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How Many Wars?

Keywords

post-Yugoslav space, state of war(s), Women's Antifascist Front, Women in Black, aesthetics of resistance, politics of affect

Abstract

The article deals with contemporary war history, the aesthetics of resistance, and the politics of affect in the context of the post-Yugoslav space. Looking back at the armed wars of the 1990s, as well as the numerous wars still being waged by other means, it becomes clear that there is still no peace in this exhausted zone of geopolitical discomfort. The politics of (non)belonging to this space has oscillated for decades between conflicting affects, liminal zones, and the (im)possibilities of overcoming the permanent production of war through lasting peace. This ambivalent feeling of (non)belonging has led to various twists and shifts in post-Yugoslav art that have solidarized within the old and new geopolitical zones of discomfort and war(s). Using the post-Yugoslav art-based research of Adela Jušić and Blerta Heziraj, who are now involved with the *Antifašistički front žena—AFŽ* (Women's Antifascist Front), as well as a *long-durée* activist performance by *Žene u crnom* (Women in Black), the text accordingly points to a common ground of politics and art that uncompromisingly resist the governing (post-)Yugoslav discourses of never-ending wars.

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Ključne besede

postjugoslovanski prostor, vojno stanje, Antifašistična fronta žensk, Ženske v črnem, estetika odpora, politika afekta

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Povzetek

Članek se ukvarja s sodobno vojno zgodovino, estetiko upora in politiko afekta v kontekstu postjugoslovanskega prostora. Če pogledamo nazaj na oborožene vojne v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja, pa tudi na številne vojne, ki se še vedno vodijo z drugimi sredstvi, postane jasno, da v tem izčrpanem območju geopolitičnega nelagodja še vedno ni miru. Politika (ne)pripadnosti temu prostoru je desetletja nihala med konfliktnimi afekti, liminalnimi conami in ne/možnostmi preseganja permanentne produkcije vojne s trajnim mirom. Ta ambivalenten občutek (ne)pripadnosti je povzročil različne zasuke in premike v postjugoslovanski umetnosti, ki so se solidarizirale znotraj starih in novih geopolitičnih območij nelagodja in vojn(e). Na podlagi postjugoslovanskega umetniškega raziskovanja Adele Jušić in Blerte Heziraj, ki se ukvarjata z Antifašistično fronto žensk – AFŽ, ter dolgoletnega aktivističnega performansa skupine Žene u crnom (Ženske v črnem), besedilo torej kaže na stičišče politike in umetnosti, ki se brezkompromisno upirata vladajočim (post)jugoslovanskim diskurzom neskončnih vojn.



Art-based research and practices in the post-Yugoslav context, through their political engagement, have shaped various counter-cartographies of this space. These efforts aim to provide insights into the non-consensual knowledge surrounding the exhausted geographies of peace and war since the 1990s. Determined by the politics of identity and identification, these exhausted geographies “as material manifestations of territorialities and territorial claims that cannot sustain themselves” are mostly the result of political, economic, ecological, wartime or other social crises.² As such, the dominant and often conflicting geopolitical narratives of the so-called great powers identify them by default as (semi-)peripheral. Refusing to be mobilised for any territorial or national, ethnic, religious, racial, economic or other geopolitical crises, wars, and conflicts, the politically engaged art practices, theories, exhibitions, and critiques of the post-Yugoslav space give an emancipatory meaning to *exhaustion*, which offers new understandings of today’s geopolitical zones of discomfort through the politics of art, and *vice versa*. The art of this space can therefore serve not only as an aesthetic source but also as an epistemic one, helping to determine the concept of the post-Yugoslav space

² Irit Rogoff, “Exhausted Geographies,” keynote lecture at the symposium “Crossing Boundaries,” organized by the Institute of International Visual Art and Royal Geographical Society, London, June 2, 2010.

within the still politically undefined meanings of one war or several mutually intertwined wars. In this regard, the article focuses on the concept of the post-Yugoslav space within politically engaged art and theory, exploring the different dialectical and often irreconcilable meanings this space holds, while relating them to its fragmented transformative wars and post-socialist transition.

What Does Post-Yugoslav Space Stand For?

The meaning of the post-Yugoslav space emerges from thinking the political forms of positioning these meta-geographies³ built through the encounter with the false choice between nationalist and neoliberal politics, in the process of wartime transition from a socialist into a capitalist society. This meaning is initially shaped in the context of an engaged theoretical discourse that views Yugoslavia not as an identity but as a revolutionary project.⁴ The group of authors associated with the *Journal of Contemporary Art and Theory Prelom—Break* (2001–2009), interpret the post-Yugoslav space as an opportunity to think beyond the binary oppositions of nationalism and neoliberalism, engaging with the dialectic of the former socialist revolution.⁵ This theoretical discourse, which rejects post-ideological geopolitical signifiers of global neoliberal democracy, also points out the necessity of breaking away from enduring “political anachronisms.” These in-

³ Meta-geography refers to the field of production of geographical thinking, imagination, and knowledge, which brings science, art, and philosophy into mutual relationship. It is subsequently interpreted as an ideological construct in a broader sense of the concept, as it refers to the creation of geopolitical determinants and frequently conflicted or hierarchically defined geographic concepts (East-West, North-South, Europe, Asia, etc.). See V. M. Gokhman, B. L. Gurevich, and Yu. G. Saushkin, “Problems of Metageography,” *Soviet Geography* 10, no. 7 (1969): 355–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00385417.1969.10770421>; Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁴ Understanding socialist Yugoslavia as a unique revolutionary project of political subjectivation, Ozren Pupovac’s article “Project Yugoslavia: The Dialectics of Revolution” (*Prelom—Journal for Images and Politics* 8 [2006]: 9–22) references the Non-Aligned Movement. This movement originated as a modernist project of socialist internationalism, redefining the meaning of the nation-state as a revolutionary (anti-colonial) project of social emancipation within the Third World. According to Marxist historian Vijay Prashad, the Third World was not merely a place but a project of African, Asian, and Latin American countries that “longed for a new world and, above all, for dignity, land, peace, and justice.” Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007), xv.

⁵ Pupovac, “Project Yugoslavia,” 9–21.

clude the reactionary nationalist apotheosis of the fatherland, various religious revivals, re-traditionalization, and liberal political and economic dogmas, all of which conceal the brutality of “privatization.”⁶ However, breaking from these counter-revolutionary phenomena seems more difficult today than it did in the past. From the perspective of these authors, the reason for this lies in the “contemporary anti-communist consensus of post-socialist neoliberal rationality,” which neutralizes any potential for revolutionary social emancipation and replaces it with the questionable politics of identity:

This kind of break is quite different from the multicultural emancipation conceived as the “basic human right” to assert one’s own specific and irreducible cultural identity—which is, in fact, effectuating nationalist ravages of nation-state building, no matter how a particular “political elite” is inclined to “democratic procedures” and manifestly committed to adopting the “standards” of the European Union. In this perspective, the post-Yugoslav space reveals itself as a symptom of the EU project with its own racisms, nationalisms, exclusions and fear-hated complex.⁷

At the same time, in contrast to this view of the post-Yugoslav space, there are alternative perspectives that introduce and understand Yugoslavism⁸ as a unitary national identity. This perspective encompasses, implies, and often marginalizes or erases the diverse array of ethno-national identities within its scope. In this context, the meaning of the post-Yugoslav space is employed to describe the post-war situation aimed at preserving Yugoslavia as an identity. This often reflects discomfort with its geopolitical positioning within the newly formed ethno-national states, as well as with what Yugoslavia represents through its (dis)

⁶ Branka Čurčić, editorial introduction to *Prelom—Journal for Images and Politics* 8 (2006): 8.

