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Unattainable past, unsatisfying present – Yugonostalgia: an omen of a better future?

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Nostalgia for the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, *yugonostalgia*, has become widespread throughout the former Yugoslavia. It takes various forms and expressions, but it represents a selective and largely embellished remembrance, influenced by the need of those who engage in it to escape from the unsatisfying present they live in. In most cases, yugonostalgia is a bittersweet craving for the past – passive, static, and restricted. The paper argues that the actions inspired by yugonostalgia not only can have an active, dynamic, and progressive face, but can also serve as an important factor in the reconciliation process among former Yugoslavs. With its focus on positive and inclusive aspects of the common socialist past, yugonostalgia has the potential to (re)connect the nostalgic subjects throughout the former Yugoslav space, helping them to overcome the alienation that resulted from the violent dissolution of the common state.

Keywords: yugonostalgia; Yugoslavia; nostalgia; collective memories; reconciliation

Introduction

"There was a land of champions, a land called Yugoslavia,"[1] declares a recent musical hit that resounds across the entire former Yugoslav federation.[2] Indeed, for some of its former citizens, even more than 20 years after it disappeared from the map of Europe, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY, 1943–1992) is perceived as an ideal place to live – a place of "champions." Despite awareness of Yugoslavia's shortcomings, for these former Yugoslavs Yugoslavia represents a great country, respected around the globe: A place that knew how to take care of its people, satisfy their existential and social needs, and enable them to live in peace, solidarity, and unity.

Popular memory of the socialist past and longing for it has become widespread discourse in all former Yugoslav republics, taking on numerous materialized and non-materialized manifestations, recognizable under a single name: *yugonostalgia.* Derived from the Greek words *nostos*, to return home, and *algai*, a painful condition, nostalgia used to be viewed as a medical, pathological state, even a "disease" (Davis 1977). These days nostalgia attracts the attention of multiple scientific disciplines. The modern view of it is as a "nice sort of sadness – bitter-sweet," a "joy clouded with sadness" (Davis 1979 as quoted in Velikonja 2008, 27), representing people's longing for a time in a lost past, for the "home that no longer exists or has never existed" (Boym 2007, 7).

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Yugonostalgia is intriguing in at least three aspects. First, since the collapse of Yugoslavia and the armed conflicts that followed, an honest and comprehensive societal debate of the socialist past is pretty much absent in the entire former Yugoslav space. The new political elites have held the framework of the socialist Yugoslavia responsible for the war and other disputes among them, very often blaming the socialist system for "victimizing" their nation and "privileging" the national "other." Subsequently, although to varying degrees throughout the years, they have pushed to demonize all that the former common country stood for. Former Yugoslavs went through an "overall shift from the promotion of a supranational sense of Yugoslav identity to the more local nationalisms of the republics" (Volčič 2007, 24), in which every nation not only rejected the common Yugoslav identity but also struggled to restore its "original" one, which predated the common Yugoslav state (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 922). As Volčič (2007, 24) stresses, "in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a new framework of internally unified, integrated, and homogeneous nation-states emerged in which anything Yugoslav had to be assimilated or destroyed." Just as "Yugoslavism" frowned upon its counterpart – nationalism, so did nationalism see socialist Yugoslavia and its legacy as the main danger and enemy. Hence, nostalgic narratives and memories of Yugoslavia have never been welcomed by the new nationalist elites, but they have somehow managed to grow in strength and intensity. Why glorify Yugoslavia, and why so persistently?

Second, longing for life in a country where limited rights and suppressed freedoms were the norm comes as a surprise for many former Yugoslavs, who now live in democratic societies. As national(istic) rhetoric sees Yugoslav Communism exclusively as a "rule of political terror," "50 years of darkness," "the kingdom of lies," "the prison of nations," or "Tito's despotism" (Kuljić 2003), the question arises: from the yugonostalgics' point of view, what did Yugoslavia offer that the new democratic states cannot?

Third, nostalgia for the past presupposes people's refusal to embrace the present mostly due to their inability to cope with their current difficulties. According to Tannock (1995, 456), nostalgia

> invokes a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world. The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community, that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present.

An unsatisfactory present, coupled with an awareness that the rosy past is unattainable, can lead to despair. Why, then, should anyone long for the past if the longing begets suffering?

Through an analysis of yugonostalgia's two main components – past and present – this paper addresses the questions of why yugonostalgia occurs, who its agents are, how it is manifested, and what purpose it serves. By adding a possible third component, yugonostalgia's future, the paper gives special attention to its everyday effects. More concretely, bearing in mind a number of studies that view yugonostalgia in a more positive light (e.g. Palmberger 2008; Pauker 2006; Petrović 2010a, 2013; Ugrešić 2002; Velikonja 2011, 2013; Volčič 2007), the paper suggests that these effects do not remain merely passive, static, and restricted cravings for the past but can also take on an active, dynamic, and progressive face.

Aside from the scholarship on yugonostalgia, the research relies on observations and data collected during a field study in Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter: Bosnia) in July and August 2012. Visits to various places dedicated to the former Yugoslavia and Tito (such as museums, memorials, restaurants, coffee bars, street vendors, and souvenir and antique shops) and unstructured and semi-structured interviews conducted with people of different nationalities, ages, and educational backgrounds, have offered a

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closer perspective on yugonostalgia and a better understanding of individual nostalgic feelings. In parallel with discovering yugonostalgia and meeting its agents, the primary data collected during the field study gives the overall impression that throughout the former Yugoslavia, the socialist past and the then-common life, as well as the tragic events that followed, remain very sensitive issues. People are not willing to forget and forgive one another. However, topics that stress the social aspect of the socialist past and recall its positive features have usually proven to be a "safe zone" in which conflicting views and positions could temporarily be put aside.

