



Tijana Matijević

**FROM POST-
YUGOSLAVIA TO
THE FEMALE
CONTINENT**

A Feminist Reading of Post-Yugoslav Literature

[transcript] Lettre

From:

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From Post-Yugoslavia to the Female Continent A Feminist Reading of Post-Yugoslav Literature

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This study of contemporary literature from the former Yugoslavia (Post-Yugoslavia) follows the ways in which the feminist writing of gender, body, sexuality, and social and cultural hierarchies brings to light the past of socialist Yugoslavia, its cultural and literary itineraries and its dissolution in the Yugoslav wars. The analysis also focuses on the particularities of different feminist writings, together with their picturing of possible futures. The title of the book suggests an attempt to interpret post-Yugoslav literature as feminist writing, but also a process of conceptualizing a post-Yugoslav literary field, in this study represented by contemporary fiction from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia.

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I Introduction: On Post-Yugoslavia and the Female Continent

Our subject is what John Lampe called a change that was felt in the atmosphere from the time when the word 'Yugoslav' entered the language and came into everyday use.

(Dubravka Stojanović)¹

By WOMEN I mean not only the biocultural entities thus represented, as the empirical subjects of sociopolitical realities, but also a discursive field: feminist theory.

(Rosi Braidotti)²

The title of this book refers to the works of fiction produced in 'today's Yugoslavia', as the closest to an unambiguous definition of the cultural (and political) space existing as the successor of historical Yugoslavia(s). One clearly needs a lot of quotation marks and brackets in order to talk about and study this space: they communicate the discrepancy between the lived experience of a single *cultural field*, and at the same time its fragmentation on the level of the administrative political entities, post-Yugoslav nation-states. And while from the present day perspective an experimental qualifier 'today's Yugoslavia' seems quite fitting, back in the period this research was initiated, any attribute trying to circumscribe the space in question was seen as either inadequate or imprecise, since it simply could not encircle the complexity of the space which simultaneously still existed and did not exist anymore. However, one of the main conclusions of this research is precisely that complexity of this space does not mean that it resists theorization; on the contrary, it motivates it, together with opening the whole new terminological and conceptual field in the last two decades.

1 Stojanović 2015.

2 Braidotti 1997: 61.

After Yugoslavia had dissolved, the term ‘post-Yugoslav’ was seeking legitimization, as the phrase which would express exactly the complexity of the end and a continuation in a single word, as it was ironically suggested most probably the first time the term was used – at least inside the literary context – in Dubravka Ugrešić’s book of essays *The Culture of Lies* (1995): “I don’t know who I am any more’ [...]. ‘I am a post-Yugoslav, a Gypsy.” (Ugrešić 1998: 7).³ Nevertheless, the term had been also reinforced in the theoretical discourse, among other proposals, as analogous to the process discussed within post-colonial studies: ‘post’ – in Bhabhian phrasing – denotes a “‘liminal’ time [...] meaning not ‘after’, but rather ‘the time never completely ‘beyond’” (Rakočević 2011: 209).⁴ Hence, though disputable, the term had actually started effortlessly circulating to define literary works produced in the spaces of former Yugoslavia, becoming at the same time an effective political marker of anti-nationalist, arguably even pro-integrationist, but generally anti-conservative cultural products and concepts.⁵ The title of this paper was decided along these lines too, and though already some alarming signals about its redundancy appeared – the issue I touch upon in the following section – I decided to keep the qualifier ‘post-Yugoslav’ and apply it as a historical term, one that marks a period of Yugoslav histories and cultures, that is, precisely the one of dissolving Yugoslavia and what emerges on its ruins, or as its effect.

This need or even a necessity to operate within a single cultural space has to do with the violent break up of the country of Yugoslavia and the subsequent continuous discourse of its delegitimization. Post-Yugoslav nation-states constituted by ethnonational identity utilized culture as a main instrument of ethnonational homogenization, distinction and eventual sense of superiority.⁶ Rastko Močnik describes ‘national culture’ as a “secret inborn knowledge possessed exclusively by the members of the community” (Močnik 2016: 180), emphasizing the “sad role played by the writers and their associations in the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed it” (ibid.). This paper is, therefore, devoted to answering the questions why certain body of works should be read inside this entire discursive and historical dynamics, at the same time drawing some conclusions on how the writings

