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**The Past With A Future**  
**The Emancipatory Potential of Yugonostalgia<sup>1</sup>**

NOSTALGIA, OR ONCE UPON A TIME AND AGAIN

*The nostalgic is enamored of distance, not of the referent itself.*

Susan Stewart, 1993, 145

“Why, heck, you Slovenes cry for Yugoslavia if you were the first to opt out of it?” I was asked this and similar questions many times during the past years, while I travelled around the former common country and in diaspora in search of materials for my study of yugonostalgia: contacts, photos, souvenirs, antiquarian items, and gatherings of yugo-nostalgics.<sup>2</sup> The mood of this question was a combination of humor and seriousness, sarcasm and pride, acrimony and benevolence – in short, the typical mixture that helped *our people*, which is a synonym for ex-Yugoslavs, survive the many political (mis)fortunes of the past decades. This brief, clear and provocative question was an inspiration and encouragement to continue with my research on similar phenomena in other countries in transition from the Baltic Sea to the Balkans, and from Eastern Germany to Russia. Various forms of *red nostalgia*, a phenomenon that could not possibly have been anticipated by anyone twenty years ago, are today encountered on various levels, in various environments, generations, constellations and under many names.

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<sup>1</sup> This text was for the first time published under the title “Povratak otpisanih – Emancipatorski potencijali jugonostalgije” in anthology “Zid je mrtav, živeli zidovi!”, edited by Ivan Čolović; Biblioteka XX vek, Belgrade; 2009; pp. 366-396.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this term should be shortened to yugostalgia, by analogy with Ostalgie used by eastern Germans.

Let me clarify one important point early on: nostalgia tells more about what is absent now, what we miss here and now, than about how *good it was once*. Accordingly, when reflecting on this phenomenon, we should focus on the current situation and popular sentiment. Post-Yugoslav statelets or *burek republics*, as I maliciously named them elsewhere by analogy with banana republics (*burek* is a typical Balkan **snack**), lag behind the other former socialist countries in many respects. Haunted by countless human tragedies which will take several generations to heal, at loggerheads with each other following one decade of armed conflict and another decade of non-armed but no less destructive conflict, adhering to Lenin's maxim *the worse, the better*, reeling from bloodshed and destruction which we naively believed could not happen again during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, plundered through privatization, denationalization, *turbo-capitalism*, sales and other legal robberies, divided by the Schengen wall and new external and internal walls that replaced open borders which lay there for decades, these countries now linger on the periphery of still another *new Europe* which invented for them still another name, *the Western Balkans*. These are the countries that were *liberated* for the fourth or third time within a single century; in which *brotherhood and unity of Yugoslav nations* were replaced with the *brotherhood and unity of our nation* versus everybody else; *Partisan fighters* were squeezed out by *independence fighters*; *the moral authority* and infallibility of one political party were replaced with the sacrosanctity of one or another Church; the destroyed monuments to former idols with new monuments to new heroes; the communist *monolithic mindset* with nationalist *one-mindedness* perversely intertwined with a neo-liberal consensus; the partocracy of one political party with the partocracy of many political parties; and obsessive implementation of the ruling party's directives with obsessive following of directives strewn along the road leading to the another *riddle of human history solved*, which comes in the form of accession to the EU and NATO.

The erosion of the old system and the construction of new ones had a literally miraculous effect on many devotees of the former Yugoslavia and its socialism, setting them on the *road to Damascus*. Armed with the new worldview and demonizing everyone and everything that existed before 1991, these former *communism* aficionados pushed out old dissidents, defending their new standpoints with the same curious mixture of opportunism and fanaticism. Speaking symbolically, for many people the killing of *Yugoslavia and communism* meant the killing of a

*Yugoslav and a communist* within themselves. This was what happened to an entire regiment of leading politicians<sup>3</sup> as well as entertainers,<sup>4</sup> so it is interesting to compare their standpoints before and after.

These were the circumstances that gave rise to nostalgia *for those times*, emerging as a whisper and gradually becoming ever louder. The phenomenon is fantastically complicated and more difficult to explain than it may appear at first glance, even more difficult than it appears to nostalgics themselves. Its many dimensions should be considered in their complexity but interpreted individually, since nostalgia is a sign of both identity and differences. The first thing that should be kept in mind when analyzing yugonostalgia is that, just like any other emotional state or ideological narrative, it is very difficult to measure. Nostalgia is by definition incoherent and illogical,<sup>5</sup> so its real scope can be determined only by observing its consequences and

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<sup>3</sup> Let me mention only the most renowned among them. Dobrica Ćosić's enthusiasm for Yugoslavia was followed from the 1980s by accusations reflected in the statement that it was *the most profound and the longest moral crisis and moral wretchedness of the Yugoslav nations* (in Kuljić, 2005, 433-436). The late President of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, began to fight against the *Yugocommunist and Yugo-Serbian* system only after a period of fervent *enchantment with it* reflected in an eulogy to Yugoslavia in a book published in 1960 (p. 196): "The grandeur and unspoiled beauty of the socialist revolution, its historical victories in the struggle for freedom and its achievements in the struggle for the progress of society, socialist democracy and humanism, led the nations of Yugoslavia – as the Program of the Communist League of Yugoslavia proudly noted – to supreme moral and political heights of contemporary humanity." Dimitrij Rupel, the former Slovenian Foreign Minister, is today convinced that "Yugoslavia was a dictatorship" (D. Bilefsky, "Oh Yugoslavia! How They Long for Your Firm Embrace", New York Times, 30 January 2008, p. 8), but when Tito died he wrote a frenetic necrology in which he said, among other things, that it was necessary to spread the truth about Tito's greatness internationally: "When we read all those articles and polemics, we often forget that they are not intended for our patriots and Tito's supporters, that **we** are already supporters and already convinced, in contrast to **them**, who are not yet convinced and to whom we still need to explain many things, which has begun to annoy us a little. Nothing special, nothing new!, is what we shout in our fervent immodesty." (Teleks, 6 May 1980, p. 47). Janez Janša, the former Slovenian Prime Minister, also admitted that he was no "exception as regards understanding Tito as such," that is to say, "that he was the supreme authority, for many almost a divinity." (The statement published on the web site of his party, 16 March 2009). The joke-loving Bosnians have a special name for this kind of people (converts) among Bosniaks: they call them "watermelons" - green on the outside but red inside.