⁷ Čurčić, 8.

⁸ Unlike the previous unitary model of the interwar Yugoslav Monarchy, socialist Yugoslavia was organized as a federal state. However, from the 1960s onward, there were tendencies to revert to a unitary nationalist model. This unitary arrangement redefined Yugoslavism as nationalism, thereby suppressing the revolutionary idea of Yugoslavia as a supranational model (Yugoslavhood) that implied the rights, freedoms, and equality of all its citizens, regardless of nationality. This counter-revolutionary unitarist model infiltrated the Communist Party and served as a front for ethno-nationalist supremacy among the peoples of Yugoslavia during the wars of the 1990s. See Jelena Petrović, *Women’s Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 67–70.

continuity with the revolutionary subjectivation of society in political, materialist, antagonistic, wartime, and other dimensions. As a result, much academic and art-based research on the wars of the 1990s finds the geopolitical signification of the post-Yugoslav space problematic, as it often overlooks the crucial transition from the socialist state to a state of war, characterized by genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other war crimes, as well as neglecting the general ethno-national context of the space. Instead, this vein of research favors a direct critique of the formation of neoliberal economies within the (post-)transitional states to the detriment of a thorough understanding of the (post-)Yugoslavian space and Yugoslav social subjectivity.

In search of the continuity of Yugoslav national identity, instead of Yugoslav social subjectivity, the war crimes of the 1990s are most often neglected. This often happens because the traumatic question of why Yugoslav society, or the peoples of Yugoslavia, ended up in mass graves, facing persecution and genocide, undermines the possibility of maintaining such continuity. Minimizing war crimes in discussions of Yugoslav issues is most evident in Yugonostalgic research, which fosters a sense of structural nostalgia⁹ and pacifies the state of war by viewing it through the lens of a nationalist madness from outside Yugoslavia that is seen as something that should not have happened and should be forgotten. Yugonostalgic narratives of the “war without war” make public historical revisionism and the political amnesia of the 1990s war(s) in a manner distinct from that of the still largely present ethno-nationalist narratives, which can be neither erased nor minimized by Yugonostalgia. Translating the socialist past into post-ideological and retro-utopian discourses of neoliberalism, Yugonostalgia is hence publicly accepted in all post-Yugoslav states as a populist *as well as* a commodified product of the post-transitional society, a society in which this populist, commodified product coexists back-to-back with its “enemy” ethno-nationalism.

⁹ The term “structural nostalgia,” coined by anthropologist Michael Herzfeld, theoretically illuminates the phenomenon of returning to the past, which erases antagonistic politics and revises historical reality to present it as a golden age. As Herzfeld describes, structural nostalgia is a construct of the “eternal essence [. . .] which pragmatically connects a mythological notion of pure origins with respect for perfect social and cultural form [. . .] this national history, like Levi-Straussian myth, retroactively elides (experiential) time in the name of (generic) time.” Michel Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 28. Consequently, phenomena once perceived as oppositional are now presented as complementary; within Yugonostalgia, socialist Yugoslavia and the backward vision of the Balkans are conflated into same, idealized narrative.

Accordingly, speaking of the post-Yugoslav space entails entering the geopolitical zone of discomfort sustained by the persistent interplay between nationalist myths and Yugonostalgia. Within this zone, the (im)possibility of producing a shared understanding of Yugoslavia is intertwined with the post-transitional crisis of the present, as efforts are made to socially imagine a post-Yugoslav future. The difficulty in consensually defining a political signifier like “post-Yugoslav” is a symptom of the war still waged in this space, though by different means. In such uncertain processes of creating the “common,” the (post-)Yugoslav space should not be seen as an *étatiste* project. Instead, it should function as a political signifier signalling potential shifts toward a shared understanding of its conflicted meta-geographic meanings, while engaging with the antagonistic politics of (non)belonging within its historical context. A precondition for this shared process is answering the basic question: *Are we discussing a single war against the socialist, anti-fascist state of the Yugoslav peoples and minorities, or a series of successive ethno-nationalist wars driven by transitional, (post-)socialist regimes, where power is determined by those who are more armed, numerous, brutal, and dominant?* This question also encompasses (post-)transitional privatization, criminal accumulation of wealth, state corruption, and other menaces arising from the initial phase of neoliberal capitalism. Ultimately, this phase introduced various *post-* political signifiers that depoliticized the neoliberal transition from socialism to capitalism, even at the cost of war.

In addition, it is important to note that one of these signifiers, “post-Yugoslav,” is often used nowadays without a clear understanding of its (post-)ideological meaning, as evidenced by the titles of numerous recent publications, exhibitions, and projects. To this effect, its meaning is rooted in two basic premises: the ephemerality and the geopolitical disorder of this space, neither of which have yet to be named in ways that contribute to a consensual understanding of recent war history of the (post-)Yugoslavian space. Likewise, other (post-)transitional signifiers, such as the Balkans or South-eastern Europe, are generally unacceptable to those who engage politically with Yugoslav heritage and (post-)Yugoslav society, especially in the context of its wartime geographies. Apart from the haphazard and common-sense prioritising of the “post-Yugoslav” over the aforementioned (post-)transitional signifiers, the reason for their non-acceptance also lies in the recognition of global mechanisms of power that created new geopolitical (semi-)peripheries following the Cold War. Such (post-)transitional regionalization, driven by the neoliberal process of globalization,

has been largely realized through the (re)production of peripheral, unsettled, and “othered” identities. Following the shift that repositioned the West and East into centre and periphery, this still-undomesticated “region” emerged on the semi-periphery of the global world, distinguished from Eastern European transitional regions by the war(s).

The post-socialist efforts to establish post-war relations among the newly established ethno-national states within this “region,” their social and cultural NGO-ization have entailed the deletion of (post-)Yugoslav signifiers in creating (post-)transitional geopolitical identities. Despite the shifting regional designations such as Eastern European, South-eastern, and (Western) Balkans—framed by purported social democratization, economic liberalization, and ethno-national reconciliation—this post-war region has continued to experience war through ongoing crises and by other means. Sites of suffering, destruction and terror, war trauma, crimes and genocide in the 1990s, become the places where Yugoslavia as a revolutionary subject lost its political articulation and social power. Moreover, the identity politics of memory and reconciliation that followed have erased any political subjectivation rooted in Yugoslavia’s revolutionary commitment, as well as the potential for a consensual historicization of the common past and all its wars. It is about a war or wars in which socialist Yugoslavia, as a revolutionary project, failed to overcome the ethno-nationalist signifiers that emerged during the transition to neoliberal world. Under the neoliberal demands of post-socialist capitalism, the emerging post-Yugoslav states have become Balkanized ethno-nationalist entities on the periphery of post-socialist Europe. Today, these states continue to reflect a state of permanent apartheid maintained by the ethno-politics of reconciliation, rather than offering the possibility of social subjectivation through a shared understanding of war and a common past that could enable politics of coexistence beyond ethnic or other historically conflicted divisions.

