

Svetlana Slapšak<sup>1</sup>

Institute for Balkan and Mediterranean Studies and  
Culture (IBAMESC) – Ljubljana, Slovenia  
Serbian Cultural Center “Danilo Kiš” – Ljubljana, Slovenia

UDK  
930.1:316.75(497)“199/...”  
316.72:305(497)

## SOUTHEAST EUROPE, THE BALKANS, GENDER, AND COLONIAL STRATEGIES: NECESSARY RESISTANCE<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT** The article tries to establish a model of critical reading/deconstruction of the last twenty years of academic dealing with the region and, its gender-related and other relevant consequences. The article will explain how (due to colonizing interpretations, imperial revival, wisdom of the colonized and unexpected alliances) the intellectual landscapes of the region have been shaken; as well as how, along with the social systems, their dissidence has been diminished leaving a huge empty space in knowledge production, cultural creativity, and state-of-the-art communication with humanities outside the region. At the same time, mobility and exchange have increased immensely, along with the skillful use of academic jargons, often lacking criteria. How can we address these paradoxes? Since it does not suffice to project them against the prevailing screen of nationalist narratives mixed with neo-liberal rhetoric, what we need is an analysis of inside problems of former dissident schools of thought. This will show how the old pitfalls and traps have accommodated new self-deceiving strategies. Forced oblivion and newly constructed memories have very much affected all areas, including gender studies, transforming them often into sites of power-games.

**Key words:** Balkan, gender, academia, knowledge production, resistance, dissidence, Yugoslavia, Yugonostalgia, patriarchy

**I**n a speech presented on YouTube, and delivered at the Zagreb Subversive Film Festival in May 2010, Slavoj Žižek started with two examples: Jacque-

---

1 E-mail: svetlanaslapsak@yahoo.com

2 This paper is published as a part of the project “Gender Equality and Cultural Citizenship: Historical and Theoretical Foundations in Serbia” (47021) financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia within the framework of integrated and interdisciplinary research for the period 2011-2015.

Louis David's painting *Death of Marat*, and Sophocles' *Antigone* (Žižek 2005). He argued that the "emptiness" of the painting is linked to a certain "emptiness" of the leftist-communist imagery, and that it would be expected to see the background filled with "representatives" of people, as in the socialist realism. Although there is no reference to the long tradition of the European criticism of this painting (rediscovered/interpreted by Charles Baudelaire), or any further interpretative attempt for that matter, the response of the public is enthusiastic. In the case of *Antigone*, Žižek calls Sophocles' version an "official" one, and gives his own version in which Creon accepts Antigone's plea - and the city of Thebes burns in flames in an apparent civil war - Antigone, look what you have done! In the second of Žižek's "versions", the chorus rebels and takes power over the tragic protagonists, as in a social revolution (ibid.). The reaction of the audience is overwhelming.

The audience in Zagreb does not differ from any other international audience, mostly young males, and the response is the same. Žižek always functions in a certain denial of knowledge and academic awareness, and with an appraisal of brutal ignorance: he ignores existing academic interpretations, accumulated knowledge, existing publications, exact quoting. The logic is also excluded: if Antigone's plea had been accepted, there would not be any cause for civil war, as her demand would have corresponded with silent wishes of many citizens in the city. Or even if all the citizens were just an angry mob, the authority of Creon would have ensured peace. The idea of the ancient drama as one of the institutions of democracy never occurs. A real scandal for the Athenian public, a woman who asks for the change of the recently imposed rules in the name of more logical and human law, also never occurs. The idea of a rebellious chorus is appealing - but it is a structural part of another ancient drama form - comedy.

The point is, it is all about a colonial construct, which should replace entire cultures of a certain region with one single clown/savage figure. Žižek's narrative replaces the critical thinking of the whole region. The other side of this "colonizing" coin is a negation of local and regional history of intellectual independence, resistance and consequences suffered. In a recent interview, Renata Salecl minimizes the role of Yugoslav dissidence in a following manner:

“We know that in former Yugoslavia every criticism was very quickly included in the system of ruling ideology. That is why I would not have any complaint (concerning resistance, I suppose - S.S.), because our successors could similarly criticize us for not resisting society in which we live. This is what we can expect especially since the crisis is going to tighten” (Babnik 2012, 18).

The connotation that a critical individual (and criticism as such) in former Yugoslavia was “quickly included in the system of ruling ideology” – supposedly in jail, by losing a job, passport or being banned from publishing – is brushed aside with this ridiculous example of self-positioning in the past and in the present. The shift toward avoiding any responsibility for non-resisting in present time and even in the immediate future shows how far one can go in self-promotion strategies.

