each other, as a private act of civil disobedience against the nationalism and war.

My brother almost got drafted during an earlier part of the war, in an earlier apartment. Our family changed eight apartments in seven and a half years that we all lived in Belgrade, and so the apartment where he was almost caught was apartment number 4, and the one where he was hiding in 1995 was apartment number 5.

> **Apartment #1:** Krnjača (the wrong side of the bridge over the Danube). It's actually a bungalow-type house, and the landlords live in a bigger house next door. The landlady stops by a lot and complains about her life. She really thinks even a family of refugees has it better than her. We stay there a few months. Like several other places we'd inhabit in Belgrade, this is a house built illegally by rural migrants driven to Belgrade by a promise of a slightly better life.

> **Apartment #2:** Borča (far outskirts of the city, also on the wrong side of the bridge over the Danube). This is not strictly a migrant community, but a planned complex of mid-rises. The roof leaks in this one-bedroom top floor apartment. We stay there about half a year.

Apartment #3: Banovo Brdo. It's on a very elite street with big, fancy family homes owned by successful professionals and shady "businessmen." We live in a trailer in someone's backyard. It has literally only two rooms: a front one, and a back one. But it has a phone line. We stay there for about a year, until the landlords ask us to leave, because they need the space for a family member.

Apartment #4: Žarkovo, an affordable, solid, not too densely populated working class neighborhood. A single bus ride to the University. A lot of students and professors live in this area as well. (It's always interesting to eavesdrop on the conversations on the bus. One time a drama student is on the bus with his girlfriend. Inbetween make-out sessions, he name-drops and brags about all the times sexy actresses wanted him, but how he always turned them down. About a year later, I recognize him on TV, and he's in almost every film made in former Yugoslavia now.) The Žarkovo apartment is a glorified studio, and it also has a phone line. It doesn't have heat, but electric space heaters do the trick. We stay there for about a year and a half, until the landlord asks us to leave because his son's girlfriend is pregnant, so they have to move in.

Apartment #5: An unmarked street on the hill between two typical, densely populated Balgrade neighborhoods. Yet another street of houses built by rural migrants, but the houses are big and the street is paved. The apartment is spacious, but has no phone, and the landlord doesn't like to fix things. Two years. We leave when the landlord raises the rent and we can't afford it anymore.

Apartment #6: Zemun. A ground floor apartment in a planned complex of mid- and high-rises, another glorified studio apartment. It's a tough neighborhood. A bomb explodes near our building one time. Another time, someone throws a brick, breaks our window, the brick lands in the kitchen, luckily with no one inside. Another time, a neighbor jumps to his death and the thump of his body in

front of our apartment wakes us up. We stay through all those events, but leave once the landlady raises the rent, and we can't afford it anymore.

Apartment #7: Borča-Pretok. Back on the wrong side of the bridge over the Danube. Far outskirts. A neighborhood of small family homes built first by Romani families in the 1980s, and then they were joined by rural migrants and refugees (see the pattern?). One of the refugee families we knew moved back to their home village, and they rented their house in Borča-Pretok to us. The house itself is small and damp, and none of the streets in the neighborhood are paved. We stay there for a year.

Apartment #8: 29 Novembra Street, 11th floor in a high-rise near the Botanical Garden. It's walking distance from downtown. It has two tiny bedrooms, a tiny kitchen, and a large living room. We're able to afford it because my brother's girlfriend moves in. We stay there for six months, until the NATO bombing begins in 1999, when my brother's girlfriend flies back to the States, my brother flees to Budapest, and my mom and I return to Borovo Naselje.

My brother and I were the only ones home, in apartment #4, and it was 1993 or thereabouts. We were talking and laughing about something, forgetting to be cautious, when there was a knock on the door, and we opened it carelessly. A young dude was outside, in civilian clothes, but carrying the unmistakable blue envelope.

"Is Stanislav Žabić here?"

Both Stanislav and I were looking at him, and we said in unison, without missing a beat:

"No."

"Where is he?"

"In Slovenia," Stanislav said.

"And who are you?" the blue envelope asked him.

"I'm his brother," my brother said.

Even then, I had a distinct feeling the envelope guy knew what was going on. I still seem to remember the face that looked highly intelligent, the eyes that had nothing of the blankness of a

military pawn or someone who thinks serving the military and fighting in the war is some kind of heroic honor. Standing in the grey of our dingy apartment building, on a dreary day, he looked more like a guy we might run into at an underground rock club, which to me, at the time, still meant that he was a good guy, or at least anti-war.

"OK, just sign here, any one of you," he said, letting us off the hook.

One afternoon alone in the apartment the following summer, or perhaps the one before, with all the windows open to let in the breeze, I played a Rip Rig + Panic tape loud from the stereo. We had a Slovenian-made stereo from the early 1980s that the plunderers didn't want when they went through the stuff in our Borovo Naselje apartment and stole the newer stereo, VCR, guitars, appliances, most of the LPs, furniture, and various items deemed worthy. The stereo had pretty big speakers, and the sound carried well outside the building. I played the Rip Rig + Panic tape that a friend had made for me, and when the tape ended, during the silence, I heard from the distance that someone else had begun playing Rip Rig + Panic on their own stereo. What are the odds? It's not like the British band was at all popular, having disbanded relatively unknown more than ten years prior. I looked outside the window, but I couldn't tell where the sound was coming from, which mysterious neighbor was an indie music lover like me. When his song ended, there was silence again. Then I played another obscure band, cranking the stereo. I don't remember what that one was. Afterward, my neighbor played the very same song from his/her collection.

I liked to think it was a he. Someone my age, about twenty. And cute. We played the game for a bit, and then it ended, I don't remember how. I figured I'd never meet that person, but I hoped we'd keep playing the game in the days to come, and fantasized that our non-verbal communication would blossom into something more. No such luck; the game was never to be repeated. The guy (I still can't help but think he was male) perhaps managed to escape Serbia and the draft and emigrate somewhere abroad. It's also possible that I had a case of auditory hallucinations.

On two occasions, I did see things in that apartment that were probably not there: maggots in a sack of onions on the balcony, and a bat in the bathroom. When my family checked on these phenomena, they saw nothing, although there is a likelihood that the maggots crawled out of the sack and the bat flew out the window just to make me look crazy.

The one time I suspected I was hallucinating about a birch tree shedding all its leaves in the middle of summer ended up being not my imagination at all. The windows of the living room—the only room in the apartment aside from the kitchen—offered the view of a small, undeveloped area punctuated with a few trees, and then there were apartment blocks beyond. Over a single windy night in August 1994, a birch tree, probably diseased, went naked. I wrote a poem about it called "You Can't See the Forest for the Trees":

> the wind blew the leaves off a birch tree
> while I stood bewildered
> waiting to fly away
> to disappear
> (. . .)
> these are the times
> when such things happen.

And so on. Writing about trees was fine, but you couldn't avoid alluding to present events in the early 1990s. I got one of such vaguely topical poems, "From October to October," published in the only openly anti-regime journal, *ProFemina*, where they'd run editorials against the war and the ruling ideology. But I published other stuff in every journal that would take me. I'd stuff the poems in envelopes, not the blue tissue ones, but solid manila ones, and mail them from the post office in the center of Belgrade. I'd walk down the street while trolleys clattered and people darted about, disorientated, depressed, some of them talking to themselves, others strutting their fashion statements and masks. I'd sing to myself under my breath. And even when the sieges and battles ended, and Dayton agreements were

signed, drafts were suspended, but the war continued by other means.

My brother never got caught, but I had extended family members who did, and one of them didn't survive. None of them ever talked about their wartime experiences. As for my childhood friends, telegraphic pieces of information would reach me, but I never learned any details. One volunteered at the age of sixteen, spent four years fighting in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then retired at the age of twenty, spent most of his pension checks on heroin and other drugs, and died before he turned thirty. Another volunteered at the age of nineteen, and when I saw him a few years later, he was an insomniac who'd sometimes fall asleep only to have nightmares and wake up his sister and his mom with his crying and screaming. Another friend got drafted, but kept deserting until they put him in jail and declared him too mentally disturbed to serve. Another one got drafted at about twenty, and committed suicide at twenty-one.

Yet another childhood friend, who worked as an ice-cream vendor on the "Knez" promenade in Belgrade, was picked up after his shift ended in the wee hours of the night in the summer of 1995, and was whisked away to Knin, Croatia. His mom followed, determined to convince the powers that be to let him go home, stat. And she succeeded. How? You don't ask for details in such situations. I suppose she knew somebody who knew somebody, or maybe it was so unusual for a mother to show up at a warlord's compound to demand her son back that they didn't refuse her.

Here's a world peace movement for you that would actually work. Right this minute, all parents around the world march right into the military bases, para- or "legit," and get their kids the fuck out of there. End of all wars.

From October to October	*Od oktobra do oktobra*
Autumn days, open windows	Jesenji dani, otvoreni prozori
glass openings, closed roads	stakleni otvori, zatvoreni putevi
riotous winds fire their machine guns	uznemireni rafali vetra
a plucked leaf I caught	otkinuti list koji sam uhvatila
and tucked away,	i spremila,

I wonder if it'll rot and when.

pitam se da li će istrunuti i kad.

Soon I'll sniff the coming winter
in the night that flew in from the north,
quietly I await my friends,
maybe we'll play card games,
they'll drink.

Uskoro ću nanjušiti zimu
u noći koja je doletela sa severa,
tiho iščekujem prijatelje,
možda ćemo kartati,
oni će piti.

Last days, deployed soldiers
leaden slaves, buried tanks
squads of rain
the dart of a raindrop I caught
and ate,
I wonder if it'll evaporate and when.

Poslednji dani, otpremljeni vojnici
olovni robovi, zakopani tenkovi
obrazovani redovi kiše
ustremljena kap koju sam uhvatila
i pojela,
pitam se da li će ispariti i kad.

Soon they'll seize the village too
in the night stolen from life,
quietly I await my friends,
maybe they'll write to me,
they're far away.

Uskoro će osvojiti i selo
u noći koja je ukradena od života,
tiho iščekujem prijatelje,
možda će mi pisati,
oni su daleko.

Autumn days, locked safes
paper clouds, signed contracts
liberated cities fall
the loaded bus I caught,
I set out
I wonder if I'll forget and when.

Jesenji dani, zaključani sefovi
papirni oblaci, potpisani kontrakti
oslobođeni gradovi pali
natovareni bus koji sam uhvatila,
pa krenula
pitam se da li ću zaboraviti i kad.

Memory of [State] # 5

Comments:

It was really proud to tell others in [State] you were from [City]. This was the industrial city of [State] with many factories and mining. It had a life of mixed ethnicity like no other city in [State].

Thousands of workers would finish at 5 pm and later the students finishing the lectures would fill the city shops, cafes, and clubs. From 5 to 8 pm the city would be so overcrowded with people. Often you would meet parents while you were with friends—it was the right time to ask for extra money, without having to explain in detail why you need it.

Just across the bridge on the northern side was the place where most of us would spend the time and money that we had, playing computer games, snooker, and table-football. To me and my friends it never mattered whether you were a [Ethnic Group Member] or a [Different Ethnic Group Member]. The aim was to win whoever you challenged.

Apartheid came and effectively ended the dynamism and pulsating time of the city. Hardship followed. My family was not alone. Thousands lost their jobs. People with money were those who had a close relative working in the West.

In 199_, I received the letter to join the Army. Of course this was not an option for me. I would not go and join an army that was involved in fighting other states. The regime knew that all too well but they also knew that once you receive the letter you

had to leave the country. Just like many of my friends, I too decided I could not go on hiding forever. I left and sought refuge in [Western State]. I did not complete high school, had no general knowledge, no real education, no skills. Really I had nothing but my simple soul and body to do jobs that no [Citizen of Western State] would accept.

Increasingly I am realizing that [Hometown] is the city where I want to grow old. When I visit now, everybody there seems so friendly. It saddens me enormously today the city is so quiet and so divided. Not much movement, no dynamism. I often sit in a café close to the bridge and wonder what happened to that entire pulsating city that I used to remember. I wonder how boring life must be [across the bridge] without the noisy [Ethnic Group].

Power Suit and Stilettos: Homecomings

By November 1991, Vukovar was destroyed, atrocities committed, non-Serbian population for the most part kicked out and unwelcome, and the city became some weird neither-peace-nor-war zone. On November 12, 1995, the Erdut Accord was signed by a representative of Vukovar Serbs, a representative of the Republic of Croatia, the US Ambassador to Croatia, and a UN peacemaker, all in the interest of human rights. After the fall and before Erdut, Vukovar existed as a soulless little puppet city-state economically dependant on embargoed Milošević's Serbia. Since Erdut, it's been functioning as a soulless little city neglected by debt-ridden Croatia, but it's peacetime again, and not only Serbs, but also Croats populate the city again. It's a multiethnic little city again, but something is broken. My hometown has become an urban zombie. Are there any movies in which a zombie becomes a living being after some miracle? We need that miracle.

Now in its second decade of post-Erdut existence, the entire Vukovar area, including my neighborhood of Borovo Naselje, is a place where children have the right to attend ethnically segregated schools, from kindergarten through high school. Young people have the right to leave the city for an uncertain alternative anywhere in the wide world. Aging Vukovar natives, born in the decades between 1920 and 1980, have the right to daydream about the pre-war past that becomes increasingly idealistic as time wears on. And the more utopian the past looks, the more

unbearable the present is, which of course becomes a vicious circle. I left the city in 1991, and I've been back many times since; each time I check the pulse of the city and each time I'm happy to leave.

I passed my Belgrade University entrance exam in June of 1992 and soon thereafter went back home for the first time after the street fighting ceased, and Vukovar was under the auspices of the United Nations. I took a bus from Belgrade to the border, where dad picked me up. He had returned to the city a few months prior, ostensibly to help rebuild the infrastructure, but mainly because he was let go from his new job in Belgrade. As we drove to grandma's apartment in Borovo Naselje, we couldn't talk; the sun mercilessly exposed the post-war, post-air-raid wasteland of the city. It was a lot like the footage of the ruins I watched on TV every day, except it looked a lot worse in 3 D, but I didn't want to start weeping in front of dad. Mainly in fear that he would then unravel as well, and then what?

As I write this, I'm close to my dad's age that day in 1992 and very far from the eighteen-year old in the passenger seat. I don't have kids of my own, but in a weird way, as I remember that scene now, I begin to see it more and more from my dad's perspective. I drive, my daughter is in shock, so am I. I had nothing to do with the war, but there is also this vague, yet unshakable feeling that it's my generation who fucked it up so badly, and that I let my children down. My generation: people with children around the same age as my daughter; people with aging parents, like my mother; some of them I knew and never suspected they could participate in a devastation like this. The world I inhabited for over forty years has been replaced with a nightmare. It's a nightmare come true: about living in wartime, being followed by figures of evil both of the amorphous and very concrete varieties, not sure if this survival thing will succeed, and if it does, if it will suffice.

And here's what happened to that eighteen-year-old me taking in the scenes of the devastated hometown: her brain began weaving an idealized, sentimental tapestry of Vukovar in the

summers of peace. It was an old city of bright yellow buildings; of tree-lined streets busy with cars, foot traffic, bicycles, skateboards, roller blades; a city of market places offering rows and rows of produce and folk arts and crafts; kiosks selling ćevapi or ice cream late into the evening. It was a city of old men playing bocce or chess, of content people of all ages outdoors, talking, strolling up and down streets and across bridges over the Danube's tributary Vuka, reading papers on park benches, fishing, and during festivals preparing fish paprikash right there on the street, in enamel pots hanging over small open fires. Vukovar people spent their summers lolling around on the Danube, in the city and outside it, and on the nearby island. Pre-war Vukovar, my patchwork of sensory memory and dreams.

In my dad's car that June 1992, I was forced to learn to recognize the new face of my city. No more yellow, but blackened buildings in various stages of ruin. No more skateboards, but craters on the pavement, often with bomb fragments at the center. Many of the old trees gone, and those still standing offering no shade, nothing to veil the ugliness. The streets had already been cleared, and there were the UN blue helmets in their white trailers, but hardly any car or foot traffic. The initial shock gave way to grief, gave way to the dull realization that my town had become what Beirut was in the evening news my entire childhood. I felt as defeated as the city, dull gray, unable to cry or get angry. I spent that day at grandma's apartment where my dad also lived now. Her building, while damaged, was at least livable once the windows had been repaired. There was nothing to do, no one to see outside the confines of grandma's apartment. I'd go to the living room connected with the kitchen to eat or watch TV, then go back to the single bedroom to read or listen to music. Frequent detonations outside, sometimes close, sometimes far away, meant that experts were clearing the numerous minefields one by one, or so I liked to believe. I'd hear stories about kids playing in the rubble and about mines exploding.

I'd look at the ruins and fantasize: this is the result of a recent devastating earthquake, nothing else. The news about the earthquake has spread around the globe, and peoples of the world are united in their solidarity. The whole world is sending construction materials, equipment, and money. We'll rebuild this, we'll have our apartments back, and schools, factories, busines-

ses, and cultural institutions, we'll be up and running again before you know it. You know things are bad when your fantasy involves not even an alternate history, but a natural catastrophe.

I certainly imagined alternate histories as well. I even wrote a sci-fi story in which, right before the war is about to begin in Yugoslavia, aliens with advanced science and technology show up due to a glitch in their spacecraft. They are so advanced, they can speak Serbo-Croatian to a bunch of teenagers in Borovo Naselje (the teenaged protagonist is based on the real-life me, of course). They tell the teenager that they have the power to go back in time and intervene in order to change the course of history, but that they never ever do that. The teenager is sad that they won't use their power, but she's glad that she at least got a chance to meet them. She parts ways with the aliens and goes home to sleep. When she wakes up, her brother is telling her to hurry up and get ready for school. As she's walking to school, she realizes that everything is a little different. The street names don't bear any names of fallen heroes from World War Two, and there's no monument to the partisans on the main square. She spends the rest of the week brushing up on her modern history, and she basically has to relearn everything. She realizes that the aliens did in fact go back in time and they not only prevented this war, but even World War One and Two, and whichever domino it was that they intercepted, the result was global peace and economic welfare, a world in which teenagers were free to stay up late at night pursuing the arts. At the end of the week—the end of the story—she plays with her rock'n'roll band at the youth club by the Danube. When her set is done, she walks to the river bank, the same spot where she met her alien friends. She looks up at the Milky Way splitting the sky in half.

It took the bird populations years to return to the city: first the pigeons, nesting in shrapnel holes, and then finally schools of migratory birds put Borovo back on their map.

It took a few more visits from Belgrade to Borovo for me to be able to leisurely walk around my old hometown. Most of the lush city vegetation had survived and bloomed again. I would

walk to the Danube, the only thing that looked, felt, and smelled the same as before the war, deep, rolling on (to the Black Sea, hundreds of kilometers downstream), indifferent about our human stupidity and evil. The Danube, named by people, used by people, but coolly independent of them. Any time of the year I'd sit by the water just to inhale its smell deeply: animal and human life and death, everything that rains down into the river beginning with the melted snow in Germany, and all the way through Central Europe. Vague saltiness would tickle my nostrils as if to remind me that before the river, its valley, and its people, there used to be a sea, and maybe one day there will be one again.

In Chicago, in the radius encompassing UIC, a cadence of urban toponyms sounds like a familiar refrain: Little Italy, Pilsen, Chinatown, Greektown, Maxwell Street, South Loop, West Loop, and so on. I stubbornly call Pilsen home, as if it's not temporary, as if I'm not a semi-intruder into its working-class, yuppie, native-born, and immigrant mosaic. Here graffiti appears in the morning and disappears overnight, and I imagine a cartoon in which the besuited, pot-bellied alderman chases young taggers who shave their heads, except for a patch in the back. A boy's cred grows (again, I imagine) inch by inch along with the lock of hair down his neck.

I still sometimes fantasize about how my life would have turned out had there been peace in 1991 and beyond. I know that people who were not displaced due to war, but simply move from one place to another, out of their own will even more than necessity, also fantasize about their personal alternate histories. Here's mine.

Let me assume for a second that Yugoslavia never broke apart and there was never a war in 1990s. I won't go as far as in that old short story of mine and envision aliens creating utopia by preventing the rise of Napoleon or something. Let me just assume that the 1990s wars were successfully prevented and Yugoslavia never broke apart.

All the factories in my little home city of Vukovar/Borovo

Naselje kept on operating. In the alternate history, it doesn't matter whether the economy is a socialist or a capitalist one, or whether it's a blend of the two, or maybe it's a whole new ism; all that matters is that things work simply and accurately as in Mr. Rogers' neighborhood or in Branko Kockica's kindergarten. All of us keep our jobs and pension plans, and the economic crisis is a thing of the past. I attend college from '92 to '96 at one of several universities in the country, majoring in literature, minoring in women's studies, meanwhile mastering English and a few other foreign languages. Upon graduation, I return to Borovo where I get a job as a translator in the import-export department of the Borovo factory, the same factory that gave employment to my grandparents and my parents. Or, more likely, I get a job as a teacher at one of the schools in the area; with the population on the rise, new schools are built to accommodate all the children, and therefore more and more teachers are needed. I make regular payments on my car and my apartment. I meet a nice man. We date for a while. We take trips to the national parks that preserve pristine swampy grounds or cascading waterfalls in the continental areas, or to the secluded beaches on the Adriatic. Sometimes we travel abroad and we always come back with photos, videos, souvenirs, and other miniature foreign symbols. Of course, I write in my free time a lot, and publish when and where I can, and take an active role in organizing local cultural life and entertainment in Borovo Naselje, Vukovar, and the surrounding area. I have a small group of friends with similar interests as I, and a large network of acquaintances, neighbors, and family members. At some point my partner and I slow down a bit and begin raising our own family. Grandparents are there to help. That's where my fantasy ends. I don't actually grow old and die in my fantasy, I mean, whose alternate life history unfolds that far into the future?