<sup>4</sup> I'd like to mention only two of them who, paradoxically, are today highly regarded by yugonostalgics. Dorđe Balašević, *who, as one of his songs goes, saw Tito three times, stated* that the popular song "Count on us," actually "escaped his control and became something that was practically not his at all." (In an interview with P. Luković entitled "U Hristovim godinama"/Of Christ's Age, Duga, 18 February 1989, p. 43). He then went on to explain (p. 42) *that he "ate the ... cactus, to use a mild term, when I sang 'Count on us:' indoctrinated, strongly convinced that we rule* wherever we go and that we are the happiest people of all, I realized that my generation was not only brainwashed, but also completely brainless, without ideals, that we were used as a tool." And Zdravko Čolić, who once enchantingly sang "Comrade Tito we swear to you," only later realized that "communism was responsible for our not realizing what a fantastic place we live in and what a gift multi-ethnicity is." (In an interview with V. Milek entitled "Nekomu je dano, drugemu ne"/ Given To Some, But Not To All, Delo, SP, 24 November 2007, p. 12)..

<sup>5</sup> The *good old times* are often recollected nostalgically by their ideological opponents as well. For example, contemporary Russian right-wingers value the imperial grandeur and achievement of the former super-power, the Soviet Union, and criticize from this point of view the present Russian regime. The same could be said about the

effects. Put differently, if Yugoslavia had been solely the reign of *criminal terror*, why do thousands of people rush to various anniversaries related to Yugoslavia, and why do hundreds of thousands visit the yugonostalgic web sites? If it was simply a *communist Reich*, why do so many instances of graffiti extol it? If everything was bad then, why is yugonostalgic pop-cultural production so massive? If people really hated it, why would anyone now buy T-shirts, various memorabilia and other political kitsch exploiting its name which obviously is a good selling point. If life was truly hard *under Yugoslavia*, why are those times relatively highly evaluated in various public surveys? To understand this, and to obtain a balanced picture of Yugoslavia, we should look at both sides of the phenomenon or, schematically speaking, we should employ both “the top down” and “the bottom up” approach, and examine it as a production and discourse as well as a social fact and mentality.

Nostalgia always appears when history “accelerates its pace” and “shows its teeth,” so it is an inevitable, although deliberately concealed, companion of modernization and progressivist ideologies, as well as of dynamic and dramatic periods following the destruction of the old world when we still wait for the new one to be constructed. Therefore, nostalgia dwells in an interspace between “no longer” and “not yet.” In our example it is a **symptom** of the period that does not have its dedicated name either, but must be content with being post-something – post-socialist transition. In this sense, yugonostalgia is nothing special – similar nostalgias for the recent past occur everywhere in the contemporary world of “liquid modernity.” There as here, the past is nostalgized and successfully fabricated and instrumentalized.<sup>6</sup> Yugonostalgia would have emerged even if socialism had not been destroyed and Yugoslavia had not imploded. The only significant difference between it and nostalgias in western countries is that the current western political systems and ideologies are not as antagonistic to the past as the new post-socialist are, where everything that existed before is fiercely castigated by new political ideologies which

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positive assessment of former leaders. One of the public figures in Slovenia well-known for his nostalgia for Tito is the extreme nationalist, Zmago Jelinčič. An empirical research among the secondary school students from Republika Srpska (one of the three entities of Bosnia-Herzegovina) showed that the most respected personality of the past and present was Josip Broz (5.6 %), closely followed by Radovan Karadžić and Draža Mihajlović (3.3% and 2.4% respectively) and that he is much more respected by children from mixed marriages (13.9%) than by children whose both parents belong to the same nation (4.5%) (Čekrlija, Turjačanin, Puhalo, 2004, 49-51).

<sup>6</sup> A small example of this is the vintage industry which produces new items that look old, with a patina of old age included. Old looks *spic and span* on the reproductions of postcards dating from the early 20th century, in new-old metal toys, factory-worn out jeans, or new T-shirts featuring the text *Rolling Stones US Tour 1972* and looking just as old.

obsessively, and for the time being unsuccessfully, search for new identities. We should add here that nostalgia is directly proportional to unrealized expectations: the greater hopes and promises, the greater dissatisfaction and despair. Huyssen (Huyssen, 1995, 47) calls this a “nostalgia of despair”. The consequences of the disappointment are twofold: nostalgia on the one hand, and political apathy and cynical resignation on the other.<sup>7</sup>

In post-Yugoslav republics there is a multitude of nostalgic discourses and productions. In addition to yugonostalgia,<sup>8</sup> it is possible to come across nostalgia of traditionalists for the Arcadian way of life (dreams about peaceful, orderly rural life),<sup>9</sup> then nostalgia of nationalists for the kind of national unity that existed during the first years of independence (when, presumably, political differences were not important and everyone worked for *the nation*)<sup>10</sup>, nostalgia of religious integralists for pre-modern spiritual and ethical unity, and even nostalgia of former civil society activists, social critics and protagonists of alternative cultures of the 1980s, who find later developments difficult to accept (in the sense of a missed opportunity to create a truly open society, as reflected in their anguished question “*is this what we fought for?*”).<sup>11</sup>

My intention in writing this essay is neither to praise nor to condemn yugonostalgia. Sentimental, heartbreaking texts about yugonostalgia today abound in newspapers, literary journals, blogs and even expert publications, filling local nostalgics with morbid joy and representing still another proof for foreigners that we are quite different from them. On the other hand, frontal assaults on yugonostalgia and biased critiques have become in the last twenty years

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<sup>7</sup> This reminds me of George Carlin who said that within every cynical man lies a disappointed idealist. It is this resignation on the part of the majority, and their turning away from social and political reality, that creates a fertile ground for the emergence of various extremist groups and parties. Radicalism always feeds on the disappointment and apathy of the majority.

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, it implies nostalgia for the second Yugoslavia, but not the *first one* (monarchy) as well.

<sup>9</sup> It is present in abundance in contemporary folk music and other folk discourses which draw attention to the *harmful* consequences of modernization, technologies, urbanization, contemporary life-styles and the loss of *real values*. What is ironical is that this attitude is expressed using the very resources and technological advantages that are condemned.