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- 3 First published in Dutch in 1995 as *De cultuur van leugens* (Amsterdam: Nijgh&van Ditmar). In 1996 it was published in Croatian (Zagreb: Arkzin) and in 1998 in English (see Bibliography).
 - 4 Unless otherwise indicated, the translations to English are mine.
 - 5 In my 2016 article “National, Post-national, Transnational. Is post-Yugoslav Literature an Arguable or Promising Field of Study?” I dealt in detail with the meaning and circulation of the term ‘post-Yugoslav’.
 - 6 Numerous studies have been written on the topic, still one of the most prominent authors of the discourse on the interaction among nationalism and culture is the anthropologist and publisher Ivan Čolović. Some of his studies include: *Bordel ratnika. Folklor, politika i rat* (1993), *Politika simbola. Oglеди o političkoj antropologiji* (1997; Eng. *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia*, 2002), *Balkan – teror kulture. Oglеди o političkoj antropologiji*, 2 (2008; Eng. *The Balkans: The Terror of Culture*, 2011), *Za njima smo išli pevajući. Junaci devedesetih* (2011).

of the contemporary authors of 'today's Yugoslavia' help understand and define the very context they write in. These two aspects define the subject matter of this study: post-Yugoslav literature.

The two apparently spatial entities from the title – Post-Yugoslavia and a female continent – have been chosen as the two concepts indicating a post-Yugoslav literary trajectory: these two utopian ends signify the post-Yugoslav literature as a feminist discourse. 'Post-Yugoslavia' is the name (or one of the possible names) of the 'today's Yugoslavia', that doesn't exist as an administrative territory, but it 'happens', it is present as a cultural and discursive reality. Recent appearance of the nouns *Post-Yugoslavia* and *post-Yugoslavism* also support this.⁷ Yet, while the 'post-Yugoslav' has been a contested term and Post-Yugoslavia barely exists, female continent is a phrase that is in circulation. In the local context, feminist literary scholars and authors extensively use this expression to refer to the women's writing, revisiting the 'female continent' from the Vojvodinian and Yugoslav author Judita Šalgo's (1941–1996) posthumously published novel *Put u Birobidžan* (Journey to Birobidžan, 1997). A female continent is a utopian place the protagonists of this novel try or desire to reach, for it represents a haven, an alternative societal structure and, therefore also a possibility of different history. A utopian female continent in this research is the figure of female authorship, denoting both a 'remote' and a resilient status of women's writing in the post-Yugoslav space, marking the striking progression of female and feminist writing in the last 20 years.

The position of women is refracted inside the literary field as – above all – the question of female authorship, an essential subject of the feminist literary criticism, that is, *gynocriticism* as the discipline focusing on the female literary traditions, women authors, relationship between the gender, writing and canon. This already classical feminist analysis of literature has been applied to show that together with the constitutive role feminist and women's writing have for the post-Yugoslav literature, the struggle of women authors to overcome the masculinist, patriarchal and often also misogynist cultural setting is continuous. The feminist reading as a strategy of the analysis is employed precisely to show that "unless the critical or historical point of view is feminist, there is a tendency to underrepresent the contribution of women writers" (Tyson 2006: 84). Yet, whether the emphasis is put on a sociological perspective of the literary production, or on the artistic practices themselves, the women's writing as the practice of writing is outside the masculinist and patriarchal economy of discourse, showing that an "abstract subject that is allegedly a priori given the freedom of speech [...] does not exist past sexual script and its power asymmetry" (Čale Feldman and Tomljenović 2012: 25).

7 In the title of the 2016 volume: *Facing the Present: Transition in Post-Yugoslavia: The Artists' View* (edited by Renate Hansen-Kokoruš), and as the concept analogous to *Yugoslavism* in historian Dragan Markovina's 2018 book *Jugoslavija u Hrvatskoj: (1918.–2018.): od euforije do tabua*.

Together with the gynocritical inquiry and the *feminist critique* as a political and polemical discipline,⁸ this analysis draws on the poststructuralist psychoanalytical space of the text as the *écriture féminine*. Briefly put, the French post-structuralist feminist school that conceptualized the notion enabled thinking the possibilities of the “discursive representation” (Gross 1986: 76) of non-phallic and non-masculine bodies and identities, by revealing that at the interface of language, power and the body “women’s oppression, and their resistances to oppression, can be located” (ibid. 70).