I had a slightly different fantasy when I was nine, in the fall of 1983, roughly around the time when Michael Jackson debuted his moon walk and Spielberg's *E.T.* played at the local theater (American movies premiered in Borovo Naselje typically about a year after, say, L.A.). I remember daydreaming at the dining table one afternoon, trying hard to imagine what the year 2000 would look like, and what I would be like in that big watershed of a year. I might have been prompted by a chapter in my 4th-

grade social studies textbook, a chapter that outlined and illustrated what everyday life would be like in the twenty-first century. The one prediction that caught my attention, so much so that I still remember it, was about the futuristic way of shopping. The illustration showed a woman at a keyboard and a monitor. The chapter said that early 21st-century people would be able to purchase anything they wanted from their homes, using their own home computers to shop. I couldn't wrap my head around that concept, but I hoped it would come true as early as possible: my top most hated chore was going to the bakery or the corner store to fetch a thing or two, like milk, bread, cigarettes, or anything else my parents would need on any given day. For some baffling reason, I felt embarrassed in front of the sales ladies (and most of them were ladies; there were very few sales gentlemen).

"But what if I make a mistake, everyone will mock me," I'd argue and plead, to everyone's bafflement.

So futuristic shopping that didn't involve human contact appealed to me as a kid, and it seemed so sci-fi that I had to wonder what else, more realistic, could be going on in the year 2000, the year I'm a fully grown woman, already in my twenty-sixth-year. It's a bright spring day. I'm in the street with my two small children, one on my left, one on my right. I'm holding their little hands. We are in Borovo Naselje, but the neighborhood is now larger, with busy, broad streets with overpasses, underpasses, bridges, and tunnels. I'm a professional of some sort, dressed in a power suit and stilettos. I'm either an undercover detective à la Cagney or Lacy or a reporter à la Lois Lane; in my 9-year-old mind, there is no difference between the feminist detective duo and Superman's sidekick. My kids (I didn't see them clearly in my fantasy, I don't even know what they are wearing or what their genders are) and I look up at the sky. We can see a spaceship being released from a local launching station. It's the year 2000 after all, and Vukovar doesn't just have freight ships and tourist boats in the harbor, it also has spaceships in the launching station.

Now back to reality.

In the year 2000, I was neither a mother of two nor a professional of any sort. Vukovar was not a healthy city, its buildings were not whole, my parents were not employed, Yugoslavia wasn't existing, and space ships were not being launched much

anywhere. Yet I found myself, in a strange version of future-as-imagined, in Hannover, the host city of Expo 2000, the first World Fair of the new millennium. The theme was "Man, Nature, Technology." Kraftwerk were commissioned to write and compose the song for the fair. And they did, titling it "Expo 2000," which would have been a perfect title for one of their albums in the 1970s, and the song was great, but stuck in the past. "Man, Nature, Technology," the vocoder voice chants, and "Mensch, Nature, Technik," as the synthesizers spin their cold, digital web. Images of Western Europe at the turn of the millennium overlap with my memories of winter holidays spent watching science documentaries in the early 80s, which always seemed to have the Kraftwerk soundtrack.

The graduate program I attended in Hannover was conceived as a female-only scholarly counterpart to the World Fair. There were about 900 of us, mostly in Hannover, but also in Bremen and Hamburg. The program was titled "Technology and Culture" (sadly, not accompanied by a Kraftwerk tune), and I was a part of the 300-women-strong Project Area Body, and within it the 10-member art subgroup. My group had women from Germany, Bangladesh, Turkey, Papua New Guinea, Australia, Greece, Croatia, and South Africa, and all the other groups were thus constituted: a few Germans and a cross section of the First, Second, and Third World. This will never happen again in our lifetimes, and we kind of knew it even back then.

Within our group of ten artists, we formed even smaller groups in order to collaborate on specific projects, and mine was called Moist Verbs. A dancer from Australia, a singer/songwriter from Germany, and me, a poet from ex-Yugoslavia. We put on three shows in three months. In the first one, the dancer danced, the singer sang, and I did a comedy sketch, a parody of a feminist theory talk peppered with references to Derrida, Foucault, and Žižek, with a few charts and illustrations projected overhead. In the second Moist Verbs show, the dancer tapped, all three of us sang, and the singer and I played guitar. For the third and final performance, all bets were off. All three of us danced, nobody sang, and we each acted out scenes, pieces of monologues, and verse.

Every day we walked the streets of Hannover, and blew our stipends on food and wine. Hannover was a multiethnic town,

with Eastern Europeans, Turks, Middle-Easterners, Africans, and Asians making their home among the Germans. It was okay, but the police were known to harass those who couldn't pass as white Germans upon cursory racial profiling. The city worked, but you could sense tensions. In my every day interactions with Hannoverians, I often talked to the Turks who owned small businesses that I frequented, who either thought I was also Turkish, or definitely knew I wasn't German. We talked in some kind of pidgin German that I can't reproduce anymore if I tried, all of it is gone. Activists in Hannover organized an anti-racism march, which many of us students in the "Technology and Culture" program joined.

At some point, I decided to accept the invitation of some Danish friends and go and visit them in Denmark. I needed a visa in order to travel, but a Danish consulate was within walking distance from where I lived in Hannover, so I thought I'd give it a shot.

Hannover was one of the most bombed-out German cities in World War Two. There was a very small, painstakingly restored old heart of the city, and everything else was newly built after the war. They had revamped their public transportation for the Expo, so it was now based on the fast, comfortable, and efficient light rail system, and they built a brand new main railroad station. Some of the city parks were huge and close to the center, and I couldn't help but think that those were once city blocks populated by people who ended up dying in some of the gruesome ways devised and executed during World War Two. But it had been five and a half decades since, and I'd lie if I said I actually felt a ghost-like presence. The time kept going forward.

The Danish consulate was in one of the centrally located office buildings. I followed the directions I had found online and walked over there and up the stairs to a glass door I needed. I peeked inside and saw a petite, official-looking, middle-aged lady sitting behind a desk, talking to a family of three: a wife, a husband, and a teenage daughter. I could hear the lady behind the desk telling the family:

"Sorry, we don't issue visas in this consulate. You need to go to the one in Hamburg."

Soon the family got out, looking exacerbated but also somehow resigned. I went inside and asked the official:

"Do you issue Danish visas here?"

The lady said yes.

Perhaps I misheard what she told the family, I thought to myself, and so I proceeded with the proceedings. I busied myself filling out the form, every once in a while asking for clarifications, and the lady readily provided them. She was very friendly, chatting with me while she was copying pages of my passport and my form. She told me to check back in two weeks, and I got a really good feeling about my future trip to Denmark.

I decided to buy some groceries on my way home. I was walking fast toward the supermarket when I realized I was unintentionally catching up with the family that was at the consulate right before me. I was still curious as to what had happened. Did I really hear correctly what the lady told them?

"Excuse me," I said as I walked within their earshot, and they turned around and stopped. It was obvious they recognized me, so I let my nosey nature come out.

"Did you just try to apply for the Danish visa at the consulate?" I asked.

They confirmed that they did, but that the official told them they had to go to Hamburg for those. The husband said:

"But we just came back from Hamburg, and they told us that we had to go to Hannover instead."

The father, who was white, explained that he was Swiss, so he didn't need the Danish visa, but that his wife and daughter weren't EU citizens, so they needed it. The wife and daughter didn't specify where they were from, as if their East Asian looks explained everything.

"I overheard what the woman told you. But they do take visa applications there, I just turned mine in."

Now I wasn't just nosey, but convinced that the consulate woman turned them down because they were Asian. They explained that the girl was off to college in Sweden, and she and her mom had already obtained Swedish visas. They just needed the transit visas for Denmark, as the three of them were driving to Sweden with the girl's stuff. We discussed the possibility that the bureaucracy was set up in a way that the consulate in Hamburg was issuing only transit visas, and its Hannover twin only tourist visas. But that didn't make sense.

"Maybe you can complain to someone higher up, she probably did lie to you," I said, and my paranoia found a welcome audience with this family. Soon they thanked me, and they went their way, and I went mine.

Two weeks later, I got the word. My visa application was denied. My Danish friends did attempt to reach higher ups to try to get the decision reversed. They made phone calls and complained, and demanded an explanation. One thing occurred to me: this was maybe the first time they didn't get what they wanted from the state. Some officials higher up pulled some strings to get the bureaucracy to flip once more through the photocopied pages of my passport and the autobiographical form I filled, and the final decision was reached—definite denial. The explanation my Danish friends got was: "She moves around too much."

If I moved around so much, what was the danger for Denmark, why was I so undesirable, a drifter who was going to move somewhere else after Denmark? Maybe it was the direction of my "moving around" that bothered them, as recorded in my passport: from Belgrade a bit north to Budapest, then a bit northwest to Prague, then quite a bit more northwest to Hannover. Maybe I was slowly and insidiously making my way to the Promised Land of Denmark all along.

From where I stood, it seemed that, as far as the Danish bureaucracy was concerned, there were several kinds of foreigners encroaching their borders. Asians? Just ping-pong them back and forth between Hamburg and Hannover until they give up. An Eastern European girl in cheap jeans and an ill-fitting sweater? Let her apply, take her fee, but ultimately reject her. Maybe it would have been different if I had come to the office wearing a power suit and stilettos, made up like a TV detective or Superman's sidekick.

A foot of snow had accumulated in Borovo Naselje during Christmas Eve and Christmas Day of 2007, while I was visiting my hometown for the first time since my move to Chicago. In the deep quiet of the half-populated-half-ghost-town, the tract-

ion of my rubber soles against the squeaky snow was the loudest sound for blocks and blocks. After a clear day, the fog was settling, and the river and the air above it were metallic-purple in the dusk. I stepped on the embankment and stood perfectly still. I scanned the familiar panorama spread open before me. There are several different ways to get from and to the Danube, to and from any given point in Borovo Naselje. Certainly there are detours, but somehow it never takes more than a half an hour to get from any point A to any point B in the town. Standing on the embankment remembering what winters were like twenty and more years ago (ice-skating on frozen, but well-lit streets; sledding down a manmade hill; the smell of gloves drying on the radiator), all I could hear was the silence for a stretch of minutes, until it was interrupted by the faint voicing of the ducks in the marshes beyond the other bank. Up the river was Borovo Selo—the old village that had been standing since long before the shoe factory and the workers' town appeared in 1930s and borrowed its name. Down the river, a little beyond the factory, I saw the familiar skyline of Vukovar: the harbor, the riverfront high-rises, the St. Phillip and Jacob parish church on one of the hills, the funnel-shaped Water Tower. Beyond the Water Tower were the vineyards and the Vučedol park nested among them by the river, harboring its Neolithic archeology. The ancient city is where I was born, it's where my high school was, as well as the theater where I even performed in drag (during my most boyish phase), more than once. So I claim Vukovar, almost equally as Borovo Naselje, to be my home, with its layers of prehistory, antiquity, middle ages, early modern, late modern, and postmodern times, apocalypse and post-apocalypse. But Borovo Naselje is special: it's an experiment in modernity. Or it was. Now it's a ticking, panting-breathing, forever "under-reconstruction" museum of modernity. They are rebuilding the residential areas, but the factory, the once-beating heart of the neighborhood, the city and the region, is barely operating, gaping empty, unusable in the murky waters of "transition," the sketchy Eastern European sibling of the already shady neoliberalism ruling the globe.

And I am now a museum exhibit isolated from its context and therefore completely unrecognizable as such, but still I'm touring the world. Currently I'm on loan to the city of Chicago. I have lived in three East European metropolises, and visited doz-

ens of smaller or larger cities in the so-called old and new worlds. I don't have a car and I never learned how to drive, so I still only experience urban landscapes via public transportation, or from the passenger seat or the back seat of other people's cars, or on two wheels, or by foot. And everywhere, from Vancouver's Granville Bridge to Utrecht's canals, from St. Mark's Place in New York, to Prague's Staré Město, there are moments when my mind projects stills of pre-war Borovo onto the panorama surrounding me. It's especially easy to do here in Chicago's Pilsen, as I recognize the working-class people in this neighborhood—a lot of them foreigners like me—who go strolling outside with the first warm days and throw block parties until the cold snaps grow frequent and brutal. I see abuelitas monitoring the children who turn the streets into their playground, and all the generations inbetween are around as well. I see men drinking in the streets, wasted, but harmless, like the drunks across the street from our last pre-war apartment. I feel comfortable as I observe the old factories and warehouses from my seat on the bus. I detect layers of history on the buildings with older Czech inscriptions and newer Mexican murals I pass by on my bike. In some Spanish accents I hear the syncopation of the old Borovo Naselje inflection. I admit: I etch pieces of my town into my map of Chicago as I traipse this American city up and down. That's my best shot at going back home, and moving on, and coming to always some different home.

Memory of [State] # 6

Comments:

Another thing that stuck with me is how we would go on a night out to listen to live music, talk about music and art or whatever and dream our little dreams, when suddenly a handful of police would burst in and raid the place, multiplying our dreams with zero. They'd slap a few people around and ask everyone for ID. Most of the people lived a few meters away from the club yet they needed to be identified by a policeman.

I was caught up in the war in 19__ when two of my friends died, while I was lucky enough to survive and flee.

I now live in [Western City]. I have seen the world is "becoming smaller" in many aspects and there is no reason to hate or fight each other anymore. Civilized people compete with each other, they don't clash.

Neighborhoods of Poetry

Loop to Pilsen, Over a Decade Into the 21st Century.

Riding on the Pink Line el from downtown Chicago to my Pilsen neighborhood, I sat behind two teenagers, a boy and a girl, who were swapping composition notebooks filled with crude drawings, Manga-inspired, and lines of verse, maybe lyrics, maybe poems. I was coming back from a band practice followed by a long walk up and down the greenest streets in the Lincoln Park neighborhood. Between the affluent Lincoln Park and the working-class Pilsen, first the Brown Line and then the Pink Line trains thundered above busy highways and streets. Views of steel and glass towers along the lake, on a bright June afternoon, made it seem as if the tracks were elevated miles above the ground. I wouldn't be surprised if the boy, the girl, and I were not the only ones thinking about poetry at the time.

I'm thinking of Branko Miljković, a tragic Yugoslav poet from the mid-twentieth century, the kind of poet you get into as an angsty teenager. One time I translated his most famous poem into English just to see how it would sound in another language, stripped of all the baggage it carries in its original, Yugoslav context. I knew it had been translated before, but I wanted to try my own hand.

Everybody Will Write Poetry

the dream is an old-time forgotten truth

that no one can verify any longer
now foreign lands sing like the sea and anxiety
east is west of west counterfeit movement the fastest
now wisdom sings with the birds of my neglected disease
a flower between the ashes and the scent
those who refuse to survive love
and lovers who turn back the time
the garden scent the earth recognizes no more
and the land that remains faithful to death
since the world is not the sun's only care

but one day
the sun will stand where the heart used to be
human speech will contain no words
that the verse will disavow
everybody will write poetry
truth will grace all words
where verse is at its finest
the one who sang the first will retreat
and leave the verse to the rest
I accept the grand thought of the future poetics:
one unhappy man cannot be a poet
I take upon me the judgment of that fledgling singing mob:
ring in a new song or the storm will ring in your ears

but:

will freedom know how to sing
the way slaves sang praises to her

Branko Miljković, 1960

I translated the poem, but I am never completely sure whether Miljković thinks it's a good thing everyone will write poetry. Will all poetry be good when everybody starts writing it? Good or bad, in coffee shops and bars around Chicago, groups of characters meet daily and they speak, sing, or rap their verse—everybody already writes poetry, it seems, even though utopia is far away, and receding.

In the summer of 2009, Café Mestizo's open mic and a

Pentecostal congregation right across the street would each start at eight. Each stage spoke in its own tongues and people danced and moved around and sang. We at Café Mestizo could peek through the open doors of the storefront church: bright overhead lights, rows of red plastic picnic chairs. They could peek inside the dim café and see the furniture and lighting that may have been collected in alleys: no two chairs alike, no two lamps alike, except those with missing shades, resembling strange cubist nudes. At ten o'clock, both the Café Mestizo open mic and the Pentecostal church service would wrap up, no crossover between the two, other than people carrying guitars in cases, brushing past one another.

Karl Marx Street, 1988-1990.

It was soon after I read some Miljković that I began to write my own free-verse poetry that was different from serious or silly rhymed quatrains or couplets I had been writing until then. I didn't understand most of Miljković, but I think I was drawn to the dark imagery, the angst, and the irregular rhythm of it. When I read "Everybody Will Write Poetry," I wasn't sure (and I still wonder) what Miljković meant by the opening lines: "the dream is an old-time forgotten truth / that no one can verify any longer." In this vague record of disillusionment, "the dream" could refer to the poet's ambition of achieving some Parnassus-high mastery when his skill, emotion, and consciousness are merged. I know now that Miljković and his friends were called neo-symbolists, and they loved ancient, romantic, and surrealist poetry equally, but had no use for the elapsed socialist realist and proletarian movements—so maybe "the dream" refers to the older generations' striving to create workers' poetry?

I was fourteen when two poems of mine appeared in an anthology of schoolchildren's poems about Dudik, the site of World War Two atrocities in my hometown. I don't have a copy of the anthology, but I remember that one of my poems mentioned "a path to death," and how there were "lots of folk terms for evil people," but I didn't name who the evil people were or what those terms were. Sarajevo poet Duško Trifunović, also a successful lyricist for some pop and rock acts in the 1970s and 1980s, edited the anthology and wrote in his blunt, but truthful

introduction that these were poems children wrote as assignments from their teachers, but he also mentioned that he could tell that some of these children would continue to write poetry out of their own need and gift for it.

When I was twenty-one, a legit lit journal called *Reč* (*Word*) out of the anti-Milošević Radio B-92 in Belgrade featured a few of my poems. I had written one of them when I was sixteen, on the eve of the war, though I wasn't aware war was on its way. That poem was titled "Dolphin." It mentioned the tree with deep red leaves that grew in front of the window of the room I shared with my brother in my parents' apartment on Karl Marx Street. The poem did not mention the drunks pouring in and out of the "Grmeč" tavern across the street. The poem went on about how the tree would bloom again, and maybe children would stop learning how to be cruel. The speaker in the poem says she is a dolphin who will break apart the aquarium that traps her and turn the whole town into a sea.

A House in Bosnia, 1992-1995.

Sometimes I'm not sure whether "Everybody Will Write Poetry" is predicting the bright future of the imminent communist telos realized, or some dystopia instead. Not some sci-fi dystopia, obviously, but rather a tragic derailment from the revolutionary promise. Is it a good thing, that "one day / the sun will stand where the heart used to be"? Sun, an enormous burning rock with no human compassion? In any case, Branko committed suicide three decades before Yugoslavia broke apart and hell broke loose.

I knew a guy who was fighting in the last war in Bosnia when he was barely out of his teens. At some point, he found himself hiding in a house near his grandparents' village for weeks after finding his father murdered. He had to bury his dad himself. The house was nearly empty of furniture, as almost everything that could be carried had been looted, and there was only one book in there: a copy of the Bible, which he proceeded to read from cover to cover in one sitting, to get his mind off fear and grief. He pretty much expected to die any minute, and it was a miracle he was not found and murdered too. He thinks God and Jesus had something to do with his survival and indeed with him staying

sane under the circumstances. Maybe so. He found God that way, although he was raised an atheist. But would he convert without the act of reading, without finding the accidental and the deliberate moments of poetry in that religious text? Would religion appeal to so many people if it were written in the language of math? This guy didn't become a preacher—he became an artist, and he paints.

"Everybody will write poetry," and all those freed people with pens in their hands will even sing their verse, all joyful and, as such, impatient with miserable poets of the past. And that inquisitive closing couplet: will life in utopia be as good as our imagination paints it? Most likely, Miljković was thinking of his own confusing present, both in Yugoslavia (workers' "paradise"), and in newly independent states throwing off colonial shackles in Africa and Asia. There he is, poised in the middle of the 20th century, and masses of people worldwide are obtaining first literacy, then political voice, and next will come lyric voice. And if he was referring to his present, does the poem have any significance in American English in the 21st century? I want to answer, but a part of me is still in Belgrade in the 20th century.

Tram Number Two, Mid-1990s.

There is an area of Belgrade they call "Krug Dvojke," named after the route of tram number 2. The tram that doesn't have terminals, but circles around downtown from early morning until late evening. Within the route of the tram are numerous cultural institutions, some of the most stylish boutiques, highly priced real-estate, and addresses that some see as the only area a self-respecting Belgrader would call home. But, as a wiki dictionary of slang defines it, "Krug Dvojke" is also "a way for a clochard and a homeless person to spend a good portion of his day during winter in a warm and dry spot, for the price of one paltry tram fare." And so, like the cores of all European cities, this is where the city's poorest and poshest live or at least ride the same trams side by side in peace. A few steps from a stylish boutique, there is a street vendor with a cardboard box as an improvised stand and a selection of cheap threads.

Within "Krug Dvojke," Dorćol is one of the oldest neighborhoods. Its Turkish name and, typical for Belgrade, history of

destructions and reconstructions, each disparate era leaving behind an artifact or two, but all of them blending together in the familiar crumbling of the neighborhood's façades. True to form, the building in Dorćol where the Center for Women's Studies was housed in the mid-1990s ended up torn down and then completely rebuilt around the turn of the millennium. Around June 1995, I earned a certificate of Belgrade's Center for Women's Studies, and later it turned out that the year I'd spent attending those classes would have more to do with the trajectory of my adult life to come than my five years at the accredited, old Belgrade University. First, a professor from the Center for Women's Studies told me about a graduate school in Budapest that gave their post-Yugoslav and post-Soviet students free tuition and small stipends. Once in Budapest, I heard about the US creative writing programs, which brought me to North Carolina and finally to Chicago, where I'm writing this with not one, but three graduate degrees in hand.