<sup>10</sup> This nostalgia for the unity of the Slovenes during the struggle for independence, a unity like *we have never seen before and will never see again*, was the thread that ran through all political speeches at the celebration of the 15th anniversary of Slovenia's independence, on 25 June 2006.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Žižek's conclusion, that “since the time of the (relatively) bright period during the late 1980s, Slovenia has regressed to become one of the darkest environments in the Balkans” (the interview with M. Štefančič, Mladina, 29 May 2009).

an integral part of nationalist, neo-liberal and patriarchal discourses, all of them inevitably peppered with yugofobia and balkanofobia. This kind of anti-nostalgia is on a par with nostalgia with respect to the absence of reflection.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, my writing will not be a lofty, and often arrogant, intellectual critique which a priori discredits the phenomenon of (yugo)nostalgia branding it an instance of impotent escapism to which resort the losers of the transition period or the lament of the shipwreck survivors aged 40 and over who are disillusioned with the present and therefore dream about the past.<sup>13</sup>

My interests rather lie in the active, emancipatory and counter-hegemonic potential of yugonostalgia and its creative inspiration. The goal of this essay is to criticize the usual understandings of yugonostalgia which range from pathetically romantic to gloomy ones. The interpretation of nostalgia as a kind of mental rear mirror, or an anesthetic, or a compensatory feeling offsetting present difficulties, is in my opinion incomplete, because the scope of nostalgic phenomena suggests that it is much more than that. Therefore, I want to liberate the notion of nostalgia from its burden of passivity and show that it is not an exclusively defensive and paralyzing closed-type discourse that is in love with the past, or a kind of masochistic rekindling of something that is irreversibly lost, or the craving for lost innocence without prospect, but rather a critical and engaged attack on the current state of affairs, aimed against new hegemonic practices and discourses whose onslaught we have been enduring for two decades now, and an incentive for creating alternative social practices. I strongly believe that nostalgia is much more than an intimate, passive and bitter-sweet story invented by *post-Yugoslavs* to lament their better past, and that it can be a new liberating discourse and an ideological platform with the potential to influence current political developments.

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<sup>12</sup> Let me quote at least one of the countless examples of (very angry) anti-nostalgia: *May God enlighten the minds of all yugo-nostalgics, yugophiles, traitors and spies in Croatia. It's time for this to happen. And may they realize finally that ex-Yugoslavia does not exist any more. There is no more crime, disorder, great comrades Titos, inflation, even-odd dictatorship, one-mindedness. It is past time. You have to accept it, comrades. Have your brains been completely washed?* (Mihael Bičak, "Zaglupljivanje hrvatskog naroda", Hrvatsko slovo, 7 July 2006, p. 28.).

<sup>13</sup> This is in line with Marx's statement that "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (1950, 9). But make no mistake: nostalgia for socialism is by no means the only possible critique of the present, nor is it the ideological platform of the present-day left wing, as it is often insinuated when arguing that it is not capable of creating its position in the new way but resorts to the safe past. Active nostalgia for socialist times is just one of the many critiques, which are adjusted to new conditions and based on completely new foundations. Here I do not have in mind the compromised post-Yugoslav *left-wing* (I use this term in want of a better one), or various self-proclaimed *socio-democrats* and *socialist* parties. Rather, I refer to the growing number of small, marginal, trans-national groups, movements and networks, which introduce new ideas into the political and cultural left-wing, as well as new media and principles of organization and operation. However, this is an issue that would deserve an essay in its own right.

Twenty years is a long enough period to enable a reflection on the past, but also short enough for memories of those times to be still vivid. Nostalgia for the *second Yugoslavia* is, in addition to anti-nostalgia, amnesia and historical revisionism, one of the four strategies employed by its successors to deal with the past. However, this recent past appears to be still with us: the newly formed countries abandoned both socialism and Yugoslavia, but socialism and Yugoslavia have not completely abandoned them. One proof: hardly a day passes by without one of the headlines in the news in post-Yugoslav countries referring to the former Yugoslavia or something connected with it.<sup>14</sup> Once the anti-Yugoslav hysteria of the late 1980s and the early 1990s in the former Yugoslav republics subsided, the trend gradually reversed towards a more tolerant and even a more positive and constructive attitude towards Yugoslavia. Today, reports on events referring to *those times* are plentiful: every now and then one or another former Yugoslav pop band reunites and sets out on still another *last tour*;<sup>15</sup> the *Old Marshal* (Tito, of course) triumphs in the surveys asking about whether he was a *positive or a negative historical figure*; cyber-Yugoslavia and various Tito associations are being established on a regular basis; thousands of *old comrades* and *young anti-Fascist forces* regularly gather at the site of one or another great battle fought by Partisan fighters; the *Youth Day* is again celebrated and the *relay baton race* re-enacted; bars and restaurants whose names, image or slogans revive *those times* mushroom across the territory of the former Yugoslavia.<sup>16</sup> Nostalgia for the late country has become, whether or not we like it, one of the codes of cultural and political communication in this region.

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<sup>14</sup> From March 2009 to June 2009 eight Slovenian newspapers and magazines featured 61 articles dealing with the former Yugoslavia, Tito, self-management socialism and so on. The titles of such articles are generally sensational: “Tito Almost Pulled Down” (about a drunk man who recently run into the Tito monument in Kumrovec, [www.24ur.com/novice/crna-kronika/skoraj-zrusil-tita.html](http://www.24ur.com/novice/crna-kronika/skoraj-zrusil-tita.html), 2 April 2009); “A Plane Like Tito’s at the Meeting” (a journalist reporting on an air show in an Austrian military base found this important enough to mention it in the title, [www.rtvsllo.si/zabava/zanimivosti/foto-na-mitingu-tudi-letalokakrsnega-je-imel-tito/206504](http://www.rtvsllo.si/zabava/zanimivosti/foto-na-mitingu-tudi-letalokakrsnega-je-imel-tito/206504), 4 July 2009); “Tito Again Causes Traffic Jams” (on the day of the opening of an exhibition on him in Belgrade, , 25 March 2009); “Tito and Party – Hajduk’s Army” (a report on a football-related incident in Dalmatia when a Dinamo fan provoked a Hajduk fan using this slogan; *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 27 July 2009, p. 46).

<sup>15</sup> From Novi fosili to Pankrti, and from Bijelo Dugme to Plavi orkestar and on.

<sup>16</sup> Even the very controversial ones like Cafe bar OZNA (OZNA was the notorious security and intelligence agency in the former Yugoslavia), in the very heart of Belgrade, with its logo depicting Aleksandar Ranković and Slobodan Penezić Krčun (two heads of the agency) and displaying slogans: *We Serve the People!* and *Again in the Center of Developments*. Another one is the cage-like “Goli otok” decoration (Goli otok was the infamous island prison for political opponents in the former Yugoslavia) in one corner of the Marshal restaurant in Bihać abounding with pictures of Tito, symbols and slogans dating from his time.

*LONELY PLANET: EX-YUGOSLAVIA – PASSIVE YUGONOSTALGIA**Now I'm nobody. Or everybody.*

Dubravka Ugrešić, 2006, 349

Indeed, I could have written this essay in the style of a Lonely Planet guide book, offering itineraries for a journey across the mental, geographical and virtual districts of the non-existent country. These would include visits to the well-known gathering places of yugonostalgics (Kumrovec, Dedinje, Jajce, Brioni, Drvar and others), various yugo-nostalgic bars and restaurants across Our Beautiful Country No More, exhibitions referring to those times,<sup>17</sup> and the streets that survived the renaming hysteria and are still named after Tito or another socialist era hero or a Partisan fighter (plus those which have only recently been named after Tito, e.g., in Ljubljana and Fažana, Istria). An appendix for cyberfreaks would include the list of web sites devoted to Yugoslavia.