Given the prevalence of these two opposing feelings, the question of whether yugonostalgia could contribute to the reconciliation process among former Yugoslavs inevitably arises. This paper, through positioning primary data in a context of wider literature on (yugo)nostalgia, argues that certain aspects and manifestations of yugonostalgia, with its focus on positive and inclusive aspects of the common socialist past, can contribute to the reconciliation process among former Yugoslavs.

Longing for the unattainable past

The object of nostalgia is a past that is often fragmented, idealized, constructed, and re-constructed, imbued with certain qualities in order to transform the memory into something extremely pleasant and enjoyable. Nostalgia commonly concerns past wishes, dreams, expectations, ideals, and life prospects, rather than actual past experiences. "Nostalgia is therefore not (only) a story about how *we were* in the past, but one about *how we never were*" (Velikonja 2008, 30). Boym (2001) makes a distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia, in which restorative nostalgia attempts to restore and reconstruct "the lost home" (a certain moment in the past, regime, leader, and territory). Restorative nostalgia acknowledges itself not as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition, and is situated at the heart of national and religious revivals. Reflective nostalgia stresses the longing itself, rests more on feelings of yearning and loss, statically dreaming about another place and time. Nostalgia can also be individual or collective, "materialized" or intangible, instrumental – "used" in order to accomplish certain goals – and non-instrumental, and so on (Velikonja 2008).

Yugonostalgia, thus, is a popular memory of the Yugoslav socialist past and a longing for the socialist Yugoslavia. There is also a so-called Titostalgia, or nostalgia for the leadership qualities, personal charisma, and perceived political accomplishments of Yugoslavia's president, Josip Broz Tito. As Yugoslavia no longer exists, what nostalgics actually feel is affection for their former state, not allegiance and loyalty (Kolstø 2014, 763). Therefore, the socialist Yugoslavia is the core of the (selective) nostalgic memories. However, it is not Communism, socialism, or the political unit that are objects of nostalgic feelings or restorative desires, but rather a certain mix of characteristics, values, and objects connected to that period, such as military strength, international reputation, economic welfare, prosperity, unity, solidarity, social security, friendship, cultural cooperation, even geographical space (Petrović 2007), or a particular consumer product. In sum, nostalgia exists for the *social* side of the regime and the system, at the level of individual biographies and everyday life (Kuljić 2003). Ugrešić (2002) (as quoted in Volčič 2007, 27) defines yugonostalgia as "a productive revisiting of the collective experience of citizens whose individual lives were embedded in the social life of the collapsed state." Nonetheless, yugonostalgia is oriented toward "past fantasies" – unfulfilled dreams, lost opportunities, and elusive ideals of the socialist Yugoslav past; toward all that was probable back then and seems so inaccessible today.

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Yugonostalgia varies in its forms and intensity. It can affect different generations and groups, including those born after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Yugonostalgia appears in practically every segment of social life (popular culture, politics, advertising, tourism, and everyday life). In concrete forms and manifestations of yugonostalgia, Velikonja (2008) makes a distinction between a "culture of nostalgia" and a "nostalgic culture." *The culture of nostalgia*, or "nostalgia for profit" represents a constructed, materialized, top-down discourse created by some social groups in order to obtain certain objectives and gains, based on "capitalizing on nostalgia." This is accomplished, for example, through yugonostalgia's commercial exploitation, especially in advertising, tourism, and entertainment (movies, music, and TV). The culture of nostalgia also reveals itself in souvenir and antique shops and street vendors in almost every big town of the former Yugoslavia, embodied in books, postcards, calendars, cups, pens, and other objects offered for sale. Paradoxically, these materialized memories of the socialist past are often presented alongside objects that glorify the nationalistic or religious attributes in a specific country – all that socialism stood against.[3]

Another aspect of yugonostalgia, *the nostalgic culture*, carries the most emancipatory and reconciliatory potential, as it represents a genuine and usually non-lucrative evaluation of the socialist past and individual memories of it. Yugonostalgic culture exists as an emotion-laden nostalgia for Yugoslavia, present in many homes and families throughout the former Yugoslav region, and visible in people's narratives and private behavior, conversations, and rituals. In many private homes or offices, Tito's pictures or calendars with socialist Yugoslav themes hang on the walls. Asked why he keeps a huge portrait of Tito on the wall of his workshop, a 60-year-old Bosnian man told me that Tito's portrait was a must-have in every house in socialist Yugoslavia.

> The new government and system made me take it off the wall, but I couldn't just throw it out, because Tito doesn't deserve that. Now he's here with me, watching me while I work. After all, we're colleagues – he was a locksmith, just like me.

Standing in front of a street vendor in Belgrade selling big paintings of Tito, a mother answers her young daughter's question about the man in the painting: "He was *our* president, of *our* Yugoslavia. He's our legend!" A woman selling old books about Yugoslavia in the streets of Ljubljana explained to me how she still remembers life in former Yugoslavia as good and how deeply Tito was respected. "I personally said a Mass in church for him when he died. It was one of the saddest days of my life."

In nearly every major city throughout the former Yugoslavia yugonostalgics are founding nonprofit organizations to preserve the memory of Tito and the socialist past through various commemorations of important anniversaries, presentations, lectures and exhibitions, books, and so on. Bosnia alone has had 42 of these organizations united through a single union since 2003, with around 20,000 members combined and many more sympathizers joining them on various occasions (Velikonja 2013). Thousands gather a couple of times per year at anniversaries of Tito's birthday, his death, or famous partisan battles, reviving various rituals that were commonplace in socialist Yugoslavia.