With these two examples it seems plausible to argue that we should replace post-colonial with a simple colonial, when it comes to strategies and techniques applied to East-Central Europe, the Balkans and especially to Yugoslav heritage. It is well reflected in anything related to gender, because the colonial politics are easy to reflect upon and observe due to an enormous academic interest in “invading” the territory - and the discipline - since the Berlin wall fell, and the war in Yugoslavia started. The academic motion toward a fascinating and engaging thematic opening and the mobility of academics and journalists that followed can be compared to similar intellectuals’ mobility in the past, for instance during the great project of liberating re-invented Greece from Turks in the early 19th century, or more recently, the inter-brigades joining the Spanish republican army. Only that this time interested academics and journalists did not join any of the sides in their military efforts, but rather used the situation to research, help and put specific accents to some aspects of war, to give it chosen meanings and to introduce their often arbitrary criteria for the behavior of suffering masses and individuals. It is quite remarkable how much judging of the locals there is in the writing on the war in Yugoslavia. Some of published works are almost nothing but judging the locals (Levy 1996)<sup>3</sup>: being judgmental during this war is nothing short of a miracle when compared with the self-imposed objectivity

---

3 A good example of a mixture of gossip and self-promotion.

of discourses on other wars of modern times. A provisional hypothesis is that we might be dealing with a still non-reflected form of cultural colonialism. I would like to try to describe it and to contextualize it.

On the other side of the academic and media attention, no less ambitious, we should try to map out a methodological and a conceptual confusion which is building up around popular culture production within the common cultural area of states generated from former republics of Yugoslavia. Since the formal ending of the Yugoslav wars back in 1999, the academic production in the region has been diminishing, because of the gradual loss of interest in the public sphere. Popular culture after the war has provided a new boost in academic production. The fear that this might threaten the seriousness of research and the quality of argumentation seems justified. There is no such thing as a “thematic risk”, but there are risks of being caught, willingly or unwillingly, into discursive strategies which serve certain other strategies, from beyond the border of ethical, and sometimes intellectual, area: manipulative strategies to diminish responsibility or even remake memories of the past war, to reverse minimal ethical polarities, to plunge into colonial-defined career commodities, becoming likable, acceptable and publishable. By the way, the game is never unilateral, and the negotiating strategies have been recognized rather early. For instance, they are a kind of internal common knowledge in the area of Gender Studies (Slapšak 2008). All of these motives are easy to trace and to decode in the native context and by readers originating from or familiar with this context, and at the same time, they are usually difficult, if not impenetrable to other readers, causing further recurring stereotyping and distancing from local debates. As a consequence, confusion becomes almost “stratified” and harder to unravel. Therefore, starting with terminology this text will address some of the manipulative discourse strategies already mentioned.

## YUGOSLAVIA

The state of Yugoslavia is a historical fact, lasting formally from 1919 to 1991. Therefore, the labels like Ex- or Post- are inexact and proof of political investment or hidden taboos which all depend on actual ruling narratives in the states originating from Yugoslav republics. It is necessary to “neutralize”

the historical connotation of the name, in order to avoid all possible manipulations. “Former” Yugoslavia is an unnecessary tautology, bearing similar connotations, and contributing to confusion between three states with the same name (monarchy, socialist federation, para-federation under Serbia during the war). A simple name-term Yugoslavia avoids speculations, taboos – and (too) late emancipation, too<sup>4</sup>. There are many examples which testify that there is little or no concern at all for terminology in this case, for instance the uncritical use of the term “Western Balkans” which is historically and geographically arbitrary, and relates only to a political agenda; or the term “Titostalgia”<sup>5</sup>, which does not correspond to any morphological rules nor to semantic ratio: the term *nostalgia*, composed by Johannes Hofer in the 17<sup>th</sup> ct., follows the way Greek composita are made (*nostos*, “return home” and *algos*, “pain”), denoting longing for home Hofer diagnosed among his contemporaries, Swiss mercenaries. An intended morphological mistake may also point to a specific meaning, like in the case of Thomas More’s neologism *utopia* (Greek, with less regular prefix *ou-* and *topos*, meaning “no-place” instead of more regular *a-topia*, but it is a successful pun of *eu-topia*, meaning “good place”, because it is pronounced in English in the same way as *utopia*)<sup>6</sup>. Using Greek words for terminological innovations is still a standard procedure in all disciplines of humanities and in technical terminology. Needless to say,

---

4 In the early 1990s, I used XYZ country as a short code instead of Yugoslavia (XY is clear, Z for Greek “zei” - lives, like the title of the novel by Vassilis Vassilikos and a film by Costas Gavras, both on the murder of G. Lambrakis, the Greek peace activist in 1963), but the joke “expired” with the appropriation of the name of Yugoslavia by Serbia for several years: one specific reason more not to use the “ex-, post-” combination. Cf. Slapšak 1994

5 Mitja Velikonja explains his neologism in a following way:

“Titostalgia is part of yugonostalgia: a lament for Yuga, as it is affectionately called, is, as a rule, also a lament for Drug Tito (Comrade Tito). Moreover, titostalgia is an even more concrete, direct and essential part of the broad and loose notion of yugonostalgia” (Velikonja 2008, 13).

