“STILL”

Some thoughts on stillness and the landscape of war

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STILL

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I

still / *adverb* / always, continually; in the future as in the past

In her book *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova refers to the concept of *balkanism*, discussing its creation in relation to and in spite of Said's *orientalism* (2009, ix). According to Todorova, the Balkans are viewed as marginal, transitional, and archaic, not necessarily as a complete other, but more as an incomplete self (18). The promulgated generalization of the Balkans had its peak during and after the war in Yugoslavia. Referring to Nietzsche's description of the process of stigmatization, of applying literal meaning to reality, Todorova underlines how the war in Yugoslavia was read by the West through the frame of balkanism, as being the inevitable outcome of "a warrior ethos, deeply ingrained in the psyche of Balkan populations" (19). Additionally, the whole discourse of the *inevitable* war in Yugoslavia, especially the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, had a lot to do with artistic and literal representations of BiH as the heart of the imagined Balkans with its mystical and exotic quality so attractive to those who are outside of the Balkan "vortex" (Jeffrey 2012, 43).

still / *noun* / deep silence and calm; stillness

The Dayton peace agreement that set out with the goal of stopping the armed conflict in 1995 divided Bosnia and Herzegovina into two main entities: Republika Srpska, with a predominantly

Serbian population, and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where mostly Bosniaks and Croats live. As a result, "BiH is a complex, multi-level, power-sharing arrangement" between three main ethnicities, with "minimal institutional competencies at the central state level" (Fagan & Sircar 2015, 33).

Two decades after the Dayton agreement, the existing confederal structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina suffers from many inner weaknesses, one of them being the failure to establish an effective environmental governance, due to the fact that neither of these entities has the capacity to autonomously handle the environmental sector (2015, 49). As a result of unregulated waste management outside of the urban centres, neglect makes its mark on the landscape – especially around the numerous river basins.

still / *adjective* / uttering no sound: quiet, subdued, muted; calm, tranquil, free from noise or turbulence

The Princess Krofne children's choir was founded by Zlatko Bostandžić in 1993, during the siege of Sarajevo. It is a choir for children aged 6 to 14, which aims to provide them with an activity to look forward to each week. One of the original singers selected the choir's name, "Princess Krofne", a kind of cream puff pastry¹ that at a time of siege and hunger in Sarajevo was simply wishful thinking.

(1) Baked choux pastry, similar to cream puffs and profiteroles, filled with vanilla custard.

“Body remembers” – a notion that I picked up, the *one* that stuck.

It was working on another project, while travelling through Bosnia and hearing the Princess Krofne choir for the first time, that brought me to this one. I was seduced by the children’s voices singing tunes long known to my body cells. All new cells, compared to my child body, and renewed at regular intervals. Yet my adult body found itself disturbed by music that belonged to a different space-time framework, to a country that doesn’t exist anymore.

It would be sound to ask why children born after the war in Yugoslavia would choose to sing songs from their parents’ past, songs that belonged to a *before*, to a country that broke down so horrendously – songs whose “sweet mainstream melody with the hint of rock ’n’ roll” (Bubaš 2014) brought upon this accidental listener a mix of fondness, sadness, and longing. Again, it would be a logical question, if Yugoslavia is not a lived experience for you. The uniqueness of the memory of Yugoslavia, and the impossibility of fully confronting the reality of all the bloodshed and the dissolution of the country, would leave a hole and a feeling of inadequacy shared by many that found themselves living in the successor states to the former federal republic.

still / *verb* / make or become still; quieten

The very notion of memory implies forgotten contents as well. In transitional states, the task of the ideological mediation in collective memory is to justify newly established class oppositions by revising history and forging facts. After the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the end of the Yugoslav Wars, the newly established states perceived capitalism as their ultimate goal. Having accepted the authoritarian and nationalistic ideology permeated with patriotic sentiments and mythology, the war personnel revived themselves in the political life as part of the elite. Therefore, through populist and nationalistic rhetoric, the “new” government revitalized dogmatic religious values, using them to

justify the aggressive take on leftist emancipatory practices. The most obvious demonstration of power is the revision of the antifascist history in the countries of former Yugoslavia. These post-socialist countries would systematically work on the erasure of past memories entangled with socialist history and an antifascist past, as “nationalism plays an important role as an atavistic form of ideology” (Gržinić & Tatlić 2014, 42).

still / *noun* / a static photograph as opposed to a motion picture, especially a single shot from a cinema film

The work *STILL* consists of a sound-video installation, photographs, and text. The sound installation features the sound recording of a rehearsal by Princess Krofne. The recorded songs were extremely popular in the former Yugoslavia. The children we hear performing were not even born when the popularity of those songs was at its high point; they were born after the war and the collapse of Yugoslavia.

The black-and-white photo shows the room where Princess Krofne rehearses. The room is located in an empty youth centre, built as an integral part of the cultural and sports centre, Skenderija. It was one of the most modern facilities of this type in the former Yugoslavia and became very popular when the stars of Balkan pop and rock music held their concerts there. The building was set on fire during the war, in May 1992. The renovation of the facility began in 2005.

The black-and-white video installation shows the River Drinjača in Bosnia. Due to unregulated utility requirements for the removal of rubbish and waste, local residents threw their waste in the river. The river carries some of it away, while most discarded items become a part of the environment, and blend with it, even creating new forms and becoming new nature. ■

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→ *About the author*

◆ Jelena Jureša has been extensively working on the questions of identity and memory through the media of photography, video and text. She has participated in solo and group exhibitions internationally. Her PhD project focuses on politics of oblivion in Europe in connection with three traumatic pasts of the twentieth century: the negation of war crimes in the Republic of Srpska and Serbia after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the construction of a national identity in Austria after the Anschluss and its relation to the silence on the Holocaust, and the construction of a Belgian identity in the aftermath of its colonial past.

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- ◆ Todorova, Maria, *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press, 2009.

→ *Images*

- ◆ Portfolio pages 1 - 2: A general map of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as it existed in 1945-1991. Created: 28 February 2011, and distributed under CC BY-SA 3.0 license. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sfrj.png> (accessed 24 April 2016).
- ◆ Portfolio page 3: [Freemages.com/Piotr Adamiak](https://www.freemages.com/Piotr-Adamiak).
- ◆ Portfolio page 8: Jelena Jureša, *STILL*, 2013, black-and-white photograph.
- ◆ Portfolio pages 10 - 14: Jelena Jureša, *STILL*, 2013, video stills.

The work *STILL* consists of a sound-video installation, photographs, and text.

The text exhibited together with the photo contains the names of the children present during the “Princess Krofne” choir rehearsal, recorded on 2 April 2013.

Berna Balić
Nejla Kulović
Arnela Demirovski
Ajša Kapetanović
Haris Čato
Benjamin Panjeta
Bennet Mano
Sabina Kadrić
Amela Špica
Ilda Tucaković
Leila Šečibović
Lamija Podgorica
Dženana Čebo
Zerina Hasković
Elma Durak
Henna Lanco
Azra Mešan
Iman Vreto
Ana-Marija Mišić

Nadža Dumanjić
Emina Torlak
Ema Pilavdžija
Berina Garibija
Mona Omeragić
Samra Bajrović
Adna Hafizović
Lamija Čeljo
Boris Simonović
Kristina Mišić
Amna Turković
Sara Zjakić
Lejla Gegić
Haris Muratagić
Amina Rahić
Iman Kunovac
Faris Karkelja
Ajla Džaka
Adna Burek

<http://jelenajuresa.com/still/audio-file/>