Museums visitors' books are full of emotional messages, very often addressed to Tito himself:

> Only today I truly realized how much I miss that feeling of brotherhood and unity. I am standing here vaguely remembering my previous visits to your house, when I was a pioneer.[4] A feeling of happiness and pride filled my eyes with tears. That was a beautiful childhood. Thank you. (A. H. in Kumrovec [Croatia], July 2012)
>
> Unfortunately, I was not born in the most beautiful country in the world – Yugoslavia, but I know everything about you, that you fought for the freedom of all our peoples. You were

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born once, but you will live forever. (N. S. in *Kuća Cveća* [House of Flowers] in Belgrade, July 2012)

Internet and social media have not been immune to yugonostalgia either. The cyber world has spawned virtual Yugoslav states such as Cyber Yugoslavia or Republika Titoslavija. On numerous websites dedicated to Tito or Yugoslavia, as well as countless fan pages and groups on social networks, such as Facebook,[5] yugonostalgics of all generations, nationalities, and from all the republics and diasporas "meet," tell personal stories, refresh memories of various anniversaries, or share pictures, famous songs, and video clips from the former Yugoslavia.[6]

Despite certain patterns in various manifestations of yugonostalgia, the reasons for nostalgic feelings, the ways in which they are discussed and expressed, as well as meanings attached to them, differ from individual to individual; in this sense yugonostalgia reveals itself as a complex and often ambiguous phenomenon.

Shelter from an unsatisfying present

Nostalgia is an inevitable companion to periods of unexpected wholesale change that follow the destruction of an old world while the new one waits to be constructed. Nostalgia "dwells in an interspace between 'no longer' and 'not yet'" (Velikonja 2011, 151). Thus, the difficulties of the transition toward democracy and a market economy taking place in the countries of the Eastern Bloc is fertile ground in which nostalgia has thrived. Yugonostalgia is just one form of a broader phenomenon named *Red Nostalgia*, or nostalgia for socialism; there is also *Ostalgie* in the former East Germany, or *Soviet nostalgia* in the countries of the former USSR (see, e.g. Barney 2009; Sierp 2009; Todorova 2010; Todorova and Gille 2010; Velikonja 2009; White 2010). All these societies went through a harsh process of change from totalitarian regimes to free and democratic ones, from socialism and centrally planned economies to capitalism and free market economies, from Marxist–Leninist ideologies to neoliberalism. However, in Yugoslavia (also Czechoslovakia and the USSR) this process also meant a transition from a multinational and multicultural society toward new, independent nation-states. Yugoslavs were unfortunate enough to experience an armed conflict as well, which makes yugonostalgia even more surprising and/or illogical. However, it seems that the wars only fed nostalgia on the subjects of economic welfare, prosperity, reputation, and so on. Former Yugoslavs long for national, spiritual and ethnic unity, peace, friendship, solidarity, and a world without hatred based on nationality or ethnic and religious differences.

In the rhetoric of nostalgia, this "periodizing emotion," Tannock (1995, 456) recognizes three "key ideas:" first, a "prelapsarian world;" second, a "lapse" or "cut" with the past; and third, the "postlapsarian world," felt to be lacking, deficient, or repressive. This leads us to nostalgia's other important characteristic: it occurs because of a present that offers a diminished quality of life or a lack of opportunities for improvement. Thus, it better describes what one misses today rather than what one misses from yesterday. Nostalgia is "a tool for using the past to engender an understanding of the collective's present-day anxieties" (Lowenthal 1989 as quoted in Barney 2009, 136). The type of past a nostalgic longs for depends on the present he or she lives in – their position in society, desires, fears, and aspirations.

Following Tannok's three "key ideas," the past yugonostalgics long for (the Golden Age), is their life in the SFRY, the "lapse" and "cut" is the dissolution of this state in the 1990s, while the "postlapsarian world" is their present life in Yugoslavia's former republics, now independent and democratic polities. While stressing how in the past

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"everything was better," my interlocutors complained about the current lack of opportunities and future prospects, the worrisome socioeconomic situation (corruption, organized crime, unemployment, and poverty), social estrangement and broken relationships, the degraded reputation of the new countries, reduced territory, cross-border immobility, rampant nationalism, and so on. In a survey of 2200 people from Croatia and Bosnia older than 45 that was conducted by Croatian *Moje Vrijeme* in April 2015, as many as 92% of respondents from Bosnia and 86% from Croatia said they lived better in Yugoslavia than they live now.[7] That conforms to numerous surveys conducted throughout the years after Yugoslavia's dissolution, which, even in the periods of strong nationalistic rule, showed that Tito and socialist Yugoslavia enjoyed continuous popularity among former Yugoslavs (Velikonja 2009).

Most interestingly, as Pančić (*Vreme* 2004) explains in the case of Serbia, this nostalgia is not a longing for a "good old Socialist Yugoslavia" simply because it was a socialist country and today's Serbia is not, but because it was *the country*, as yugonostalgia is actually nothing but a "normalostalgia." That is true in other former Yugoslav states as well. Most of my interlocutors, while complaining about the socioeconomic aspect of their life, recalled the "normal life" [*normalan život*] they once had in Yugoslavia and said it is this "normalcy" they most miss today. Many did not consider themselves yugonostalgic or even despised those who are. Many are also proud members of their nations who openly embrace a particular nationalist discourse of their nation-states.