But I will not catalogue here various elegiac elements of pastoral yugonostalgia present en masse at yugonostalic events, in a multitude of articles, essays, collections and books, web sites and blogs, at the gathering of nostalgic groups, in urban culture (graffiti and street-art), mass culture, popular music and apologetic exhibitions. The repertoire of this kind of yugonostalgia is pre-set, practically unchangeable and fully in line with the once dominant discourse, as illustrated for example by an article about the Youth Day celebration with the indicative title *Simple joys of our youth*. These include things *that distinguished our adolescence*, such as Čunga Lunga and Bazooka chewing gums, Animal Kingdom chocolates and PEZ sweets, Lučka ice scream, Pingo juice, typical children games, cartoons, the white chalk and the green

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<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, several thematic exhibitions on these times were recently staged in Belgrade, attracting extensive media attention, many visitors, and naturally, provoking discussions. Let me mention the one entitled *Silver World* (silver items from all around the world given to Tito, 2008), *Tito's New Years* (his celebrations of new years, 2008), *Tito Effect* (around 500 items from his collection, 2009) and *Death in a Treasury* (a selection of some of the most interesting presents given to Tito, 2009); see also the catalogue accompanying the *Relay Batons 1945 – 1987* permanent exhibition (2008)

board reminding us of the first day at school, and so on.<sup>18</sup> Naturally, this old cultural cosmos has acquired a completely different meaning in new ideological and historical circumstances.

With all due respect to the views, sentiments and sensibility of yugonostalgics, I must say that the above is just one of the many aspects of this phenomenon, and the simplest one at that. It is propounded by the fans of times past who dwell on beautiful moments, achievements, episodes and personalities of those times, but without a moment's reflection. Their attitude towards the "Yu-wonderland" is invariably positive but the mood of their perspective varies.

The first nostalgic perspective is characterized by gloominess, meditateness, defensiveness, morbidity and vegetation on something that is dead and will never return. This is exploited by various antique shops, street vendors and flea market sellers across the former SFRY offering its fossilized remains (ranging from old medals and postage stamps to banknotes and flags). In 2003 one yugo-enthusiast established at his estate in Vojvodina, Serbia, a *mini-Yugoslavia* or *Yugoland*, where he organizes celebrations and nostalgic gatherings on the dates of various anniversaries. The cyber world is much the same. One web site says: *If you are a yugonostalgic, you will find many things about SFRY on this page. Return to the past (join hands in the kolo dance).*<sup>19</sup>

The second perspective on the lost Yu-universe is melancholic and sentimental: nostalgia is sweet sadness. *We loved it*, reads a badge that can be bought from street vendors; under the text is a silhouette of the SFRY in the colors of its flag. A Power Point presentation intended for the *Superb Generations of 1950...1960...1970*, which has recently circulated the web, celebrates the times of (be prepared for still another usual collection!) *crvendaći* (an old 100 dinar banknote), *Vegeta* (a brand of mixed herbs used in cooking), our fathers' memories of the times when they served in the Yugoslav People's Army, the Cocta drink, the uniforms worn by Tito's pioneers, the comic book hero Zagor, *fićo* (a popular Yugoslav-made car manufactured under license from Fiat), *Bijelo Dugme* (the most popular Yugoslav rock band), youth brigades, movies about Partisan fighters, and relay baton races in honor of Tito's birthday etc.; the background

<sup>18</sup> [www.rtvsllo.si/zabava/zanimivosti/drobne-radosti-nase-mladosti/203724](http://www.rtvsllo.si/zabava/zanimivosti/drobne-radosti-nase-mladosti/203724) , published on 28 May 2009. I could identify the more or less same collection of nostalgic items, events and sentiments while researching yugonostalgia among ex-Yugoslavs in Philadelphia and New York in 2005.

<sup>19</sup> [www.kissradio.biz/linkovi%20razno/JUGONOSTALGIJA.htm](http://www.kissradio.biz/linkovi%20razno/JUGONOSTALGIJA.htm) , published on 14 May 2009.

music is the Pink Panther tune.<sup>20</sup> A Montenegrin yugo-nostalgic and the founder of the *Embassy of SFRY* in Tivat,<sup>21</sup> has a phone number that is not difficult to memorize: 29-11-1943. It is the date of the Second AVNOJ Congress in Jajce when socialist Yugoslavia was established. He arrived at the celebration of its 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary in polished black Mercedes dating from the 1970s, decorated with Yugoslav flags and red stars, and bearing the registration plate reading TV-SFRJ1 (**TV stands for Tivat, his place of residence**). Belgrade yugo-nostalgics rearranged graffiti reading *Every street is Zoran Đinđić Street!* by crossing out the name of the assassinated Serbian PM and writing *AVNOJ* instead plus the red star: so, *Every street is AVNOJ street!*.

The third perspective on the good old times is entertaining and parody-like: the past is discussed in a relaxed manner but in a positive light. An excellent example of this type of nostalgia is “The Lexicon of Yu-Mythology” (Adrić, Arsentijević, Matic, 2004)<sup>22</sup>, not to speak about countless nostalgic celebrations and carnivals with the impersonators of Tito and his wife Jovanka appearing as guests, and with visitors wearing the outfits of “Tito’s pioneers” or the uniforms worn by Partisan fighters, Yugoslav police and army officers. The range of *crazy sounds* for mobile phones offered by the Slovenian company Pimp includes the popular song *Comrade Tito We Swear to You (that from your path we will not turn)* plus the Marshal’s picture, or the Yugoslav anthem *Hey, Slavs* plus the Yugoslav coat of arms.

The common denominators of these three nostalgic perspectives – morbid, melancholic and entertaining – are the absence of a prospect, passivity, disappointment with the present and apology for the past. This is the point where one encounters the double paradox of every nostalgia. First, it is attractive only because it is crystal clear that history cannot be repeated. As Susan Stewart says (1993, 145), “nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss.” And second, the nostalgics crave for something that never existed in the form they extol. They cherish fond memories of something that never existed as such. This is so because nostalgia is an ideological narrative much like any other and as such it is subject to all fundamental ideological methods used in the construction of a narrative, including selection, binarism, polarization and

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<sup>20</sup> Comments on how everything was better in those times end with the following statement: *We grew up like real children in harmony with the laws of nature before states and their institutions, governments and courts, began to determine how we should live. You, too, are part of “Don't Give Up, My Generation”.*

<sup>21</sup> See [www.konzulatsfrj.com/](http://www.konzulatsfrj.com/).