6 Hofer is of course widely quoted and his term discussed in all contemporary studies on nostalgia, especially by Svetlana Boym. Her definition of restorative and reflective nostalgia seems to be enlarged by more complicated forms (Boym 2008). Boym qualifies Shalamov’s way of documenting historical facts on gulags in appropriated discourses as exposing cultural myths revealing “paradigm shifts” (ibid.).

modern public is incomparably less informed about the Ancient Greek than More's and Hofer's learned contemporaries – their readers, but this fact does not absolve the academics from checking up any Greek dictionary if they intend to make a neologism consisting of Greek words or Greek words with words from other languages, which has to be composed according to Greek morphology in order to produce a new meaning. Thus “nostalgia for Tito” should have been *Titonostalgia*, or *Nostalgotitoism*, or even *Titalgia*. All of these varieties of neologisms would have made sense morphologically and semantically. As there are no Greek words such as *talgia* or *stalgia* (nor *talgos* or *stalgos*), *Titostalgia* is a clear case of ignorance awkwardly serving a desire to be innovative in terminology. It would be quite a stretch to connect this term to a German newly coined term *Ostalgia* (clever and correct combination of German *Ost* and Greek *algos/algia*), denoting nostalgia for objects and times of DDR<sup>7</sup>: Tito's greatest political achievement was distancing himself and Yugoslavia from the Soviet rule and away from the Eastern bloc. In fact, Mitja Velikonja insists on the semantic relation *nostalgia* – *Titostalgia*. Put in terms of the golden age of Classical studies in the German speaking academic world, *Titostalgia* is simply a *Klang-etymologie* (cf. Slapšak 2008), a failed acoustic attempt at pun without meaning – definitely not like Thomas More's learned pun. With all the sympathy for the research intention and energy, one cannot but regret the result based on a failure in basic knowledge. It might look like a hair-splitting pedantry: but for those who know some Greek as a basic source of most of terminology even today, this is an offense against professionalism – and the dignity of academia.

## TWIN CULTURES

*Twin cultures* is an operational concept in the context of Balkanology, in which Yugoslavia holds a special position, both as a cultural invention and a historical reality. It refers to a special linguistic and cultural blend of the Serbo-Croatian. The symbolic separation of “Serbian” and “Croatian” language is

---

7 A German TV show *Ostalgia* attracted audience with humorous, yet accurate recall of Eastern German everyday trivia. The term entered the academic discourse too - cf. Banchelli 2006. One of the most in-depth analysis of the phenomenon in its Yugoslav context is found in Dubravka Ugrešić essays on the “culture of lies” (cf. Ugrešić 1998).

not linguistically justified, but it bears a great political meaning (cf. Škiljan 2002). According to Louis-Jean Calvet, the relation of a language and a dialect is in many cases purely political and non-linguistic (Calvet 1987), therefore, in many cases there are no linguistic reasons to separate language: every such action is political, in which a newly “conquered” language that was “ours” in the past but was somehow stolen from “us” is justly returned. The separation process is highly ritualized. In the early years of the independent state of Croatia, a dictionary of linguistic differences between Croatian and Serbian was published (Brodnjak 1992): it would be hard to find a better proof of the “twin-state” of the language(s) (cf. Slapšak and Petrović 2002)

*Twin cultures* concept operates even better in the domain of culture – it is impossible to understand many phenomena of literature or visual arts in any of the two national cultures if they are not observed as parallels and comparatively. Even in the case of two different languages, like Slovenian and Croatian, it is impossible to grasp cultural developments without parallel vision and comparative perspective. The same goes for twin culture relations between Serbia and Montenegro, and Bosnia & Herzegovina – linguistic politics stream in the same direction, cultural too. All of this indicates specific colonizer/colonized relations, which are not transparent within the nostalgic imagery. With such closeness of cultures, often non-related to state-connections and state formations of a certain timeframe, it is necessary to develop a precise methodological framework based on genealogical (genre-related), gender-related, discursive-strategic and post-colonial epistemological notions. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary.

The *twin cultures* concept exposes a number of new paradigm shifts - narratives based on kinship – former brothers, brotherly reconciliation, fatal kinship. A gender shift changes this stream of narratives into a basically anti-nostalgic feminist narrative of sisters who never went into quarrel, but were separated by patriarchal politics. It includes narratives and “items” banned from the nostalgic imagery, like the pacifist activism during the war, women’s resistance and strategies of avoiding military drafts, anti-nationalism, mockery of patriotism, and so on. The cocktail of nostalgia and commodification often excludes conflicts and irony, not to mention critical thought (cf. Hutcheon 1998).

The *twin cultures* notion, within an interdisciplinary approach adapted to a map of interwoven thematic streams in nostalgic narratives, works as a deconstructive toolbox - it should detect and ridicule lethargic, imperial, patriarchal, and any other “universalizing” narrative implements. Irony is its structural element, which is more than Linda Hutcheon posited (*ibid.*). Twin cultures concept reveals “processual” aspects of nostalgic or para-nostalgic clean-ups, censorship and accommodations. It may obtain a status of a symbolic platform of lustration, especially in culture, and perform forgotten dissident ethics.