As Palmberger (2013a) argues in her study on Bosnia, longing for a "normal life" is tightly connected with economic security and well-being, as well as specific social values, such as ethnic co-existence [*suživot*] and good-neighborliness [*komšiluk*], which used to be a cornerstone of the social life in socialist Yugoslavia. In times of rupture with their former life, while the present appears chaotic and unpredictable, people tend to use memories to help maintain a sense of continuity. Also, facing a difficult socioeconomic situation and general life conditions, people look into the past searching for a lost sense of security and stability. Bartmanski (2011, 226–227) argues that nostalgia and its manifestations represent the bridges between the past and the present, those much-needed "regular symbolizations of continuity" in the "irregular times of transformation." Furthermore, normalcy is in some cases described as the dignity of having "a place in the world," best expressed in people's cross-border mobility (Jansen 2009). Many former Yugoslavs nostalgically recall owning the Yugoslav red passport [*crveni pasoš*], which gave them an open access to the outside world – the same world that had been inaccessible for a long period of time after Yugoslavia's dissolution. Greenberg (2011, 89) stresses that discourses of normalcy, particularly in relation to travel, "are about the loss (and possible restoration) of a historically specific form of citizen agency that emerged in relationship to a functioning and sovereign Yugoslav state … " Unlike internationally respected Yugoslavia, their current states are considered incapable of translating people's desires into action.

To an already depressing recognition that the longed-for past cannot return, yugonostalgics add an equally depressing awareness that the present is full of disappointments, with not much hope for improvement. That is why this phenomenon has often been seen as retrograde and regressive, keeping those who engage in it from living in the present and actively participating in building their own future. To these people, yugonostalgia primarily provides shelter from an unsatisfying present, but are its functions exhausted here, or it can offer more? Can this longing for an unattainable past because of an unsatisfying present have any positive influence on the future?

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An omen of a better future?

As mentioned earlier, in the countries that emerged from the Yugoslav federation, nostalgia for the former country has been sneered at, and yugonostalgics labeled the "biggest losers of transition," incapable of coping with the problems of young, modern, democratic societies. The region's nationalist ideologies – which seemed less antagonistic toward one another (one nationalism or religious fanaticism vs. another) than toward Yugoslavia and the past (Velikonja 2011) – cast yugonostalgics as "traitors" and "enemies of the nation." Therefore, nostalgia for Yugoslavia has been seen not only as regressive and depressive, but also as largely irrational (unable to deal with present difficulties), unpatriotic (lacking real love for their countries), reactionary (attempting to re-establish Yugoslavia), and immoral (favoring an oppressive political regime) (Petrović 2013). This has triggered some interesting and important debates on yugonostalgia, which attempt to add a contrary perspective to the predominant anti-nostalgic and revisionist discourse and look into positive aspects of this phenomenon.

Boym (2001, 8) writes that nostalgia "is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by the needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future." Boym believes that each of us determines what nostalgia becomes based on how we "use" it: "Nostalgia can be a poetic creation, an individual mechanism of survival, a countercultural practice, a poison, or a cure" (18).

Similarly, Petrović (2010b, 128–129) stresses that the discourse of nostalgia "is never a plain expression of longing and grief," but that it can also be a "powerful ideological tool" that allows those who articulate it "to express their views, establish or retain certain value systems, or achieve particular goals." In another work of hers, Petrović (2013) argues that many values and narratives associated with yugonostalgia – continuity, anti-fascism, solidarity/workers' rights, and cosmopolitanism – are essentially "European" and universal, even though they have been delegitimized on both the European and national levels. The common socialist past, she further argues, may be a source of resistance, solidarity, and collectivity in the former Yugoslav states that cuts across ethnic boundaries while being deployed in imagining, building, or demanding a desirable future in this area (130–131).

One of the most attentive scholars of yugonostalgia has been Slovenian author Mitja Velikonja, who has written of the "emancipatory" potential of yugonostalgia, which is often unappreciated or ignored in post-Yugoslav societies. He argues that yugonostalgia does not necessarily exist only in its passive and static appearance but that it can also be an active, engaged and emancipatory discourse, enabling nostalgics to act not with "teary eyes," but rather with "a clenched fist" (2011, 161).

Yugonostalgia as a driving force

The first positive aspect of yugonostalgia is that through fostering personal memories of the past, yugonostalgics actually promote the preservation of their history, which has been threatened by the dominance of the nationalistic rhetoric in all former Yugoslav republics since the dissolution of the common country. Yugoslavia and all it used to represent have received a negative connotation. People have been taught that these "50 years of Communist terror" must be forgotten for good. On the other side, no matter which form of yugonostalgia we have in mind, it always chooses remembering over forgetting. Ugrešić (2002) sees yugonostalgia as a vital, productive tool in the emotional reconstruction and preservation of histories. As Pančić (2004) says of the *Leksikon Yu Mitologije* [Lexicon of YU Mythology] (Andrić, Arsenijević, and Matić 2004), which collects various concepts of Yugoslav popular culture, it is "valuable evidence that it makes sense remembering,

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because it represents the only identity-pledge for those who refuse to allow their remembrance to be modulated by others." At the same time, keeping memories of Yugoslavia alive can serve as a reminder that post-Yugoslav societies still need a more critical debate concerning their socialist past and socialist heritage. Another positive aspect of yugonostalgia is that it offers a counterbalance to the overcritical narratives of the past for young generations who never lived in the socialist Yugoslav era and who are trying to understand the past and discover their own truths.