<sup>22</sup> See Mandić for witty descriptions of the mythology of the Yugoslav everyday dating from the 1970s (1976).

antagonizing. Needless to say, it is practically impossible to learn anything about the past from nostalgic fairy tales. They tell more about what is wrong now than about what was good in the past, and **in our case more about the betrayed hopes and broken promises during the period of transition than about** past reality. The world of the past is nowhere as perfect as in a nostalgic perception. The materialized reconstructions of the past – at memory sites, in the cyber space, at gatherings and anniversaries, in apologies, in nostalgic designs of public places or in small altars in private homes – are always hyper-realistic and completely unconvincing except to the members of a specific nostalgic circle.<sup>23</sup> They show that nostalgia tells us less about how it was and more about how it never was; less about how we were, and more about how we never were; less about past reality and more about the envisioned future of times past; little about how life once was, and more about what people dreamt about.

When something dies, we save it from oblivion by putting it in a museum or another safe place, where it functions as either a memento or a warning. The same fate was anticipated for Yugoslavia and socialism and it is precisely what both anti-nostalgia and passive nostalgia strive for, the former by disapproving of and discarding Yugoslavia, and the latter by lamenting it, musing over it or finding amusement in it. However, yugonostalgia and its kaleidoscopic manifestations have escaped the confinement of a museum refusing to restrict themselves to lamenting the lost paradise. In the circumstances of post-socialist and post-Yugoslav reality its message acquires new meanings, much more deeply penetrating people's minds and activities. Generally speaking, the less the past is confined to museums and the less institutional protection and conservation it enjoys, the more alive it is and the more present in people's minds.

### *LET'S MAKE IT AGAIN 1945-1990*<sup>24</sup> - ACTIVE NOSTALGIA

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<sup>23</sup> Hyper-realistic and anti-nostalgic museum collections and exhibitions on those times include "Museum of Communism" in Prague, "Museum of Socialist Realism" in Kozłówka, Poland, "Grūtas Park of Socialism" in Lithuania, "Memorial Park" in Budapest, an exhibition in Slovenia entitled "The Dark Side of the Moon – History of Totalitarianism in Slovenia, 1945-1990," the "Graveyard of Fallen Monuments," next to the New Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, and "DDR Museum" in Berlin. The logic underlying these exhibition is always the same, only the intended effects are different. Naturally, socialism has never been so perfectly totalitarian and omnipresent as it appears in these, as I call them, "socialist Disneylands."

<sup>24</sup> Graffiti in Istria, 2008.

*Next Station: Hope (Próxima Estación: Esperanza)*

Manu Chao, 2001

The emancipatory potential of nostalgia is either deliberately or unwittingly ignored for various reasons: for the sake of political correctness or pragmatism, because the recent past is still a sensitive topic, because it is conceptualized and accepted as a harmless game or travesty causing pleasant excitement and *warming the heart*, or in order to make a profit from nostalgic tourism, or **to compete with the dominant ideological discourses of today**. By contrast, its passive, meditative aspect is sometimes deliberately exaggerated to facilitate its acceptance. I strongly believe that new nationalist and other ideologies that today dominate the statelets that emerged after Yugoslavia's disintegration (neo-liberalism, new eurocentrism, patriarchalism, religious integralism etc.) are less antagonistic towards each other (e.g. one nationalism or one religious fanaticism versus another) than they are towards Yugoslavia and the past. They adamantly reject proofs that it was possible to live and prosper together and that, despite tensions and conflicts, the coexistence of diversities at the cross-roads where the Balkans, the Mediterranean and Central Europe meet was a viable option. Since for them this coexistence is the most irritating aspect of the former country, this coexistence of diversity was their first target of attack after they took over the power. Therefore, for the new ideologies yugonostalgia is invariably dangerous, even when it is manifested in innocent, intimate and lethargic ways. In line with this, the terms *yugonostalgia* and *yugonostalgic* have become convenient swear words in new political vocabularies applied to all those who refuse to follow new ideological discourses. Nevertheless, these terms have only recently succeeded in detaching themselves from negative connotations, but not because society has become more tolerant, but because the phenomenon has become widespread. By taking on many forms and infecting many activities, social groups and generations, it has become an element of the amorphous but important counter-hegemonic platform for many people who have found themselves – willingly or unwillingly – *on the opposite side* of rampant new ideologies.

For me, a genuine symptom of yugonostalgia is not, say, a 50-year old needlework depicting the Yugoslav coat-of-arms that can be seen on the walls of some living rooms, or singing of Partisan fighter songs at the gatherings of old mates who met while serving in the Yugoslav People's

Army or in work brigades. Rather, I see the symptoms of yugonostalgia in T-shirts with a yugonostalgic motives or texts and, even more so, in yugonostalgic web pages.<sup>25</sup> Taking the latter as a point of departure, it is possible to say that (yugo)nostalgia is also emancipatory discourse, implicitly and explicitly. These web sites have several things in common. The prevailing mood is sad or melancholic, occasionally with an admixture of joy at having been *lucky to live during these times*. They include commercial advertisements (selling nostalgic items and tour packages to the growing number of yugonostalgic destinations and events). They condemn the current situation, the new ruling elites and ideologies, and call on visitors to stand up against these. They publish critical articles and encourage visitors to fight for social justice, equality and brotherhood, to join protest, to mark former proletarian and Yugoslav holidays, to sign petitions and so on. Sentimental nostalgia meets non-sentimental, active and engaged nostalgia. No teary eyes here, but rather the clenched fist.

Criticism of the present state of affairs is therefore the first aspect of the emancipatory potential of yugonostalgia. As already said, nostalgia tells more about the present than about the past; it denounces present deficiencies rather than speaks about what existed *in those times*. The assumingly superior past is recollected primarily to be able to criticize the inferiority of the present. This is obvious at various yugonostalgic rallies where present political leaders are castigated by contrasting the glorified past with the present time. In decimated Bosnia-Herzegovina, yugonostalgic graffiti are often found on traffic signs, which – what a perversity! – welcome you to one or other *entity* of the formerly-not-entitled Bosnia-Herzegovina. Just like in other transition countries, peoples of the former Yugoslav republics are dissatisfied with the changes. They expected more.<sup>26</sup> The sarcastic words of a young Albanian from Kosovo in the video spot for a yugonostalgic band Zaklonišče prepeva are a good illustration of their