This is often the reason why the post-Yugoslav space is used as a (geo)political signifier, especially when it refers to the criticism of global neoliberalism and resistance against the current strategies of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism from the very particular ideological or revolutionary perspective of the Yugoslav past, especially in art. The spatial dialectics of post-Yugoslav art—resisting war and its state mechanisms that have kept the conflict in a constant state of readiness from the outset—have commonly evolved through participatory practices of distinct positions. Facing difficult questions and problematics, such as the one

of Yugoslavia and genocide, the post-Yugoslav art since the 1990s has engaged with the epistemology of violence, the aesthetics of resistance, and political efforts to reveal subjugated knowledge about the revolution and war in the (post-) Yugoslav context. Different layers of the (post-)Yugoslav past, permeable borders between Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, and the repetitive dark imagination of the Balkans have in parallel been exposed to this (counter-)epistemological process of appropriating art through many turns.¹⁰ Within participatory formats of “exposure,”¹¹ geopolitical meanings of this “exhausted” space have been politically informed in the attempt to redefine it in the post-historical and post-ideological geography of today’s neoliberal society. The (post-)war transition of socialist cultural politics, which, on the one hand, led to the state institutionalisation of counter-revolutionary, ethno-nationalist, and depoliticised canons of art, and, on the other hand, enabled a new form of artistic (self-)organization and financing tied to foundations, especially foundations and (self-)organization aimed at fostering politically engaged art. Previously unknown forms of project-funded (self-)organization have brought politically engaged art practices, social movements, and subjugated knowledge to light. However, their dependency on external funding has initially led to commodification and, more recently, to the burnout of these efforts. The project-based logic of capital thus compromised, exhausted, and finally altered the politics of engaged art, adjusting it to the already dominant neoliberal discourses within state art institutions. The most radical art practices—which this way of financing made visible in state and international institutional frameworks—acted within institutions as transitory interventions and isolated examples of political emancipation. Rather

¹⁰ Starting from the 1990s onwards, many artistic turns have articulated new demands as regards geopolitical space and social relations within the art system, withdrawing from the emotional (affective), perceptual-representative (aesthetic) into the cognitive (but also educational). See Irit Rogoff, “Turning,” *e-flux Journal*, no. 00 (November 2008): 1–7; Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998); etc.

¹¹ The meaning of exposure is in this context determined as a curatorial strategy of “exposing to a state of radical uncertainty” in the process of political subjectivation and articulation of those who create the field of art not as a material practice but rather a process of “subverting the imperative of spectularity and representativeness,” being simultaneously exposed to one another. Ivana Bago and Antonia Majača, eds., editorial introduction to *Where Everything Is Yet to Happen: 2nd chapter; Exposures* (Banja Luka, Zagreb: Protok, DeLVe, 2010), 16.

than manifest an anticipation of some radical, systemic changes, even the most radical art practices were subsumed into the nascent neoliberal state of affairs.

However, as regards this context, politically engaged practices are still being rearticulated through their own failures and errors, despite all problems when it comes to shared meaning of the post-Yugoslav space, primarily due to the necessary confrontation with the social and material urgency of positioning the (post-)Yugoslav space in opposition to the politics of global changes and, above all, ongoing permanent war.

Finally, considering all the previously mentioned antagonistic frictions, the notion of the (post-)Yugoslav space can function as an ideological, historical, and social battleground for the production of common knowledge about Yugoslavia, particularly concerning the causes and consequences of the war(s) of the 1990s. In confronting the historical reality and its various interpretations, this notion becomes crucial—due to its geopolitical arbitrariness and social antagonism—for understanding the following: *How did Yugoslavia, as a revolutionary supra-national state, become a blurred ethno-nationalist signifier of the genocidal wars against what was originally a revolutionary project for the socialist subjectivation of all national differences in the fight against fascism, patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, racism, and so on? What political concepts are we articulating when we discuss the post-Yugoslav space today, in the age of identity, neoliberal empires¹² and permanent war?*

What is Yugoslav in Post-Yugoslav Space?

More than three decades have passed since the beginning of the war(s) in Yugoslavia, which marked the end of the revolutionary project born out of the anti-fascist struggle in World War Two. Initiated by the first (1942) and determined by the second (1943) session of AVNOJ (abbreviated from *The Anti-Fascist Coun-*

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¹² Wendy Brown argues that the articulation of difference, belonging, marginality, as well as civilization and barbarism stems from the politics of tolerance. While this politics may alleviate certain historical instances of systemic violence or abuse, it does so in the name of hegemonic social or political power, thereby continually renewing empire—especially in the neoliberal age, through the politics of unevenly developed identities. Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 10.

cil for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia), the creation of the socialist Yugoslavia (1945) primarily entailed social and national equality of all its peoples and minorities under the slogan of *brotherhood and unity*. Thus, the newborn Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was inscribed into the geopolitical map of the world as a state formed on the grounds of anti-fascism, class and national equality, women's emancipation, anti-capitalism, anti-colonialism, social justice, and solidarity that promised peaceful coexistence and development of not only Yugoslav society but also humanity as a whole (the politics of the Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War was part of this worldwide, Yugoslavian agenda). However, the fundamental postulates of this socialist state led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia could not be achieved through its historical reality to a sufficiently effective extent that would enable such a system to operate freely and forever in its projected socialist democracy (through self-management, right to self-determination, etc.).

The revolutionary slogan of *brotherhood and unity* at the very beginning brought into question the basic asset of the new Yugoslav state: gender equality and women's emancipation—and not merely on a linguistic or symbolic level. With rare exceptions, both the Party and all the positions of power within the state were taken by the revolutionary “brothers,” behind whom women remained, still without any considerable influence, regardless of their crucial role in the revolution and building of the new socialist state. These parallel processes of de-traditionalization and re-traditionalization of society, that is, of revolution and counter-revolution, created an illusion of completed social emancipation, especially as regarded the abolition of patriarchy, in which all the major causes of degradation, oppression, exploitation, violence, and so on were located. Due to this, the concept of “re-patriarchalization,” which is often used in the post-Yugoslav context to indicate the successful struggle for women's emancipation and the improvement of women's position during the Yugoslav socialism, does not have its own fundamental meaning because patriarchy has been internalised by socialism on many levels. Although Yugoslavian socialism was an important historical event for the revolutionary struggle against the long history of gender-class violence: the revolution of the Women's Antifascist Front (hereafter WAF) remained unfinished.

In addition to the absence of women from positions of political and social power, the twofold burden placed on working women under socialism further un-

derscores this issue. Women were responsible for household chores and reproductive labour, alongside other phenomena that socialism accommodated despite the freedoms it claimed to offer—such as equality, education, and social and political rights. The paradoxical relationship between the freedoms and oppressions of women in socialist Yugoslavia was deepened by the (self-)abolition of WAF in 1953, under the excuse that in a fully emancipated socialist society, the movement had no reason to exist. This year could historically mark the beginning of the counter-revolution and of all that would come to happen with the ethno-national appropriation of socialism, especially considering the more and more widespread symbolic manipulation of women and women's bodies, which over the decades culminated in the systemic violence and mass crimes against women during the 1990s.