The active, emancipatory potential of yugonostalgia is probably most visible in yugonostalgics' engagement in social critiques of their countries' ruling structures and politics. Yugonostalgic groups not only organize meetings, exhibitions, and seminars to gather in one place many individual "sorrows for yesterday," but they also actively participate in the criticism of particular political decisions and measures, or, more often, the general political course of their country. They also stand up against exclusive nationalisms and neofascist organizations and groups. In November 2004, as Velikonja (2013) describes in the case of Bosnia, one of these associations named after Josip Broz Tito demanded that the country's presidency reverse a decision to send minesweeper battalions to Iraq. In January 2009, a similar group from Goražde joined other organizations in local demonstrations against the Israeli attack on Gaza. It also participated in the condemnation of the planned concert of the Croat neo-Ustasha rocker Thompson and joined in 2008 an anti-fascist group and other organizations in preparation for the official proposal of the "Law to ban the activities of fascist and neo-fascist organizations and the use of their symbols." The president of one of these organizations from Tuzla explained that the organization's motives were not to restore the former country or the socialist political system, but to convince the government and the society that some things can and must be done better (Velikonja 2013).

Numerous yugonostalgic groups within online social networks[8] show an astonishing level of everyday engagement in the preservation of the memory of Yugoslavia, but are also very active in social criticism. All these groups are interconnected, and they cooperate under the spirit of Yugoslavism, brotherhood, and unity. They share common memories, impressions, pictures, and video clips related to Tito and Yugoslavia, but most of all they share a feeling of disappointment with the current political climate in their countries. One of these groups,[9] rejecting the nationalistic agenda that surrounded the highly politicized 2013 population census in Bosnia, urged its followers not to declare themselves Bosniaks, Croats, or Serbs, but "Yugoslavs."

Through these associations and groups, yugonostalgia manages to produce one more important outcome: it creates a new form of collective identity, though unintentionally and unconsciously. Although yugonostalgia does not rely on any ideological bases, nor can we find any political strategy and program in its background, its *social* aspect could be equally threatening for the ruling system by challenging and provoking it. Also, by searching for desirable value-models of the past, yugonostalgia offers answers to what reality should be like, and what the future should bring. The past represents a utopian desire for a better tomorrow and gives people hope that a different world is possible (Velikonja 2011).

Finally, yugonostalgia serves as an inspiration for cultural and artistic expression, which often treats nostalgic feelings and memories in a satirical and humorous manner; escaping from nostalgia's melancholy, sadness, even darkness. This, furthermore, contributes to a cultural convergence among former Yugoslavs on a larger scale, having an even more important outcome – the re-establishment of cultural and other dialogues among the former compatriots, which carry the building blocks of the reconciliation process with

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them. Volčič (2007, 27) stresses that yugonostalgia produces "interesting and creative narratives," provides "useful resources for citizens in a time of turbulent transition," and can play an important role in the reconciliation process among former Yugoslavs, helping them "negotiate the historical tensions that all too often manifest themselves in contemporary conflicts." Yugonostalgia as an inspiration for cultural cooperation and its reconciliatory potential will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The reconciliatory potential of yugonostalgia

That aspect of yugonostalgia that represents the longing for the common *past* and creates the desire to preserve its memory is one reason for peoples' reconnection and cultural convergence today. As mentioned earlier, the Yugoslavia of people's selective memories was a country with a large territory, army, and international reputation, but it was also a multinational and multicultural country, a symbol of brotherhood and unity, friendship, and ethnic solidarity. It is understandable, then, how it could encourage interaction without hatred, intolerance, or emphasis on differences of any kind, especially those based on nationality.

In this context, in her study on yugonostalgia in the Bosnian town of Mostar, Palmberger (2008) recognizes two different nostalgic discourses: first, a regressive "longing for a lost home" that produces "paralyzing hope" as the lost home cannot be retrieved, and second, "yugonostalgia as a tool and a vision for better co-existence," which utilizes nostalgia for "overcoming the troubled relationships" among the war-alienated Bosniaks, Serbs, and Croats. Palmberger's interlocutor, although not being yugonostalgic, "used" memories of Yugoslavia as a "safe topic" to engage in otherwise very restricted communication with the ethnic other, as well as the values from the Yugoslav past as a "guiding star" for regulation of future interrelationships. In another work, Palmberger (2013b) elaborates on practices of border-crossing in postwar Mostar, where this "border" is created by economic, political, and cultural forces and is manifested in everyday social practice, representing an obstacle to a "normal life." The study explains how people of all generations use positive pre-war memories, especially those in relation to cross-national co-existence, as a tool for overcoming the city's ethnic divisions that affect all aspects of everyday life. Palmberger stresses that these memories of an idealized past play an important role in postwar border-crossing activities and represent "powerful tales," put forward in support of a shared and united future of Mostar.

These are some examples of how an embellished and "safe" past can be used for accomplishing certain goals, in this case for overcoming strained relationships and bringing former Yugoslavs closer together. Social values that existed in Yugoslavia – either personally experienced or introduced through the narratives of older generations – are employed as a bridge between conflicting collective and/or individual memories. As Dembinska (2010) argues in her work on managing the common past and symbolic public spaces in Poland, bridging conflicting collective memories and insisting on those elements that bear witness to a common peaceful past helps generate trust in post-conflict societies. Such use of inclusive, rather than exclusive and divisive elements of the past can not only help people deal with their present difficulties but, through its trust-building and reconciliatory potential, also offer better future prospects. It is important to stress that this strategy is also employed by those who do not consider themselves yugonostalgic, those who are prone to nationalistic narratives, and those looking to the past in order to re-establish "normalcy" in their current lives. Consideration of a larger number of subjects who use their memories to overcome present struggles helps in widening yugonostalgia's emancipatory and reconciliatory

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scope, which is otherwise limited by self-declared yugonostalgics' status as a minority in their countries and the region.