The connection of Post-Yugoslavia and a female continent illustrates the thesis of this research: the interconnectedness and interaction of the major theme of the post-Yugoslav writing – the past of Yugoslavia and its interruption by the war – with the exploration of gender, sexuality and body in the narrative and along the process of the text production. The analysis follows the ways in which the feminist writing of gender, body, sexuality, and social and cultural hierarchies brings to light the past of socialist Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav wars. Therefore, a type of *crossover* writings – integrating the ‘performance’ of the past and the ‘performance’ of the body, or ‘performance’ of the *sexual difference* – are the corpus of works representing the post-Yugoslav literature as a feminist discourse.

In view of that, this book is a study of the post-Yugoslav literature as a feminist discourse focusing predominantly on the beginning of the second decade of this century (2010–2015). This interval is seen as a period of confirmation and development of ‘literary feminisms’, with a more visible presence of women authors in the literary scene. Nevertheless, besides the above-mentioned major themes, altered interpretations of the Yugoslav wars, topics of Yugoslav socialism and the Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde, the shifts in the perception of genres, but also an ‘old-fashioned’ take on the *écriture féminine* and the new possibilities of literary comparisons enabled by almost twenty years long tradition of the post-Yugoslav literature are circumscribed by this view. The period preceding the year 2010 is presented as a discursive and historical background of the analysis, whose critical features and some of the authors – mostly those with the international reception – are solely pinpointed here.⁹

8 The texts of Biljana Dojčinović are informative regarding the history and theory of feminist literary criticism, and its development in the local academia and theory. The varieties and different ‘schools’ of feminist literary criticism with the focus on gynocriticism are analysed in her 1996 article “Ginokritika: istraživanja ženske književne tradicije” together with the whole thematic issue of the journal *Ženske studije: Američka feministička kritika* she edited (see Bibliography).

9 Many of these authors are exiles, which according to some interpretations makes them an emblematic group of writers constituting a post-Yugoslav literary discourse as ‘exilic’ (see the following footnote).

The first part of this period – in which the post-Yugoslav as a term first appeared – concerns literature written along the dissolution of Yugoslavia up to the end of the decade (roughly 1990-1999). Already in the beginning, post-Yugoslav writing has been clearly articulated from the feminist standpoint. Beside the activation of the phrase ‘post-Yugoslav’, the link that Dubravka Ugrešić had made between Yugoslav women’s writing and post-Yugoslav literature, the fusing of the topics of exile and memory, social criticism and different feminist modifications of the romance and other ‘women’s genres’ is what has principally shaped the post-Yugoslav literature. The narrativization of the first experiences of war and exile – what some researchers saw as a specific post-Yugoslav genre (Rakočević 2011; Duda 2017; Mijatović and Durić 2018)¹⁰ – marks the works of the already critically acclaimed Yugoslav authors, David Albahari, Bora Ćosić, Slavenka Drakulić, Mirko Kovač – to name a few. Also, the writers who published their first novels during the war, like Vladimir Arsenijević (*U potpalublju*, 1994; Engl. *In the Hold*, 1996) and Nenad Veličković (*Konačari*, 1995; Engl. *Lodgers*, 2005), joined this group of authors who narrativized the dissolution of Yugoslavia as an autobiographical experience. David Albahari’s *Kratka knjiga* (Short Book, 1993) is probably the first work to launch the issue of post-Yugoslav literature as an aspect of the narrative. The story about the autofictional figure of a writer is succeeded by the author’s note in the end of the novel in which he discusses the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the effect this had on him and his writing. The narrative itself is forged in a type of a spatial and temporal void suggesting the shift of both historical and literary reality. Also, Nenad Veličković’s novel *Konačari* about the Sarajevo siege was one of the first literary evidences of war, told from the perspective of a young girl. Such a focalisation is suggestive for the discourse of post-Yugoslav literature generally, together with the criticism of the hitherto proscribed topics of nationalism, and social and economic devastation. Needless to say, even a glance at the bibliography of the post-Yugoslav literature shows that these authors and their works have become a standard topic of studies, dissertations, and anthologies.

A provisional second half of the interval falls in the first decade of the new century, whose beginning coincided with the political changes in Serbia and Croatia.¹¹ While Aleksandar Hemon would be one of the most significant authors – owing in part to his peculiar type of belonging to the post-Yugoslav field as the author

10 Rakočević theorizes “exile and emigrant narratives” (Rakočević 2011: 204) as one of four “sub-categories” of the post-Yugoslav writing, while Duda writes about a topical post-Yugoslav literary “exile-nomadic matrix” (Duda 2017: 46). Mijatović and Durić emphasize that numerous works from former Yugoslavia follow genre strategies pertaining “exile experiences in the form of the pseudo-autobiographical modus” (Mijatović and Durić 2018: 87).