In that period, on the one hand, a brutal appropriation of Yugoslavian determination is committed by Serbian nationalists (with the aim to create the Greater Serbia under the name of Yugoslavia), while, on the other hand, most of the peoples of Yugoslavia were split along national and ethnic lines completely demonising Yugoslavia in the process. As Rada Iveković states, in such wartime machinery of propaganda, “sexual,” cultural, and social stereotypes became dominant within the symbolic order, since the myth of the courageous soldier and threatened mothers and women was the easiest to manipulate within the militarist ideology of ethno-nationalism. In such militant ethno-nationalist divisions, women's bodies symbolically and practically become a weapon and territory to fight over. Being most deeply rooted in the affective consciousness of every patriarchal community these “sexual” stereotypes make war and nationalism virtually anti-women in many disturbing ways.¹³

Accordingly, in the 1990s, Julie Mostov explained this process of wartime ethnic identification through gender with the following words:

That is, they forge their identities as males, as agents of the nation over the symbolic and physical territory of the feminine homeland which must be secured and protected from transgression and which holds the seeds and blood of past and future warriors, and over and through the actual bodies of women who reproduce

¹³ Rada Iveković, “Women, Nationalism and War: ‘Make Love Not War,’” *Hypatia* 8, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 113–26, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1993.tb00280.x>.

the nation, define its physical limits, and preserve its sanctity. Women's body can be seen as providing the battleground for men's wars: over this battleground of women's bodies—borders are transgressed and redrawn.¹⁴

Besides, those women who were not seduced by the wartime euphoria of ethno-nationalism, propaganda, hatred, false democracy, and/or the neoliberal wealth society, were proclaimed to be witches, whores, bastards, *apatrides*, traitors, and more. Right after the war started, they began to form various alliances to resist the all-encompassing madness of war and violence, mostly through anti-war actions and discourses which spread fast and connected mutually within the thus far common state, although it seemed impossible inside the existing war zones.¹⁵

The red thread that links women's World War Two antifascist struggle with the activities of women's anti-war movements and their peace actions in the 1990s can hence be described as Yugoslavian in the sense of the emancipatory and peace politics on which the revolutionary project of the Yugoslavian state was founded in the first place. There are two important anti-war/wartime movements: WAF and Women in Black which testify to the revolutionary beginning and war ending of the Yugoslav revolutionary project—precisely through their perspective on the unfinished women's revolution in which Yugoslavia remains the common place of struggle against patriarchy, that is, nationalism, wartime economy, violence, fascism, political amnesia, historical revisionism, etc.

In between these two anti-war/wartime movements, in the historical period of Yugoslav socialism, numerous women's, feminist, and queer groups also appeared, questioning the patriarchal mechanisms of oppression and systemic errors of the state within bureaucratic socialism.¹⁶ In the attempt to create a con-

¹⁴ Julie Mostov, "Our Women/Their Women: Symbolic Boundaries, Territorial Markers and Violence in the Balkans," *ProFemina, Journal for Women's Literature and Culture* (Belgrade, 1995/3): 213.

¹⁵ See Jelena Petrović, Katja Kobolt, and Tanja Velagić, eds., *Gender Literature and Cultural Memory in the Post-Yugoslav Space* (Ljubljana: City of Women, ZAK, 2009).

¹⁶ See Biljana Kašić, ed., *Critical Feminist Interventions: Thinking Heritage, Decolonizing, Crossing* (Zagreb: Red Athena University Press, 2013); Jelena Petrović and Damir Arsenijević, eds., "Feminism: Politics of Equality for All" and "Yugoslav Feminism(s)," 2 special issues of *ProFemina* (2011) among many others who have addressed these issues since the 1990s.

temporary society, mostly with the idea of raising awareness through art, popular culture, activism, as well as praxis and theory, these groups were present in Yugoslavia simultaneously at several places in large numbers, despite the fact that in the 1970s and 1980s they were repudiated, ridiculed, censored, marginalised, etc. During the belligerent 1990s, women's creativity and feminist activity were rediscovered, in the new post-socialist context of human i.e. women's rights, and often nationally appropriated and (mis)interpreted, while in the last 20 years or so, many of these attempts have often been manipulatively branded as being counter-revolutionary or transitionally liberal, especially because of their non-institutional self-organisation in socialism and their criticism thereof. Additionally, numerous anti-war women's movements and feminist associations established in the 1990s, building on past continuities, prioritized confronting ethno-nationalism, violence, and war crimes over critiquing transition and neoliberalism. At best, they were portrayed as guilty of left-wing liberalism. The repudiation of the left-wing politics of women's movements dealing with the war was a consequence of the ideological rehabilitation process for those leftists who persistently ignored the war in their post-Yugoslavian analyses of neoliberal capitalism and economic transition, considering the fact that their left-wing actions during the 1990s wars were "paused," for different reasons.

Post-Yugoslavian feminism emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s as the third-wave of feminism, and nevertheless succeeded to establish continuity, through its anti-war resistance and post-war solidarity, with the previous, Yugoslavian, antifascist, feminist movements and practices. Over time, this pluriversal¹⁷ field of feminist activity became the basis for building new left-wing, anti-capitalist, queer, anti-colonial, green and other women's discourses, which have recently introduced reductionism, monosemy, divisions, and false choices, starting afresh or from a faraway place of nostalgic discontinuity, especially as regards the selective approach to socialist Yugoslavia. Still, despite ideological repudiation, feminist wanderings and scissions, the unfinished women's revolution in the (post-)Yugoslavian context is the only one that has continuously been opposing all those (post-)Yugoslavian politics that resulted in war, torture, genocide,

¹⁷ Referring to the participatory methodologies of Catherine Walsh, Rolando Vazquez introduced pluriversal genealogies of aesthetics that have the potential to create demanding but necessary knowledge for understanding the meaning of decoloniality. See Rolando Vazquez, *Vistas of Modernity: Decolonial Aesthetics and the End of the Contemporary* (Amsterdam: Mondriaan Fund, 2021).

ethno-nationalism, turbo-fascism,¹⁸ as well as post-socialist neoliberalism. As a result, the unfinished women's revolution is the only movement that can speak about all these issues without being silent or nostalgic. Examples testifying to this certainly include the already mentioned women's anti-war/wartime movements on which today's art, archive, and theory research and/or practice focus. Dealing with Yugoslavia, such research and practice produces strong knowledge about the (post-)Yugoslav space, which is in the course of creating a continuity of revolutionary left-wing politics inevitably confronted with the question of how genocide and war occurred in a revolutionary socialist "project."

Politics and Art of Women's Antifascist Front—WAF

The WAF appears today in numerous research and art practices as the place of a lost revolution oscillating between myth and forgetting.¹⁹ Back in the times of socialist Yugoslavia, Lydia Sklevicky wrote that the (self-)abolishment of WAF (1953) did not stand for the progress of socialism but patriarchy. The rapidly increasing number of women in WAF in the wake of World War Two posed a threat to the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, hence this revolutionary women's movement was made systematically weaker and weaker until it was finally transformed into the Conference for the Social Activity of Women in Yugoslavia (1961). In other words, it was turned into a bureaucratic state agency without membership.²⁰ The danger coming from the socialist patriarchy within the Party was indicated by one of the main organisers and leaders of WAF, a revolutionary and for a brief time also minister of education, Mitra Mitrović. Immediately after

¹⁸ The notion turbo-fascism is introduced by Žarana Papić to conceptualize hegemonic post-socialist nationalisms of 1990s, especially in Serbia (national separatisms, chauvinist and racist exclusion or marginalization of (old and new) minority groups, etc.). Marina Gržinić reintroduced and further developed this notion to point to the post-transitional development of the neoliberalism through the turbo-neoliberal state i.e., war-states with a repulsive postmodern fascist social structure. See Žarana Papić, "Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, The Fascisation of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia," in "The Body/Le corps/ Der Körper," ed. Marina Gržinić Maehler, special issue, *Filozofski vestnik* 23, no. 2 (2002): 191–204; Marina Gržinić, "What Matters is Revolution at the Historical Moment of Radical Contemporaneity," interview by Raino Isto, *ARTMargins*, May 21, 2017, <https://artmargins.com/what-matters-is-revolution/>.