Dissident position has disappeared from cultures originating in Yugoslavia along with the system that was thoroughly restricting culture and thinking. And since dissidence split into two unequal groups on the eve of the war, to the incredible but in fact quite effective anti-communist and pro-communist nationalist groups and to the much diminished and weakened anti-war and pro-human rights groups, the disappearance of the Yugoslav dissidence opens not only historiographical, but also an epistemological problem. Most of the memorable and influential cultural and academic production during the war was created by the latter minority, which was also crucial in establishing a basic critical perspective of the newly invented national cultures. Moreover, due to the specific position of Yugoslavia, Soviet dissident production was often first translated and published in Yugoslavia, much earlier than in the countries where it originated from. The same goes for the theoretical and academic production - Yugoslav culture knew and was using Mihail Bahtin in translation a decade before his work became influential in the Western feminist and literary theory (cf. Slapšak 2002; 2006). It is not about the rehabilitation of the small part of the Yugoslav dissidence, but about a space of reflection and production which is simply missing from most, if not all research on Yugonostalgia. Understandably, the dissident production questions a comfortable unification of the reception body that opposes new nationalist narratives by re-inventing Tito and socialist memorabilia. However, what about those who just refuse to destroy all traces of their own critical thinking that already marked their lives by exclusion and loss before the war that ended Yugoslavia? On a methodological/processual level, it is of course easier to be silent about the dissidence when proposing the argument about nostalgia as a direct response to new limiting narratives – but this is simply false. A veiled

conflict of memories is hiding new politics of accommodation and revealing academia's commodity techniques. It is necessary, for more than one reason, to question the actual academic production dealing with nostalgia and identity treks.

There must be more ways to deal with the unexpected aspects of new uses of nostalgia. Some theoretical models and methodological procedures which can be applied to the case of Yugoslav cultures and cultures of the new states in the Balkans do exist. The concept of twin cultures enables a different approach to nostalgia phenomenon and provides for more objective and anthropologically explicable behavior, which can be separated from the usual escapist and consumerist needs. They can be easily directed and re-directed, and blur the strategies implied in the imagery. The twin cultures concept necessarily introduces realities of everyday life and patterns of behavior which cannot be easily "translated" into imaginary needs, but remain firmly in the modes of cohabitation – the social and anthropological feature underlined in Svetlana Boym's research on Soviet nostalgia (Boym 1994). In the case of twin cultures, the cohabitation of two growing (or fading, depending on the temporarily ruling political discourse) ethnic identities offers a great field of investigation into the strategies of nostalgic manipulation.

One possible line of investigation is through the theory of cultural intimacy posited by Michael Herzfeld (Herzfeld 2005).<sup>8</sup> The "shifting locations" of ambiguous narrative patterns of national belonging, defining socially distant or opposed time-space clusters (social groups, elite – common citizens, high and low discourse, occasional and everyday life discourses and gestures) get into an even more complicated web when it comes to sudden changes connected to separations of national identities and to a hard work of inventing new differences, like in the case of twin cultures: Serbian-Croatian, Bosnian-Serbian, Bosnian-Croatian, and so on.

---

8 Herzfeld's researching of how cultural forms are used as a cover for social action seems perfectly adapted to the Serbian case, therefore the author's introduction for the Serbian edition gives a specially powerful input into the existing theoretical framework.

The *twin cultures* model invokes the concept of structural nostalgia in a new narrative setting, consisting of conflicting narrative explanatory lines. First, there is the aetiological line, the search for causes/origins – why twin cultures could not live together as an evolutionary story – the “natural” causes, main historical turns based on school history books, para-anthropological stereotyping. Second, personalized stories which form a cluster of mythology with many common narratives, being largely based on stereotypes. Sometimes, these personal stories were promoted by the official story makers, the media – like celebrating divorces of “mixed” couples. Third, there is the uncomfortable Yugoslav narrative, which fluctuates according to the official discourse on recent history, but also according to the needs of common people (profit, networking, personal needs). Between these three main narrative lines, there is an obvious schizophrenic discursive space in which conflicting narratives and practices are entangled: for instance, defending the causes for the split of Yugoslavia, and at the same time profiting from Yugoslav nostalgia. Multiplied bricolage techniques are at play in organizing narratives: one of the common points of discursive connection is the invention of a common enemy for twin cultures (Roma, Muslims/Catholics/Orthodox, women, gays/lesbians are the usual pool of choices). Generation gap can be used in a twisted way, for instance to celebrate a common oblivion. Researchers themselves also produce most simplified aspects and points of view because of the lack of critical approach and methodological precision.

### **PATRIARCHY AS *LONGUE DURÉE***

Ground truthing is an archaeological term, recycled and re-semanticized here in a new context (Hargrave 2006): as the ground truthing relates to the checking of survey data (satellite, geographical maps, also oral traditions) on the ground, by a researcher in person, it should consist, in its new context, of checking basic anthropological models applicable to all cultural formations on the ground, in their reception. In the case of Yugoslavia (both historical and re-invented) several such basic anthropological models could be put in place as useful tools for interpretation. Among them, patriarchy is certainly the most imbedded, structurally functional, and discursively efficient; it would be possible to understand patriarchy as a *longue durée*. In this specific case, patriarchy can be observed as the only social/cultural continuity

from antiquity on in the Balkans, opposed to imagined ethnic continuities. Obsessive narrative patterns of “the oldest” in the Balkans, which follow the Greek model, form another specific case – with a much weaker social/cultural grip on every day’s life realities, but their presence is detectable. For instance, it would be quite indicative to see how much criminal case discourse has, in the last twenty years, become impregnated with ethnic motives and hints. Another way of researching such narratives would be to trace their presence in media, electronic and printed, and in the products of popular culture. It would be challenging to explore and to understand, in an established timeline, the transition from war propaganda and the elite’s narrative to the everyday discursive formulae. These two cases, as a result of ground truthing “metaphorized” into a pattern of thinking as well as an interdisciplinary method, already form a methodological framework for comparative analysis of twin cultures/Yugoslav culture.