The Center for Women's Studies was housed in a pre-World War Two apartment building, a long trolley ride from where I lived. I was too young, too uneducated and too much of a refugee to be an insider in this activist and intellectual circle, but when one reporter interviewed us students, I proclaimed that not only was I a feminist, but that my grandmothers and mother supported my politics. And so that statement was printed, along with my name, in one of the most widely distributed daily newspapers in the country. The paper with that article and my quote made it even to the village in Bosnia where some of my extended family lived, and the word is that they were shocked that "Snežana was a lesbian and that her mother and grandmother support her in that lifestyle." I never bothered to look up the newspaper in question, so I don't know whether I was misquoted or the extended family simply conflated "lesbian" with "feminist."

I have no idea which way Branko Miljković swung—but I have to wonder, what if it turns out that he was a gay man living in the time and place when no one was out of the closet? Straight or gay, I imagine he could have been among gay poets and artists, aware of the irony that the workers revolution did not involve a revolution of hypocritical bourgeois sexual norms. Metaphors pile up in the middle of the first stanza of "Everybody

Will Write Poetry" and refuse to be unpacked:

> now wisdom sings with the birds of my neglected disease
> a flower between the ashes and the scent
> those who refuse to survive love
> and lovers who turn back the time

I saw Allen Ginsberg read in Belgrade. I think it was in late 1992. I had read some Ginsberg, some of it in the original, because I had developed a habit of going to the small library of the American Cultural Center. But that institution didn't organize the reading; it was at Dom Omladine. Even in the 1990s, Belgrade had an art and music scene that was on a lifeline if not necessarily lively. Many of those engaged in various protests against Milošević's regime showed up in Dom Omladine to hear Ginsberg read his poems, sing, chant, and talk about warmongering generals as so sexually repressed that they waged wars in order to be surrounded only by young men. The regime media warned people not to go see the "homosexual poet, enemy of Serbia," but the intimidation didn't work. Besides, everyone knew that nothing would happen if you did attend, because Belgrade, and "Krug Dvojke" in particular, were designated areas of some kind of freedom of expression. Still, Serbia was not a routine stop on the itinerary of even one of the most restless beat poets.

Within "Krug Dvojke," you'll see buildings from all the chapters of the city's past, though most of them from the 19th and 20th centuries, and mostly out of order and without some master plan, buildings that shouldn't be standing side by side, but in Belgrade they do, and somehow it works. Dom Omladine is on a busy corner with buses and trolleys clanking up and down both streets, a building designed and constructed as an arts and culture space for Belgrade's youth during nineteen sixties. It packs a lot of action on its two floors: a bookstore, a gallery, a bar, a movie theater, a venue for live shows, and an auditorium for readings, lectures, and debates. Artists, literati, musicians, journalists, and university students mingle there every day and into the night.

I arrived to the reading early to beat the crowd and found a

seat with a good view of the small stage with a table and a few microphones. I remember that it was a black-box kind of a room, and that all of us seemed to have worn black or subdued dark colors, including Ginsberg, his translator, and the actors who read the Serbo-Croatian translations of the poems. Ginsberg had his trusty harmonium on the table in front of him. Before the whole thing began, a woman and a man in those gold yellow Hare Krishna robes walked in, each carrying flower wreaths; not lotus, because where would they find lotus flowers in Belgrade in the late fall of 1992, but roses, carnations, daisies, yellow lilies. Visually, that's what I remember: watching the Technicolor Hare Krishna couple giving flowers to Ginsberg and company, against the background of black walls and tables, watched by the auditorium of pale faces wearing black, brown and grey.

UNC-Wilmington Campus, 2005.

There is a poem Branko Miljković wrote that argues, I think, that poets use metaphors in order to hide that which they fear saying directly (my translation):

A Critique of Metaphor

Two words about to be uttered touch
And evaporate into an unknown meaning
That has nothing to do with them
Because there is a single word in one's head
And the poem's only purpose
Is to avoid that very word
That's how words teach one another
That's how words invent one another
That's how words tempt each other to do wrong
And the poem is a string of blind words
But their love is entirely obvious
They thrive on your convenience
They are more beautiful the more powerless you are
And when you use up your strength when you die
People say: my god he wrote such great poems
And no one doubts the word you never said

My last semester as an MFA student in North Carolina, my university brought Robert Creeley to teach a month-long, intensive poetry workshop. We met four times a week in a windowless conference room with posters on the walls advertising past readings by famous visiting writers and poets passing through the university. Creeley was never late, never cancelled a class or a one-on-one consultation. One weekend, he got ill and an ambulance drove him to the emergency room, yet he simply showed up to class on Monday. He told us to start a blog, and two of my classmates got to work and started "Mad Yaks." "RC" contributed to the blog both while he was in Wilmington and after he left North Carolina for Texas at the end of February of 2005, up until the news came in March that Creeley was gone.

RC's second blog post, dated February 17, 2005, and still up there at http://madyaks.blogspot.com, began with a link to some satirical article about former Attorney General John "Let-The-Eagle-Soar" Ashcroft being a "top contender" for the Poet Laureate honor. I knew that some of the students in the workshop found themselves to the right of Creeley on the political spectrum, but no one ever debated him—everyone was in awe of a great poet and a World War Two veteran well into his 70s, his body frail and fighting illness. And while our own young convictions were sometimes shrill and sometimes had a ring of posturing, Creeley spoke his mind (always against politicians in power and the wars they led) with hard-earned matter-of-factness. In the middle of it all, he taught us and wrote with us, and his lectures were all impromptu streams of consciousness and memory. The last time we saw him, all nineteen of us co-wrote a poem that closes with cryptic lines by RC:

it's here
again

I think I
do

Sometimes lines eschew metaphor, but still hide something behind pronouns that reference something secret, behind auxiliary verbs that lack completion. All of us, including RC, continued contributing to the blog with poems and writing prompts after

the Creeleys went to Texas, their next temporary residence. Here is one entry I posted on March 4, 2005:

new exercise

. . . or maybe not even an exercise, but rather a call for people to post their poems, old or new, that are consciously written as tributes to poets they like. i think we always write tributes—just because we're under the influence of other writers. we can only hope we'll also be a little innovative, not just derivative, from time to time.

this is an old and derivative poem i wrote after reading an essay by denise levertov in which she wrote about her corresponding and then falling out with robert duncan (vis-a-vis the paperback edition of the entire d.l./r.d. correspondence). original line arrangement is lost due to the limitations of the blog, but that doesn't really matter.

Statement of Style

sequence of smooth lines
it's the mystic propaganda
spine, vertical carrier
green apple syrup
pills to ease the pressure
medicines extracted from sap

upright when you begin
loose, as you end the movement in an arch

recipes known to communions of
letter-writing poets
in ghettos
and forgotten cities

postures created for us
to remember beings as metaphors
to connect with bees and with tigers
returning to the den

And here is RC's response the following day:

Echoes

Snezana's post stirs a lot—and her evocation of Denise Levertov, especially in the concluding lines, is very powerful—the metaphor, being the thing rather than like it, etc. At that same time we were in Wilmington some twenty years ago, I got hooked on Thomas Hardy—who, be it said, only repeats his verse form some fifty times in over a thousand poems. Curiously it was Allen Ginsberg who prompted me to read him—and could himself quote veritable reams. Anyhow here goes:

VERSIONS

after Hardy

Why would she come to him,
come to him,
in such disguise

to look again at him—
look again—
with vacant eyes—

and why the pain still,
the pain—
still useless to them—

as if to begin again—
again begin—
what had never been?

*

Why be
persistently
hurtful—
no truth
to tell

or wish to?
Why?

*

The weather's still grey
and the clouds gather
where they once walked
out together,

greeted the world with
a faint happiness,
watched it die
in the same place.

As said, I wrote this (and a few others like it) back then in the early 80s. Probably the poem I'm most echoing here is "The Voice," a classic anthology chestnut: http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/rpo/display/poem928.html.

Now back to the ranch!

One time midway through his February course, Creeley simply sat and read from his laptop the entire article printed in the *New York Times* on February 16, 2005: "New Model Army Soldier Rolls Closer to Battle," by Tim Weiner (http://nytimes.com/2005/02/16/technology/16robots.html).

The article talked about the US developing robots to fight instead of human soldiers in battlefields, and it was unrelated to any of the poems we were to discuss that day. Why did Creeley read the article to us, the only article he read out loud the whole month? We didn't discuss the article at all, if my memory serves me well. Rather, we moved on to the usual topics of the class: poetry, writing, and Creeley's memories. Some of us sitting still, others rocking in their manager chairs placed all around the conference table in that small, windowless room, we read our poems one by one, talked, listened, and then dispersed. Perhaps Creeley hoped the article would resonate and we'd write new poems, in a new language, to challenge the world in which we lived, and that we'd echo, but not imitate, the poems he'd seen

over and over through the decades. Maybe he read it to make us think what it even means to write, and especially write poetry, here in the United States in a time when most of the country's poets will never witness a war first-hand, but will keep on paying for wars. Some of us have stopped writing, some of us keep stumbling, still in the dark.

Memory of [State] # 7

Comments:

In 19__ I remember I was nine years old
tanks were making their way
through the main street
I remember my father and mother
kicked out of work
I remember my father's
apartment being taken away because
he was kicked out of his job because
I remember being chased by cops
and my teachers being beat up every day
I remember massacres on TV
I remember refugees coming
to our grandfather's house
their houses burned
I remember my grandfather
told me once: "never trust"
I try to forget but memories keep
bringing that quote back
all these memories people think
can go away just like
in Men in Black by a flashing device
I cannot forget
and if you ask me I wish I had
better memories but it wasn't my choice

Memory as Quoting

Quote:
The production of material goods

Quote:
The production of memory

Quote:
Of known, imagined, remembered geographies

Known:
Blowing balloons in the yard

Clothesline from tree to tree
between two rows of houses
washed-out shirts sheer in the sun

Imagined:
I wear boots as big as Himalayas

Seven miles with each step
the ocean is a kiddie pool
seaweed and fishes stick to my ankles

Remembered:
Balloons in the small cube of the hallway
Drawing faces on them

with a lipstick stump

Later, in secret, in the bathroom

I apply shadow,
powder, kohl,
lipstick on my own face
then I wash it all off
before I return
to the living room and
sit in front of the TV as if
nothing happened

Quote:
The production of material goods

Quote:
The reproduction of memory

Known:
This snow-covered field
framed by the window
of the train that has halted
in the countryside
is a quote
of photographic paper
just before an image appears
in liquid life

Remembered:
When the president died at eighty-eight
some adults wept

Quote:
The state of deception

Imagined:
When the singer died at forty
some fans wiped off their tears
and became adults

Remembered:
And four years later I (still a child) drew
in colored chalk
on the pavement in front of my school
a picture of the singer's profile
hooked nose, round glasses

Imagined:
Glasses shattered on the pavement
in front of a Manhattan building

Quote:
Victims and those who come after

Bugs Bunny, Overdubbed

In your lab
free of dust
you put on a white suit and cover your face
like some post-industrial bee keeper
and grow hives of nanowires

I use my stuck compass as a sundial
and always keep a wallet full of stamps

we were raised on cartoons aired before the evening news
we understood when Bugs Bunny said

that's all folks
nema više narode

peace leaves town classmates get divided
"us" vs. "them" allowed to flee
either east or west

in the fall of '91, on "my" side of the border and "yours":

our mothers packed our lunch bags
with identical UNHCR sandwiches
kissed us good luck
released us into the world

double crossing customs past robotic guards
I claimed
each temporary bedroom my free republic
and my factory of words

my postcards and letters overlapped
with the stories and the jagged verse
I conjured up at my Atari . . . you'd reply anyway
  so for years

peace comes and goes
and right now I'm not sure were it's at

world wide web and jets reliable enough
for sinister or sentimental ends

we're old enough to say "we go way back"
and sound credible

but if we didn't graduate as planned
  no group photo but
rubble glass shards shrapnel
  on high school steps
does it mean we never grew up?

you learned the language of physics
  your retinas registering the music of meteors

refined processors humming in our plexuses compute
  the likelihood we'll collect our due shares of stimuli
from cities strategically positioned
by great rivers and airports

I write everything down into the cyberspace
  Atari, dear departed, murmurs with hologram angels

Capsaicin Heat Unites

In memory of D.

I

at my newly claimed doorstep in Prague
you showed up like a flashback

not of bombed-out bridges sunk in the Danube
between the citadel and your boulevards
but everything before this '99
of horse chestnut trees
cobblestones and asphalt of Novi Sad

In exchange I offer
one bedroom partitioned into two
for us: thick refugees
washing down our foreignness
with Czech spirits

at the space we share in Smíchov and yes
there is laughter/smích

II

there is laughter/smích
glass high-rises and Gothic steeples turn

into wild goose feathers in my pillow at night

I'm a veteran of fleeing air raids

but here I can safely wear
the symphonic Moldau like an anklet
too light to shackle me

here I'm weightless

and blind to
your breakdown

III

your breakdown—taxi to Ruzyně—

and after I see you off
I take the bus back to Smíchov
and think how
at the right altitude
perfect crystals will form
in the corner of your plane window

I wish
    I'd told you—
you know that crane outside the building?

I am its operator

I construct future of concrete and spices:
    ginger-flavored, not saccharine
                almost perfect
    with just a tad of cayenne/cayenský pepř

but maybe you're right
maybe we should all carry capsaicin
in our pill containers
the number of heat units
depending on the ailment

My Dad's Lens, Borovo Naselje, 2004

In English you shoot guns and you shoot pictures;
I.Z. doesn't know that, as familiar as he is
with Howard Hawks. There's that language barrier.
Then there's the draft dodging.
A mysterious kidney infection waived
I.Z.'s mandatory army service at nineteen.
Chronic phobia of guns did the trick
for him at forty-two. That Balkan war
went on without him. At fifty-five, he took a picture

of wild ducks descending upon icebergs. He stood
on the Danube's right bank, next to
the ruin of the Workers Club,
and clicked. Low-res, ducks like specks,
but the ice was mighty. More so than
the Orthodox steeple, than the Catholic steeple

within I.Z.'s vision. Behind him and the birds
stood one large silo, one factory, apartment buildings,
one harbor, construction cranes. One thing
he's always known, being a duck in the hawks' domain
is no cowardice. Further up the river,

and sixty years back,
his father spent the entire World War Two
as a civilian, neutral like a one-man Switzerland

in the bull's eye of the Third Reich, when
Vienna was laden with meaning.
In winter '04, wild ducks

invented a game only they could play:
float on an iceberg a bit, fly back, float a bit,
fly back, or so did I.Z. report.
When they got tired, they flew into the marshes
on the river's other bank, which was (and still is)
another country. Border patrol sat tight in the harbor,
binoculars and revolvers at hand. Their speedboats docked,
waiting for the ice to melt.

Memory of [State] # 8

Comments:

I grew up under [Dead President no. 1's] regime, as an [Ethnic Group Member] in [State]. I was told I was a [Citizen] and that I was accepted. As a child I pledged allegiance to [Dead President no. 1] and the state and was a model [Citizen] embracing [Slogan] which my teachers all preached, at least superficially. Though, at the slightest provocation, ethnic tension rose to the top.

I remember locking myself in a classroom clutching a sharp umbrella as a weapon after a mob of [Ethnic] kids chased me through the school yard. As soon as I had the upper hand, I did the same to them.

There was never peace, we fought each other like wild dogs, every chance we got. By the end of the 19__s the hatred was overspilling all over the place. There can never be a happy coexistence between [Ethnic Group Members] and [Ethnic Group Members]. At least never in our lifetime.

SKYSCRAPERS

As a girl aged ten to seventeen, with a desk by the window facing South, I'd look up every clear evening from my homework, diary or bad art (I tried to draw imaginary film stills), and try to see past my street and the roofs beyond. I could see the thin strip of lights of the street paralleling the railroad tracks I knew were there. The street by the railroad eventually bled into the highway that led to Belgrade in the east and Zagreb in the west, and to their respective Surčin and Pleso airports; I'd gaze up at the sky, and look for moving triangles of light among the still stars, and my longing was so pleasantly realizable: to get to that street, that highway, those airports, board those planes and get to still farther cities, highways, and airports, and let the structures and lights multiply before me, always a bit different and always a bit similar.

Once I got a little older, I became a refugee and began moving around, as if life had a sick sense of humor (*I'll show you wanderlust!*). At the time, I wrote a small poem, called "Night Catches on the Road," about moving from one place to another, even if the new place is not all that different from the point of departure.

Noć hvata na putu	*Night Catches on the Road*
Koje je ovo mesto?	What is this place?
Kako ćemo stići kući	How will we make it home
u dugoj zimskoj noći?	in a long winter night?

Ovo može biti bilo gde—	This could be anywhere—
uličnо osvetljenje,	street lights,
izlozi, natpisi,	shop windows, signs,
automobili, psi,	cars, dogs,
ljudi	people
Pomeri se s mesta.	Take another place.

In August of 1991, my mom drove my brother and me to the Western Central Serbian town of Valjevo. He stayed there at the science camp he'd attended previously. The next day mom drove me to her aunt Milica's studio apartment in Kragujevac, further South in Serbia, and after that she drove back to our war-torn hometown. Some time after that—about ten days, two weeks?—mom and dad drove to Kragujevac together, picked me up, and we went to Valjevo to see my brother, and then they drove me to the Serbian province of Vojvodina, to the town of Vrbas where my grandmothers, and my aunt and her family ended up. Vojvodina was a neighboring province to our own Slavonia in Croatia. My parents went back to Borovo Naselje. What was with all those returns to the war-torn shithole?

All these landscapes were sun-drenched that summer, and everywhere we went there was nothing but scenic roads we'd passed before as tourists, taking in images of fields of sunflowers, hills with thick forests, hunting grounds, parks, a land criss-crossed with rivers, and small towns like breathing palimpsests of history with their Roman ruins, medieval churches and monasteries, Turkish bridges, mosques, and baths, and Austro-Hungarian castles and fountains, interwar boulevards, and the post-war factories, workers quarters, urban parks, and the latest upward direction of blocks of flats and even a skyscraping tower here and there in the capitals. We were driving through the last summer when there was at least some hope for the peace. After that came torture, murder, large-scale theft, and neither the countryside, nor the towns, nor the cities would have the slightest chance of continuing as they once were, and we would never be tourists again.

I realize now that within the span of one month I was first completely separated from my family, then reunited with a part of it, and then finally my parents, my brother, and my paternal

grandmother when I ended up in Belgrade in early September of 1991. But in my mind, the time I spent in Kragujevac and then in Vrbas seems much longer somehow. And yet I remember little; there wasn't much of anything going on, except waiting for something to resolve or for life to continue one way or another.

I had brought *Cosmos* by Carl Sagan with me because I hadn't read the whole book before, and also *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, which was my favorite novel, and I had read it many times since I'd gotten it from a 30-something neighbor soon after I turned sixteen. But in my current situation, growing pains, maladaptation, and nerdy rebellion just wouldn't do. I savored Sagan instead because his book was about ideas, discoveries, and theories that far surpassed my predicament, and as such allowed me to escape into questions of the origins of the Earth and other planets around the sun, scientific discoveries from the first telescopes to the future of space travel, and so on. My first days in Kragujevac, I actually couldn't eat. Sleeping wasn't a problem, but feeling hunger, chewing, and swallowing, were difficult tasks. I wanted to eat, but couldn't. I was constantly anxious and choked up, but suppressed tears in order not to upset my hosts.

Aunt Milica was patient and calm in the midst of the new responsibility of caring for her seventeen-year-old grandniece who just escaped the outbreak of war in her hometown, who weighed all of a hundred and five pounds and who was unable to eat. We didn't talk about my lack of appetite, or about the war and me being separated from the rest of the family. We were both just patient. And patience paid. One afternoon, while immersed in *Cosmos*, I felt my chest and my throat and my stomach relaxing for the first time, and my appetite awakening. I waited to see if the sensation was real, and then I told aunt Milica that I was hungry and she, calm and faintly smiling as ever, made me a sandwich. She was married, but she was deeply lonely, and yet at peace with her loneliness. She never had children of her own. Her father died when she was a small child. Her beloved first husband died when they were in their early thirties. Her only brother, my grandfather, died when she was middle-aged. She lived in a town far away from her home village. As a child and an adolescent, she survived World War Two, when her brother was a POW in Austria, while she, her young cousins, her

mom, her aunts, and her uncle, all living together in a large but impoverished household, struggled to stay out of the way of various enemy forces and looters. She then survived the lean post-war years, a struggle that caused all the siblings and cousins to disperse: Zagreb, Belgrade, Borovo, Kragujevac . . . . She probably knew all too well what it meant to feel too scared and sad to sustain an appetite.

I applied for my refugee ID when I moved from Kragujevac to Vrbas, a town in the northern province of Vojvodina, where my grandmothers also ended up. When it was my turn to get my ID, the official-looking man with a moustache asked me what my ethnicity was. As a matter of strategy, it would have been smart of me to state firmly: Serbian. And: Orthodox, when it came to the religion. But I maintained the same declaration I offered in the 1991 census a few months prior: ethnically undeclared, atheist. Ethnicity had everything to do with religion, and I didn't want anything to do with either concept. Still don't. Typically, you are what your parents are, right? My mom and dad identified ethnically as Yugoslavs before the break-up of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, and they'd still identify as such if only the category were recognized, if not by local Balkan governments then at least by Brussels, or by the United Nations. I identified as ethnically undeclared in that line in the Vrbas Refugee Center, in front of the big, serious, graying, mustached man with a pen and the power to make me legal.

During the 1991 census, on the eve of war, I sat with my parents, my brother, and our next door neighbor in our living room. My brother and our neighbor were giving deadpan answers, such as our neighbor (who was about fifty at the time) identifying as an Ante (a term for Slavs that was probably last used around 91 AD), or my brother as a Melmacian (from the same planet as the sitcom character, the cat-eating alien Alf).