¹⁹ See Andreja Dugandžić and Tijana Okić, eds., *The Lost Revolution: The Women's Antifascist Front Between Myth and Forgetting* (Sarajevo: Association for Culture and Art Crvena, 2018).

²⁰ Lydia Sklevicky, *Konji, žene, ratovi*, ed. Dunja Rihtman Auguštin (Zagreb: Druga, 1996).

the abolition of WAF, she stated with resignation that the woman question was closed without justification by the closest ones right at the moment when it was finally beginning to be resolved:

But it seems that in this question, perhaps more than in the case of racial or class issues, the enslavement is less disguised and more complex, because it does not depend solely on those who hold the power, those who are distant and foreign, rich and white, but also on the closest people, individuals such as father and brother, son even, who cannot themselves overcome the prejudice and beliefs that were imposed upon them—a long time ago, yes, but which have nevertheless become constituent parts of life, customs, and house rules.²¹

Vilification, marginalisation and, finally, abolition of WAF erased the significance and credit of all women of the revolution who had first engaged in an organised struggle for a free society, and later on systematically worked on this society's emancipation. By deriding and depreciating women's mass antifascist struggle in the war, this movement was in time entirely erased from the concept of *contemporaneity* in the socialist Yugoslavia, which led to a *black wave* of socialist patriarchy (intellectually shaped both in cinema and in life).²² Despite this, the revolutionary legacy of WAF persisted to this very day. The politics of resistance to the patriarchal politics of war, ethno-nationalism, violence, and exploitation served as the trigger for re-examination of the role and significance of WAF in the post-Yugoslav spaces, especially after the 1990s. This process of re-establishing continuity with Yugoslav women's movements, involved revisiting traumatic places of the past, which revealed that only the women's side had stayed true to the socialist revolution—either in terms of collective practices or work by individual women.

²¹ Mitra Mitrović, *Položaj žene u savremenom svetu* [The Position of Women in Contemporary World] (Belgrade: Narodna knjiga, 1960), 5.

²² Black wave is the name for the new Yugoslav artistic production, most often literature and film (60s and 70s), in which the propagation of socialist ideology and aesthetics is criticized in order to show the real life of ordinary people under socialism. The Black Wave often included misogynist motives of brutal violence against women, depoliticized, sexualized and passive female roles, etc.

Simultaneously with efforts to systematise the WAF archive,²³ and to curate related exhibitions (*AFŽ Drugarice – WAF Comrades* 2017; *Polet žena – Verve of Women* 2019, etc.), what we have had in recent years are artistic and research practices that deal with darkened spaces of revolutionary women's emancipation in the (post-)Yugoslav context, pointing to Yugonostalgic illusions, as well as to historical failures of the socialist state in relation to this movement. In this retrospective of the people's liberation past, the socialist Yugoslavia is perceived both as a myth and as a revolution lost, once the following question about the last war(s) emerges. In pursuit of an answer to this question, a limited amount of post-Yugoslav art-based research deals with the revolutionary past of women's struggle and socialist emancipation while simultaneously focusing on the 1990s wars, genocide, and violent patriarchy, putting those issues in the same context with the post-socialist transition. Also, attempts to use this difficult approach in establishing continuity with the revolutionary politics of WAF represent stepping out of the artistic and social comfort zone, not only in the post-Yugoslav context of creating radical politics and confronting the history of the present, but also in the global context of resisting the neoliberal politics of permanent war, which has in the meantime become the *modus operandi* for all post-socialist states.

Thus, for example, the artworks of Jušić and Haziraj speak exactly of this shaking ground when it comes to the WAF in the post-Yugoslavian context of the war(s) of the 1990s.²⁴ Considering the fact that there is no commonly accepted knowledge about what Yugoslavia stands for today, insights into what the revolutionary struggle by WAF brought, in terms of women's solidarity in the (post-)Yugoslavian continuous state of crises and wars, remain still in the zone of discomfort and denial.

With years of artistic work dedicated to difficult issues including the feminist experience of war, transition, and patriarchal violence, Jušić has created a bitter politics of hope, which, through the history of WAF, still considers and con-

²³ Gordana Stojaković, *AFŽ Vojvodine 1942–1953* (Novi Sad: self-published, 2017); "Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia," Association for Culture and Art Crvena, www.afzarhiv.org; etc.

²⁴ Adela Jušić (Sarajevo, 1982) is a visual artist based in Sarajevo. See her website at www.adelajusic.wordpress.com. Blerta Haziraj (Runik, 1994) is an art researcher and filmmaker who lives and works in Prishtina and Prizren. About her recent exhibition and research, see <https://autostradabiennale.org/exhibitions/blerta-haziraj/>.

ceptualises revolution and a better world. Working on the solo exhibition titled *Šta je nama naša borba dala?/What Has Our Struggle Given Us?* (Sarajevo, 2013), and after on the WAF Archive, created in collaboration with Andreja Dugandžić (2015 onwards),²⁵ within the Sarajevo association of Crvena, Jušić has created politically engaged art based on archival materials on WAF through her own experience of the most recent war. Thereby, her work becomes a part of a radical feminist politics which admits that talking about the revolution and Yugoslavia has not and would not be easy after the genocide, but that it is nevertheless necessary in every politically engaged practice. In artworks such as *Nepoznata partizanka/Unknown Partisan Woman* (2016–17), *Komunista sam i to je sve što ćete od mene saznati/I'm a Communist and That's All I'll Ever Tell You* (2016–), and several art collages about women of WAF and Yugoslav socialism (2013–), Jušić builds a feminist narrative of political struggle in relation to what still surrounds us, after all these wars. The collages, as well as other works that imply a political aesthetics of the image, depict dark, printed contours of ordinary women, as well as of World War Two heroines which emerge as spectres, often smiling, and thus warn and prompt to rebellion, reminding us of what they had already won through their struggle, yet what was afterwards forgotten and lost. With their cyclical repetition of reproduced archival photos of women and their revolutionary slogans, when confronted with the post-Yugoslav reality, these collages oscillate between politically engaged proclamations and (post)war crime reporting, not leaving space for the false sentiment of Yugonostalgia.