Gender perspective reveals generally censored patterns of resistance. From the myth of Kosovo, in which the whole underlying social, ritual and cultural women’s response – a negative one – can be read (cf. Slapšak 2005), to women’s resistance to the war in Yugoslavia and the repression that followed it, women’s world in Yugoslavia and after shows distinctive features of opposition. This opposition disrupts any nostalgic narrative – in fact, it makes it impossible by revealing its lack of truth and honesty. Any nostalgic narrative of Yugoslavia is false if it does not relate to dynamically changing gender positioning, from the early Yugoslav emancipatory politics to the misogynic critique of socialism and the transitional “structural misogyny”. The re-invention of the communist past as a responsibility of women, who were supposedly more inclined to communism because it gave them more rights, closes a perfect circular argument which enhances more new misogyny. Recently a number of young researchers, artists and activists reacted to the situation by critically addressing the academic and artistic production about Yugoslavia in the last twenty years. They condemn “postist practices” (Petrović 2011) and plea for a responsible reflection of the past in order to initiate, in the space they define as Yugoslav, a dialogue between feminism as a universal category (feminist orthodoxy) and feminisms as different practices (feminist heteropraxies). Their posited thesis is: what does the name of feminism determine in a demand for the affirmation of politics of equality (ibid., 9).

Concluding this short critical overview of mainly methodological problems in researching Yugoslav nostalgia which affect the credibility of the whole academic field of cultural history and historical anthropology of the region, I would like to question the use of the concept in current academic production. Nostalgia – *le mal suisse*, could be described as a patriot's qualificative/meritocratic disease. Although, just like utopia, it has undergone semantic changes from diagnostic to metaphoric meaning and obtained a status in scholarly use it has to be discussed and re-semanticized over and over again in any specific case. For example, a term Yugonostalgia has passed phases from accusation for treason to marketing in a relatively short time. A non-debated notion of nostalgia is therefore just a methodological mistake with political and cultural consequences. It might be a consequence of academic self-censorship, or an intellectual *otiosum*, but it also represents a missed opportunity to study kitsch formations, and functions as a narcosis for cultural initiatives and as a means to re-establish new cultural colonialism, based on old cold war divisions.

Some cultural production in the last decades opposes nostalgia in such a radical way that they demand a discussed and structured critique against nostalgia as a framework. For instance, a theatre play by Oliver Frlić *Damned the Traitor of the Fatherland*,<sup>9</sup> which is partly improvised and relates to changing local narratives, in order to provoke the public in twin cultures. In a similar way, Dino Mustafić's play *Born in the YU* challenges superficial nostalgia and touches upon traumatic experiences of the Yugoslav citizenship. Both plays deconstruct nostalgia and ask questions about what Yugoslav citizenship used to be in its social, cultural and historical reality. A gaze without mercy explores Yugoslav hypocrisy from the past in order to expose the hypocrisy of today, and to reveal how censorship of today is feeding on nostalgia's falsehood. Both plays are political in the sense of dealing with contemporary problems, some of which could be solved if some political solutions from the past were not banned from reflection and historical consideration. What additionally blurs the reflection is nostalgia. Both plays have successfully provoked public in different regional settings, and abroad. Let us see why the critique and even a denial of nostalgia was necessary here in order to enhance and revive the cultural production inside the Yugoslav thematic space. In both cases, there