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<sup>25</sup> The list of those is impressive: Slobodna Jugoslavija/Free Yugoslavia [www.slobodnajugoslavija.org/](http://www.slobodnajugoslavija.org/) , Jugonostalgija [www.kissradio.biz/linkovi%20razno/JUGONOSTALGIJA.htm](http://www.kissradio.biz/linkovi%20razno/JUGONOSTALGIJA.htm) , Generalni konzulat SFRJ/Embassy of Yugoslavia [www.konzulatsfrj.com/](http://www.konzulatsfrj.com/) , Tito's Home Page [www.titoville.com/](http://www.titoville.com/) , Leksikon Yu-mitologije [www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/](http://www.leksikon-yu-mitologije.net/) , Nostalgija - Pjesme iz cijele Jugoslavije/Nostalgia – Songs From All Over Yugoslavia [www.nostalgija.com/](http://www.nostalgija.com/) , Jugonostalgija na youtube/Yugonostalgia on YouTube [www.youtube.com/user/Jugonostalgija](http://www.youtube.com/user/Jugonostalgija), Cyber Yugoslavia [www.juga.com/](http://www.juga.com/) and many others.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g. data for Croatia in Ferić, Burušić (2004); comparisons with Russia are also interesting (Levada Center, 2006).

frustration: *Hey, can't wait for this democracy to be over, so that we can again live as human beings!*<sup>27</sup>

Yugonostalgia is also a defense of the past against new hegemonic discourses and their benign and malign consequences. It is the second aspect of its emancipatory potential. It protects the personal and historical continuity of (post)Yugoslav generations. The lofty presentism of new ideologies entirely ignores, demonizes and revises the past, and pretends that history began during the early 1990s when new countries were formed. This breakneck turn is countered by the defense of memory. The majority of former Yugoslavs have no other history but one related to the socialist era. Regardless of how good or bad it was, they do not want it taken away from them. *They've been destroying it endlessly, but cannot come to the end of it*, is one statement reflecting this sentiment. *For us, 1991 was not the beginning*, said one Slovenian yugonostalgic. Such opinions are not isolated. The majority of respondents participating in a public opinion survey in Slovenia stated that their life in the former Yugoslavia was “good or very good”, and in general their view on the Yugoslav decades and the past system was very positive (see Toš et al., 1999, 565, 872; Toš et al., 2004, 474).<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, yugonostalgia has a significant creative potential within various fields of culture, including pop culture and contemporary design and arts. In my opinion, this creativity constitutes its third emancipatory potential. Positive figures, episodes and values from the past have become an inspiration for the artists of various generations, ranging from film directors to performers.<sup>29</sup> Yugonostalgia is further present in youth subcultures drawing on the rebellious and leftist tradition of the past system. In the “graffiti battles” in Belgrade, young left-wingers counter graffiti painted by various nationalist and clero-fascist groups by putting up the SKOJ (the League of the Communist Youth of Yugoslavia), sickle and hammer signs. Several years ago, stencil graffiti reading *Born in SFRY* appeared in Ljubljana.<sup>30</sup> It is also possible to observe

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<sup>27</sup> The song entitled “Vote For Us”, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> These results corroborate the behavioralistic thesis that external, objective factors (GDP growth rate, political stability, economic development etc.) directly influence subjective perceptions and changes in the mentality; in this concrete example this translates into “the faster the progress, the lesser nostalgia.”

<sup>29</sup> A real nostalgic genre, or at least nostalgic motifs, are found in certain books and essays by Slavenka Drakulić, Dubravka Ugrešić, Aleš Debeljak and Miljenko Jergović; in the movies by Goran Marković, Želimir Žilnik and Vinko Brešan; performances by Alketa Xhafa and the Eclipse group; paintings by Walter Steinacher, photographic projects by Goranka Matić and Milomir Kovačević, installations by Marko Kovačič, dramatic texts by Sebastijan Horvat and Radoslav Zlatan Dorić and in many other works of art.

<sup>30</sup> And this is repeated four times, like in Springsteen’s song “Born in USA” (1984). See also another allusion to this song, this time a remake by the Polish group Snake Charmer, Born in PRL (Born in People’s Republic of Poland),

the creative potential of yugonostalgia in design and advertisements featuring typical socialist motives and aesthetic preferences of that period (e.g. social realism, progressist modernism and functionalism, and to some extent Soviet avant-garde as well). Such examples are the *Snedvičprogres*, a retro sandwich bar in Ljubljana, the sign for a hairdresser in the old part of Belgrade,<sup>31</sup> and Broz Café bar in Skopje. Various pop bands and singers occasionally or regularly produce nostalgic songs or include nostalgic motives in their image or concerts across the territory of the former Yugoslavia, or *From Vardar to Triglav and from Djerdap to the Adriatic*, as the refrain of a popular pop-patriotic song goes (see Tijana Todesk-Dapčević<sup>32</sup>, Zaklonišče prepeva<sup>33</sup>, Rock Partyzani<sup>34</sup>, The Beat Fleet<sup>35</sup> or Zabranjeno pušenje<sup>36</sup>).

Nostalgia in these new productions is not mimetic and not limited to imitating the models from the past. Instead, it is eclectic, satirical, deliberately profanized and humorous. For example, Tito on T-shirts smokes marijuana instead of his trademark Cuban cigar; a CD insert depicts him riding a chopper; Tito's pioneers in video spots are silicon blondes in revealing clothes; Partisan fighters' resistance is related to the subversiveness of rock-n-roll; and Yugoslav *brotherhood and unity* to new *multi-culti* trends. Nostalgia is often an encouragement for something new which is associated with *good old times*. I call this phenomenon *neostalgia*, or *new nostalgia* among younger, post-Yugoslav generations. For example, criticism of the new dominant ideology of *united Europe* is obvious in the text *Yu-ropa* on T-shirts that appeared several years ago. NATO-fanaticism in dominant discourses in Slovenia preceding Slovenia's accession to this militarist organization was mocked in graffiti reading *Comrade Rumsfeld, we swear to you* (by analogy with *Comrade Tito, we swear to you*), while the overabundance of folk-culture on Slovenian national television was countered with the slogan *Better Tito than Trefalt Mito*.<sup>37</sup> These are typical post-modern techniques using pastiche, kitsch, irony,

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available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFfJSpwPmTk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFfJSpwPmTk).

<sup>31</sup> The design of the sign of this shop that promises *Truly Good Haircuts* is eclectic: photos of a platinum beauty, reminiscent of those in Hitchcock's movies, plus a cartoon-vignette in the style of Roy Lichtenstein, all of it against the backdrop depicting the Yugoslav flag.

<sup>32</sup> The song entitled "Everything is the same, only he is not here," 2007.

<sup>33</sup> The song entitled "I'm going rock-'n-roll, mum", 2001.

<sup>34</sup> The song entitled "Yugo", 2008.

<sup>35</sup> The song entitled "Nostalgic", 2004.