11 I refer to the Social Democrats (SDP) coming to power in Croatia after the ten years rule of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), and the so-called ‘October 5 Revolution’ when Milošević was overthrown.

who writes in English – to join the mentioned community of authors, this period (2000–2010) is more closely related to the topic of this research. It had been marked by the appearance of numerous women authors of younger generation, not just in the field of literature, but also in other cultural fields (perhaps most prominently in cinema and theatre).¹² Hence, while the female authorship is largely ‘normalizing’, or mainstreaming in this period, the post-Yugoslav literary discourse is further developing and diversifying, by dealing with the war from the specific female perspective, but also integrating the complexity of remembering and forgetting the past, and with these interrelated issues of responsibility and politics of memory. Therefore, the post-Yugoslav literature has been conceptualized as an expressively politicized discourse engaging in social criticism and almost effortlessly overcoming the traditional problem of the artistic, and therefore also literary autonomy. Most of the authors whose works were analysed in this paper publish their first fictions at the beginning of this period, together with other authors of the younger generation (born approximately 1970–1980) like Lamija Begagić, Slađana Bukovac, Šejla Šehabović, Maša Kolanović, Tatjana Gromača, and poets like Adisa Bašić and Dragana Mladenović, present also in German translation.¹³ Novels by Daša Drndić (1946–2018) published in this period expand the post-Yugoslav literary discourse by exploring and narrativizing the Holocaust – and the contemporary forms of fascism – interacting with the writings of Danilo Kiš, David Albahari, and Filip David.

Two studies published in Germany in 2009 by Katja Kobolt *Frauen schreiben Geschichte(n): Krieg, Geschlecht und Erinnern im ehemaligen Jugoslawien*, and in 2010 by Damir Arsenijević *Forgotten Future: The Politics of Poetry in Bosnia and Herzegovina* research exactly this ‘transitory’ period of post-Yugoslav literature, with a focus on women authors. Both of the studies conceptualize the same discursive space of the post-Yugoslav women’s writing and represent an important theoretical and analytical backdrop of this research.

The beginning of the last decade – the years 2010 and 2011 respectively – mark a conceptual threshold for the post-Yugoslav literature as a feminist discourse. On one side, this point in time means the onset of the female and feminist consolidation inside the literary mainstream marked by the publishing of the two novels written by women authors, on the other, it represents the ‘positioning’ of the feminist and Yugoslav literary traditions inside the very post-Yugoslav literary discourse.

12 Again, to name only a few authors who came into focus in this period, though some appeared earlier: Aida Begić, Jasmila Žbanić, Elma Tataragić, Teona Strugar Mitevska, Milena Marković, Biljana Sribljanović, Ivana Sajko.

13 The list is by no means exhaustive, including the authors whose poetry works were translated to German (from the authors already included in the analysis like Olja Savičević Ivančević and Tanja Stupar Trifunović, to Ana Ristović, Anja Golob, Tanja Bakić, and many others). I thank the poet and translator Cornelia Marks for her help in this matter.

The first aspect has to do with some principal and at the same time stereotyping practices of the reception and the literary canon. A ‘mainstreaming’ of a novel about the war by a woman author, namely *Hotel Zagorje* (2010, Engl. *Hotel Tito*, 2017) by Ivana Bodrožić highlighted a problematic link between the genre and gender.¹⁴ While a general “hierarchy of genres” (Đurić 2016) already leaves out the great corpus of poetry works outside the field of reception, it also affects the female authorship which often becomes visible precisely through this genre, not to mention the emancipatory potentials of poetry in feminist ‘consciousness rising’ (ibid.). A majority of the authors in this analysis initially published poetry (including some of the male authors like Slobodan Tišma), which is why the ‘mainstreaming’ has a double significance. It refers to the articulation of the experience hitherto reserved for the male authors – a war novel – suggesting also that poetry is almost exclusively a popular and recognised mode of women’s literary activity. On the other side, the novel – as what is predominantly perceived ‘as literature’ – marked our culture, becoming a necessary discourse or even a tool of women’s protrusion into the social sphere:

As any society changes its social structure, changes its economic base, artefacts are re-created within it. Literary forms arise as one of the ways in which changing subjects create themselves as subjects within a new social context. The novel is the prime example of the way women start to create themselves as social subjects under bourgeois capitalism – create themselves as a category: women. (Mitchell 1990: 100)