Instead of Yugonostalgia, political anxiety is invoked, like in the work titled *Dostojanstvo Prkos Strah Očaj/Dignity Defiance Fear Desperation* (2014), which reminds us of the price of freedom which is often taken for granted, through the

²⁵ The largest WAF archive was initiated, designed, and digitized by members of the Association for Culture and Art Crvena, based in Sarajevo. The idea behind this archive started in 2010 at Crvena's 8th of March initiative *Živi solidarnost! – Live Solidarity!* and continued through different research and artistic activities, events, and actions. In 2014, artists, researchers, and feminists Dugandžić and Jušić began the work of creating a systematic digital archive of thousands of documents, photographs, secondary sources, and works of art connected to the history of the WAF that had been forgotten and neglected after the collapse of Yugoslav socialism. On the occasion of the 8th of March 2015, the online Archive of Antifascist Struggle of Women of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia (AFŽ archive) was launched by Crvena.

mythical stories of the so-called women heroes of World War Two.²⁶ These stories of the socialist Yugoslavia's greatest heroines were told by others, not them, as they had been brutally executed, or in other way died very young in the war. Their torture, pain, terror and trials are presented through their superhuman ability to resist war violence, causing their existence to become abstract in time (*Unknown Partisan Woman*, 2016–17), making them unattainable in any way for ordinary mortals of any subsequent historical epoch. Partisan heroines of World War Two, as Jušić suggests, are conjured before us as supernatural beings, not afraid of anything, or anyone:

They are represented as mythical creatures, superheroes that jump in the graves they dug for themselves, before being executed with smiles on their faces. These women sing while bleeding to death for Yugoslavia.²⁷

With this work, Jušić returns one of the photographs showing a captive partisan woman from World War Two, taken by the enemy, to the historical reality of the war. In variously cropped fragments of this preserved war photograph, which subsequently received a revolutionary title *The Dignity and Defiance of a Captive Partisan Woman during the Operation Rösselsprung*, her real condition is revealed. The artist thus intervenes in the very description, giving a new name to the cropped and enlarged photographs: *Fear and Desperation of a Captive Partisan Woman during the Operation Rösselsprung*. This work about the anonymous partisan woman, a young girl who was captured and executed during the war, through its title finally integrates all these states of dignity, defiance, fear, and desperation into a current politics of affect—of both reality and revolution. In these affective states, art, ideology, and feminism intertwine with great discomfort to highlight the vigilance and spirit of revolution, aiming to raise our political awareness and re-engage us in the struggle for social change.

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The point of constant departure and return, to and from war, is depicted in the latest work by Jušić, art book *Out there* (2021), through a series of photo-

²⁶ Inspired by the book Mila Beoković, ed., *Žene heroji* [Women Heroes] (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1967). The book contains life stories of 10 people's heroines of the liberation struggle in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their life stories were compiled based on the testimonies of the people who had known them.

²⁷ Adela Jušić, *Dostojanstvo Prkos Strah Očaj*, artist's statement (2014), accessed August 29, 2024 <https://adelajusic.wordpress.com/dignity-defiance-fear-desperation/>

graphs made mostly in Sarajevo during the Covid-19 pandemic, as a response to the PTSD of the war and all the politics that had led to it and occurred in its wake. The deserted streets during the pandemic, graffiti, photos from old family albums, images of some Jušić's artworks, as well as photos of the latest war, and the war's still visible traces on Sarajevo's facades, as well as notes, quotes, memories, and rarely people, return the same sense of wartime devastation and absurdity to one's life:

It was sunny 3rd of April, 1992. I was celebrating my 9th birthday in the nearby park. Even the teenagers joined the party. "What a success," I was telling to myself, when my dad lowered down the music. The song we were listening might not be appropriate anymore. As soon dad was gone, we continued singing loud: "Don't be a FA-FA-FASCIST!" Few days later, we must leave. My parents still do not believe that war is starting, so we take little with us. And our parrot Mickey.²⁸

The trauma which started with an "emotional-political" experience of reality, once again returns to the very same place, where the past is experienced "politically-emotionally" within the scope which, in the given moment, becomes much wider than its earlier, wartime (post-)Yugoslavian iteration.

Within this new global scope of turbo-fascism and permanent war, another artistic archive, work, and exhibition is created by younger generation filmmaker and art researcher Haziraj, dealing with the Women's Antifascist Front in Kosovo. According to Áron Rossmann-Kiss, Haziraj's exhibition titled *ATO/Them* (Austrostrada Biennale, 2023) "documents a pursuit which is simultaneously full of hope and doomed"²⁹, not only because the archives in questions have been forgotten, destroyed, or vanished, but also due to their meaning in the (post-) Yugoslav context of a radically feminist politics. In pursuit of historical documents, revolutionary narratives, and ways to rearticulate WAF politically in the contemporary context of women's resistance, Haziraj reaches not only for archives and Kosovar WAF magazines of the time (*Buletini* and *Agimi*), but also resorts to field work, political landscapes, and conversations. The film footage of the villages devastated by the war and war crimes and left on the margins of the

²⁸ Adela Jušić, *Out There*, ed. Ilari Valbonesi (Rome: Balkanology Editions, 2021).

²⁹ Áron Rossmann-Kiss on the exhibition *ATO* by Blerta Haziraj (Pykë-Presje, 2023), accessed August 29, 2024 <https://autostradabiennale.org/exhibitions/blerta-haziraj/>

transitional capitalism, such as Drenica where Serbian police committed a massacre in 1998, shows women who have heroically persevered in these areas (*'Sytë e duert e jueja duhet të shifen kudo/Your Eyes and Hands Must Be Seen Everywhere*, 2022). During this encounter with an archive of the forgotten WAF magazines and other texts concerning collective women's struggle and the history of their solidarity during and after World War Two, as they read the archive, these women talk about their own lives through political rearticulation of WAF today. In Haziraj's conversations about the history of women's resistance and emancipation with the women of these almost abandoned villages, a new feminist narrative of revolutionary resistance emerges, exactly in these locations where women's struggle and solidarity were the most radical. In this manner, the paths of solidary action by women against patriarchy and fascism are connected through time and wars and into revolutionary maps of common history that resist the continued hegemonic politics, this time under the guise of neoliberalism.

These artistic departures "out there," outside the Yugonostalgic zone of geopolitical comfort in dealing with WAF, are in the vein of the radical feminist politics which can only emerge on this slippery slope between hope and abyss. In this place, through resistance to patriarchal and neoliberal canons of the post-socialist politics of memory, rare feminist, political-theoretical and artistic practices occur, which deal with the socialist revolution through counter-revolutionary errors of the Yugoslav socialism, without compromise with the populist Left or any other falsely radical politics. Without marginalising the 1990s war as a sort of anomaly with no importance for future Left politics in the (post-)Yugoslavian context, these practices emerge from the vortex of social emancipation, critical thinking, and political articulation concerning the meaning of this struggle to this very day, indicating that it is still manipulated by Yugonostalgia. These two artists do so through revolutionary aesthetics of antifascism and antinationalism, transcending today's patriarchal and neoliberal constraints to sustain women's resistance beyond their immediate context, both within and beyond the (post-)Yugoslavian space.