---

9 Verse from the Yugoslav anthem.

is a reaction to the cultural colonizing of the region, which is done by many foreign and also many domestic profiteers of nostalgia. In both plays, there is a deep empathy for responsibility – Yugoslavia did not collapse due to external causes, but through efforts of its own citizens, controlled by local nomenclatures. That is why all “new” discourses of patriotism sound hardly credible. Patriotic feelings are not supposed to stretch and to be changed as underwear. Responsibility is not equalized and automatically neutralized (“all sides are guilty”), but made into a dramatic inferno on scene, especially in Frlijić’s play. Nothing can be “measured”, reasoned nor proportioned within proposed transitional rules of game and imposed correctness, when victims are taken into account. Consumerism, fun and entertainment related to Yugonostalgia are perverse, especially if enjoyed by people who claim the authority of their memories of Yugoslavia. The status of “truth” has been re-examined in both plays. Actors in Frlijić’s play are made to engage in open personal conversation on ethnic issues on the scene, and they uncover their real ability to exclude the other, to reveal their ethnic reserves or even hatred, to torture – at least verbally – a person suspected not to be of “clean” ethnic origin, and so on. In other words, all manifestations of mutual nostalgic pleasures are proof of covering up and falsifying the truth and not only of nonchalant compromising. In an obvious effort to reinterpret the causes for the war in Yugoslavia, both Frlijić and Mustafić point to the specific Yugoslav solution of ethnic situation as the best legacy, and, at the same time, as the critical point from which the plague of war spread once the principle was twisted, abandoned and destroyed. The Yugoslav form of citizenship is deconstructed, but at the same time re-evaluated from the perspective of what kind of changes have occurred during the twenty years of transition and savage capitalism. The Yugoslav case is thus regarded as a violently stopped modernity, replaced by a retrograde social system. Therefore it offers a platform for resistance. The semantic content of the “structural nostalgia” has to be defined, in order to understand its functioning. Frlijić and Mustafić have radically shaken the current superficial forms of nostalgia, showing a need to reformulate Yugoslav narratives, to avoid colonial narrative investment, to replace cheap thrills with social, political and cultural action. Their cultural

production coincides with other cultural and academic initiatives in the region and in the Yugoslav diaspora.<sup>10</sup>

The central narrative of this anti-nostalgic cultural and intellectual production is the citizen, necessarily transgressing the new borders and positioning him/herself in a larger context, in the midst of ruins of fatal identity inventions. This new cultural and political persona cannot be formed out of the Yugoslav model, marked by the lack of democratic habits, cynicism, and structural failures, nor out of the clumsy bricolage of situational patriotism, nostalgia and consumerism. It should work out its presence through critical reflection, into the new epistemological framework in which cultural and academic sphere should be connected.

### IGNORANCE SLIPS

The last segment of my attempt at presenting a sketch of the panorama of colonial strategies in the region has to be illustrated by a series of ignorance slips – major ones – that marked a hasty rush to explain Yugoslavia, gender, and of course rape. Although the quick media reaction finally moved UN in admitting the rape as a war crime, and although the Bosnian case re-evoked some forgotten ones in Europe and Asia during and after the World War II, there has been a lot of confusion and intended ill-will and personal ambitions in this area. I will recall some of the “classic” ones.

Alexandra Stiglmayer, the editor of a collection (in 1994) which followed Roy Gutman’s discovery of mass rapes in Bosnia & Herzegovina, allowed for a huge number of material and other mistakes in this collection, which bear the typical signs of the colonial haste (Stiglmayer 1994).

At least three European intellectuals, Bernard-Henry Levy, Alain Finkielkraut and Peter Handke re-played the cultural role of the saint of a small nation, staged by Lord Byron (during the independence war in Greece), during the war in Yugoslavia, Levy “taking” Bosnia & Herzegovina,

---

10 Names of Damir Arsenijević, Nebojša Jovanović, Pavle Levi, Jelena Petrović, Spomenik group come to mind.

Finkielkraut Croatia, and Handke Serbia. Levy was caught in “acting” for the camera a heroic scene in Sarajevo, Finkielkraut named Tuđman a great literary author, denounced Dubravka Ugrešić as a communist representative, and published a book in 1992 on how to be a Croat, without ever learning the language, while Handke published a book presenting Serbs as the greatest victims of war and denying the genocide in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

In her book on the Yugoslav war in 1994, Renata Salecl denied the existence of the Yugoslav feminism, and declared herself the only feminist from former Yugoslavia. She also interpreted that rapists in Bosnia & Herzegovina “deprived” Muslim women of their pleasure (Salecl 1994).

Already in 1993, Nanette Funk opened a crucial question about American researchers rushing into Eastern Europe and imposing feminist theory without respecting the academic achievements or the realities of the rights women used to have in socialist countries (Funk 1993). This put them in the same group of local misogynous voices that claimed that women were responsible for the communism in the first place – because they were granted rights. The access to research post-socialist women was facilitated by institutions, means and support based on the old anti-communist attitudes and ideas. And of course, the process was helped by some local researchers, who were ready even to falsify the previous position of women in order to gain from the new one – all at women’s cost. This was especially tricky in Yugoslavia, where the feminist movement has been at the top of theoretical reflection in Europe before the war, and later a leading force in anti-war and solidarity actions.

The position of feminist thinkers and feminist/women/gender issues, or no-position<sup>11</sup> which led Yugoslav feminists to organize a space of dialogue and research for themselves, was limited by three ruling strategies toward

---

<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning that most of outstanding philosophers and dissidents were completely silent, if not sarcastic when feminism was only mentioned, and that the attempt of including feminism into program texts of the students’ uprising in 1968 in Yugoslavia miserably failed. Only one Yugoslav dissident kept his interest in feminism alive, both in his research (he published the most reliable bibliography of Yugoslav feminism) and in his public appearances: dr Nebojša Popov, today editor-in-chief of a periodical *Republika* in Belgrade.

feminism in the realm of dissident thinking: women's rights have been defined by the ruling ideology, realized and secured by the state, therefore there is no need to raise feminist questions; feminist/women/gender issues are not a priority in the process of changing the ideological features for the society and the political landscape, so let us wait for a better moment; feminist/women/gender issues are not serious enough to be treated by the dissident academia and thinkers. Although blatantly banal, this kind of patriarchal mentality prevailed in dissident circles, with rare exceptions. I had a hard time deciding to distance myself from high goals (to change a society) and from the dissidence, which was my social and cultural zone since 1968, and to transgress to feminism, which did not flag such an ambitious political agenda. By the end of 1980s, majority of dissidents opted for nationalist programs and eventually for the war, while feminist circles favored peace and the continuity of the state of Yugoslavia, or any other functioning solution which might have guaranteed peaceful arrangements. The war in Yugoslavia took on a strange turn, becoming also a war between genders. Since the late 1980s, media, but also cultural production and prevailing narratives in the region were characterized by a harsh misogyny. Only with knowledge of rather detailed contextual circumstances, this specific media situation could be explained so that the argument on social and cultural background would remain reliable. Too often have I witnessed arguments gone completely astray because of the lack of this specific knowledge.

## IN CONCLUSION: ETHICAL CONCERNS

All of the above should serve as basic framework for mapping an interdisciplinary research area where an abundance of research topics will be found, and where research could prove rewarding and fruitful. Does it generate special ethical concerns and reflection?

My argument about local/native knowledge might seem too trivial. *Un train peut en cacher un autre*: The first problem emerges with the choice of language, and it is obvious that it is necessary to publish in English. A second grave problem emerges from this – the linguistic colonialism, which in fact does not have any alternative. Therefore, it is not clear – and it poses a serious ethical dilemma for the researcher – if we deal here with a phenomenon of colonialism,

or a means of emancipation. However, a general and silent commodity of not knowing a local language, even if the academic ambition directs a researcher toward a “sexy” topic, is definitely part of a colonial behavior. My proposition is to invent new types of cooperation between researchers, which should not be a problem for the Gender Studies population. Imagine the old 19<sup>th</sup> century institution of *au paire*, or hosting a researcher not only in many formal ways available in academia today, but in the sense of cooperation of two or more researchers on one topic with equal authorship. One of them provides for the native language and knowledge competence, but is not determined by this competence only. The other(s) provide for less available aspects of research politics (having in mind access to EC funds, for instance), escaping de-privileged conditions – but is/are not determined by this competence only. The other aspect of inventing new research co-operations and thus elevating new ethical grounds is certainly a gloomy perspective of social sciences and an even gloomier of humanities. Young researchers are already aware that the funds are typically shrinking for young researchers, that a scale of privileges of big countries/universities inside EC is staggering, that stable long term jobs in academia and research institutions are becoming rare, that academic writing/publishing is simply not paid – and that an enormous amount of time and energy is being spent on writing totally irrelevant bureaucratic texts and practicing non-relevant discourses, while more bureaucratic staff is becoming necessary in academic and research institutions, in order for them to survive. Too often such developments are not connected to research criteria or prevailing standards of research quality. Such paradoxes might lead to an amusing conspiracy narrative of EC bureaucracy consisting of failed students who are now taking their revenge, but things are much more serious. In a spiral of bad solutions and ideas, humanities and social sciences are gliding down on the ladder of imaginary EC values and, more seriously, this approach is affecting decision making processes and public discourse. Choosing one of the least privileged niches on such a map of disciplines and academic priorities as they still are configured is certainly a high-risk personal decision.

Could the *au paire* project work? I am not sure that I can guarantee, but I am positive that such cooperation is possible inside the region. Let it not close...

## LITERATURE

- Babnik, Gabriela. 2012. "If You Don't Have Money, You Don't Have a Choice: An Interview with Renata Salecl." *Življenje na dotik* 10: 15–17.
- Banchelli, Eva. 2006. *Taste the East: Linguaggi e forme dell'Ostalgie*. Bergamo: Sestante Edizioni.
- Boym, Svetlana. 1994. *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Boym, Svetlana. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books.
- Boym, Svetlana. 2008. "Banality of Evil, Mimicry, and the Soviet Subject: Varlam Shalamov and Hannah Arendt." *Slavic Review* 67(2): 342–363.
- Brodnjak, Vladimir. 1992. *Rječnik razlika između hrvatskoga i srpskog jezika*. Zagreb: Školske novine-Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada.
- Calvet, Louis-Jean. 1987. *La guerre des langues*. Paris: Payot.
- Funk, Nanette. 1993. "Feminism East and West." In *Gender, Politics and Post-Communism*, eds. Nanette Funk and Magda Mueller, 318–329. New York: Routledge.
- Hargrave, Michael. 2006. "Ground Truthing the Results of Geophysical Surveys." In *Remote Sensing in Archaeology: An Explicitly North American Perspective*, ed. Jay K. Johnson, 269–304. Tuscaloosa, Alabama: University of Alabama.
- Herzfeld, Michael. 2005. *Cultural Intimacy. Social Poetics of the Nation-State*, New York: Routledge.
- Hutcheon, Linda. 1998. "Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern." *UTEL – University of Toronto English Library*. <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>
- Lévy, Bernard-Henri. 1996. *Le lys et la cendre: Journal d'un écrivain au temps de la guerre de Bosnie*. Paris: Grasset.
- Petrović, Jelena, i Damir Arsenijević. 2011. "Uvod: feminizam – politika jednakosti za sve." *ProFemina* specijalni broj: 7–11.
- Salecl, Renata. 1994. *The Spoils of Freedom: Psychoanalysis and Feminism After the Fall of Socialism (Opening Out: Feminism for Today)*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Slapšak, Svetlana. 1994. "Women from the XYZ Country." *ProFemina* 1: 137–142.
- Slapšak, Svetlana. 2002. "Im Innern der populistischen Maschinerie: Eliten, Intellektuelle, Diskurslieferanten in Serbien 1986-2001." In *Rechtspopulismus: österreichische Krankheit oder europäische Normalität?*, ed. Wolfgang Eismann, 199–222. Wien: Czernin.