I got my refugee ID in Vrbas in August of '91 and everything was OK. Even if I were to say I was Croatian president Tudjman's granddaughter, no one would see any threat in a skinny girl looking even younger than her age, without make-up, pixie haircut and big glasses, wearing her father's old brown polyester suit as her fashion statement.

I remember sitting on the balcony of the host family's house in Vrbas by myself. I had my headphones on, playing a tape of

Mega City Four, a British indie rock band. This was one of the bands with the noise of the many punk and post-punk bands' guitar-bass-drums combos, but combined with the melody steeped in the 1960s pop. With Mega City Four in my ears, I stared at the unfamiliar sunny neighborhood backyards and their fruit trees, hedges, swings, all of which was not too different from home, yet it seemed foreign like one of those dreams when you know you're dreaming, but you can't bring yourself to fully wake up. The song "Storms to Come" began, one of those quiet-loud-quiet-loud songs of the late 1980s/late 1990s. That album had lyrics as if out of a nerdy and sensitive kid's journal full of records of little epiphanies. It helped that the lyrics were in English. By then, nationalist politicians and their media tainted my native language in my ears. They deliberately reduced it to blood, hearth, motherland, pride, loss, victory, knives, martyrs: their linguistic oppression both preceded and accompanied the wartime insanity. By comparison, the sincere lyrics of a British punk were pure poetry: "A fork of lighting in the black / shows me where I stand / for a moment I know where or when I am / for a second I can see where I want to be." And I wanted to be not home in Borovo, but rather far away in another country, perhaps in England, stage diving in some club when the thrashing guitars join the cymbal, the drum, and the voice, and the singer starts singing louder, clutching onto his defiant words like a sonic straw: "Now I am standing around just waiting / for the storms to come / instinct tells me I must carry on."

In 2001, it was time for the first post-war census and I found myself (after living in Belgrade, Budapest, Prague, and Hannover, Germany) giving a simpatico law student, a bit younger than me, my answers in the kitchen of the same Borovo apartment where I gave my details for the first time ten years earlier. There was no one else in the apartment. My dad was in Italy, working for a construction company along with other migrant laborers from Croatia and Bosnia. Mom was in the US, visiting my brother and his wife in Baton Rouge. I sat with the census guy by myself in the spacious kitchen, at the heavy dining table. I

remember how his eyes lit up when I told him my answer under the rubric "religion/vjeroispovjest"—I said I was "an atheist/ateistkinja." He said with a big smile:

"You're my first one! And I've done twenty apartment buildings all the way from Trpinjska Cesta to here. They're all religious."

I was pleased to make him happy, although I'm not sure what exactly made him so glad. A fellow atheist lost in the sea of either merely nominal or full-fledged believers? A break in the monotony of his census work? An attempt at flirting?

A year and a half later, I moved to Wilmington, North Carolina, where I started my graduate studies in creative writing. One day, I went to a local Social Security office, situated in one of the countless strip malls in the sprawling coastal Carolina, in order to obtain my first Social Security card. I learned there that official American forms give you the option of skipping items such as race/ethnicity (though not gender or hair and eye color), and so since the day I got my first Social Security card, I've been leaving the race/ethnicity line blank.

Then in 2006, my bag got stolen in Chicago, with my Social Security in it. I went to the office in the West Loop, on Adams Street, to get a replacement card, and before I was able to pick it up, the lady behind the counter passed me a piece of paper through the slot in the glass barrier between us. The paper had all my pieces of information, and I was to check it for accuracy: date of birth, sex, hair color, color of eyes, mother's maiden name, all that. 03/13/1974, female, brown, brown, Vincic. I passed the sheet back after inspecting it. I said:

"Everything is correct, at least everything that matters."

The lady didn't say anything, she just typed something on her computer, and I continued, with a smile and a shrug:

"It says I'm an Asian-American/Pacific Islander." The lady looked up, but her face was still expressionless.

When I tell that story to friends here, I tend to add a moral at the end: "So remember, even if you leave race/ethnicity blank, the state will randomly assign you one nevertheless!" I don't really think many people skip this question and I don't know what they make of my oddly triumphant laugh (especially as I'm the only one laughing) with which I follow my story of the state's unflinching need to categorize us all to death.

I change my home base over and over again, spanning two continents and two decades so far, but a sense of freedom has eluded me, since my moves so far haven't been out of adventure as much as out of scrambling for ways to survive and subsist. I can say I've done well. I've made it—I realized that one time while I was on a solitary walk around my old neighborhood in Borovo Naselje. And by solitary I mean: there was no one else walking around that evening. And by no one else, I don't just mean that there was no one by my side, and I don't just mean there was no one there I knew. I mean, there was no one but me outside, and only half of the windows in the newly repaired buildings were lit. My hometown remains broken, over fifteen years since the war officially ended; my home country does too. As I placed my left foot in front of my right, passing by the building on Karl Marx Street, I looked up to where my room was, the window that framed the urban landscape and the half-imagined highways leading out of this place. And it hit me: I never have to go back to what's left of my hometown. I can come back and visit. But, although I haven't done much with my life so far, I've arranged it so that I never again have to go back and get stuck here. I've made it.

Back in my parents' apartment, I smoked a cigarette with my mom on the balcony, puffing smoke in the general direction of the big windows and balconies, birches, fir trees, linden trees, willow trees planted all around. The closest is a group of stout, but elegant six buildings about as twice as tall as the tallest poplar tree in the small park next to them. These are the buildings local people call "soliteri" or "neboderi," the latter an almost literal translation of "skyscrapers." I'm becoming quite an ethnographer of this place, an observer planted every once in a while in this semi-foreign place called my hometown. My roots—the ones that are at the core of the network of nerves controlling my desires and fears—are no longer here.

Memory of [State] # 9

Comments:

It was a wonderful time to be young in [State]. [Dead President no. 1's] [Former State] was finally allowing and even encouraging [Ethnic People] to be part of the promising future in multiethnic [Former State]. And we took that green light in droves. Schools were full of children and the University of [Capital] where I went to study was among fastest-growing universities in that region.

Our country, we felt, was heading in the right direction toward prosperity and we wanted to be part of it. One thing was obvious: even though [Different Ethnic Persons] were less than one-tenth of population they refused and ignored anything that had to do with [Ethnic] language and culture. In the famous [Capital] Promenade they walked on the other side.

If you dated a [Different Ethnic Female] you were expected to speak [Different Language] and almost never expected her parents to know. I remember once, a mayor's daughter falling in love head over heels with an [Ethnic] musician. Unable to break it up, the [Different Ethnic] mayor took her out of school and sent her to [Former State's Capital] to live with relatives.

Once I was visiting [Former State's Capital], and a girl, a bank teller that I spoke to for a while, asked me to take her out. I was so excited. Upon seeing my ID, I could not miss the disappointment in her face. She took her offer back. As I sat on a park bench on a beautiful spring day in [Former State's Capital], a

retired teacher who overheard me speak [Language] to a friend, came and asked me if it was true that [Different Ethnic] kids learn [Language] as part of the curriculum in [State] schools. Upon learning that you could, he walked away shaking his head in disgust.

My father who fought [Enemy] as a young partisan had many [Different Ethnic] friends. Our families helped each other through thick and thin. That all changed when [Dead President no. 2] started to radicalize [Different State]. All of a sudden my father's friends were organizing huge anti-[Ethnic] rallies in [State] towns that were 90% [Ethnic].

I remember my now deceased father, watching his [Different Ethnic] friends on TV in disbelief as they spoke words of hatred. My dad could not understand why these decent people that he had known for so long and respected and loved were on this path of destruction eroding the few human bridges that were still left standing.

As he lay in his bed, sick, I saw him crying one night after he watched the news. After that, we kept the TV off.

SINGER

I imagine them digging out the sewing machine after the World War.

I imagine:
I can only imagine a scene that took place in May of 1945. I wasn't there. My mom, the person who told me about the excavation of the sewing machine wasn't there. To begin with, there's the brand—Singer. "Singer," spelled in wrought iron, seems indestructible. And the logo, a golden sphinx painted on the machine's black body.

them:
Two persons were present when the scene was taking place: my maternal great-grandmother and my grandmother. They were still just mother and daughter then, with similar names, Mika and Milka. Mika (40) was a widow. Milka (19) was single. Mika (40) became the head of the family, since her husband was gone. Milka (19)—second in charge, being the oldest child. Mika (40) was illiterate, but self-sufficient. She knew how to take care of the poultry and the cattle, how to plant vegetables and fruit and grain and how to reap and harvest. She cooked, made bread, cheese and *rakija*. She even wove fabric, not to mention she could sew, knit and embroider. Milka (19) was in the process of mastering some of those skills herself. Unlike her mother, Milka knew how to read and write, and she fought in the resistance against the fascists and against the old system in her country. But her first responsibility now was to get married. And get married

well, because her mother had trouble feeding her and her two little brothers and her sister.

digging out the sewing machine:
The sewing machine was bought used, after Milka had finished her fourth year of elementary school at the age of thirteen. Around the same time, she went to Banja Luka to continue her education at a school that focused on household economy and finer household skills. With such an education, Milka was supposed to eventually marry into a good, wealthy family or become a teacher, or both. And so they bought her the sewing machine, as the first item in her dowry. But Milka spent only one year at the new school, and then the war started in 1941. Milka was sent home to Banija. The sewing machine, the pride of the family, the only "modern" thing they had, was buried in the backyard, and it stayed buried until 1945.

When peace came, the Singer was dug out, cleaned, oiled and put to good use. Milka's father was not alive anymore, neither was his brother, the uncle from Banja Luka. Many young single boys, prospective husbands for Milka, had also died in the war, and it was too late for Milka to prepare to get married to the best and the wealthiest possible guy, too late for her to pick and choose, having only a sewing machine to offer as her dowry. No gold, no fancy household skills, no money, no land, no horses. But some family in the village had a son who thought Milka was pretty enough. There is a photo of her from 1946. In it, she is wearing a summer dress buttoned up to her neck, with a blouse collar, puffy short sleeves and a pleated skirt. She has a pair of flat shoes and white socks on, one sock pulled up a little higher than the other one. Her hair is braided into two plaits in the back of her head—only one plait is falling on her right shoulder. Her forehead is broad and her eyes deep set, giving intensity to her face with high cheek bones, lips almost smiling. The dress is dark, and her figure is outlined clearly; it's January, and the ground, all the way beyond the unpainted, simple picket fence far in the background, is covered with freshly fallen snow. A girl in her summer dress in January: she knows the photograph will last, maybe forever, so she puts on her only nice dress and poses outside; a camera doesn't capture her shivering.

The family came to speak with Milka's mother who promised

Milka would marry their son, so they set the date for the wedding. But there was someone watching all of this. Not exactly watching, but following. Following the process of choosing a fiancé for Milka, hearing the news about the engagement, reading between the lines that Milka wasn't happy.

During the war, during the extremely dangerous times, when it was unsafe for Milka to stay in her village, she would find refuge in a village on the other side of the hill, in Ružica's house. Ružica, a single mother of a boy and a girl, grew to like Milka. Ružica's oldest son wasn't there: in 1941, he was captured and sent to Stalag 17, a POW camp in Austria. Ružica showed Milka a picture of her son and said: "Take a good look, girl. He may be your future husband." Milka smiled. As war went on, Milka didn't think about the boy from the picture again. The boy returned from the camp after the war, but didn't stay at home for very long. That same year, he went to Borovo to work in the shoe factory.

In 1948, Ružica heard that her favorite single girl from the village behind the hill was about to get married, whereas Ružica's son was still single, well into his twenties, all alone in the town hundreds of kilometers away. So Ružica sent her brother to that town, to bring her son over.

I don't know *how* they all pulled it off, but they did. Milka broke off her engagement to the boy from the village and married the guy she had actually met for the first time only when he proposed. All she knew of him before that was a picture she had seen while she was staying at his mother's house in the wartime.

Milka's Logic

I didn't like that guy I was supposed to marry, even though he was well-to-do. He had a nice carriage, with four horses, already decorated for our wedding. But then your grandfather came. At first, I didn't think he was good-looking. He wore his slacks tucked in his tie-up boots. But I thought: if I marry the other guy, I'll be stuck in the village. If I marry Ružica's son, I would move to Borovo with him, get a job there, and if I don't get to like him, I'll be able to divorce him and live by myself, because I would still have my job.

He was more shy than me. That day when I said I would marry him, we were sitting with my mother and his uncle and his mother, and he said:

"Let's go out for a walk."

And we went outside and walked to the orchard. And I told him, because I knew he felt awkward:

"You know, you can put your arms around me."

And he smiled bashfully, and he caressed me. We brought the sewing machine with us to Borovo.

Accessory: The Refugee Bag

Milka (1924-2000) lived through World War Two, the war in ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and one season of air raids in her immediate surrounding in 1999. In 1991 she became a refugee, and left Borovo for a town across the river Danube. Her mother Mika (1905-1995) lived through two world wars and died during the war in ex-Yugoslavia. After Mika (1905-1995) got married in the 1920s, she moved only once, when she fled in 1995, while the war was still going on. She survived the long trip from Banija to Vojvodina, just a few hundred kilometers, but it took three days. She was placed in the collective refugee shelter together with all the others. She fell asleep one evening and never woke up.

All the refugees all over the world carry a certain kind of a bag with them. I used it myself. Just pay attention the next time you see refugees on TV: the bags are big, cube-shaped and strong, although they are plastic (nylon). Colorful plastic threads (most probably recycled) are tightly woven into a kind of fabric. Then this fabric is cut into pieces, pieces hemmed and then stitched together and the product is the bag with a zipper on the top and a pair of short straps. You can hang the bag on your shoulders so your back supports the weight, but it's not comfortable at all that way. You can put any big blanket in that bag, and it's strong enough so you can put a kilo of flour in it, together with a bag of rice, a bag of lentils, soap, detergent, canned feta cheese and corned beef and meat paste, etc., the whole monthly supply from the Red Cross. The empty bag can be folded and it doesn't take up much space. It has no label on it, or a tag, no "made in . . ." sign.

When it's peacetime again and you are back at your old home, or if you made a new home somewhere else, the refugee bag still comes in handy as a laundry bag. It is widely used that way. Another way is for smuggling things across borders, if you make a living reselling a variety of goods on flea markets in, say, the European Southeast. The bag is also called the smuggler bag. But any smuggler bag is still a refugee bag, that's its origin, its identity, and, at times, the smuggler is a refugee or an ex-refugee, anyway. And even if you have no use for the bag at all at the moment, you won't throw it away. You'll fold it nicely and put it aside somewhere. It doesn't take much space, and you never know, it might come in handy.

2001, A Weekend in May

At this point, my parents have been married for thirty years. I'm twenty-seven and I'm staying with them, as I recently started working for a local NGO. Mom and dad like having me around, but they know I won't stay long. Only for a year or so. And they always say I shouldn't stay longer. Vukovar has no future, they say, look at it, it's been ten years since the war ended and there has been no progress.

They are working on the second hand furniture they bought recently, a couch someone smuggled in to town from Germany. The upholstery is worn out at places, so they decided to turn the fabric inside out, face down, so that the side that is worn out is not visible anymore.

Dad removes the upholstery, plucking the staples off one by one with a screwdriver. Then he repairs the stuffing with extra layers of puffy white synthetic lining. Next, he staples the upholstery back, pretty side up.

Mom does a similar thing with the cushions. Only, the cushions are designed as firm foam pillows, with the upholstery around them like pillowcases stitched together. She tears the fabric carefully along the seams and takes out pieces of unnecessary thread. Then she patches small holes that are invisible but to her eyes. After that, she sits at her old Singer and stitches the fabric back together, the flip side on the top now. The machine is squealing and it won't stop, even after they spray its parts with special oil. But the important thing is—it's working, no problem!

The sound of stapling mixes with the sound of the sewing machine and spreads into every corner of the apartment.

They are determined to work non-stop until they finish, until the couch looks as good as new. After they're done, they'll ask me to come over and see. I'll honestly admire their work.

"You didn't think we could do it, did you?"

"*No, I would never think it was possible*!"

Every guest and visitor that drops by the apartment will be shown the new look of the couch.

"It's comfortable, functional - and it looks good."

"*As good as new*!"

"Next summer, we'll redo the armchairs."

"*You're becoming professionals*!"

The armchairs will be blue and green: I'll see pictures my parents e-mail to me the following year, when I'm in the US. Small pillows will be scattered around, made out of the same fabric. It will go well with the colors of the couch. The sewing machine will sing again. The machine arrived to Borovo in 1948. It moved only once before that. Not bad for a thing from the twentieth century.

Memory of [State] # 10

Comments:

Yes, I grew up in [City, State]. I had
two [Other Ethnic Group] friends when I was
10 years old. We would hang out all day long,
and play soccer. We did many "crazy"
things as children—I remember how once
we trespassed on a neighbor's property,
we took his dog and we played with it for
like four hours. We brought it back. Its master
never understood it. It all changed when
the war began. Both my father and my
nine-years elder brother were beaten on
the main bridge by six cops. Months after that
we were driven out of our homes and were
forced to go to the nearest mountains to
escape soldiers and police—we spent eight
days there with almost no food or water.
Weeks later, my uncle and a neighbor,
who refused to flee their homes, were beaten
to death when police found them. A few
months later when I came back to my home,
everything was burned to the ground—the whole
neighborhood, we had to live in tents for
months—everything destroyed, people suffered
the consequences of the war, no jobs,

no money, just chaos. I did not live
my childhood normally. As a 10-year-
-old I had to see dead bodies on the
streets, see grown men cry, see houses burning.
So yes, trauma has changed me forever—
I do not think I could ever befriend
some [Other Ethnic Group] person again.

Neo AFŽ: Revolution without Premeditation

1 :: Manifesto

WE ARE TEARING DOWN the existing patriarchal consciousness.
WE ARE TEARING DOWN stereotypes and prejudices against those who suffer discrimination.
WE ARE TEARING DOWN the borders that divide that which is inseparable.
WE ARE TEARING DOWN the artificial differences and values set up by force.
WE SEEK the right to the individualization of values.
WE SEEK a celebration of the diversity of people and their ways of life.
WE SEEK a space to create, express ourselves, and work freely.
WE SEEK an exchange of critical views.
WE DEMAND equal opportunities to access knowledge and information for everyone.
WE DEMAND complete freedom for everyone as they create and search for knowledge.
WE DEMAND the immediate cessation of violence against national minorities and non-heterosexual people who are fighting for their rights.
WE DEMAND the unconditional recognition of our activity in the context of the tradition of progressive women's movements.

Ivana Percl and I wrote the manifesto one summer day in 2001 on the island of Vis, sitting at a massive table in the front yard of the former Yugoslav People's Army barracks, a complex of stone buildings once occupied by countless 19-year-old boys on their mandatory 12-month-long service. But in the early 2000s, the barracks stood mostly empty, except when in the summer they were rented out as an affordable seminar venue to not-for-profit organizations strapped for cash. The barracks had not been renovated at all, and remnants of the past were scattered all around the complex. We found a framed color photo portrait of Josip Broz Tito on the floor in the corner of a room, and then Ivana and I had a friend take a picture of us squatting and holding hands in front of it. We all slept on the cots with their thin and worn-out spring mattresses that had been used while the army was still there in the decades prior to 1991. The cots caved under our bodies like bumpy, wiry metal hammocks, but we were in our 20s, and too excited about our projects to care about comfort. It was there that Ivana and I decided to print our manifesto in a zine that we'd type up, cut, and paste by ourselves, then xerox and hand out for free, mainly using the office supplies we could help ourselves to at work. We decided we wouldn't ask for money for *Neo AFŽ*, and that we wouldn't register as an NGO or a not-for-profit organization, that we simply wouldn't register at all, that we would work clandestinely, with hardly any operating cost.

The manifesto finally appeared in the first *Neo AFŽ* zine in November of that same year, after we'd collected enough submissions to fill five double-sided sheets of paper folded in the middle, to create a small booklet. The copy that I have with me in Chicago, where I live now, is probably a third-generation photo copy of that first zine. The grainy cover photo features a friend of ours smirking as she burns a fascist poster on a Belgrade wall. On the next page, we address "fans of utopian ideas, and idealists," we define *Neo AFŽ* as "a group of radical feminists practicing subversive theory and activism," and we urge readers to make their own photocopies of the zine to distribute further. The facing page features the "We Are Tearing Down" manifesto setting the stage for the political and personal, critical and creative prose and verse, drawings and photographs that would fill all the subsequent issues of the zine.

2 :: DUBROVNIK

Before there was *Neo AFŽ*, there was the beginning of my friendship with Ivana. The setting is again the Adriatic: we met in the late spring of 2001, at a feminist course at the Inter-University Centre in Dubrovnik.

One evening probably midway through the week-long course, after a day of heavy theory, we students from various parts of the post-Yugoslav region gather on a beach to relax and drink, sitting on the sand between the Adriatic and the old city walls. To compensate for all the intellectual work we've been doing over the previous few days, we get silly and loud, and we play a type of charades where you are supposed to guess the celebrity name scrawled on an index card taped to your forehead, asking yes-or-no questions until you can guess the name. "Am I a woman? Am I a singer? Am I alive?" As long as answers are 'yes,' you can continue; if you get a 'no,' you have to wait till all the other players have taken a turn and you can begin again on the next round. You have the sea murmuring nearby, you sip your wine enveloped in the warm late-spring night, and the slightest blunders you and the other players make become a cause for uproarious laughter.

The game of beach charades takes us back to childhood while time gallops ahead. I am the one who tapes the name of Jura Stublić, leader of the 1980s pop band Film, onto Ivana's forehead, for no reason except perhaps that I subconsciously remember his old hit 'Ivana,' about an older man who is having an affair with a girl whose age is an 'unlucky number' she is trying to conceal. Ivana finally guesses, 'I'm a male singer, I'm alive, I used to be cute and now I'm an old has-been, I was fronting a band in the 80s, it wasn't Haustor. Wait, was it Film? I'm Jura Stublić!' And she recalls how back in the late 1980s, when she was indeed 13, she fantasized that Jura was actually singing to her. We all laugh until we cry, recalling that when we were kids we didn't realize how creepy the song was.