The *Longue Durée* of Resistance: Women in Black

The anti-war movement of Women in Black was founded in Belgrade in October 1991, that is, immediately after the war(s) in Yugoslavia broke out, in resistance to the warmongering politics of the Serbian regime, and has persisted continuously

in its different waves of activism to this very day. It was established following the peace movement of Women in Black, founded in Israel in 1988 in response to the First Palestinian Intifada³⁰ and the violent Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

The political act of publicly mourning all victims of war violence was expressed in the same way by Israeli women activists from the very beginning: “The movement maintained six minimal rules that defined the demonstration anew each week: the time, the site, the silent protest, the black attire, the all-woman format, and the sign ‘Stop the Occupation.’”³¹

In time, many women’s movements with the same name, which followed the same rules, were founded all over the world in response to current wars or violent events, or in the context of commemorating victims and crimes, always with clear and direct messages directed to the governing structures. In other words, women dressed in black, standing in central squares and streets, in front of public institutions, vigil and mourn in silence and thus discontinue, albeit for a short while, the dominant narratives of war that are always essentially the same—patriarchal, militant and hegemonic. With its performative activism, through different forms of local action without clearly established boundaries, this movement opposes war, fascism, militarisation, social injustice, economic inequality, racism, femicide, homophobia, and other types of violence, calling for peace and solidarity. Today, this women’s anti-war movement has around 10,000 activists worldwide.³²

Women’s private space, which has historically transitioned into a public domain through the ritual of mourning the deceased, now functions as a political act. This transformation symbolically draws upon an anthropological formula from ancient times and generates collective consciousness by invoking feelings of irreplaceable loss, unbearable pain, and profound fear.³³ Resounding

³⁰ The First Palestinian Intifada (1987–93) was a massive and radical Palestinian uprising against the Israeli military occupation.

³¹ Sara Helman, “Peace Movements in Israel,” The Jewish Women’s Archive, October 27, 2022, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/peace-movements-in-israel>.

³² “About Women in Black,” Women in Black, accessed August 29, 2024, <https://womenin-black.org/about-women-in-black/>.

³³ Lada Stevanović, *Laughing at the Funeral: Gender and Anthropology in the Greek Funeral Rites* (Belgrade: Institute of Ethnography SASA, 2009).

silence, ominously black clothes, and the uncompromising demand to stop violence: this is essentially how the political aesthetics of an activist performance is shaped, where resistance is generated through *longue durée*³⁴ forms of women's actions against patriarchy. This is the very reason that today's Women in Black worldwide symbolically use black attire as the expression of ritual mourning, to stop any additional systemic and violent death:

Black is the symbol of the tragedy of Israeli and Palestinian peoples. The black colour for the Women in Black has a double meaning: solidarity with Palestinian people because of the repression they endure, as well as attitude to one's own people: an act of rejecting the death culture which marks the collective identity and always reminds of the Holocaust mass casualties (Women in Black—*Israel*).

Women wear black because of the death of a close person. We wear black for both known and unknown victims. We wear black to protest against irresponsible nationalist leaders that we hold accountable for the victims of this war, as their only arguments are brutal military force and violence (Women in Black—*Belgrade*).

For the women of the South, black is a very important colour. This is the colour of grief, of tears, and it is also their traditional duty to wear black clothes. For Italian women in black, wearing black is not individual and private, but rather collective and public. It is an expression of bitterness and rejection of war in any of its forms. In international women's movement, colour black is recognised today as the strongest way of rejecting any type of violence (Women in Black—*Torino*).

We wear black to protest against the politics and practice of all armies whose arguments are force and violence (Women in Black—*Columbia*).³⁵

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In the post-Yugoslavian context of the war(s) of the 1990s, Women in Black have been standing in squares and streets since 1991, protesting against the regime,

³⁴ The *longue durée* approach to historical research is used by the French *Annales* School to indicate a perspective on history that extends deep into the past, focusing on the long-standing and imperceptibly slowly changing relationships between people and the world which constitute the main aspects of social life (this approach incorporates findings from various human and natural sciences).

³⁵ Women in Black, "Symbolism—BLACK CLOTHING," accessed August 29, 2024, <https://zenecrnom.org/en/17-aktivnosti/stajanje/1413-symbolism-black-clothing>.

ethno-nationalist violence committed then under the auspices of the governing Socialist Party of Serbia (established with the dissolution of the Communist Party), while defending the very principles of Yugoslavian antifascism from the party's appropriation, as well as from all the rightist politics which, in the reactionary process that gave birth to ethno-nationalist myths all over Yugoslavia, strived to rehabilitate war crimes and criminals from World War Two. Due to their perpetual and public presence, Women in Black still remind us of the genocide, ethnic cleansing, and other war crimes committed in the name of this politics in the (post-)Yugoslavian space. On the other hand, they consistently protest each new violence that occurs due to the repressive, ethno-nationalist, and global politics of permanent war. The banners they place in front of their bodies are: "Not in Our Name; Srebrenica—The Name of a Genocide"; "We Will Never Forget Vukovar Crimes"; "Operation Storm 1995: We Remember"; "We See Banished Albanian Population"; "Public Lecture in Antifascism"; "Always Disobedient to Patriarchy"; "Bread not Weapons"; "Stop Killing Women"; "Not One Woman Less"; "Stop the War, Not Refugees"; "Stop the Syrian War"; "Open the Borders"; "Stop Israeli Aggression against Gaza"; "Solidarity Is Our Strength"; "Stop Racism against Roma"; "LGBITQ against Fascism"; "Stop Russian Invasion of Ukraine"; and many others. Addressed to those who, from the position of power, systematically kill, oppress, and exploit in the name of hegemonic, war politics, these banners are messages against the violence that follow the red thread of revolutionary ideas upon which the socialist experiment of Yugoslavia was supposed to be built.

Women in Black have been the target of ethno-nationalist hatred and aggressive intimidation from the very beginning, despite the fact that they and their allies always protest silently and in small groups. Even though they do not possess the power to change the violent structures of warfare and governance that conquered this space even before the 1990s, Women in Black, through the ritual act of silence, vigils, and mourning, paradoxically became, in the social and political sense, the loudest and the most consistent in their antifascist resistance. This is confirmed by the disproportionate ethno-nationalist and rightist hatred for their activism, despite their media exclusion and small numbers as they realise their performative street actions, but also by the frequent paternalistic accusations of "left-liberalism," put forward by the old-new male Left which, faced with ethno-nationalism, failed during the 1990s, unlike anti-war women's movements.

The same gender patterns of anti-war action, especially in the post-socialist context, have been repeating even today, thus being confirmed as a rule, since in wars and repressive regimes, political resistance repeatedly dons woman's face. Anti-war activism, media campaigns against misinformation, help to refugees, psychological aid, strengthening the resistance against the military, police, political regime, etc., are all also organised today by women in Russia, collaborating with other women outside its borders, solidarity in resisting the Russian invasion of Ukraine, war aggression and neo-imperialism. Women in Black in Russia, whose faces are often blurred in publicised photos, with white roses in their hands and their anti-war and antifascist banners, organise vigils and publicly mourn the victims of Russian invasion, just like all the other women belonging to this movement all over the world. Artist Katya Muromtseva makes this resistance visible and present through art with her black-and-white, watercolour portraits of Russian feminists who, dressed in black, have been silently protesting against the Russian invasion of Ukraine in public squares and streets since the beginning of war. Certain that there is always an opportunity for political subjectivity, on the occasion of her exhibition *Women in Black against the War* (2023) held in Pushkin House in London, Muromtseva states:

I created these works to share my belief that it is possible to raise your voice against injustice under any kind of pressure, even if your protest looks like a wake. I stand in solidarity with everyone who has the courage to protest the war in any possible manner.³⁶

The symbolic form of Women in Black's protest against violence and for peace, which is based on centuries-long women's collective ritual against patriarchy, points out that the power and strength of resistance largely depend on its political aesthetics, which acts upon social consciousness. Contrary to the political carnival, which simultaneously signifies the negation of the old and affirmation of the new in a cycle of constant changes. In terms of Bakhtin's description of the notion³⁷, what the ritual vigil, that is, the political act of mourning

³⁶ Katya Muromtseva, "Women in Black Against the War," Pushkin House, May 26, 2023, <https://pushkin-house.squarespace.com/katya-muromtseva>.