Top-down initiatives for preserving memories of the socialist past and their employment in trust-building and reconciliation efforts are rare, but do exist. For example, Armakolas (2015) explains how local authorities in Tuzla, through selective revisiting of the socialist past, have attempted to formulate a vision of society in accordance with the needs of contemporary Bosnia without rejecting the legacy of the socialist regime. Tuzla's leaders have found some values from the socialist regime compatible with the values of independent Bosnia (such as anti-fascism) and reckon that by stressing these values they also strengthen the independent Bosnian polity. Also, through preservation and reconstruction of the socialist cultural heritage and focusing on its positive values, the local Tuzla elites believe that they are actually building a more inclusive, civic society, capable of functioning beyond the dominant ethno-national divisions in the country.

With top-down initiatives infrequent, the reconciliatory potential has mostly been discernible in bottom-up activities, in what this paper described as yugonostalgic culture. Although visits to various places of importance for Yugoslav history on important anniversaries take place only a couple of times a year, it is a good opportunity for former Yugoslavs to meet and share memories of the time when they lived in peace and unity. These occasions certainly cannot provide reconciliation on a global scale, but they can surely be a small step in this process. In 2012, in the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade, delegations from all former Yugoslav republics brought the *štafeta* [baton] just like they had done in the former country on 25 May, Tito's symbolic birthday. The Slovenian delegate said the baton carries greetings from the "brotherly" peoples of Slovenia and Croatia as well as a message that "the feeling of brotherhood and unity has not died and that it still exists, just like the love for Tito and all he did for his people" (*Balkan Insight*, May 25, 2012).

Furthermore, yugonostalgia fosters the reconciliation process by serving as an inspiration for cultural and other cooperation among former Yugoslavs. Cultural convergence, including that inspired by yugonostalgia, is important because it is voluntary, unlike other aspects of cooperation that might result from political pressure and conditionality imposed by the EU or other international organizations and institutions, in exchange for stepped-up European integration or financial and other forms of support, or are stimulated by the promise of personal profit.

One of the first serious attempts to establish cultural cooperation among former Yugoslavs was a common project of Serbian and Croatian authors to gather numerous concepts of Yugoslav popular culture into one book, *Leksikon Yu Mitologije*. The project was designed to involve in its creation all citizens of the former Yugoslavia who were willing to identify and comment on the people they loved, things they enjoyed, and situations that characterized their lives in the former country (Bošković 2013). The book represents a sort of remembrance that the peoples from the former Yugoslavia used to live together, cooperate, even love one another, and that all the bad things that have happened recently cannot be attributed to an "ancient hatred" among them. While not welcomed by those who had already opted for forgetting over remembering, the project drew so much public attention and so warmed the hearts of readers in all former Yugoslav republics that BBC Radio marked its 2005 publication as "more important for the establishing of the post-war dialogue than was the five years of the common efforts of all the politicians in the region" (*Leksikon Yu Mitologije*, official Facebook page). A visitor to the project's website also noted that she does not perceive it as an outcome of a simple nostalgia or curiosity, but rather as a "beginning of the process of healing, and the first natural step back to

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sanity, as it should be" (Pauker 2006, 74). Pauker explained that this book offered to former Yugoslavs "the first real opportunity for a democratic, honest, cross-border, and inter-ethnic discussion of their common social history; a history that took place under the umbrella of the Yugoslav state" (74).

It is a similar story in other cultural spheres, such as theater and film, and, most of all, music, where ex-Yugoslav rock 'n' roll is key to the process of reconnecting former Yugoslavs. Unlike popular folk music, which in all former Yugoslav republics tended to be used as "an expression of the soul of the nation," Yugoslav rock 'n' roll emanated from the traditionally non-nationalistic, urban areas, representing the multicultural Yugoslav identity, yet on the margins of public life (Pauker 2006). This rock 'n' roll is widely listened to today, gathering a similar audience as before the breakup of the state, free from political and nationalistic bonds. Led by the thought of how great music was in the past, former Yugoslavs are reconnecting through various CD compilations that circulate in the former Yugoslav space, theme parties where they can dance only to "good, old, Yugoslav rock 'n' roll," radio stations that play only music from the former country,[10] farewell concerts of some popular Yugoslav rock bands such as *Bijelo Dugme* [White Button], or websites and forums dedicated to Yugoslav rock that are "rarely divided along ethnic lines or newly established borders" (Pauker 2006, 76).

In her analysis of nostalgia for the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), Petrović (2010a) uses the film *Karaula* [Border post] (Grlić 2006) as an example of a post-Yugoslav project that gathered authors, actors, and financial support from the culture ministries of all former Yugoslav republics, something no film in the region had done until then. The authors denied that the film was born of nostalgia, but that is the reaction it provoked in much of its audience. Capturing army life at the military border post on the Yugoslav–Albanian border in the late 1980s, the film managed to produce a "feeling of solidarity among former Yugoslavs by showing recognizable details from their common past much more than dividing them by focusing on the tragic end of the common history" (Petrović 2010a, 75).

That aspect of yugonostalgia that represents dissatisfaction with the present also manages to bring people closer together. As members of the same yugonostalgic association, or followers of the same yugonostalgic group from social networks, former Yugoslavs are uniting across political and national boundaries to share their worries over their countries' social-economic situations. Through their common disapproval of their governments' politics or in joint social critiques, they are showing that it is possible to work and act together, despite national and other differences. In many groups in popular social networks, administrators immediately exclude those who provoke on a national basis or advocate hate speech. All this shows that yugonostalgia, which gathered the people together in the first instance, is managing to accomplish goals beyond its regular scope and give a more unified voice to the former Yugoslavs against distrusted politicians and their decisions, as well as against nationalism and intolerance.