Likewise, genre of a novel is what marks this phase of (post-)Yugoslav literatures: “when we say post-Yugoslav, we also say a novel, we say capitalism” (Duda 2017: 49). In this sense, post-Yugoslav women authors’ writings about the war, their war novels is a double intrusion into the masculine/masculinist literary field, and it reshaped the literary scene.¹⁵ Another novel, Olja Savičević Ivančević’s *Adio, kauboju* (2010, Engl. *Farewell, Cowboy*, 2015), narrativizes the post-Yugoslav “negative continuity with the socialist past” (Buden 2017: 350). Thematic intersections of gender, labour and inequality offer another perspective of the ‘democratic and capitalist transition’ and remind of the better (Yugoslav) past and socialist modernization that were interrupted by the war, criminal privatisation and impoverishment. The two authors of the younger generation disturbed the literary mainstream by introducing various tabooed topics, from the ‘better past’ of the socialist Yugoslavia, to

14 Though the novel has been published under the name Ivana Simić Bodrožić, throughout this paper I abide by the author’s current decision to use one last name.

15 Besides the already mentioned study, Katja Kobolt in her 2006 text “Smrt u muzeju moderne umjetnosti Alme Lazarevske – ili: zašto se ratna literatura ženskih autora (spisateljica) ne recipira kao književnost o ratu” theorizes the relationship of the female authorship and war writing. See Bibliography.

the critique of the 'Homeland War'. What has been often interpreted as the 'political incorrectness' in their writing has been only intensified by the feminist articulation of their narratives.

The second aspect is represented by Slobodan Tišma's novel *Bernardijeva soba* (Bernardi's Room, 2011), which not only 'recollects' the artistic practices of the Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde, but *performs* a vital link between the post-Yugoslav and Yugoslav arts. Importantly, this "performatively address[ed] historical praxis" (Buden 2017: 348) was made possible through the 'passage' between the two Neo-avant-gardist authors, Slobodan Tišma and Judita Šalgo. Here is where another connotation of the female continent describes the historicization of post-Yugoslav literature: it symbolizes the connection the post-Yugoslav authors establish with the late (and dissolving) Yugoslav literary and artistic practices, specifically those feminist and Neo-avant-gardist. Through Judita Šalgo's novel *Put u Birobidžan* these feminist and links between the late Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literatures have materialised.

While all the three works shall be analysed in detail in the following chapters, they are here indicated as constituents of the exploratory timeline of the study. The year 2010 roughly represents the year in which the feminist literature reshaped the post-Yugoslav literary discourse. This happened over the narrated topics and the protrusion of the female authorship, but also over the post-Yugoslav's literary discourse successful defining of its place within the history of the Yugoslav literature(s).

The focus of the analysis are works published after 2010 in the post-Yugoslav states of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, as those heuristically representing the post-Yugoslav literary field in which the language, history, past of the common country of Yugoslavia, together with the contradictions, failures and finally the Yugoslav wars in which Yugoslavia disintegrated are shared. While this choice certainly reproduces the inequalities existing in Yugoslavia – regarding the Serbo-Croatian, or Croato-Serbian language versus the languages of the 'minorities' and with this correlated cultural dominance – it as well reflects the reality of war the three countries have principally shared.

Finally, while the chronology pertains to the fiction published in the specified period, the authors represent a transgenerational assemblage of writers born immediately after the World War II, to the last Yugoslav generations in the eighties, hence representing in reality a 'trans-Yugoslav' writers' generation.

1.1. Post-Yugoslav Literature: A Utopia and a Field

Izraz 'Jugoslavija' je ušao u ovaj rječnik ne zato što se njime služe, već zato što se njime ne služe. Prije nego što definitivno precrtaju sa karte ono što ostaje od ove države, izbrisali su njeno ime iz jezika.

(*Petit glossaire de la guerre civile Yougoslave*)¹⁶

As remarked in the introduction, the terminology around Yugoslavia and Yugoslav is – particularly in the post-Yugoslav period – instable, and the epigraph above indicates the status of this signifier along the process of its actual methodical elimination from use. This section is an overview of the circulation of the term 'post-Yugoslav' – particularly in the literary context – and the accompanying arguments for its usage that develop in spite of or parallel to this process. These arguments are informed both by the historic developments and what exists or is perceived as inherited and shared culture, and by the political re-appropriation and articulation of the term. Already a considerable bibliography and various regional projects reflect both the necessity of 'addressing the historical praxes' of Yugoslavia and with this process correlated interdisciplinary conceptualization of the (post-)Yugoslav present.¹⁷