³⁷ Related to the Bakhtin's theory of carnivalization which is interpreted as a means of politics of resistance and social movements in the present-day. See Andrew Robinson, "Bakhtin: Carnival against Capital, Carnival against Power," Ceasefire, September 9, 2011, www.ceasefiremagazine.co.uk/in-theory-bakhtin-2/.

attempts is precisely to break the cyclical infinity of violence, be this violence subjective or objective.³⁸ By pointing out the fact that social structural violence is generated by constant exploitation of all “the Others” through war, this repetitive act of women’s collective mourning demonstrates over and over again the same thing, which is that violence begins and ends in patriarchy. To this effect, there is a clear difference between women’s politics of mourning and left-wing melancholia, because ultimately the public act of mourning signifies the liminal space between what must not be repeated and what has not yet happened. Unlike left-wing melancholia, which today maintains a state of constant commitment to the ideals of a lost revolution,³⁹ this ritual public mourning (vigil and grieving) represents a symbolical *momentum* of feminist encounter with the historical reality of that very same revolution, to achieve its ideals in the “new” social context of today—in the post-patriarchal, post-hegemonic, and post-capitalist reality—through solidary action.

Beyond Yugoslav Utopia/Dystopia

More than 30 years have passed since the 1990s wars that marked the end of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY); however, any consensual knowledge is still lacking about these historical events of the wartime transition from Yugoslavian to post-Yugoslavian society, that is, from the socialist into the post-socialist system. In such a geopolitical space still maladjusted to the post-socialist determinants that emerged after this transition (such as the Balkans, South-eastern Europe, or simply the neutral term “the region”), the politics of war continues by other means. This politics normalizes and celebrates war crimes, and justifies systemic violence through the absence of justice and erasure of memory, whereas the transitional politics of reconciliation determines the bastions of inter-ethnic apartheid. The consequences of the armed conflict are also still present in various forms of PTSD, pain, disappointment, loss, and various other affects which give way to new ones, caused by

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³⁸ See Étienne Balibar, *Violence and Civility: On the Limits of Political Philosophy*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

³⁹ See Walter Benjamin, “Left-Wing Melancholy,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kæs, Martin Jay, and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 304–6; Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy,” *Boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 19–27; Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (New York: Verso, 2012).

corruption, poverty, migrations, and the impossibility of leaving the vicious circle of neoliberal appropriation of democracy and freedom.⁴⁰

Despite the fact that today there are comprehensive archives, numerous sources, and a plurality of theoretical and practical writings on the war(s) and the transitional situation, and, crucially for the present article, that there are various artistic practices, political, social, and cultural theories that still deal with the (post-)Yugoslavian space there is still no common political articulation of the historical reality. In other words, the politics of knowledge and memory within the (post-)Yugoslavian space and beyond remains to be commonly defined. While counter-public spheres within the (post-)Yugoslavian states still build a common field of knowledge about the historical reality, the official political narratives, either right-wing or neoliberal, create fragmented conflicted zones of geopolitical discomfort, which permeate the governing mechanisms of institutionalised narratives of new and old necropolitics of war-mongering. In addition, lacking courage or urgency to tackle the specific wartime situations and their consequences in the (post-)Yugoslavian context, contemporary political theory has in the intellectual world assumed various banalizing approaches to these questions, be they the politics of identity, the stultifying discourse of human rights, or the dilution of Marxist, historical materialism.

Unlike many political-theoretical discourses that became polarized into pro and contra positions, feminist understandings of the socialist revolution, the wars of the 1990s, and the decolonial pursuit of peaceful planetary coexistence in the post-Yugoslav context rejected the false choices imposed by both sides. For instance, the assertion that one could identify as leftist while treating the wars of the 1990s as an insignificant topic within the left was, for most feminists from this space, a manipulative misconception.

Unlike numerous theoretical discourses which have been publicly polarised and divided into *pro et contra*, the feminist context of dealing with the socialist revolution, war, and peaceful politics of planetary coexistence exhibits a depar-

⁴⁰ See Angela Davis, *The Meaning of Freedom and Other: Difficult Dialogues* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2012); Jelena Petrović, "What Does the Freedom Stand for Today?," in *Border Thinking: Disassembling Histories of Racialized Violence*, ed. Marina Gržinić (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018), 108–22.

ture from many imposed false choices (such as those according to which being leftist in the post-Yugoslav space does not entail dealing with the war of the 90s, etc.) although this is not always the case (especially not in the context of gender mainstreaming and the today frequently present biologized transphobic feminism). To this effect, only persistent feminist practices can establish an active emancipatory epistemology through continuous border transgressions of war zones.⁴¹ This also includes transgressing bio(necro)political states⁴² and neoliberal politics of wartime aesthetics,⁴³ while moving beyond the (post-)Yugoslavian reality into a broader space of resistance against global, permanent war.

Regardless of whether it takes the form of theory, art, or practice, any critical examination of the revolutionary project of socialist Yugoslavia—and of the anti-colonial project of the Third World, in which Yugoslavia, along with many other countries, founded the NAM during the Cold War—becomes necessary in the context of genocide, violence, war, migration, reactionary appropriation of revolutionary ideas, and finally patriarchy itself. Otherwise, through the politics of ignoring, forgetting, and nostalgia, the war is merely reinscribed into every new attempt at revolutionary change within the social system, particularly within any future radically imagined geographies, especially within the still unsettled (post-)Yugoslavian space.

Translated by Tijana Parezanović and Milan Marković

⁴¹ See Svetlana Slapšak, ed., *War Discourse, Women Discourse: Essays and Case-Studies from Yugoslavia and Russia* (Ljubljana: Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis, 2000); Svetlana Slapšak and Ghislaine Deschaumes, eds., *Balkan Women for Peace: Itineraries of Crossborder Activism* (Paris: Transeuropeans, 2003); Žarana Papić, *Tekstovi 1977–2022*, ed. Adriana Zaharijević, Zorica Ivanović, and Daša Duhaček (Belgrade: Centre for Women's Studies, Reconstruction Women's Fund, and Women in Black, 2012), and many others.

⁴² See Marina Gržinić, "From Biopolitics to Necropolitics and the Institution of Contemporary Art," *Pavilion 14* (2010): 9–94; Marina Gržinić "The Body in the Field of Tensions between Biopolitics and Necropolitics: Analyzing the Future of the Prosthetic Body in the 21st Century," in *Filozofski vestnik* 44, no. 2 (2023): 19–52, <https://doi.org/10.3986/fv.44.2.02>; Gržinić "What Matters is Revolution"; etc.

⁴³ To name a few: Grupa Spomenik (The Monument Group) undertook intensive work on the 1990s wars from 2002 to 2015, see their website at www.grupaspomenik.wordpress.com. Numerous artists gathered around the Crvena association individual and collective projects since 2010, see www.crvena.ba. Information regarding Armina Pilav's collective projects, including *Un-War Lab* and *Toxic Lands*, can be found at www.toxiclands.eu.

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