3 :: AMBIVALENCE AND ALTERNATIVES

Ivana and I shared mixed feelings about the existing models of women's organizing in the wider feminist milieux in which we

participated in Croatia and Serbia.

I'd attended the Belgrade Women's Studies program, and volunteered for some mainly art-related projects with other feminist organizations in Belgrade, but by 2001, I had returned to my hometown of Vukovar, and there I worked in a center where women, who were drawn there largely by free courses in computer literacy, basic English, sewing, and embroidery, could also attend consciousness-raising meetings. I was longing to escape the mindset that sees women as victims of patriarchy and domesticity whose best option to temporarily escape their "fate" is to gather in a center run by well-meaning professional activists. Ivana had studied Peace Studies and Women's Studies in Zagreb, so we compared notes. While there were some huge differences between the college-level interdisciplinary courses we had attended in the Women's Studies Centers in Belgrade and Zagreb and the courses offered to the Vukovar women, in the end we agreed that this escape from domesticity ultimately becomes a mirror image of that which it tries to escape: a large private apartment turned into an educational/support center; a safe female-only space; a semi-familial feeling among the activists and the beneficiaries while the hierarchy between them remains intact; a clean, domestic vibe; the smell of coffee being brewed on a stove. It was necessary, and we benefited from it, but there had to be another model.

We were eager for some kind of street feminism that would need to be reinvented, especially in Croatia. Belgrade at least had the Women in Black, and we respected the stoic, silent vigil they had been conducting every Wednesday at noon on the square in front of the National Museum to demand peace and justice. We had also taken part in student protests in the late 1990s, massive performances that may or may not have helped the demise of Tuđman's and Milošević's fascist regimes. By 2000, those regimes had been replaced by liberal democratic political forces, and that was supposed to be the end of it: now it was supposed to be smooth transitional sailing into the European Union, which is of course heaven on earth. But Ivana and I were itching for something more radical in nature, even if smaller in scope: with our little photocopied zine, we at least wanted to express our desire not just to replace whoever was in power with whoever was in the opposition, but for a system free of patriarchy and

heteronormativity first and foremost. Throughout it all, we also cultivated a sense of humor, as we saw how vastly disproportionate our ambitions were to our power.

In February 2002, we participated in the City of Women manifestation in Ljubljana. Issue 4 of the *Neo AFŽ* zine that came out in the summer of the same year was the only publication in the country to devote an entire issue to the writings by the organizers and participants of the first Zagreb Gay Pride demonstration-parade.

One of the clearest memories I have of the summer of 2002 is of tasting the sting of the tear gas that almost broke apart the Zagreb Gay Pride celebration in the Zrinjevac park after our first successful parade, which happened the day before my flight to the US.

We walked around the city protected by a private security firm as well as police in riot gear. On the sidewalks of the streets along our route were people of all ages, mostly admonishing us, throwing pieces of melon at us, spitting at us. I protected myself from the spit with a copy of the official Zagreb Gay Pride poster that spelled three words in shades of pink:

ISKORAK
KONTRA
PREDRASUDA

One of the anti-Gay Pride spitters was a furious local Nazi skinhead shouting "sieg heil," raising his arm repeatedly like a robot. Another was a middle-aged woman some recognized as an English missionary known as "Sister Ruth." The woman was balancing a huge statue of the Virgin Mary on her shoulder. The woman was also raising her arm and shouting "sieg heil."

Our walk was not the caravan of unbridled, carnivalesque, erotic, celebratory (and commercial) energy that Gay Pride parades are in the West. We were tense with trepidation at a possible attack by the homophobes all around us, right there, wondering what would happen if they tried to break through the security. One of them threw tear gas into our small crowd in the park, and we started running, trying to resist the urge to wipe our watering eyes and running noses. It turned out it was just a small amount of the chemical, easily blown away by the breeze,

and we soon calmed down. The fucker must have enjoyed watching us scatter in panic, if for a short while.

After the program was over, most of us quickly dispersed to our homes. About thirty of those who stayed around in bars and cafés downtown were sought out and beaten up by the homophobes when the police were out of sight.

4 :: The Name

I don't quite remember exactly how we came up with the name *Neo AFŽ*. But it definitely rang a bell for our audience members: AFŽ was of course Antifašistička Fronta Žena, or the Antifascist Front of Women, an organization that originated in World War Two (founded by the Yugoslav Communist Party) and lasted into the early 1950s. Considering that the organization had been gone for fifty years, the acronym was still used remarkably widely, and I remember how people in Vukovar would often joke about contemporary women's organizing, calling us the AFŽ, not without a touch of nostalgia. In Croatia and Serbia in 2001, as the nationalist parties from 1990s were replaced by the more European-oriented opposition parties—although the change seemed merely cosmetic—Yugonostalgia seemed to grow ever stronger, and for an obvious reason: it grew of frustration with the then current state of events, the joblessness, the corruption, and the hundreds of thousands of families torn apart and displaced as a result of the wars of 1990s. Vukovar in particular was and still is technically divided from top to bottom, and children from kindergarten age all the way through high school have attended segregated classes and schools ever since the war ended. When one is unable to imagine a better future, one re-imagines the past as near utopia.

But *Neo AFŽ* tried to turn these nostalgic tendencies into something productive, and instead of idealizing the past we tried to learn as much as possible about it, and especially about the triumphs and defeats of women's movements. When the Communist Party dissolved the AFŽ in the 1950s, some feminists of that generation continued working quietly within the confines of the regime. Socialist women (our grandmothers' generation) kept their jobs and hard-earned rights, but were not relieved of their traditional domestic duties and thus the double-burden com-

promise with patriarchy was established as the norm. The next generation of feminists came of age in 1960s and 1970s (our mothers' generation), completely at odds with the generation that raised them. Instead of building on past efforts, they began their own struggle seemingly from scratch, inspired by their French and Anglo-American peers in the 1970s, focusing on consciousness-raising and finally opening women's centers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. *Neo AFŽ* was a part of the third, post-socialist generation of feminists, and we intentionally built alliances with both of the previous generations, wary of falling into the same old traps.

5 :: FACTORY GIRLS: AN INTERVIEW

Stoja Žabić is my grandmother. She was born in 1924 in the village of Karajzovci (near Banja Luka), and she's been living in Borovo since 1946. I decided to interview her and learn about AFŽ first hand.

Q: When did you join AFŽ?

A: I was a member of SKOJ[2] and us girls founded AFŽ chapter in our village in 1943, I think.

Q: A couple of you SKOJ girls founded the AFŽ?

A: No. The Party founds AFŽ, and SKOJ girls participate, lead it. Our village was near Liberated Territory Gornji Podgradci, it was right below Bosanska Gradiška, which hadn't been liberated yet. Gornji Podgradci had it all: the municipality office, headquarters, all of it. The Gornji Podgradci Party headquarters decreed the founding of AFŽ in our village.

Q: What were the women in charge of, specifically?

A: During the war it was the woman's duty to help the People's Liberation Struggle, the wounded. Women and SKOJ members were in charge of securing food for the partisans. Sec-

[2] Savez Komunističke Omladine Jugoslavije—Union of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia, a youth branch of the Communist Party. SKOJ and the CP were operating strictly underground after the CP was declared illegal by the King of Yugoslavia in 1920.

uring food, and everything, knitting wool socks . . . I didn't knit a single pair, don't worry. (*Note: Grandma has always refused to do any kind of needlework ever since childhood.*) Besides, SKOJ and AFŽ were in charge of convincing the folk to help the PLS.

Q: Was there any word about women's societal position?

A: Oh yes, at length. Women didn't even have the right to vote before then, can you believe it?!

Q: What did people think of women partisans?

A: The opinion of women with guns was positive, it was equal, they were equal.

Q: Tell us a remarkable story about some female comrades, for the zine, make it interesting, you know?

A: There was one girl from Dubica, and another one from Gradiška, they were in SKOJ. They joined the struggle as soon as 1941—their names were Bora Batos and Mira Šimik. They met in Borovo, by chance, in 1938, can you believe it?! One of them came here with her dad, one had already been living here…. They became best friends, of course, both originating from the same part of Bosnia. They worked together with Jovica Brandajz at the factory.

Q: He's the one who turned them on to progressive ideas?

A: No doubt. Jovica Brandajz was killed in Dudik[3] in 1941, and they went to the Kozara mountain and got organized there. They joined the local SKOJ chapter and recruited all the other progressive folk. Other women gladly joined, that was the only way for them to really aid the struggle. Ach, listen, Nana, everyone wanted something to improve after the war, women were no exception.

6 :: Tied to the Stove

Yugoslavia remained a rural country well into the 20th century,

[3] The site of mass executions of (and subsequent mass graves for) actual or perceived enemies of the Independent State of Croatia, which was at the time a Nazi puppet state ruled by local fascists known as Ustaše.

but my grandparents' generation left their villages in droves after World War Two, when they were young, and took jobs in cities around the country. Borovo in particular, a city less than two decades years old, must have been a haven of youth figuring out how to live away from the village norms they knew, how to come up with a new system. The former peasant girls cut their hair and donned a new wardrobe, and tried to emulate the city-born chicks they met upon arrival. They joined AFŽ and the Party, began voting, some even running for office, leading workers' meetings, rebuilding infrastructure with the guys. Once the babies came, their guys began watching the little ones and doing housework. But in 1953 the Party dismantled the AFŽ and the brief experiment in equality began deteriorating. Men simply went back to the old ways of going to work, from work to the dinner the wife would make, after dinner a nap, and after that TV or card games. Wives—the concept seamlessly transitioned to my parents' generation—worked, cooked, cleaned, took care of the children, sometimes they nagged, and sometimes promoted patriarchy with glee, favoring sons and teaching daughters how to be docile and obedient.

Now *Neo AFŽ* exists largely in the past, but it's not entirely stuck there. There is a bilingual book titled *Po(jest)zija/Po(eat)ry* that Ivana and I worked on for years after I moved to the US: we wrote free-verse poems and poem-recipes that you can actually follow and prepare simple meals. The irony that half of our book comprises recipes, that we return to the kitchen as if in a bad parody of a defeated radical feminist movement, as if in some awful misogynistic scenario in which bitches get tamed, does not escape us. And so the recipe-poems are in fact satirical and easy, while the non-recipe poems tend to be quite oblique, and we are saying: read and write complicated poetry, and in the meantime, prepare simple, quick meals to nourish yourself for the struggle, and don't waste precious time in the kitchen. We don't want to live in the world where cooking is complicated and demanding, and poetry is reduced to one-dimensional aphorisms.

And even though the zine stopped coming out in 2003, we didn't reduce our existence to just writing, reading, and getting by. We kept attending and organizing numerous street protests in Zagreb, Wilmington, NC, and Chicago (animal rights, gay rights, unionizing, against the Iraq war, for immigrants rights),

and we stayed active in local music scenes, as promoters and performers. Hardly a tame lifestyle.

revolution without premeditation

at. to ape the adolescent sects apply a pat
that of glitter on your lips, wear rhinestone jewelry, a hat,
apart. anything in order to open the art-
at last. ificial respiration center by the salon next door, past
at last. the stylized beehives, the mast-
er pieces—style 2003. you may pass if the - - symbol
at rest. is next to your driving lane. (maneuvering rest-
ricted.) at night, patrols _____
_____turn the caesura into a solid line.

revolution without premeditation

a kilo/kilo & ½ of dry beans
three spoonfuls (tbsp) of barley (four is okay)
one carrot (home-grown or not)
a tablespoon of oil
two cloves of garlic
salt

soak a kilo of beans until morning. in the morning, put the pot of beans on the stove and let the beans simmer. add the carrot, sliced or not, a tablespoon of oil, minced (or whole) garlic, and let it all simmer until softened. add salt, a lot of it. in the meantime, bring a pot of barley to a boil, and then let it simmer. when the barley softens, combine it with the beans and let everything stew together. for how long? approximately, for a while. in the end, gently thicken the stew by pouring it, stirring constantly, over the flour browned in a larger pot. serve to a group of several people. note: never serve to just one person. lettuce garnished with all kinds of tasty additions goes well with this main course. instead of lettuce, you can serve peppers, not thermically treated (raw). make sure you serve bread.

the amount of serious love-sickness

she stayed. she cared mostly for the delta
[especially the branching kind]
not so much for the spring, river, or ocean.
delta. delta. we called her
/you are guessing/ simulation.
she liked her earth to be silty
water muddy
she could sing swamp scales, always
somewhere in-between
the tones desirable to us
coming from the sea level
or above the sea so we
left, she did not.

the amount of serious love-sickness

1 packet of instant mushroom soup
1.5 liters of water
2 eggs
vegeta (salty spices)

pour the content of the soup packet into the lukewarm water and stir it with a ladle to prevent the formation of lumps. if lumps occur, they must be broken apart. you do it by pushing the lumps to the walls of the pot and then pressing them. stir constantly. add a teaspoon of salty spices. when the soup begins to boil, throw in two beaten eggs, but not all at once. let the eggs drip into the soup, and stir constantly. reduce the heat and continue cooking for about ten minutes (because of the eggs and salmonella). eat while it's hot. nothing on the side. it's soup.

obedience is not a virtue. obedience is slavery. a gradual diminishment of creativity, with a dulling tendency. disobedience is often unjustly confused with naughtiness. it's a tendentious and intentionally incorrect misconception. disobedience is a self-sustaining category.

women's disobedience is the death of patriarchy.

Memory of [State] #11

Comments:

I was born in [Capital] and lived in [Town] and [Capital] until age 13. Like many other [Ethnic People] at the time, my family decided to move in 198_ after violent demonstrations organized by [Different Ethnic People] in what was then [Former State]. These were the times of the [Slogan] officially declared by [Dead President no.1] and his policy-makers.

I remember watching from my building situated in [Capital]'s center scores of mobs throwing rocks and bottles at downtown stores & buildings and vandalizing them. Riot police intervened using shields, water guns and tear gas. Many of the police special units were from all over [Former State]: [State], [Region], [State], and [State].

I ever since wonder why the [Different Ethnic People] hated us so much. Maybe because [Ethnic People] were [Adherents of Religion] and they were predominantly [Adherents of Different Religion]? Or maybe because they had explosive birth rates which made them the majority in [State] and gave them the right to expel us?

Frau X

If you don't learn a foreign language, you might starve.

That was the moral of one of the stories my grandpa told his daughter, my mother, especially when she got bad grades in German.

The story goes that when he began working at an Austrian household near the camp where he was imprisoned, they would call him: "Nicolaus, komm essen!" And Nikola, not speaking German, would start working harder and faster, thinking they were reprimanding him. He would then miss a chance to eat, and eventually go to sleep starving.

My mom never became conversant in German, despite learning it for eight years in school. I had German for four years in high school, and even lived in Germany for three months in 2000, when I was 26, but was only able to communicate with the Turkish grocery store owner in our equally broken versions of the language.

I had learned how to count from *ein* to *zehn* from grandpa Nikola. He'd sit me in his lap, and I'd face him. At four or five, my face was at the level of Nikola's chest bone. I'd count the buttons on his shirt, repeating after him phonetically, in a thick Serbo-Croatian accent: *ajn, zvaj, draj, fir,* etc. It was a game as well: each time I got to ten, he'd turn off the light by leaning his head against the light switch. Then he'd declare that there had been a power cut, and I'd plead him to bring the electricity back. Then he'd click the light switch again with his head, and we'd both cheer. I was at the age when such games would never grow

old, and Nikola had patience to spare. This was in Borovo Naselje, the little industrial city in the center of Yugoslavia's Northeast, where Nikola moved after World War Two, and I was born to his older daughter thirty years later.

I was a child growing up in the socialist version of Yugoslavia, a version that originated in World War Two and guarded over a specific narrative of that war through literature, films, and comics, targeting everyone, starting with kids in the kindergarten. Every child watching TV series about the brave and handsome resistance fighters was eager to find out what their grandparents did in the war—how did they contribute to the victorious Tito's partisans? I was happy to know that my grandmothers had indeed fought in the resistance, as civilians who supported partisans. One grandfather, my dad's estranged father, was completely out of the picture, in another city, not on speaking terms with my dad or anyone else among us. Even when I wondered about him, the information was scant, suggesting less of a glorious role he played, if any, in World War Two. Nikola, the other grandfather, was the person I was closest to: he dressed me and fed me every morning my mom went to work, took me for walks, and taught me how to read.

One time during our walk, we climbed the steps to the movie theater to look at the posters. I could see my reflection in the dark glass of the theater's façade, from my mary-janes and white-lace knee-highs to the pigtails. Passing by one of the posters, I recognized one detail as a letter I could actually decipher: "I." In Serbo-Croatian, "I" is a word, too, although not the first-person pronoun like in English. In my native language, it means "and," and it's pronounced "e." Saying the letter out loud, I could recognize it as a word that connects stuff.

Soon after I learned how to read all the other letters, I began going to kindergarten. Elementary school followed soon, as did lessons about World War Two, and at home I found out Nikola was a prisoner of Germans during that historic time. I didn't ask what kind of a prisoner. Once I found out that he didn't have a number tattooed on his arm, I simply concluded that he hadn't been in a death camp, but in a work camp.

Perhaps it was my inattentiveness, but it must have also been the contradictions in the family lore that were throwing me off. I was a graduate student in North Carolina, and almost thirty

years old, when a fellow student sent out an e-mail to the department's listserv asking if anyone else but him was a grandchild of Nazi camp survivors. I replied back saying my grandpa was in a work camp. But after I hit "send," I began questioning my own understanding of Nikola's story, and I e-mailed my mom to check that. She corrected me: it wasn't a work camp but, according to the documents, a regular P.O.W. camp, more precisely Stalag 17B, where captured Allied soldiers were kept, including the Yugoslav ones.

Okay.

A big fan of Billy Wilder, I have seen *Stalag 17*, but that and a short story by Vonnegut was the extent of what I knew about that particular Third Reich institution.

I wondered why the words Stalag 17 never came up when I was growing up, at least not in my presence.

After Nikola's death in late 1982, his wartime experience would come up once in a while when the news would announce that Germany was thinking of paying reparation to the victims of the Third Reich crimes. Such news seemed to have proliferated in Yugoslavia in the mid-to-late 80s, when the inflation rose, per capita income fell, and people could use hope for some hard currency, even if it meant digging out old traumas and potentially cashing in on them. Terse dialogues between my grandma and her daughters made me believe that Nikola was in a work camp. Their conversation would go something like this:

"Did he work in the village the entire time he was there?" my mom or my aunt would ask.

My grandma would begin to remember her husband's stories, and she'd look in the distance somewhere beyond her living room. Her eyes would get intense behind her thick glasses. She'd frown a bit, her thin lips would become a sliver of pale flesh, and she'd run her fingers through her thin, silver, permed short hair. She'd sit in her chair, her back always straight, a small cup of Turkish coffee in front of her, artificial sweetener like tiny lozenges in a small plastic container at hand.

"Did he work the entire time? I don't think so," grandma would say and take a sip of her coffee. "Though all he ever talked about was how he worked in the village. But they probably put them to work only later in the war, when shit hit the fan in 1944."

"Remember he said they didn't have any blankets where they slept? They slept on bare cots," my aunt would say.

All along, I might be only half-listening to the conversation, and instead play with my aunt's long soft hair died mahogany red, pretending I was a top-notch Paris hair stylist. She suffered like a champ, later admiring my creation of half-teased-half-braided strands held together with a dozen clips in all the colors of the rainbow.

My mom kept thinking of the practical side. She'd say:

"Four years or one year, that's a lot of unpaid, forced labor. Let me calculate how much we'd get if they were to pay him at today's minimum wage. Let's say it would be fourteen Deutschmarks per hour."

She'd take a ball point pen out of her purse, and write on an empty cigarette pack, her blond bangs above her blue eyes, and once in a while she'd pause in order to tuck strands of her bob behind her ears.

And so on.

And so I was almost thirty when I finally asked my mom for some details. The story went that Nikola was doing the mandatory military service in the Royal Yugoslav Army when the country was attacked and swiftly occupied by Germany's Wermacht. King Peter fled the country, the army was dismissed, and so Nikola found himself still uniformed, but without an army, in a small city of Novska, not far from his home village. But before he was able to return home to find a partisan unit to join, Wermacht troops arrested him and took him to a camp near Krems, Austria.

I was not yet eight when Nikola got ill and I didn't get to see him a lot or talk to him the last year of his life, when I was old enough to begin asking him about his youth. So I piece the story together out of the family lore, out of facts and inconsistency, with some contradictions, and lots of gaps. Documents say that Nikola was a P.O.W., and then the family lore says that he was also working as a servant in a butcher's household. The lore says the butcher's wife was a kind woman who was sending him packages of flour and sausages up until Nikola met my grandma in 1948. Not only that, but the lady liked him and was hoping, apparently, that he'd marry her daughter once the war finished. That didn't make sense to me, and I don't mean the part about

the Third Reich disregarding the Geneva convention and forcing P.O.W.s to work.

When I was in eighth grade, a whole semester of my history class was about World War Two and the Yugoslav revolution. It was then that I began asking my grandma about her own memories, and about the stories she heard from Nikola, prodding for details, stories of courage preferably, or something.

As a teenager, I often spent weekends at my grandma's place. She lived in a two-bedroom apartment with my aunt, my uncle, and my cousins, two toddlers at the time. My grandma slept on a couch that would pull out into a comfortable full bed in the living room, and I'd sleep with her. We'd lie on the bed and talk until she fell asleep, and then I'd read or watch late night TV.

"A Nazi lady would want a non-Aryan to marry her daughter? Come on," I'd say to my grandma.

"Oh, she wasn't a Nazi. Only her husband was a Nazi sympathizer."