To sum up, while a Serb waves a Yugoslav flag in Kumrovec and a Slovene carries the white baton in the Kuća Cveća, while a Bosniak and a Croat protest together as members of the same yugonostalgic group, or they all, at the level of everyday interaction, manage to put aside ethnic divisions in order to bring back "normalcy" to their lives, former Yugoslavs come closer together and contribute in a small way to the normalization of relations among their countries. What, then, will happen when even the last generation born in Yugoslavia disappears, and together with it all the warm memories of the former country? Is yugonostalgia and its positive effects for relations among former Yugoslavs destined to fade away? In other words, what is the future of yugonostalgia?

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Yugonostalgia among the youth

The answer to this question should be found by exploring the attitudes of youth in the former Yugoslav republics – children born after the dissolution of the state in which their parents and grandparents lived. These generations have grown up in an environment where nationalism is a prevailing ideology and where Yugoslavia exists only in a couple of lines in history textbooks, some socialist monuments in their towns, or the partisan films rarely shown on TV. Young employees of Café Tito in Sarajevo, and their guests and peers, told me the bar's name and socialist-inspired interior mean little to them, and that the place is popular among young Sarajevans because "the coffee is good and cheap, and beer is always kept cold." The parties that this and similar bars organize on important socialist anniversaries are attended by hundreds of young people, many dressed as Tito's pioneers, but, as some of them told me, the accent is not on the pioneer's scarf and a hat, but on having a good time. Velikonja (2008, 32) names this phenomenon "neostalgia," or the "false," "pretended," "stolen," "pseudo" nostalgia for the former Yugoslavia, which is nothing but a playful and ironic usage of the past, an urban trend that can anytime be replaced by another, more interesting one.

On the other hand, during my visit to the Museum of Yugoslav History in Belgrade, I spoke with a group of teenagers from Slovenia who said they hold Yugoslavia and Tito in high esteem, although they were born after the country's breakup. They explained that their parents had taught them that life was good in the former country, and that "they were not lacking anything they wanted." Even though these young Slovenians were visiting Belgrade for the first time and had only one day available to explore the city, they decided to spend that day visiting Tito's grave and the museum that keeps the memories of the country they know only from the stories of their parents.

Many young people also engage in yugonostalgia due to difficult life conditions and a lack of good prospects. Although aware of Yugoslavia's bad side, young people look to past values in search of "normalcy" in educational opportunities, employment, or the ability to travel abroad, or simply to picture a stable and secure future for themselves (Greenberg 2011). In a 2011 survey of generations born in 1971 and 1991, most respondents from the younger group said life for their parents was better than their lives are today – that there were better employment opportunities in the past than now (*Balkan Insight*, March 9, 2012). Encouraged by the nostalgic stories of their parents and despite the fact that these young people have no firsthand experience of living in Yugoslavia, they search for the positive aspects and value-models from the socialist past and perceive them as superior to what is available to them today. Previously mentioned practices of border-crossing in Mostar (Palmberger 2013b), encouraged by a rosy socialist past, are mostly employed by the young generations, even those who were only young children at the time of Yugoslavia's dissolution. Young people in Mostar of all ethnic and religious backgrounds deliberately emphasize those social values from Yugoslavia (and multinational Bosnia) that foster inter-communal trust, encourage reconciliation, and help reconcile conflicting collective memories. Similarly, some young citizens who did not experience life in socialist Yugoslavia consciously choose the socialist past as an inspiration and driving force for cultural cooperation with their peers in neighboring countries. For instance, young journalists-volunteers in 2012 reestablished the Yugoslav Radio Television, which is broadcast on the Internet with a wide range of content, including politics, entertainment, sports, culture, and education.[11] A 19-year-old volunteer from Sarajevo explained that their aim "is not to revive the former Yugoslavia, to change the borders of the countries, not even

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to be yugonostalgic" but "to become a professional regional channel that will be capable of connecting the peoples in the whole region" (*SETimes* 2012).

These and numerous other similar cases show us that the young generations in the former Yugoslav republics are able to use yugonostalgia as an impetus for the normalization of relations and the reconciliation process among them. They also remind us that the future of yugonostalgia is not determined by the lifetime of those who lived in Yugoslavia, nor will it completely vanish along with the last generation born in that country. Due to its usage by youth, yugonostalgia – although drastically weaker – could remain in the region as a reminder and a warning that the people of all generations are not satisfied with the political, economic, or social aspects of their lives. Nostalgia for the socialist Yugoslavia, thus, could persist as long as it takes for the myth of the Golden Age to become reality.

Conclusion

Yugonostalgia, a popular memory of the (unattainable) socialist past and longing for it, is common in all former Yugoslav republics, recognizable in individual memories, nostalgic narratives, behavior, and rituals, but also embodied in souvenir objects, songs, books, movies, and popular media. No matter the form their feelings take, yugonostalgics have a tendency to see the past through rose-colored glasses, influenced by their need to create a deeper contrast with the unsatisfying present they live in. Former Yugoslavs have been through an arduous transition to democracy and a market economy. Those who had high expectations at the starting point of this road have seen few of those hopes realized. Nostalgia for the former country and the value-models of the socialist past is a reaction to this harsh reality and an escape from it. That is why yugonostalgics have often been characterized as the "biggest losers of transition," who search for refuge in the past, instead of finding solutions to current problems.