16 The term 'Yugoslavia' entered this dictionary not because it is being used, but because it is not. Before they definitely cross off the map what remains from this state, they erased its name from the language. (Stoyanne 1992: 126)

17 This very dynamic theoretical and artistic production is disseminated throughout various academic, cultural and artistic initiatives and organizations, from The Centre for Cultural and Historical Research of Socialism founded in 2012 in Pula, and the Centre for Yugoslav Studies in Belgrade founded in 2016, to the Museum of Yugoslavia in Belgrade (former Museum of History of Yugoslavia), and various internet portals and platforms like the *Yuhistoria* (<https://www.yuhistorija.com>) which has published texts of the prominent historians on the wide range of Yugoslav themes. The extensive bibliography on the topic is here exemplified by a short list of some of the relevant edited volumes, as they are good examples of the interdisciplinary, regional and often international collaborative projects: *Zid je mrtav, živeli zidovi! Pad Berlinskog zida i raspad Jugoslavije* (edited by Ivan Čolović, 2009); *Mitovi epohe socijalizma* (edited by Ljubiša Despotović et al., 2010); *Komparativni postsocijalizam. Slavonska iskustva* (edited by Maša Kolanović, 2013); *After Yugoslavia: The Cultural Spaces of a Vanished Land* (edited by Radmila Gorup, 2013); *Traumata der Transition: Erfahrung und Reflexion des jugoslawischen Zerfalls* (edited by Boris Previšić et al., 2015); *Social Inequalities and Discontent in Yugoslav Socialism* (edited by Rory Archer et al., 2016); *Post-Yugoslav Constellations: Archive, Memory, and Trauma in Contemporary Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian Literature and Culture* (edited by Vlad Beronja et al., 2016); *LGBT Activism and the Europeanisation of the Post-Yugoslav Space* (edited by Bojan Bilić, 2016); *Jugoslavija u istorijskoj perspektivi* (edited by Latnika Perović et al., 2017); *The*

To begin with, the relatively recent criticism of the phrase ‘post-Yugoslav’ as anachronistic, that is, an opting for the uninterrupted usage of Yugoslavia/Yugoslav, shows how studying Yugoslavia and what comes after is a vibrant academic and cultural field (Slapšak 2011b; Brebanović 2016, 2017; Levi 2019). While it now seems that this most apparent solution would be the most accurate, the authors continue switching the terminology, clearly showing the trouble with the comprehensive naming of the cultural production, or even a societal situation, experience of living and working *as if there were no state borders*.¹⁸ But, while until recently the post-Yugoslav literature alone appeared as a contested term and concept – often formulated as an open question¹⁹ – a few studies have lately evidenced that Yugoslav literature had never been a dominant or stable term either.²⁰ Unlike the popular argument that Yugoslav literatures started ‘nationalizing’ after the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav literature(s) were variously defined from the beginnings of the common country. Also, together with the particularities of the history of Yugoslavism and Yugoslav culture, this process in reality reflects the dynamics of the *universalist* or *particularistic* paradigm in conceptualizing “literary cultures” in Eastern and Central Europe (Cornis-Pope and Neubauer 2004).

In the context of Yugoslav literature, this dynamic is reflected in the terminological and conceptual choice between a particular national literature (for example, Croatian literature), Yugoslav literature, or Yugoslav literatures (in plural), as a whole of different but in fact to the common *literary field* belonging national literatures (see S. Lukić 1972, J. Lukić 2018a, Vidulić 2017). Bibliography of the literary histories or the titles of the universities programmes in the period of Yugoslavia illustrate well this plurality. Hence, Yugoslav literature had in reality already held the status the post-Yugoslav literature assumes today, by being a transnational but also an integrationist literary and cultural project, and a discourse. While this fact could be read affirmatively, presenting the whole debate about the ‘validity’ of the (post-)Yugoslav literature as superfluous (Brebanović 2017), it can further support the arguments that neither Yugoslav nor post-Yugoslav literatures had ever *really*,

Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia: (post)Socialism and its Other (edited by Dijana Jelača et al., 2017a); *Tranzicija i kulturno pamćenje* (edited by Virna Karlić et al., 2017).

- 18 Though possibly ironically, Brebanović still uses the qualifiers ‘post-Yugoslav’, or ‘ex-Yugoslav’ (Brebanović 2016: 122; 120), while Levi criticizes the term post-Yugoslav as “superficial” (Levi 2019: 95), but also resorts to the terms like ‘Yugoslav region’, ