

Croatian (non-)memory about Yugoslavia: Concealment, disregarding and memory retrieval in Croatian prose after 1991

My main aim when conceiving this monograph was to attempt a concise presentation within Slavic and Croatian studies (but maybe also with a broader audience in mind) on taboo, concealment and sidelining of those events from Croatian history that refer to both Yugoslav states, in other words looking at the 20th-century history of Croats from their own internal contemporary Croatian vantage point. As declared in the Introduction, my intention was to maintain a distanced approach, especially towards biased narratives dealing with the most sensitive aspects of historical events, bearing in mind H. White's conclusion that the same historical event can generate quite different narratives determined by the storyteller's vantage point. Entering the murky waters of the complicated history, politics and ideology that have always been pervasive features on the Balkan peninsula, it can be noticed that confronting the contemporary discourse that dominates Croatian culture and literature, especially in the context of the most recent social changes, leads to the emergence of combining grand history with multiple microhistories (E. Domańska), the narration of so-called weak heroes' (M. Velčić), and counter-history (P. Connerton), but most of all, the phenomenon of the kind of memory that T. Snyder identified as "always one's own".

In the discussion developed in this publication, I put forward the hypothesis that it would not have been possible to bring back into the Croatian collective memory those taboo topics in literature that were censored or suppressed during the Tito era had it not been for the explosion of autobiographical accounts and individual narratives which started surfacing as early as in the 1980s. The point at which Croatia regained independence witnessed numerous new editions and reprints of literary works, critical and journalist pieces written by the authors related to the Croatian political emigration (including dissidents), who had also been barred from the mainstream through censorship. This was a time of rehabilitation for the writers and works "published" in the era of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH), which were excluded from the mainstream discourse after 1945. Some of these publications emerged for the first time in the Croatian publishing market only recently, thanks to the publishing policy of such publishers as Matica Hrvatska or Naklada Pavičić, and they gained the status of the "first domestic edition".

Selecting the methodological tools was a major challenge due to other scientific fields intertwining with literature, such as: history (microhistory, E. Domańska) and sociology (social frameworks of memory, M. Halbwachs). I gave primacy to the discussion of memory, as is clear in the title of the thesis, although this was treated selectively, because of the current extensive scope of studies and research stemming from the *memory boom* in present-day humanities. Moreover, in view of the limited space in this book and in order to avoid superfluous compilations and repetition of the main theories and principles in the

study of memory, I also restricted myself to using basic and established concepts. These include collective memory, individual memory, post-memory, body memory, which refer to the ideas of many other scholars. What proved to be extremely useful were issues from the field of somasthetics, biopolitics and biopower, as well as studies on trauma and gender. The issues I undertook to analyse connect with identity- and post-dependence discourses.

My inquiries also concerned the fates of numerous literary works and authors dealing with the thorny and delicate subjects related to the end of World War II in Yugoslavia. Croatian collective memory was revived through events known colloquially as Bleiburg, the Croatian Way of the Cross, which were related to attempts to conceal partisan crimes and driving out the Danube Germans, known as the Schwabs, the long-hidden story of Goli Otok (Barren Island) and other prisons/ camps for Tito's political opponents in the Goli archipelago. Subjects banned for political reasons included the literary testimonies of former prisoners of the Ustaše prisons Jasenovac and Stara Gradiška, accounts that were censored or completely withdrawn from circulation. Of particular interest to me was the analysis of numerous texts on Croatian political emigration, related to the controversial dissident periodical "Hrvatska revija", first published in Buenos Aires (1951-1966), and later in Barcelona (1968-1990). The autobiographies of many authors born after 1945 take a critical stance to the Yugoslavia of their childhood and youth, presenting the federation under Tito's rule as a state maintained under false pretences, founded on bogus myths (e.g. brotherhood and unity among nations, socialist prosperity), in which it was the Croats who were most discriminated, rebellious and, following the Croatian Spring of 1971, "silent" (S. Ešeš) or a gagged republic. Looking back on almost five decades of Croatia's existence in Yugoslavia, seen through numerous literary narratives, proved insufficient. To complete the picture it is necessary to go back to the 'First Yugoslavia' of the 1930s and 1940s, in which the Croatian perspective is dominant in presenting the Yugoslavia of the Karađorđevićs as an oppressive state and a continuation of the Habsburgian "prison of nations".