In addition to explaining why former Yugoslavs long for the past, this paper aimed to show that yugonostalgia can offer more than a simple shelter from a disappointing present. The actions inspired by yugonostalgia can also have an active and progressive face, promoting cooperation and, ultimately, reconciliation among former Yugoslavs. Yugonostalgia has a reconciliatory potential because for yugonostalgics, the past – usually a divisive factor – is not the issue; it is rather the present, in which they are all equal in sharing common problems and worries, despite their ethnic or religious determination. Even when this past *is* emphasized, it is a selective, uncritical, and embellished common past that stresses those inclusive, rather than exclusive, elements of the socialist heritage, and is therefore capable of bringing people closer together.

We should be careful, however, not to attach straightforward meanings to a particular yugonostalgic form and expression. Yugonostalgia is a complex and often ambiguous phenomenon, with multiple layers of individual feelings and motives that are not always easily recognizable. If a person visits Tito's birthplace or similar memorial together with thousands of yugonostalgics from all over the former Yugoslav space, this does not automatically mean that he or she is immune to the feelings of hostility toward people of other nationalities, or that this person even sees the value of restoring the destroyed links (see, e.g. Kurtović 2011). Many people I have interacted with foster very warm feelings toward Yugoslavia and all it represented, but they are also proud members of their nation and citizens of their nation-states, who unwillingly accept the fact that cooperation and reconciliation actually benefit them all. Yugonostalgia among the youth is especially ambiguous; it could rarely be characterized as "nostalgia" in a true sense of this word, as it often

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appears as nothing more than a quickly worn out and easily replaceable trend. On the other hand, there is a whole category of former Yugoslavs, as well as those born after the country's dissolution, who do not consider themselves yugonostalgic but nonetheless consciously recall positive value-models from the socialist past in order to overcome their present struggles, bring back "normalcy" to their lives, and frame a specific vision of the future. Importantly, such utilization of the socialist past significantly extends yugonostalgia's reach beyond the self-declared yugonostalgics, who are a minority in the region, and boosts its emancipatory and reconciliatory potential.

Furthermore, while emphasizing yugonostalgia's active and progressive side, we should bear in mind that it lacks an organized, programmed social-political dimension through which it could accomplish more serious goals. Nostalgically inspired activities, even open resistance and revolt (e.g. demonstrations in the streets against some political decision), are more an indicator of dissatisfaction with the current order of things than an organized struggle against it. In other words, some forms of active yugonostalgia cannot (and do not seek to) seriously undermine existing political and other conditions (Ekman and Linde 2005) – but rather can make them bearable.

Therefore, the task before the political elites and the societies in the former Yugoslav republics is to start seeing yugonostalgia more as a "cure" for the wounds of the 1990s than as a "poison" that can endanger the current order of things. The aim of yugonostalgia is not to restore the country and the system of the past, but to point out the flaws of the present societies, propose visions for improvement, and thus possibly provide a better future for everybody. Despite political elites' resentment of yugonostalgia, re-enacting the positive aspects of the common socialist past, including those that are objects of yugonostalgic feelings, can support the challenging process of trust-building and reconciliation in the entire former Yugoslavia. Engagement of a broader society in encouraging cross-national cooperation through emphasizing the inclusive elements of the common past – especially the media and educational system – would offer a valuable contribution to this process.

Yugonostalgia's reconciliatory potential exists. However, further qualitative and quantitative academic research is needed to fully examine the nature of that potential and to look into ways it can be used as a reconciliatory tool.

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Notes

1. Magnifico: The Land of Champions, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6RbLsByZUlQ.
2. Consisting of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM).
3. For more details on the culture of nostalgia and its manifestations, see, for example, Velikonja (2008), Baković (2008), and Pauker (2006).
4. In former Yugoslavia, children were initiated in the pioneer movement [*Savez pionira Jugoslavije*] under the Federation's ideal of "Brotherhood and Unity." All children of age seven and older, attended an annual ceremony, wore pioneer's uniforms – including a blue hat called *Titovka* [Tito's hat] and swore in *pionirska zakletva* [the Pioneer pledge].

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5. See, for example, www.juga.com, www.titoslavija.org, www.titoville.com, www.postyu.info, www.yugomuzej.com. Some fan pages and groups and number of members: SFR Jugoslavija – SFR Yugoslavia – 134,664 members, Josip Broz Tito – 54,502 members, Tovariš Josip Broz Tito [Comrad Josip Broz Tito] – 10,736 members, 25. Maj, Dan Mladosti [25 May, The Youth Day] – 62,524 members (accessed on 7 September 2012).
6. For more details on the nostalgic culture, see, for example, Velikonja (2008).
7. www.mojevrijeme.hr, "Hrvatska i BiH složne: U SFRJ se živjelo bolje," http://www.mojevrijeme.hr/magazin/2015/04/hrvatska-i-bih-slozne-u-sfrj-se-zivjelo-bolje/.
8. See note 5.
9. Facebook group: Izjasni se kao Jugosloven/ka na bosansko-hercegovačkom popisu [Declare yourself as a "Yugoslav" at the Bosnian and Herzegovinian population census], http://www.facebook.com/pages/Izjasni-se-kao-Jugoslovenka-na-bosansko-hercegova%C4%8Dkom-popisu/354511117902869?ref=ts.
10. See, for example, www.exyupoprock.com.
11. Live streaming: http://www.livestream.com/jugoslovenskatelevizija; YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/user/rtvjugoslavije.

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