"How do you know she wasn't a Nazi, too?"

"Well, your grandpa told me that when customers came to the shop, and they'd say 'Heil Hitler,' she'd just say 'Guten tag.'"

"Aha," I'd say, prompting grandma to continue.

"You know, they'd raise their arms," grandma would say and raise her outstretched right arm in a mock-Nazi salute, "and the boss lady never saluted back."

That's how grandma referred to the Austrian woman: *gazdarica*, or the boss lady. No name ever came up, and I never asked. I assumed she was long dead, though maybe she was still alive at the time of my childhood; she could have easily been a healthy eighty-something-year-old out there in the Austrian countryside, with her own wartime memories. It certainly would have fitted my grandma's notion of the boss lady, and she instilled a kind of respect for that phantom woman in me. It was as if the shadow of the Austrian's authority, just the tip of it, reached me, the granddaughter of the prisoner working for her.

By the time I did learn that Nikola was a Stalag 17 inmate, grandma Milka had also passed away, and I couldn't go back to her for more stories and clarifications.

Milka must have heard all the stories early on in her and Nikola's marriage, when she told him her stories of narrowly escaping Nazis and Quislings as a teenager in the resistance,

sabotaging railroads and carrying messages from one group of partisans to the other in the thickly wooded hills surrounding her village. I doubt that they ever repeated those stories to each other afterward: that stoic generation did not dwell in the past. But stoicism was sometimes bought at the price of suppressing traumatic memories, and selectively transferring the story of their World War Two survival for their children and grandchildren, editing out the most horrific parts.

My mom remembers the stories they did tell her, and she even repeated the story of the non-Nazi boss lady to me over the phone. I was in Wilmington, North Carolina, and she was in Borovo. I had a calling card that bought me an hour and twenty minutes of long-distance calls to Croatia, so I asked mom every question I could think of, although she couldn't answer all of them, at least not in detail. What were the conditions of life like? (*He said the difference between a P.O.W. and a death camp prisoner was that the P.O.W. didn't have his number tattooed.*) When was he put to work? (*Probably later in the war.*) Was he able to write letters to his mother? (*His mother was illiterate.*) Was he working for the same family all the time? (*I don't know.*) What exactly was he doing? (*I don't know.*) The boss lady somehow was the only even slightly tangible detail of the story.

"How come everyone thinks that lady wasn't a Nazi? I mean, other than her not saying 'Heil Hitler'?" I asked mom.

"Well, your grandpa told me that the lady kept sending him packages with food. Even after he moved to Borovo and got a job in the factory. Until he met your grandma."

"Really?"

"Yes. It seems she was hoping he would marry one of her daughters."

"Are you sure?"

"Look," mom said, not out of impatience, but to collect her thoughts and memories. "What I know is that after he sent the lady a letter saying he was getting married, the packages from the boss lady stopped coming."

I had never heard that from grandma—maybe that was a detail Nikola only told his daughters.

"Are you there?" mom asked.

"I'm listening," I said and took a drag of my cigarette.

"Are you smoking?" mom asked me.

"Yes, are you?"

"*I* am, but *you* shouldn't. I'll go over there and give you a beating!"

"Anyway, you were saying about the packages?"

"Well, apparently she was hoping to hitch your grandpa and her daughter. Anyway, the fact they had kept in touch obviously meant she wasn't a Nazi, right? I mean, grandpa was a communist, a sympathizer even as a kid, before the war."

"Mom, you know what I think?"

"What?"

"Maybe Nikola had a thing with the boss lady."

My mom gasped and then burst out laughing.

"Get out of here!"

"Why not? If you were anti-Nazi and your husband was pro-Nazi, the husband would be a total turn off. But a young pro-communist man, a P.O.W.? How old was Nikola when he was captured?"

"Let's see, he was born in 1919, captured in 1941—twenty-two."

"See, he wasn't too young. What else do you remember? Where did he sleep?"

"Oh, he slept in the barracks, absolutely. They'd take him to the boss lady's household in the morning, and take him back to the barracks in the evening."

"So he worked for her during the day, in the house and around?"

"As far as I know."

"That would explain how he learned German."

"Right. I remember one story about her. She gave him some blankets, when she heard they slept on the bare bunks with practically no heat. But the guards didn't allow the blankets in."

"And, so?"

"So she was furious, but she couldn't do anything about it."

I began speculating:

"She probably fed him while he was at her house. When the guards weren't around."

"She must have. She treated him like a human being."

"But really he was her slave."

"She did keep sending those packages and letters," mom said, still feeling the need to defend the woman she never met. Or

maybe to defend her father's story, the piece of the story with which he had entrusted her.

But one thought wouldn't let me be: what if the boss lady is fiction? There is no evidence: no name one could look up, no letters she allegedly wrote. What if, in order to satisfy his children's curiosity and yet spare them from the truth and spare himself from traumatic memories, Nikola weaved a tale of a benevolent Austrian woman and him as her P.O.W. beneficiary? He was an immaculate storyteller; I can vouch for that. When I slept over at grandpa and grandma's, he'd stay up with me while grandma was in deep sleep on her side of the bed, and tell elaborate tales, parts of which I'd remember later on when we read the real deal at school. Medieval princes and princesses would fight with Greek mythical beasts, William Tell would spar with the Turkish trickster Nasraddin—anything was possible in those epics composed of folk tales and legends he had absorbed and reconfigured for his entertainment and mine.

If I could only find proof that a lady I've been hearing about *might* have existed. I browse the titles of memoirs of P.O.W.s in the library catalogue of my current school in Chicago: *Damn Cold and Starving*, *Given Up for Dead, Nightmare Memoir* . . . . Even compared with the movie *Stalag 17*, what with soldiers clowning around in the face of horror, betrayal, and madness, Nikola's story sounds like a best-case scenario. But perhaps Nikola did tell the truth; the negative parts of his experience might have been unspeakable, so he omitted those and emphasized the positives, but it was a kind of truth, incomplete but real.

There is a picture of him, and on the back it says Austria, 1945. He doesn't look starved, he just looks like the thin young version of Nikola I remember: pointy chin, short brown hair combed back, closely shaved face with a narrow hooked nose and high cheekbones. Most likely, his life in the last year of World War Two was a surreal walk back and forth between the home of that benevolent boss lady during the day, and the horrors of the camp every evening, night, and morning. As for his first three years as a P.O.W., there couldn't have been a single comforting thing.

I will never be able to imagine how that must have been. But maybe I should collect as much information as possible and piece together a facsimile of the complete story Nikola never

told. For starters, I ask my mom to scan and e-mail me the Red Cross document Nikola received when he came back to Yugoslvia in 1945. I look at it for the first time in my life, now that I am thirty-four, and in the background the radio is talking about rendition, Guantanamo Bay, decapitations, kidnappings.

The Red Cross document says Nikola was captured on April 7, 1941, and released from the camp on May 9, 1945, and that he arrived back home on July 12 of the same year.

So along with answering some basic questions, the document opens up another huge one: what in the world was Nikola doing during those two months before arriving home? I call my mom, she chuckles and says:

"Well, he *told* the authorities in Yugoslavia that he walked home from Austria and that it took him two months."

"Really?"

"Of course, he made it up, it would have been dangerous for him to tell the authorities the truth," my mom says with a voice filled with conspiracy, and pauses dramatically. Always the suspense master, my mom.

"And the truth was?"

"Well, the truth was," she says, her voice nonchalant all of a sudden, "The boy wanted to try out the life in the big city, in Vienna."

"He told you that?"

"Yeah, but I guess something didn't work out, so he returned home."

"He must have been awfully homesick," I offer.

"Yes, but remember, he owned nothing back home, poor as a church mouse, and his mom and sister were at the mercy of his uncles, who in turn were poor too and could perhaps only take care of their sons."

"So he thought . . . "

"He thought, *maybe I can find work in Vienna*, after all, he had learned German."

"So did he find work, I mean how did he survive even those two months?"

"I don't know," my mom says.

"He didn't tell you much about his experiences, did he? Probably wanted to spare you."

"To be honest, I never asked him much. I guess I should have," my mom says.

With the absence of facts, we begin speculating. Maybe he wanted to send for his mom and his little sister and bring them to Vienna. But what could that bombed-out wasteland hold in store, other than espionage and black market wheeling and dealing? Maybe it was dangerous for him to return to his village. Maybe it was dangerous *not* to return. Maybe the boss lady's husband was drafted and killed in the final year of the war, and Nikola stayed on to protect the women from the Russian soldiers.

I don't know if I'll ever find out. But maybe it's time for me to master some German and start bracing myself for a trip.

Memory of [State] # 12

Comments:

I was born and grew up in [Capital City]. Many foreigners who visit it for work or business do not have the best opinion about the city, however, it is a brilliant place to grow up in and I dearly miss it.

As far as life with other communities goes, there was not much interaction between different ethnic groups even before the [State] oppression. Languages are so different. For a [Ethnic Group Member] to go out with a [Wrong Ethnic Group Member] was an exception, not the norm.

I do hope that inter-ethnic relations in [State] will improve, nonetheless, the different communities never lived (as in, there were very few inter-ethnic marriages) together, but rather tolerated and respected each other. But, as most [Ethnic Group Members], I am very optimistic about the future and want to see a small, yet powerful state in the heart of the [Region]—the va-va-vroom republic, as I like to call it.

Failing Haibun

> Whatever the shortcomings of nomenclature, however, haibun refers to a short informal essay, usually light in tone and commonplace in theme, which shares those qualities that we associate with haiku verse, including suggestion, allusion, and ellipsis, and which similarly exploits the techniques of the pun, the associative word, and the pillow phrase and word. At its best, haibun is ruminative and reflective, a happy wedding of brevity of form and profundity of content, affording the reader a fresh and unconsidered view of the world, a new look at the commonplace—a fan, the sweet pleasure of sleeping late, the pitfalls of borrowing money. When it is less than successful, it can be studied, artificial, almost euphuistic in its stylistic ornamentation and the gratuitous intrusion of classical allusion and proverbial lore.
>
> Lawrence Rogers, "Rags and Tatters: The Uzuragoromo of Yokoi Yayu" (*Monumenta Nipponica* 34.3: Autumn, 1979)

It's autumn 1979 in Yugoslavia, and the old tube radio from the previous decade is on in the kitchen. And yes, it has a "gramophone" on the top, which is what I want to turn on, so I can play a children's record. I'm five, and my brother is six. He won't let me turn the radio off and play my record, because the radio is playing his favorite new band and their song about upsetting the neighbors with loud rock music. I try to argue in favor of turning it off, but my brother shuts down each of my attempts. Then, eureka! I proclaim triumphantly:

"President Tito doesn't like rock music!"

I storm off, probably to complain to an adult member of the household.

I think it's around that time that I wrote my first poem. I don't remember how it went and the piece of paper I wrote it on has disappeared a long time ago. I don't know if I even showed it to anyone. But I remember clearly that I wrote it in all capital letters, the only kind of letters I knew at that age. The poem mentioned a boy, and it mentioned a plum. Was it in the fall, when bags of blue plums arrived in my parents' car on Saturdays, market-place days, to be eaten raw (skins a bit sour, flesh sweet) or cooked into jam? The poem must have rhymed. That's all I remember.

And the radio. It's housed in a wooden box and it looks like a face: its left eye is the volume knob, its right eye is the tuning knob. The dial: radio's cheeks tattooed with names of cities, some close (Belgrade, Zagreb, Sarajevo, Ljubljana), some far away and exotic (Lyon, Moscow, Naples). Radio's teeth-baring, grinning mouth is a set of five white keys—off/gramophone/long waves/medium waves/short waves.

Ripen, new skins, plums
drum this season. Weeds wither
as the planet tilts.

In June and July 1991, I wrote a full-length screenplay about a Prague indie rock radio DJ who emigrates, following the Velvet Revolution, to Wichita, Kansas. Why Wichita? I found an entry about Wichita in a tome of the Yugoslav Lexicographical Society Encyclopedia and I suppose that the entry told me just enough to make me realize it's a place so radically different from Prague as to seem exotic. Is that fair? I still haven't made it to Kansas.

I wrote each day for those two months. The city grew more and more quiet during the day, deserted, as people drove to safer parts of the country, Europe, and the world; these were the months when the artillery positioned in the neighboring villages taunted the city. The nighttime sounds of the artillery firing off but rarely hitting any targets were there in order to terrify us,

because of course they could just as easily have hit, or stormed into the streets.

Before the summer of 1991, I imagined that people in wartime lived in the nightmarish state of constant fear. I'd had actual nightmares myself sometimes, living out in my dreams the true stories of terror from World War Two, rolled up in a ball, hiding, or running, trying to escape the Nazis, or witnessing torture of my loved ones. But then, when the new war began in 1991, what possessed my immediate family was not so much a state of fear as denial. Yes, it was getting dangerous and more insane, but surely rational solutions would emerge and sanity would prevail, and life would go back to normal any day now. We actually slept through the artillery noise. We'd shut the windows and pull down the heavy wooden blinds. This was supposed to block out the noise of the war, but I think that, in our denial, we actually imagined that this layer of glass and wood could protect us from flyaway shrapnel; our imagination didn't go as far as picturing anyone purposefully targeting us civilians, us kids, us pacifists, us who don't hate anyone.

At one point, when all the characters and plot points in my screenplay were complete, it was time to fantasize about my casting: who should play whom in the movie? I would, of course, be the director. Who should play the protagonist, the DJ (I think his name was Marek)? It would have to be my favorite Yugoslav rock star, Dušan Kojić Koja (he could learn Czech and English for the purpose of my movie; that said, the dialogue would have to be translated into Czech and English first). The only copy of the screenplay has long been lost, and I don't remember the title, but I remember that in the final scene Marek is on the train, leaving Wichita for Seattle. And I still imagine Marek as played by Koja at that time, a guy in his late 20s, with big, curly, jet black hairdo, and thick black eyebrows.

Like a green girl
in a nutshell
count myself a king

In the early 1990s Belgrade, in the wartime, there was a woman I never met, whose name I never knew, but I know that she wore a white coat in her office. The door of her office was closed, and behind it was a waiting room that filled every day with young and middle-aged men who failed the Yugoslav-Army-issued questionnaire assessing one's psychological fitness to be a soldier. The woman in a white coat was the draft dodgers' last hope.

A lot of the men she examined were genuinely disturbed. But each day, she saw a few men who were not only physically fit, but also sane enough to intentionally fail the psychological questionnaire, for a chance of being rejected by the Army.

"Do you ever urinate in your bed while asleep or while waking up?"

"Yes."

She signed documents saying they—one of them my dad, who claims that all he did was confess that he suffered from a phobia of guns—were unfit to serve.

My brother related to the psychiatrist several vivid nightmares, all of them simply summaries of one-act plays by the Australian rocker Nick Cave, full of blood and absurdist violence.

A priest, a blade, five
severed fingers, "My little
children, run, run free!"

I stand with the crowd every noon on the plaza by the Philosophical Faculty, Belgrade University. And then we walk, each time a different route, closing traffic, making noise. A truck with a sound system blasts Prodigy's "Fire Starter" and other aggressive techno tunes, drummers drum along. No classes since mid November this year, 1996. Instead of getting a Master's in Literature, I'm a part of praxis in popular uprising. Every day there are dozens of us. Until one day arrests and beatings begin. Then there are hundreds of us. The cops rape a male student with a baton up his ass while torturing him at the station. Then there

are thousands of us. One day the organizers decide we're walking from Old Belgrade, crossing the bridge over the Sava to New Belgrade, and on to Zemun, the western end of the city.

My feet begin to lose grip of the asphalt somewhere in the middle of the bridge. I hold on to a friend next to me, thinking, I'm just a little hungry and thirsty, this dizziness will go away. But it's not that temporary dizziness that accompanies hunger (aka being high on skip-a-meal), it's as if the bridge is swaying under me. My friends around me feel the same. Then word comes: we gotta *march* across. Drummers drum a marching beat, and we all begin walking in the exact same rhythm. It turns out, people aren't supposed to walk across a bridge any which way: if each person's gait is in a different rhythm, the bridge begins to sway as if a giant hypnotist is dangling it over the river. Then the walkers on the bridge begin to stagger, and the bridge sways even more. That's why any protest needs mathematicians and engineers. They quickly figure out what is happening and spread the word. We have to go in groups, and we have to march at a set rhythm: the same way infantries have been crossing bridges ever since the first military was formed. The bridge calms down.

No traffic—feet can
make bridges swing left
and right. March with a purpose.

A high school opus of mine is a novella about a wannabe jazz pianist from Brest, France, who escapes on a transatlantic ship, believing it's bound for New York City. The ship however takes him to Quebec, Canada, but not before two thieves strip him of all of his possessions. The protagonist tries to chase his robbers by following them across the continent in a Ford T Model, never catches them, but finds himself finally in Vancouver, where he befriends an elderly black woman who emigrated from the US and is a touring preacher/singer. The action takes place in 1923, and the novella is titled "Pacific Ocean." A kid who had traveled no farther than 600 kilometers from her hometown, I typed up

the thing on the family's Atari computer in 1990, in our apartment in Croatia, in Vukovar, the place of my birth.

One decade and several wars later, on December 31, 2001, I was stuck at the airport in Brest, France, for about eight hours. Brest was not my destination: my ticket was for a direct Air France flight from Paris to DC, and I was on my way to America for the first time, just like the protagonist of my first novella, now with ten years worth of dust between its pages. In retrospect, trying to fly from Paris to DC in the last hours of the first year of the "War on Terror" may not have been the best idea.

Something seemed wrong even before takeoff in Paris. We got no word why we waited on the De Gaulle tarmac for two hours; then the takeoff, and then, maybe half an hour later, the pilot announced we'd need to make an unplanned landing in Brest. Air France attendants had been tense and served nothing but bread. No water.

After we disembarked in Brest, we were told that the reason for the emergency landing was "a suspicious object on the plane."

Nowhere in the Brest airport building was there a designated spot for people to pray, so a group of Muslim men prayed right there in the lobby. The airport restaurant had maybe a quarter of the capacity of our abandoned transatlantic aircraft. Of all the befuddled millennial travelers, the most flustered was the fur-clad woman who spoke only Ukrainian and had only me to explain to her, in my best Panslavic Pidgin, what in the world was happening.

I was over 2,000 kilometers away from home, about to triple that distance and arrive in the New World. And the only thing I could think about was: what did the "suspicious object" look like? All I could imagine was a mysterious black container the size and shape of a shoebox, a container that was supposed to stay locked forever, but instead materialized onboard our plane. If you opened it, a blinding light and a sound of a disembodied scream would come out.

A stewardess runs
down an aisle. Turbulence?
My mouth too parched to ask.

Memory of [State] # 13

Comments:

I grew up in [City] and my best friend was [Other Ethnic Group Member]. He was never interested in learning [Language]. So we always spoke [Different Language], even when there were ten [Ethnic] children and he was the only [Other Ethnic Group Member], for respect, not anything else. We had a great time.

Fast forward 12 years, in the middle of [Dead President no. 2's] apartheid regime, police raids, and demonstrations, I was walking in the street, when suddenly two dangerous-looking [Different Ethnic] policemen stopped me to check my ID. One of them was my best friend! I almost collapsed right there and right then. I just could not believe that he had agreed to be part of the brutal [Dead President no. 2's] machinery. I never saw him again. I wonder what happened to him.

Today, no one speaks [Different Language], only English. I am glad though [Different Language] is a very beautiful language. On the other hand [Different Ethnic People] never learned [Language]. This is why they lost everything, they always thought of themselves as better than everyone else, especially better than [Ethnic People].

IN SEARCH OF GABI LUNCĂ

> Gabi Luncă also spent many years singing at weddings, and although from the beginning of the 1990s her only performances were in Pentecostal churches, her voice remains unforgotten in Romania. Her songs are the quiet, melancholic songs of passion and yearning for one's home, mother, or sweetheart; songs to lift the weight from one's soul. Included among Gabi Luncă's greatest hits are: "Omul Bun n-are noroc" (The good have no luck) and "Superata sint pe lume" (I am sad in this world). Gabi Luncă's silvery, strained singing was often copied, but never equaled, although the accordion player Victor Gore remembers, she "always sang slightly out of time."
>
> Grit Friedrich, liner notes for *Gabi Luncă—Sounds From a Bygone Age, Vol. 5*

JULY 7, 1998

N. and I are outside of the Central European Time zone for the first time, in Cluj, Romania, practically the only country where we can travel without having to apply for visas. Romania is one hour ahead of Belgrade, in the Eastern European Time Zone.

My friend S. lives in Cluj, and we're staying in her studio apartment with her. The TV is on, S. is watching a soccer game. I'm commenting on the players' hairstyles.

It turns out that the taxi we took from the train station to S.'s studio was a rip off. It should have cost 6 times less. N. says,

"The cab driver is a hick. Everything is fun and crazy because we are in the land of vampires and Draculas. Tomorrow, we'll

turn into witches and no one will fuck with us anymore!"

Tomorrow we'll go out looking for Gabi Luncă tapes and for the high E string for N.'s guitar.

July 8, 1998

It rained today and it kept getting colder. The three of us walked under a big white-and-blue umbrella, circling around the small center of this beautiful little city.

Saw *LA Confidential* at the Arta theater.

Haven't yet bought the E-string.

This evening, S. was watching Croatia vs. France, and N. and I read poems by Rita Dove and Luise Glück and wrote music for Langston Hughes.

N. says,

"The cops in *LA Confidential*, right. Both Buddy and Eddie are pretty stupid. Eddie has a muscular body, a tight ass, and Buddy has blue eyes, and he'd make a good one-night stand. Eddie has pretty little eyes with big black irises. He is incapable of any male-female physical relationship, what with his sunken cheeks and a Nazi-ish face. We can all agree that Eddie is a bad kisser, while Buddy is a great kisser and maybe something else."