<sup>36</sup> The song entitled "Yugo 45", 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Mito Trefalt was a television presenter well known for his broadcasts dealing with characteristically Slovenian topics.

provocation, theatricality, inter-textuality and repetition, in the style of Eco's semiological guerilla. They invert the old figures, symbols and stories and lend them new meanings.

One strong potential of memories and nostalgia lies in their ability to create groups, called *memory-groups* or *nostalgia-groups*. Yugonostalgia therefore brings new options of collective identification, even of organizing by circumventing currently dominant nationalism, neo-liberalism and patriarchalism.<sup>38</sup> It is this social rather than ideological aspect of nostalgia that is also dangerous in the same way anything that challenges the hegemony of the ruling system is dangerous, and it is what provokes attacks on it and exclusion although there is usually no political strategy or program behind such nostalgia. And in our case, it is additionally **discomforting** for the majority of new top dogs, because it audaciously pricks their troubled conscience (i.e. their *yugo-communist* past, to use this hackneyed compound).

The emancipatory aspect of yugonostalgia further lies in its direct engagement in politics, much the same as anywhere else where nostalgia has been instrumentalized to serve political ends. The idealized pictures of the glorious past were constituent parts of the neo-conservative ideological agendas of Margaret Thatcher<sup>39</sup> and Ronald Reagan,<sup>40</sup> as well as various religious traditionalists and fundamentalists. Zyuganov's Russian neo-communists, an important political party, also exploit the iconography and slogans of the *good old times* to capitalize on the strong nostalgic emotions of Russian voters disgusted by transition. The same can be said about yugonostalgia, which has been engaging in new political conflicts in post-Yugoslav countries in two ways. One is symbolic, and involves Yugoslav and socialist symbols and slogans displayed during political and social protests. To the horror of local right-wingers, the red flags of the Yugoslav Communist League and socialist Yugoslavia and Slovenia could be seen at the protests of students (2007), workers (2007) and anti-Fascists (2009) in Ljubljana. The party called *The Association of Tito's Left Forces* in Macedonia has around 3500 members who strive for the *return and development of everything that had been positive in socialist Yugoslavia before it dissolved*. This, naturally, implies the leading role of the worker class, the self-management socialist model, free education and health care for all, and re-nationalizing of the property that

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<sup>38</sup> For the role of nostalgia among refugees fleeing from Nazism to Latin America, see Spitzer, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Her rhetoric included slogans like: *Make Britain Great Again*. (In a statement for the annual edition of *Conservative Monthly News* 1975)..

<sup>40</sup> For example, by referring to the *American roots, patriarchal values, a strong state, an individual initiative, patriotic pride, religious tradition* and *determined foreign policy*. For a critique of Reagan's nostalgia, see Lowenthal, 1989, 26.

was privatized and plundered during the transition period.<sup>41</sup> The recently established Communist Movement of Yugoslavia is less known. It condemns liberal capitalism as a system designed for *the ruling elites and the big capital owners*, and calls it the *pyramid of apocalyptic evil we have been seeing in Yugoslavia for the past twenty years*.<sup>42</sup>

There are also many other legal and political yugonostalgic entities. For example, several tens of *Josip Broz Tito* associations, most of them in Croatia (twenty altogether, most of them located in Istria) and in Bosnia-Herzegovina (more than forty). These associations engage not only in activities typical of such associations, e.g., commemorations, marking of various *red-decades* anniversaries, the organization of gatherings, excursions and the like, but also in day-to-day politics. For example, Bosnian associations bearing Tito's name were active in anti-Israeli protests during Israel's latest attack on Gaza; they also publicly opposed sending Bosnian deminers to occupied Iraq; and protested against the announced concert of the Croatian neo-fascist rock singer Tompson. They encourage citizens to take part in elections and support various initiatives, for example, one advocating the introduction of a law that would forbid the establishment and operation of neo-fascist organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## THE POLITICS OF HOPE OR THE FUTURE OF NOSTALGIA

*Hope is not a plan.*

Graffiti in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina

Let us now move for a moment to the new center of the world, the USA, and recall the slogan used by Barack Obama at the last elections, the one which appeared countless times in his propaganda, statements, and in the items of political kitsch sold in the streets: *Hope*. In the circumstances of the economic crisis, social perturbations, ecological threats and the fiasco of US foreign policy, the emotion that remained at the bottom of Pandora's box grabbed the center stage of the their political scene. In my opinion, the politics of hope has a much greater potential than it appears at first glance in contemporary times dominated by the obsession with efficiency

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<sup>41</sup> They recognize the role of Yugoslavia in the survival and development of the Macedonian nation. A conversation with the leaders of the party in Skopje, in August 2008.

<sup>42</sup> [www.vest.si/2009/05/03/jugokomunisti/](http://www.vest.si/2009/05/03/jugokomunisti/), published on 4. 5. 2009. Ninety years after the unification of Yugoslavia they want to *actualize the idea of unification*.

and the imperative of presentism (or immanence). Consumer society rests precisely on the assumption that there is no past and future, that everything is here and now, in the eternal present time, converted into conveniences accessible to everyone. Naturally, everyone who has money! Consequently, it is anti-utopian by definition, having no need for transcendence.

However, throughout history as well as today, hope has found ways to express itself on various levels, in various forms, and in many languages, as Ernst Bloch argues (Bloch, 1981). *There is always hope*, to use the simplest slogan of optimism: utopian wishes and dreams about a better tomorrow are integral part of individual and collective human existence and of man's gaze fixed upon the future. These impulses appear constantly in places where we would least expect them, in apparently innocent ideas and activities, and either explicitly and deliberately, or implicitly and spontaneously, oppose the omnipotent presentism and **the principle of reality**. After all, throughout its history Christianity has obsessively searched for *New Jerusalem* although none among the believers knows first-hand how the old one looked like. In much the same way, politics and cultures have always searched for *perfect worlds and just societies*. Precisely because of this, every utopia, as a transcendence of the existing and an anticipation of the new, is by definition subversive. It courageously engages in social developments and political struggles. It is then no wonder, as Jameson argues (Jameson, 2005, 193), that "the desire called Utopia becomes the most dangerous political enemy, the one most worthy – despite its seeming insubstantiality – of persistent and vigilant critique."

Nostalgic vignettes too reveal the elements of utopia. At times it seems that what they present is "science fiction," or rather "political fiction" rather than recent history: *Never and nowhere will there exist a better system than the Yugoslav one was*, said one of my interlocutors in Bosnia-Herzegovina; *that country cared about ordinary man and didn't protect the rich men*, argued another one from Croatia.<sup>43</sup> Young people were presumably able to *learn, plan and create their own future; working people and citizens could directly decide about all issues that concerned them; people's will was taken into account and there existed a welfare state; everyone had the right to free education, health care and secure pension, and salaries were regular and*

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<sup>43</sup> Field research, June-September 2008.