The emerging image of Croatian non-memory about Yugoslavia, which I interpret as the revised version of the nation's past, of what was forbidden to remember (Yugoslav oppression and repression) and of what one does not want to remember (socialist prosperity, brotherhood and unity of the Balkan nations), reveals the juxtaposed conflicting memories (M. Bloch). They take the form of the clash between Croatian and Serbian martyrological narrations, which stems from the opposite historical perspectives and renders the issue extremely sensitive. Within the acute conflict of ideological paradigms, i.e. the communist vs. the nazi-fascist, the Croats are identified as the custodians of the Ustaša regime and are therefore held responsible for the atrocities committed in the Pavelić-governed state, whereas the Serbs are equated with Great Serbia's expansion and the coloniser's territorial attempts and are made responsible for the creation of the regime whose sinister representation was best reflected in the Goli Otok (Barren Island) prison and labour camp. Once again it becomes clear that the complexity of ex-Yugoslavia's history can be referred to using I. Andrić's idea as a space suffering from too much history.

An issue of crucial importance that emerged from analysing the current research is that from the break-up of Yugoslavia up until the end of the 1990s, narratives presenting a 'Yugo-nostalgic' view enjoyed huge popularity. In these, 'exiled' authors presented the Yugoslav War and disappearance of states from the map as a post-national trauma,

which engendered a whole array of problems related to identification and the redefinition of national identity, cultural identity, and especially among the generation born after WW2, a kind of hybrid identity, and the overuse of such terms as post-Yugoslav literature (writers) sustaining an illusory image of a still-existent community. In contrast to the way in which Yugoslavia began to awaken and express itself with greater confidence, especially in Croatia, another narrative which had lain dormant for decades stirred: a national, right-wing-martyrological narrative, which focused on pages of history hitherto left blank due to the tabooisation or negative stigma attached to many past events. Taking up the issues of partisan crimes and the repression of the Croatian nation offered an opportunity to revive and reconstruct the past, in which individual memory was the primary building block and an important link in the Croatian identity narrative chain in the aftermath of the break-up of Yugoslavia.

The predominant approach in the analyses conducted so far has been that of favouring Yugo-nostalgia (with its prominent ideal of Atlantis, socialist Arcadia etc.) over a hermetic and centrifugal nationalist attitude. After Croatia regained its independence, it was essential to formulate a position on the recent past, and this position was shaped by successive ways of articulating this national community's narrative, from silence, forgetting, suppression, through to remembering and redefining identity, and also models of culture: martyrological, guilt, shame and (post)trauma. Revision of significant events takes place by means of reverting the order: what was not allowed to be remembered becomes that which can not be forgotten. From such a viewpoint Croatian culture, can be defined as a culture of memory (J. Assmann), and also a culture of trauma, which is a reaction to a "culture of silence" (J. Tokarska-Bakir), a phenomenon typical of a particular kind of martyrological societies. Cracks in the narrative of the Tito state and related taboo subjects slowly appeared due to autobiographical texts testifying to that particular time and place. >From the perspective I propose, Croatia can be perceived as a post-colonial space, or to be more precise, a post-dependent one, to use the term coined by Hanna Gosk to describe situations where subservient-dominant relations have ceased. The current Croatian non-memory of Yugoslavia appears as "a bad memory", negated by several decades of the Croatian nation's existence in a federation, which is now viewed rather critically as the cause of stagnation and economic regression, enslavement and ultimately, the bloody break-up of the state. Referring to Erl's concept, it is important to define the role of literature as both a conduit and also a creator of collective memory, while memory becomes the indicator of identity.

In my view, the problems discussed in the monograph and presented from the proposed perspective are topical, significant and as yet not dealt with comprehensively in Slavonic literary studies. This book might make an important contribution to further exploration of history and memory in Yugoslavia from the point of view of other microhistories and individual narratives.

Translated by Rob Pagett