July 9, 1998

Went to the Art Museum and to the Rex Pizza and Paghetti restaurant. Bought some tapes, but we're still looking for Gabi Luncă.

S. threw a party at her studio apartment, and we danced to Frank Sinatra, Carole King, and Led Zeppelin. It was even colder out today, so we're not going to the Black Sea. I hope we'll still make it to the Delta.

Az santămplat. It happened today.

July 10, 1998

N. says,

"S. is starting to grow her fangs and I'm letting my fingernails grow long. Even here in Transylvania we have to remain underground."

JULY 11, 1998

Climbed up to Cetățuia and walked by the Someș River.

Maybe we'll play at the Music Club tomorrow if there's no one there.

We went to the socialist part of Cluj, it wasn't painfully ugly. It will become ugly, though: they're building some huge churches there, with a McDonald's right in the middle.

N. says,

"While we were in the forest, we did a little performance. We wrote *nevidljivO* on a tree trunk. That's invisible art. As we rode through the communist parts of town, I was imagining the time of Ceaușescu and I was thinking about the fates of the people on the tram."

JULY 12, 1998

Visited an open-air ethnographic museum full of huts in Transylvania village style, made of wood, and mud, and there were a few churches too. I hit my head on the door frame, that's how small the houses are. I'm not sure if people used to be smaller, or they simply bowed to enter their homes.

S. threw a party at her studio apartment. Her friend D. was telling about their trip to France with the kids from the orphanage, and he summed it up as "apocalypse." The crew of orphans got into fights and ended up in the police station.

JULY 13, 1998

N. says,

"We're on a road trip to the mountains. The guitar is with us, as is some Mexican percussion, we'll chase away the rain and bring the sunshine back. Our hearts beat bim bam bam bam bam. I decided I would maybe jump into the lake naked if the beach isn't busy."

JULY 14, 1998

Belis Lake, breeze, sun tanning. Paradise. We slept in S.'s lodge cabin. The night sky was the kind of sky you can see only far

from any cities or civilization. We could see the Milky Way, everything.

N. says,

"Fucking Romanian boatman wouldn't take us for a ride on the lake, so we left, having decided that no one can fuck with us."

JULY 15, 1998

Stopped by a Hungarian village where they sell handcrafted décor, jewelry, and accessories out of wool, straw, and wood. It's all very pretty, but all I got was a hairpin. I'm saving money for Gabi Luncă tapes.

Back in S.'s apartment, we could hear through the open balcony that a neighbor was playing Serbian radio, Serbian folk music, everything. Fuck. We have to go home tomorrow.

New song lyrics:

Peter Sellers' Daughter

She is worse than stormy weather
She's the daughter of Peter Sellers
And if you happen to see her, tell her,
I've come to watch her sky turn blue again

(Blue again)

And in time
The sun will shine
Breeze will blow
And we will sing a song of woe

Cool in LA

I have long hair on my legs
And that's cool in LA
I have long hair on my legs
And that's cool in LA

Hair on my legs, hair on my chest
Hair on my face, hair on my ass
But baby
That's cool in LA

JULY 16, 1998

It was nice going to cheap Cluj movie theaters, and eating ice cream in front of the National Theater. On the train back to Belgrade, I'm thinking of Cluj and wondering if N. and I will go back and play a show at the Music Pub. What will that be like?

The train is full of smugglers, yelling and trying to hide their wares in the ceiling of our compartment. I feel like this is a documentary and I am a camera.

N. says,

"We refused to leave our compartment when they asked us to leave so they can hide their things. Let them hide the stuff elsewhere! No one can fuck with us."

The smugglers are collecting petty cash among themselves, I'm guessing in order to bribe the border guards and the train conductors. The smugglers in our compartment are two older ladies, very nervous, praying and clutching pictures of Jesus.

After we cross the border and are in Serbia, the ladies relax and begin retrieving the hidden goods. So many lipsticks in plastic bags. One of the ladies starts to shave her legs. So many electric razors. They get off in Pančevo.

The train inches toward Belgrade. Even though there are only 20 kilometers left, the train has never been this slow. N. grabs her guitar and we start singing our songs. The train conductor peeks in and asks, in English, "Where are you from?" "Iz Beograda," we reply. He asks is he could sit with us in our compartment and we let him. N. and the conductor take turns playing the guitar. We agree to visit him in Vršac and jam with his band at the Railroad Workers Club. Before we get off the train, I tell him, "You should read the novel called *Closely Watched Trains* if you haven't. It's by a Czech author, his name is Bohumil Hrabal."

I have 500 lei left over; I never found those Gabi Luncă tapes.

Memory of [State] #14

Comments:

I grew up in [the Capital City] and had [Wrong Ethnic Group] friends, we used to play football and basketball together. Now it sounds politically incorrect but I used to cheer for [Ethnically Wrong] football club (a [Ethnically Right] striker played for them, too) as well as [State representation] when they played international fixtures. But authorities ruined it all by taking away [State] autonomy, throwing our parents out of their jobs, and just in general kicking off this massive anti-[Ethnic Group] campaign.

Diaspora Mixtape

> Yugo-rock never wanted to conceal its flirtation with shepherd's songs or the Macedonian panpipes . . . . Based on the universal configuration of bass, guitar, drums, and voice, it also drew on the living wellsprings of southern Slavic folk melodies.
>
> Aleš Debeljak, "The Twilight of the Idols"

Track 1: *Star on Fire*

Jadranka and Goran were teenagers in Sarajevo in the years of harmony, dissonance and noise, synthetic and analog. On this side of the ocean, John Coltrane was somewhere between the first and the second quartet, and a kid named James was about to become Iggy Pop here in the Midwest. Then the film reel of the 60s was spent, and the 70s came. Factories in Yugoslavia began pressing little black vinyl discs with Jadranka's and Goran's first recordings, and artist Marina Abramović gained attention by setting a five-pointed star on fire, the kind you could find on the flags of the US, USSR, or Yugoslavia. It's a part of the myth: Marina burning a star on a gallery floor, the fire depleting oxygen, the kind you need for breathing.

Track 2*: Slap Your Thighs*

Jadranka Stojaković had a recognizable, understated and unaffected way of singing regret and lament over lost chances: "In this drab, deserted town, these streets / steal the very steps under

my feet / and now I'm a roaming shadow." She became a singer-songwriter in the 1970s, a decade of harmony, dissonance and noise, with a bit more synthetic.

She started appearing more often in children's TV shows throughout the 1980s, explaining to the kids what songwriting is all about. For instance, you don't have to own an instrument, you can just slap your thighs rhythmically, and sing along, as she demonstrated and made it look easy. Also, you should not rhyme "sorrow" and "tomorrow" because that's a cliché. She didn't say what you should rhyme.

In Kyoto, Jandranka plays the medieval Persian string instrument called saz, and she plays computer programs, performs old Bosnian sevdah songs and new ambient instrumentals, sings in Japanese for video games, theater, and TV. She tours occasionally with a small combo from her new homeland: electric guitar, violin, kokyu and Jadranka's acoustic, a computer plugged in the middle of it all.

Track 3*: Shepherd Rock*

Goran Bregović started Bijelo Dugme (White Button) in the 1970s, and played lead guitar in it, and by the time they found success midway through the decade, the band got classified derogatorily as "shepherd rock." "Shepherd": from a remote hamlet on a mountain, no electricity, everything low-tech. "Rock": electricity, harmony, dissonance, noise, glitter and glam. And there were herds of fans of all ages. In the early 1980s, the band cut their hair and traded their bellbottoms, platform shoes, and peasant blouses for skinny jeans, sneakers and skinny ties. After that brief phase, they spent the rest of the 1980s looking, at least in videos and on stage, like that large segment of their following: factory workers who were bearing the brunt of the deepening economic crisis. All the while, Goran became one of the wealthiest Yugoslavs.

Now Goran lives in Paris, and occasionally tours the world with a small army of musicians and singers performing the film scores he writes. He puts together wall-to-wall patchworks of sound, a piece of one of his old pop songs here, a piece of a Romani standard there. Those cows can be milked and milked.

Track 4: *White Suit*

> This is how "ethnic music" can still be renewed: by being performed against the grain, relieved from the quicksand of nostalgic fetish. . . . No doubt, Bregović's genius is one of absorption and appropriation.
>
> Stathis Gourgouris, "Hypnosis and Critique: Film Music for the Balkans"

We are sitting on a blanket at the Jay Pritzker Pavillion, on the lawn, under the mesh of steel tubes supporting the impeccable sound system. It's a cool July evening in 2006 in Chicago, and there are hundreds of people in small groups, their blankets, food and drinks spread on the grass. Four thousand people fill the seats in front of the Frank-Gehry-designed stage that looks like a sci-fi starship or a gigantic lotus. It's already twenty minutes into Goran's orchestra's show, but the momentum is still building up, slowly, and no one is in a hurry. We've already heard the classical strings prelude, and then the Serbian liturgical male choir joining in, and then the Bulgarian women vocalists in traditional costumes (from a remote hamlet on a mountain, no electricity, everything low-tech), and now a Romani brass band is walking down the aisle way in the front, adding another layer of sound to the harmony, dissonance, and noise. They get up on stage, a male voice begins singing a Romani song.

We can only glimpse the stage far in the front, no way of telling one face from another. We can see that the singer is wearing a white suit. But that's not him. Goran won't sing much, in fact he doesn't have much of a voice. He'll probably play guitar a little bit. He's not much of a guitar hero. Mostly he'll just sit there, being charismatic.

I am hardly a fan of Goran's, in fact I went through a long phase bashing his former band Bijelo Dugme every chance I got in high school and beyond. And yet I'm here at his show; what would the teenage me say? I doubt that my excuse—I'm a writer and a scholar now, curious and nonjudgmental—would reassure her.

Critics respond to people looking down on Goran's music, to people who say he appropriates things, that he doesn't invent anything on his own; look, people, that has been going on in

postmodern art for a long time. Even in modern art.

Finally Goran appears, which we can't really discern by looking at the stage. Rather, we hear the roar of the fans—probably one third of the people here are his long-time fans—chanting his nickname: Bre-ga! Bre-ga! Bre-ga!

All the elements of the sound get incorporated, now that the boss is on stage: the Serbian liturgical male choir, the Roma brass, the Bulgarian female folk singers, the strings, and Goran's guitar, snug in his lap, letting out a few notes here and there. We are served a selection of Goran's compositions for film scores, mostly for Kusturica's films. He conducts his fifty-piece orchestra sitting down, with his right hand in the air, and I wonder if his white suit is supposed to bring to mind a captain running a tight ship or even Marshal Tito's favorite white admiral uniform. As I get comfortable on my blanket, I think about a show a long time back, when I was just thirteen.

Track 5*: A Simple Jazzy Phrase*

Back in 1987, when I started 8th grade, radio stations played a song by Jadranka Stojaković that really irritated me, especially considering the fact that my dad had that song on a mix tape he made and played all the time too. Something about her hitting the road as the new day is about to dawn, telling her lover she'll be far away by the time he wakes up. When my friends told me they were going to see Jadranka play a free show one afternoon at a community center, I went along, but I wasn't excited.

When we got there, Jadranka was already on the stage. It was a small space, the interior of a simple, clean cube constructed in the 60s, and there was only one microphone and one amplifier. My friends and I sat down quietly. Our seats were close to—as I recall—the big windows overlooking a small park and the building of a grade school across the street. Jadranka was in the middle of her version of a 19th-century poem set to folk music, probably the most beloved sevdah song of all time: "When silent midnight lays its pearly strings / Of dewdrops on wildflower fields, I cry / As desire soars from my heart and sings / Why won't you come by, why won't you come by?" I knew a version of that song from my grandma's Himzo Polovina LP, and Himzo the king of sevdah sang as if he was about to choke up, or per-

haps as if he was not singing, but sighing. But Jadranka was no folk waif. Even the most sentimental and melancholy lyrics sounded kind of tough when she delivered them.

Next she told a story behind one of the first songs she had ever recorded: "A Secret Connection," with music written by Goran Bregović. Before then, I knew that song only in Bijelo Dugme's version, with the histrionic "power-ballad" vocalization I abhorred.

It turned out that she had recorded the song before Bijelo Dugme did, that the song was written for her. It had to do with her relationship with a Russian musician at a time when Yugoslavia and Soviet Union were not on best terms, when she was already a popular solo performer, and she had to keep the relationship secret. And so a poet friend of hers wrote the lyrics about a "rigid law for all people" and the song transformed her Russian love affair into a "secret connection of us all."

There were about a hundred people in the audience at the most, and there really was no connection among us. I liked it that way. There was a gorgeous chemical-industrial sunset outside, and on the ground the autumn foliage in all shades of red, yellow and brown. Jadranka was playing a simple, jazzy phrase on her harmonica, while her bronze and wood bracelets—the clearest image I recall—were clinking against the guitar, adding to the harmony, dissonance, and noise.

She didn't play the song I knew from the radio. She dipped into her catalog and pulled out the things that amused and satisfied her. She wasn't about to play a whole lot more shows in Yugoslavia, free of charge or for money—she was about to move to Japan and continue writing, singing, and playing there. At that point, she thought she was going to stay there for a few months, but it ended up being a few years. As a compromise, she traveled back and forth between Sarajevo and Kyoto, up until the war, and the siege of her hometown, 1992.

Track 6: *The Sun and the Moon*

Marina Abramović performed solo from 1969 to 1976, and then with Ulay from 1976 to 1988. In 1987, they did "The Sun and the Moon," in Geneva, Bern, Cincinnatti, Baltimore, and Santa Monica. The first four performances included Ulay balancing on

top of three stacked chairs forming a wobbly pedestal, Marina inching toward him slowly. The record duration was 72 minutes, but usually Ulay would get toppled in less than that. There is a secret connection.

For the fifth performance, they sat each on one chair, facing each other, lit in red, letting the spectators observe them. Sitting down, they were motionless, except when one of them would get up and leave. Then the remaining one would be sitting down, motionless.

At the Stedelijik Museum in Amsterdam, there are still two lacquered black vases, not as tall as Ulay and Marina, doing the performance "The Sun and the Moon" instead of the two artists, now that they are not together. The vases are positioned on the parquet so that they are not touching, not even reflecting each other.

Marina Abramović and Ulay's break-up took some hard work, but in the pictures they took, their parting looks peaceful, even serene. They traveled to China. They each got a guide: a male guide for Marina, female for Ulay. They went to the opposite ends of the Great Wall, Marina at the eastern end, Ulay at the western end. They walked for 90 days until they met in the middle of the Wall. That was their last performance, and then they separated for good.

Track 7: *Bigger Than Tito*

> Serious connoisseurs and aficionados know full well that there is no true song without the aksamluk (evening company) and without rakija (brandy) made by a craftsman's hand. That which smells of the plum, or more precisely the velvety blue dew shrouding the ripe fruit at dawn, pours benevolently through the stomach and the limbs, catches slowly and holds long, and fills the soul with a noble and disconsolate melody . . . And draws forth a song.
>
> Ivan Lovrenović, "The Echo of Our Souls"

We are perched on the blankets, it's getting darker and the buildings along Michigan Avenue and Washington Street are picture-postcard-glowing. There seem to be even more people on the lawn at the Pritzker Pavillion, people in their thirties and forties, some with children. The family in front of us, the couple

to our right, a group of women to our left, are all speaking *naški*, "our language." For those of us growing up in former Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s, Bijelo Dugme was bigger than … than Josip Broz Tito. Almost. My grandmothers, who hardly knew who The Beatles were, knew Bijelo Dugme, and even had an opinion which of the three successive singers was the best: Željko, Tifa, or Alen.

Track 8: *Drifting Smoke*

After Jadranka sang her last song and thanked the audience, my friends, who had brought me to the show, went to the singer's press conference in the community center's office. I went with them. The first question for Jadranka was "Tell us, how did you become who you are?" Jadranka sang in taverns in Germany when she was a teenager, she toured Yugoslavia numerous times, performed at festivals abroad, she was a household name. And she sat there, shaking hands with provincial journalists, patiently providing answers, puffing cigarette smoke, and every once in a while adjusting the bronze and wood bracelets around her wrists. Smoke drifted outside the open window, toward the gorgeous chemical-industrial sunset.

Later that evening, after I got home, I sat down on the floor of the living room, where the stereo was, and flipped through the family record collection, taking out the black vinyl disks that featured women singer songwriters who played acoustic guitars. I selected ten of them and put together a mix tape, from Joan Baez to Suzanne Vega. I imagined that a few years later, after I mastered the guitar, I would be hanging out at the little market place a few blocks from my parents' apartment, that I would be sitting on one of the concrete counters after all the vendors went home. I imagined I would wear a pair of jeans and my Ramones t-shirt, with my naturally spiky short hair. I imagined I would be sitting there surrounded by my friends, or by no one at all. In any case, I imagined I would be playing my acoustic guitar and singing my own songs.

My early teens became my late teens, and I still hadn't learned how to play guitar, and then the war began in 1991. All my friends scattered around, bombs swept the old parts of town off the face of the earth, and badly damaged the concrete construc-

tions like the community center or the market place. Miraculously, the acoustic guitar survived, having suffered only a few holes in its body from the shrapnel. I finally picked it up in 1997. By 1998, I taught myself enough chords so that I could begin writing songs. Into 1999, I boasted a repertoire of about four.

Track 9: *Blue Electric*

> Bregović is explicitly drawn to variation, recirculation, rearrangement, repetition, continuous self-quotation, continuous blurring of the "original" instance and the instance of its reproduction—indeed in the vein of the classic Brazilian "cannibalismo".
>
> Stathis Gourgouris, "Hypnosis and Critique: Film Music for the Balkans"

What was a pleasant cool evening has become an unseasonable chill coming from the lake. We get up from the dampened ground, people wrap themselves in their blankets, and I start walking around, watching. "In the death car, we're alive." Goran is saying the lyrics Iggy Pop wrote and sang for a version of one of Goran's old songs that was recorded for a Kusturica movie. The Bulgarian women are singing, the brass section is making its pumping noises, mandolins are ringing ("come on, play"), the male choir murmurs along, strings are woven in too, somehow the entire small army is employed in the patchwork of sound.

Then the tempo picks up and the orchestra swings into all those dance numbers, and I can tell, for the first time, who in the audience is likely from the Balkans, and who is likely not, simply by watching the way they dance. People who are likely from the Balkans are dancing holding hands, kicking their feet and knees as they are turning their torsos left and right, all rhythmically, all the while moving in a line to and fro, left and right. People who are likely *not* from the Balkans are just jumping up and down. You can just slap your thighs rhythmically, and sing along. I'm not dancing. There are thousands of people there and really no connection among us. I like it that way.

The last thing that Goran says is: "We're The Wedding and Funeral Band. Book us for your weddings or funerals. But keep in mind, we're expensive." After the show, streams of people go back to their cars, to their bus and train stops. I take the Pink

Line back to my place.

At home, I make a cup of mint tea, and look up "Balkan ethno" on YouTube. There is Marina Abramović's new video "Balkan Erotic Epic" made in the US, an interview with Jadranka in Kyoto, and a clip of a recent Goran's show in France. As I view Goran's Paris performance, with the volume all the way down, a CD with my favorite Jadranka songs is playing in the background. In the image displayed on my computer screen, Goran is sitting on the stage in his white suit, his sky blue electric guitar in his lap. Every once in a while, he plays a few notes, his curly hair half-covering his face. Otherwise, he snaps his fingers as his musicians and his singers, all fifty of them, play what seems like a raucous wedding song. Every once in a while, he conducts them without standing up from his chair, so they only see his back and his right hand lifted up, moving in a way only they can understand.

I check my file-sharing program, and I see that my dad has uploaded, just for me and my brother, the compilation titled "Yugoslavia: Songs of Freedom, Brotherhood and Unity." He had downloaded it from someone else, and I can tell because each song title is translated in correct English, rather than his rudimentary, rock'n'roll English: A Song for Tito, Comrade Tito, Comrade Tito Our Oath To You, Comrade Tito's Dance, and so on and so forth . . . . Seven out of thirty-six songs have Tito in its title. Many more, including "The Heart of My People" by Jadranka, mention Tito somewhere in the lyrics. Then I see that my dad added a song by Bijelo Dugme, titled "*Pljuni i zapjevaj, moja Jugoslavijo*" ("Spit and Sing, My Yugoslavia"). The song doesn't mention freedom, brotherhood, unity, or Tito, and its refrain says: "Yugoslavia, get up, let them hear you sing. Those who won't listen to the song, will listen to the storm." My dad added next to the song title: "Of course, nobody was listening." And I have to laugh.

It was not about bellbottoms, platform shoes, peasant blouses, nor about skinny jeans, sneakers, skinny ties, nor about sweating under the relentless stage lights. Goran played in taverns in Italy when he was a teenager, he toured Yugoslavia numerous times, performed at festivals abroad, he was a household name.

Each time he performs nowadays, he wears a big, happy grin on his face from the moment he appears on the stage twenty minutes into the show, until the end, when he warns the audience of the price they have to pay if they hire his band for weddings or funerals.

I remember how much I argued with my friends throughout my youth, trying to convince them not to listen to crap like Bijelo Dugme. Let alone the thirteen-year-old, what would the twenty-five-year-old version of me think of my detached, but amused attitude toward Goran now, at thirty-two?

Track 10: *Because the Night*

> My father arranged for a painter to come to give me a lesson. My first painting lesson went like this. The guy came to the small room that was my studio. He cut a piece of canvas irregularly, put it on the floor, opened a can of glue and threw the liquid glue on the canvas, then a little bit of sand, some yellow pigment, some red pigment, some black, then he poured about half a liter of gasoline on it, lit a match, and everything exploded. Then he said, "This is sunset," and left.
>
> Marina Abramović, *Artist Body: Performances 1969-1998*

In 1999, I stood in old Cinema Rex, in Dorćol, the part of Belgrade where the majority of the city's Jewish population lived before World War Two. Rex became the performance and exhibition space of the anti-regime Radio B-92, and every year the Day of Women activities took place there. That March 8, just sixteen days before the NATO bombing campaign over Serbia and Kosovo, I got up on stage with my friend Natalija to perform my songs for the first time: "Sun Soul Lovers," "Peter Sellers' Daughter," "Dancing Machine." Natalija played her acoustic guitar and both of us sang. We did one of Natalija's songs too, "Patti's Breakfast," which is also how we called our duo, and we covered "She Floated Away" by Hüsker Dü and "Because the Night" by Patti Smith.