*decent*.<sup>44</sup> A visitor to the Tito memorial house in his birthplace Kumrovec noted in the guest book that life in Yugoslavia was *peaceful, happy and satisfied*.<sup>45</sup> Yet even its most devoted fans are aware that Yugoslavia was never like they want to remember it, that it is more a dream about a country they would like to live in or a dream about life as it should be. As the motto at the beginning of this essay says, nostalgia is determined by and born of distance formed towards the object of admiration.

Therefore I am strongly convinced that in attempting to understand nostalgia, we should take into account the pleasant memories of the past and its utopian dimension, the social critique of the present situation and a vision of a better future. It is only in the field of political imagination that nostalgia shows its full capacity. Precisely because of this the nostalgics – let me discard the most frequent critique – *do not lie and do not exaggerate* when they speak about the past; they *do not invent* it nor construct it anew, but when sketching society as it should be, they simply take the idealized examples from the past. They argue that the present world is not the best one possible as dominant discourses strive to convince them. They offer a view that transcends the present: they envisage and reflect on a better world that could come into existence one day. They are not stuck in the past, but on the contrary, they keep a keen eye on present developments. As Huyssen says (Huyssen, 1995, 88, see also Boym, 2001, 342), “nostalgia itself, however, is not the opposite of utopia, but, as a form of memory, always implicated, even productive in it.”

The real subject of yugonostalgia is more utopia of an ideal better life than the rehabilitation of the past; it is not lost reality but an idea not yet realized. A note in a guest book in Yugoslavia’s birthplace, Jajce, clearly expresses this: *Let us return to ZAVNOBIH and AVNOJ for the sake of a better tomorrow*<sup>46</sup> (ZAVNOBIH and AVNOJ were the WWII liberation organizations, the first one for Bosnia-Herzegovina and the second for the whole Yugoslavia). Therefore, in my opinion, the sixth, and the most important emancipatory potential of nostalgia, its creative starting-point, is precisely this utopian hope for a better life. If this is true, why then the utopian search for a better world is associated with the former country? The answer to this paradox should be sought in progressist ideological orientation of the former Yugoslavia. First,

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<sup>44</sup> This and many other Tito's crimes can be found on ironical arrest warrants actually praising him and Yugoslavia. They appear in the forms of posters or leaflets in various languages in all ex-Yugoslav republics and on the web.

<sup>45</sup> Signature unreadable, 24 May 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Signature unreadable, 29 November 2008.

nostalgia always draws on the times that looked forward. Yugoslav socialism brought rapid modernization. Although it would have happened anyway, even if another system had been in place (as it happened in Greece), people identified the socialist system with development, industrialization, urbanization, secularization and, most importantly, with the emancipation of women, young people and the poor. Second, since every expression of nostalgia is eccentric and self-centered in its essence, nostalgia for *the late Yugoslavia* also contains the elements of self-obsession: *we were something special,*<sup>47</sup> *we were unique, on our own,*<sup>48</sup> *we had international reputation,*<sup>49</sup> *we were able to outwit all enemies.* In many texts and conversations about this subject, the list of various good things that were part of this *better yesterday* was followed by one resigned and symptomatic cry: *And look at us today!*

Nostalgia implicitly says that, if the present does not offer hope for the future, we should return to the times that held future prospects, the times in which life was sustained by the idea that better times were still to come. Rather than saying, *Give me back the past!* it says *Give me back the future!*; it does not search for the lost paradise but paints a new one; and it does not return to the lost Yugoslav past but to its lost future; it dreams again the past dreams. In its essence, yugonostalgia is not as much the **struggle to regain the past achievements of Yugoslavia, but to regain what Yugoslavia was striving to achieve but failed because it was not capable of it**; not the struggle to regain what existed but what should have existed. In the absence of a “new” future, yugonostalgia desires and revives the “old” future.<sup>50</sup> To put it differently, it is the comeback of what was consigned to oblivion, but not the comeback of Yugoslavia as a discarded political reality, but of its political utopia, in new forms, new colors, through new channels and with the eyes fixed on the future.

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<sup>47</sup> The American historian of Hungarian origin, István Deák, concurred that this aspect, i.e. Yugoslavia’s original anti-Fascism and socialism which enjoyed much more popular support than similar systems elsewhere and were peculiar features of the second Yugoslavia within the cold war division of Europe, is very important in understanding today’s nostalgia for Yugoslavia. A personal conversation held on 18 May 2009.

<sup>48</sup> In line with the joke from the period of cold war, saying that when choosing between vodka and whiskey, the Yugoslavs chose *šljivovica* (a popular local plum brandy)...

<sup>49</sup> In the post-socialist post-Yugoslavia, the problem of the absence of prospect in consumer society is compounded by the third-rate, or even fourth-rate position of these countries in the contemporary world, or to be more concrete, the condemnation to *Europe’s waiting room*. By contrast, *Yugoslavia – it was our Europe, our freedom*, argued one of my interlocutors in Kosovo said in August 2008.

<sup>50</sup> It is the message of a note in the guest book at Tito’s burial place in Dedinje, Belgrade: *You were our bright future...* (signature unreadable, 9 July 2009). Some guests want him back: *Comrade “Marshal,” may God give you another life!* ... (signature unreadable, 9 July 2009); and: *Comrade Tito, wake up* (signature unreadable, 5 July 2009).

Therefore, the ambition of yugonostalgia is not to restore old Yugoslavia, as some of Yugoslavia's ideological opponents continually accuse it of aspiring, with the loudest critics being various converts as usual. In most cases, yugonostalgia is not intent on restitution: that *Yuga* cannot return and cannot be re-created is clear to the greatest nostalgics even. Yugonostalgics actually need a vision of friendships when old friendships no longer exist; they dream about *brotherhood and unity* when none of the two is present any more; about statehood that would not be based on the hatred expressed towards neighbors; and about social justice when confronted with the situation devoid of social solidarity. They search for hope amidst the **pervasive** despair of the pauperized classes in the countries that emerged in the territory of Yugoslavia, and they remember the reputation of the former country while confronted with the situation in which their new countries have been accorded practically neo-colonial status. What is important in this, no matter whether or not the nostalgics are aware of this, is the utopian desire for an ideal society. By glorifying Yugoslavia, they glorify Yutopia. There lies the answer to the question of *what the future of yugonostalgia is?* As long as there is injustice, exploitation, incitement of hatred and intolerance, there will be criticism, resistance and dreams about alternative worlds. The past cannot be bettered, but the future can. Emancipatory nostalgia is therefore not an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms, but an anticipation of a utopian society based on justice, equality and solidarity, regardless of whether this utopia is called *Yugoslavia* or something else.

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