- Slapšak, Svetlana. 2005. "Women's Memory in the Balkans: The Alternative Kosovo Myth." *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 14: 95–111.
- Slapšak, Svetlana. 2006. "Osveta slabih učenika: stilistika i raspad predratne disidencije u Srbiji." In *Devijacije i promašaji: etnografija domaćeg socijalizma*, eds. Lada Čale Feldman and Ines Prica, 71–94. Zagreb: Institut za etnologiju i folkloristiku.
- Slapšak, Svetlana. 2008. "The After-war War of Genders: Misogyny, Feminist Ghettoization, and the Discourse of Responsibility in Post-Yugoslav Societies." In *Violence and Gender in the Globalized World: The Intimate and the Extimate*, eds. Sanja Bahun Radunović and Julie V. G. Rajan, 91–106. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Slapšak, Svetlana, and Jelena Petrović. 2004. "Sex/gender Distinction, Uses and Abuses in South Slavic Languages in the Multilingual Balkan Region. Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian in Their Comparative Setting." In *The Making of European Women's Studies: A Work in Progress Report on Curriculum Development and Related Issues in Gender Education and Research (Volume 5)*, eds. Rosi Braidotti, Edyta Just, and Marlise Mensink, 80–85. Utrecht: ATHENA – Advanced Thematic Network in Activities in Women's Studies in Europe, Utrecht University.
- Stiglmayer, Alexandra, ed. 1994. *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Škiljan, Dubravko. 2002. *Govor nacije: jezik, nacija, Hrvati*. Zagreb: Golden marketing.
- Ugrešić, Dubravka. 1998. *Culture of Lies. Antipolitical Essays*. Penn State University Press.
- Velikonja, Mitja. 2008. *Titostalgia – A Study of Nostalgia for Josip Broz Tito*. Ljubljana: Peace Institute.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2005. "Zašto napustiti svaku nostalgiju za jugoslavenskim samoupravljačkim socijalizmom?" *Zagreb Subversive Festival*, May 3<sup>rd</sup>. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mD8VzWM0LTg>

Primljeno: 5.09.2015.

Izmenjeno: 29.10.2015.

Prihvaćeno: 8.11.2015.

## Jugoistočna Evropa, Balkan, rod, i kolonijalne strategije: nužnost otpora

---

SVETLANA SLAPŠAK

Institut za balkanske i sredozemne studije i kulturu – Ljubljana, Slovenija

Srpski kulturni centar “Danilo Kiš” – Ljubljana, Slovenija

**Sažetak:** Tekst pokušava da ustanovi model kritičkog čitanja/dekonstrukcije poslednjih dvadeset godina akademske produkcije o regionu, kao i rodni i ostalih relevantnih posledica takve produkcije. U radu će biti objašnjeno kako je (zahvaljujući kolonizujućim interpretacijama, oživljavanju imperijalizma, mudrosti kolonizovanih i neočekivanim savezima) intelektualni pejzaž regiona uzdrman, kao i kako je, zajedno sa društvenim sistemom, njegova disidentnost umanjena, ostavljajući ogroman prazan prostor u produkciji znanja, kulturnom stvaralaštvu i savremenoj komunikaciji sa humanističkim naukama izvan regiona. Istovremeno, došlo je do znatnog povećanja mobilnosti i razmene, zajedno sa povećanom upotrebom akademskog žargona, često bez ikakvih kriterijuma. Kako možemo objasniti ove paradokse? S obzirom na to da nije dovoljno posmatrati ih naspram preovlađujućih nacionalističkih narativa pomešanih sa neoliberalnom retorikom, ono što nam je potrebno je analiza unutrašnjih problema ranijih disidentskih škola mišljenja; to će pokazati na koji način su stare opasnosti i zamke izrodile nove samoobmanjujuće strategije. Prisilni zaborav i konstruisana nova sećanja su veoma uticali na ove oblasti, uključujući i rodne studije, često ih transformišući u mesta igara moći.

**Ključne reči:** Balkan, rod, akademija, proizvodnja znanja, otpor, disidencija, Jugoslavija, jugonostalgija, patrijarhat