We were no folk waifs. Even the most sentimental and melancholy lyrics sounded kind of tough when we delivered them. And when we did our cover of "Because the Night," all the feminists in the audience sang along. During our own, upbeat numbers, they danced holding hands, and jumping up and

down. There were about two hundred people there, and I knew most of them from the activist scene, and that particular night in that particular space did belong to us, not just to Natalija and me, but even more so to all the people at the Rex, the regulars from Belgrade, including my brother who was taking pictures, and the guests, Albanian anarchofeminists from Kosovo who were crazy and brave to come, and the North American feminists who are everywhere in the world, and that is a connection for real, nothing secret.

There is a home recording of Natalija and me doing "Because the Night" on March 24, 1999. In it, Natalija is playing way too fast, and my voice is strained, as if I am trying to open up some pipes in my throat that keep shutting. We are playing in the living room of my mom's apartment, on the 11th floor of a concrete high-rise in downtown Belgrade, overlooking the Botanical Garden. The balcony door is open, and we can see the reds and oranges in the sky, the purples on the horizon, out west, across the Danube, above the chemical plant. At that point, we know for certain that the missiles are on their way.

Track 11: *Big Black Cadillac*

The night of March 24, 1999, everybody's gone except my mom and I. She's is in the kitchen, I'm in the living room. At one point, mom walks in, in her lounging-around track suit and says:

"We're going down to the shelter. Can't you smell it?"

"No, what?"

"I think they hit the chemical plant across the river."

I know the smell is not poison unleashed by a missile maiming Serbia's chemical industry, and even if it is, I'm not sure how breathing this same air in the basement would make a difference. But there's no arguing. My mom smells fear, so we're going down. I grab our deck of cards, but we won't play.

The large concrete basement is split into spacious rooms full of people, our neighbors we had never met, sitting on their picnic chairs, talking, playing cards. Old transistor radios don't transmit any information.

Someone's whole library is piled up in one of the corners, I find out as I stroll, inspecting our new surroundings. The books are all about theater and film, going back to 1960s. Two men are

going around, announcing:

"Feel free to pick up the books and read them, but please return them to the pile when you're done."

But nobody is reading, and I'm the only one leafing through the books, looking at the black and white shots of plays from the 1970s.

As I step around the corner, I spot a Cadillac covered with an inch of thick dust like grey fleece all over its steel body. I run my finger and discover it's black underneath.

It was easy to leave Belgrade for us, veteran refugees. If we could, we would have dusted off that Cadillac and it would miraculously be filled up and in mint condition and we would have driven off, my mom behind the wheel. Along the same roads as eight years earlier, but in the opposite direction. We ain't never coming back.

MEMORIES OF [STATE], OR OUR SERIES ON FUTURE

☞ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6463761.stm

> As part of our series on [State]'s future, we asked for their memories of life there before and after the 199_ war. Here we publish some of their accounts.
>
> Note: These are not native speakers of English (though now they have settled in English-speaking states around the world), and this language was not widely used in either [State] or [Former State] before [State's] independence. Their language proficiency varies, and therefore in some cases we corrected spelling and punctuation and occasionally syntax for the sake of clarity.

As Kosovo strode toward independence in 2007, BBC asked its readers with ties to this brand new Balkan country to write brief entries remembering their life before and after the 1990s war. I've still never been to Kosovo as I write this; most of us from Croatia never make it there. Kosovo and Macedonia are the only parts of former Yugoslavia I have not visited, but I can imagine going for a visit one day when I have some surplus income and time. I could go back to the familiar Montenegrin coast, cross the border to explore Albania a bit, then travel from there to Kosovo, from Kosovo to Macedonia, from Macedonia to Bulgaria, then from Bulgaria to Greece. My surplus income will be well

spent, and I will have covered all the parts of the Balkans. Finally I'll witness the beauty of the Southern part of the geographic Balkan Peninsula proper, and be done with that region once and for all.

Most of my life in Europe, I lived just north of that region, in the Danube harbor cities of Vukovar, Belgrade, and Budapest, in the vast Central European Danube Plain, where you can drive for long hours surrounded by sunflower fields and vineyards, and where you can tilt your head a bit in the passenger seat or the back seat of a car and see nothing but the sky. In the evening, the moon might follow you at the exact speed of your car as if it's tied to your roof like a balloon. Daytime clouds have their own destinations and speed, unless they just lie around as if someone sketched Jabba the Hutt all over the sky.

As I was reading BBC readers' accounts of Kosovo, I wanted to see what would happen if I erased the proper nouns, to see how much those memories could apply to anyone's experience in any country where there had been a war and vast changes in the political and economic system, because I had this hunch that most parts do correspond to what I went through and what I saw other people go through. A lot of responses came from people roughly my age, people who can't help but see the pre-war history that coincided with their childhood a bit nostalgically. They remember their friends, long-lost romances and authority figures, often in a flattering light, through the wrong end of the telescope. Just as often, they fixate on the negative experiences, looking for a straight line that leads from peace to conflict, to escalation, to war, because if there isn't a simple cause-and-effect there, then nothing makes sense. We are all professional writers in that sense: if the facts of our past are the rough draft, the way we narrate those facts with the help of memory is a polished revision, and at least grammar mistakes and stylistic slips can be corrected. Says Shelquim, from Pristina:

> In 1989 I remember I was nine years old. Serbian tanks were making their way into Kosovo through the main street of Pristina. I remember my father and mother being kicked out of work (and my cousins). I remember my father's apartment being taken away because he was kicked out of his job because he was Albanian. I remember being chased from my school by

> Serbian cops and my teachers being beat up every day. I remember massacres on TV. I remember refugees coming to our grandfather's house asking us for a place to stay because Serbs had burned their houses. I remember what my grandfather told me once: "A Serb is always going to be a Serb—never trust one." I try to forget, but memories keep bringing that quote back. All these memories that some people think can go away just like in Men In Black, by flashing a device. I cannot forget the pain that Serbs have caused in Kosovo. And if you asked me, I wish I had better memories but it wasn't my choice.

I kept returning to the accounts like Shelquim's for a few years, retyping them and erasing place names, personal names, and ethnic categories, cutting and pasting, sometimes breaking lines to create verse, intervening with my own lines, all in order to write a kind of experimental personal essay. It went fine for a while. I restructured Shelquim's account as a poem:

> I remember I was nine years old
> tanks were making their way
> through the main street
> I remember my father and mother
> kicked out of work
> I remember my father's
> apartment being taken away because
> he was kicked out of his job because
> I remember being chased by cops
> and my teachers being beat up every day
> I remember massacres on TV
> I remember refugees coming
> to our grandfather's house
> their houses burned
> I remember my grandfather
> told me once: "never trust"
> I try to forget but memories keep
> bringing that quote back
> all these memories people think
> can go away just like
> in Men in Black by a flashing device
> I cannot forget the pain

and if you ask me I wish I had
better memories but it wasn't my choice

It was night time, I was alone, sitting at the desk in my apartment in Pilsen deep in the work, without even the mandatory music in the background, and all of a sudden I heard an explosion and saw a light outside the widows. "Chicago is being bombed," I thought, got up, and slowly walked to the window. I regained a tiny bit of common sense while stepping to the window, thinking, "Silly, no one is bombing Chicago, someone just threw a small bomb in front of the building." As I peeked through the window and saw sheets of rain and heard thunder, I realized it was just a lightning that hit nearby. That's when a bit of panic hit me finally: "Am I losing it? I'm mistaking a storm for a bombing campaign, like some Vietnam vet in a movie?" That had never happened before or after. I went back to the desk, worked on my project a while longer.

For over two years, the BBC Kosovo responses remained in my computer files after I turned them into anonymous and delocalized accounts, but no workable draft of my experimental personal essay came of it. I played with incorporating the fragments into my various essays-in-progress. But they proved resilient, as if they wanted their identity back. So here are two of my favorite accounts, as they appear on the BBC site, proper nouns and all.

Val, Washington, DC, USA: "I am an Albanian woman born in Pristina in 1981. Many of those who were born before the 1980s might still have memories of living together with the Serbs but my generation was never given the chance to create such bonds with the Serbs, because by the time we grew up and became socially and politically aware, the inter-ethnic divide was already running too deep and Albanian-Serb relations were exacerbated. There weren't many avenues to establish relationships, especially because we attended different schooling systems (as an Albanian I attended an underground schooling system when the existing schools were closed to Albanians by Milosevic in the 1990s). Nevertheless, there were times when we made efforts, as children, to cross the ethnic boundaries established at that time. When I was growing up, I had a Serb neighbour with whom we shared a similar taste in music; we came to know this by

reading each other's backpacks which contained printed names of different rock bands. We became friends through music and we used to share albums of U2 and learn the lyrics together. But all this ended in the late 1990s."

On some level, I can easily imagine myself as Val in Pristina in 1980s and 1990s. I can also imagine many people accusing me: "No, you can't imagine what it's like to be a second-class citizen! What do you know about segregation and terror? What you went through is nothing compared to Val's trauma!" And maybe those imaginary people are right, but I'm convinced that, if I was an Albanian teenager in 1990s Pristina, I'd be checking out what Serbian teenagers' backpacks were saying, on my quest for an alternate universe in which music and lyrics captured on fifth-generation bootleg tapes overpower the adult world of ethnicity, statehood, police force, and violence.

Several entries could be outlines for books or movies about a young person's life pre- and post-immigration from Kosovo, perhaps none more than this one:

Femi Nga, Mitrovica/London: "It was really proud to tell others in Kosovo at that time that you were from Mitrovica. This was the industrial city of Kosovo with many factories and mining. It had a life of mixed ethnicity like no other city in Kosovo. Thousands of workers would finish at 5 pm and later the students finishing the lectures would fill the city shops, cafes, and clubs. From 5-8 pm the city would be so overcrowded with people. Often you would meet parents while you were with friends—it was the right time to ask for extra money, without having to explain in detail why you need it. The Edi-Club just across the bridge on the northern side was the place were most of us would spend the time and money that we had, playing computer games, snooker, and table-football. Edi-Club belonged to an Albanian (to my knowledge) and was always full. To me and my friends it never mattered whether you were a Serb or Albanian. The aim was to win whoever you challenged. Milosevic's apartheid came and effectively ended the dynamism and pulsating time of the city. Hardship followed. My family was not alone. Thousands of Albanians lost their jobs. People with money were those who had a close relative working in the West. In 1991, I received the letter to join the Yugoslav Army. Of course this was not an option for me. I would not go and join an army that was

> involved in fighting other ex-Yugoslav states (Croatia, Bosnia). No Albanian would. The Serb regime knew that all too well but they also knew that once you receive the letter we had to leave the country. Just like many of my friends, I too decided I could not go on in hiding forever. In 1992, at only 18, I left Kosovo and sought refuge in Germany. I did not complete high school, had no general knowledge, no real education, no skills. Really I had nothing but my simple soul and body to do jobs that no German would. After a year, I finally decided to join a good friend in London. London suits me better, but increasingly I am realising that Mitrovica is the city where I want to grow old. When I visit now, everybody there seems so friendly. It saddens me enormously today the city is so quiet and so divided. Not much movement, no dynamism. I often sit in a cafe close to the bridge and wonder what happened to that entire pulsating city that I used to remember. I wonder how boring life must be in the North without the noisy Albanians.

He wants to grow old in Mitrovica, a town that was once "pulsating" and now is a gravely quiet and divided shell of its former self, but at least people are "friendly." There is nothing sadder than that. It makes me think of my own Mitrovica, my hometown of Vukovar, the way it is now when I visit. People are happy to see me, I'm happy to see them, but I'm still nowhere near a desire to ever again return there for good, or to grow old there. Is that what I will feel, though, in years to come?

I would love to be done once and for all with my home region, North to South. I'd love to not feel compelled to give an hour-long amateur poli-sci lecture any time a stranger at a party asks me where I'm from and when and how I got to the United States. I do possess an inner voice that says, "Easy, now, Sneža, it's just small talk, just answer briefly and ask a polite question back," but that voice goes away after a drink and a half or a strong cup of coffee.

Sooner or later, during my lifetime or after I'm dead, a new generation will grow up conceiving of the past as dark ages that can never happen again. Before I die, maybe I'll take my trip south, maybe take a boat from Ulcinj, Montenegro to Velipoje, Albania, take a train to Tirana, rent a car in that Albanian capital, and drive across the border to Kosovo, and from there to Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece. Of course, I'll write a book

about it, and the only thing that book will talk about will be the beauty of the nature, the harmony of tastes, smells, and colors of local delicacies. I can see myself. We're deep in the second half of the 21st century already. I'm very old, but sprightly; I'm the oldest person alive and kicking. There's a plate of any of the varieties of mousaka in front of me, and I'm taking a shot of some spirit, raki, ouzo, pelinkovac, whatever, sweet or bitter, clear or opaque, as long as it's stiff and aromatic. After the aperitif warms my digestive system, I let mousaka melt in my mouth piece by piece. Later in my hotel room I type (into whichever machine replaces today's laptops; probably into the air) a cliché that my readers will love. "Mousaka is the dish that best represents the Balkans: like the perfectly balanced aromas of eggplants, onions, tomatoes, peppers, and sauces, the many ancient cultures make up a delightful harmony, just as they always have." Yes, it may almost be the 22nd century, but that doesn't mean the old mousaka metaphors can't be squeezed for all their delectable, oily juices, even as everything else is so different. I'm very old, and the concepts of nation states, people's republics, capitalisms, socialisms, democracies, and everything else I grew up with, are regarded as failed experiments of the faraway past, and no one is able to imagine anything else other than peace. I'm an ancient fool, trying to return home.

Mika Comes Out of the Darkness of History

~~This myth~~, ~~this lore~~, this tale that I (the omniscient narrator) am in charge of tells that you (the addressee) come from the Vendish matrilineal stock where all names begin with "Mi-": great-grandmother Mika, grandma Milka, mama Mira. And then you, Lucija, broke the unwritten rule—or, rather, your dad did. It happened at the last moment: up until the day of your birth, your name was supposed to be Milena, your dad's initial choice (since your mom let him choose the children's names). But then he changed his mind and called you Lucija. And then he left. You still don't know who he really was.

Along with the name, other unintended-by-you rule breaking began taking place. Consider the looks—Mika, Milka and Mira resemble one another quite a bit. They are all blond, their skin fair, their deep-set eyes blue. Their body shapes differ somewhat, but their faces unmistakably show the direct relation. You, on the other hand, don't resemble any one them, as far as physical appearances go. Your hair is dark brown as are your eyes. Your complexion darker, olive. Now, on your dad's side, which is also Vendish, literally everybody has jet black hair (straight or curly), dark brown eyes and year-round dark skin. So maybe you're just a blend of those two sets of genetic materials, who knows? Or maybe you took after some forgotten ancestor whose own genes somehow got carried on to you practically intact? I may be an omniscient narrator, but I'm no geneticist.

Your mom's ancestors believed that one's name foreshadows one's destiny: mama says that since you are her only daughter and since your name goes back in the alphabet and starts with an "L," that means you will only give birth to sons. Thankfully your older sister Mihaela has a teenage daughter named Midonia who has a baby daughter named Mitkica. I can say with all certainty: *you* won't have any daughters to pass on the feeble Vendsih tradition to. But your mom is wrong about the sons: you won't have any male offspring either.

You're childless and your friends pity you. You don't even bring it up—they do—and you just tell them: the utter realization of a woman does not lie in motherhood. But clearly they think you're just fooling yourself, comforting yourself, being in your forties, single, and poor. It's okay. You also often think to yourself that *they* need comfort, caught in the domestic trap that they wish everybody would fall into. But it's not that you really think that your friends have children just because they were taught that their adult femininity can culminate only in motherhood. They have children also in order to pass down the stories they heard from their mothers, as well as the stories they collected on their own. You too have the stories you got from your mother and her mother and her mother's mother and also the ones you collected yourself. As one by one your friends get the urge to raise children of their own, the only urge you feel is to write.

Here's a Vendish saying and I promise I'll control myself in the rest of the text: "Where there's a story, there's a daughter." If that's true, who are writers' daughters then? I don't think it's the critics, or scholars, or other kinds of professional readers. Maybe it's those readers who stumble upon books and read entire volumes out of curiosity, page by page. You and I, the addressee and the omniscient narrator, we'll never get to know our daughters, and that may be a little sad, but on the bright side, we don't have to worry about them staying healthy and happy and safe. It's not our job to think about those things!

Back to the ~~myth~~ tale and what it has to tell us.

Mika comes out of the darkness of history. Before her, before 1905, there is the unrecorded lineage of peasants who migrated across the Balkans. Before Mika's time, the history noted the exact routes of all the sizable armies galloping on their horses up

and down the river valleys, shadowed by the deep green mountainous terrain, down to the Adriatic coast, and back to the hills and plains. The serfs fleeing and hiding—Mika's displaced ancestors without a homeland—were nobody's business. They called themselves Vendi. Croats and Serbs, the most numerous peoples in their part of Southeastern Europe, both claimed them, as neither Turkish nor Austrian rulers saw them as any different from the majority South Slavs. And they were all alike indeed. There the Vends were, for hundreds of years, mostly tucked away in the most insignificant part of the otherwise relatively prosperous Southeastern European land of Croatia, invisible to the half-blind eyes of old lady History. Mika's ancestors came from Banija—a small region, a strip of land along the river Una. Banija, Ban's land, "ban" being the Croatian prince; but no prince ever set foot in Banija, let alone came from there.

Vendi were nominally orthodox Christians, but quite out of touch with religion. The closest organized religion was that of the orthodox Serbs. Serbs were well-meaning, and they kept sending the Vends their Serbian priests who preached in the barely intelligible Old Church Slavonic to the illiterate Vends. Serbs believed that the Vendi were a Serbian tribe, uprooted during the Turkish conquest, but even if that were true, Vends carried little ethnic pride in their hearts. Serbia was far away, down the river Una, and then down the long course of the Sava, too far away to matter, except to provide priests and teachers, each one staying temporarily, and finally getting transferred to a better place. Often a decade would pass in-between two teachers or priests. The inhabitants of Banija went through the motions with all those religious rites and couldn't find reason to believe much. Where was that, when was it that god was born and then died and then appeared again and then disappeared again? How long for the strongest person on the best horse to reach Nazareth or Jerusalem? One tried to take that trip--Mika's great great-grandaunt tried that once, or so the ~~myth~~ story went, but only the horse returned, skinny and lame. And the ancient Serbian kings with their sainthood? Great grandma Mika used to say, if the priest's chin is so greasy, belly so big, how insatiable must the kings have been to have all those palaces and monasteries? Who built those edifices, who fed the princes, knights and priests? And so on.

The Vendish language could have been classified as a dialect of Serbo-Croatian, or Macedonian, or Bulgarian, had anyone ever cared enough. No Vend cared, but non-Vendish linguists mapped out the Vendish language for their own pleasure. Vends spoke fluent Serbo-Croatian when they wanted and needed to. Often they would marry and have children with the Serbs from the surrounding villages (as poor and illiterate as them, for that matter) or with the town-dwelling Croats. The town was Kraljev Dvor—King's Court in English—I guess to go with the royal theme in the province's name. Dvor's Croats were Roman Catholic, like Austrians and Germans and Hungarians, but almost as poor as the Vends and the Serbs. Croats were the town's poorest people and, as a survival technique, they developed strong ties with Vends and Serbs: they traded, lived side by side and shared a language. Every once in a while, a Croat would come to the Vendish villages for a while and sometimes stay forever. Usually it was a man who needed to hide from someone—maybe after insulting a big wig from the town council on a drunken night, shouting obscenities in half-German, half-Serbo-Croatian. He would change his name and marry a Vendish girl.

Maybe that didn't happen that often. But such a man did marry Mika's mother. He was a poor Croat, a butcher's son, who fled the town and married the Vendish peasant girl whose family used to sell live pigs and calves to the butcher. The butcher's son waited till his baby girl was born, then fled the village again, even the country. The big wig he offended must have been really big, the insult matching the status of the target. But the ~~myth~~ story has never been told. When Mika was almost twenty, years after the Great War, her fugitive father returned to them. He stayed until Mika's baby sister was born, then fled again, never to return. He couldn't even stick around to meet his first grandchild—Mika's firstborn Milka. There must have been other women and children waiting around the world, everybody thought. It didn't matter. Mika's mother managed to raise Mika on her own, and life went on.

You, Lucija, the addressee, might notice that this narrative bears strange resemblance to the family ~~lore~~ narrative of Snežana Žabić, the author of *Broken Records*. That is merely a coincidence. Maybe what happened to her family and yours is not at all unusual or unique. Millions of families get displaced due to

wars to this day. There's a kid growing up, walking around with earbuds full of music and a head full of questions, and then the next thing you know, the kid is fleeing with her family or is wearing a uniform and following orders. Who does not have ancestors who fought wars or bummed around from place to place in the 20th century, and all the centuries beforehand, all the way back to unrecorded, but surely once real, time of peace, before states were formed? Before private property was invented, some would say, and I would agree—even omniscient narrators need a philosophical underpinning, and mine is supplied by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, thank you very much.

Speaking of Marx and Engels, Lucija, I know the question on your mind: "Omniscient narrator, who is my daddy?"

All you need to know for now, he's not me.

Memory of [State] # 15

Comments:

I never hated
I used to love
going to candy
stores and eating
baklava but for
very closed people
high fences you
feel you are passing by
a prison

Žabić, Snežana

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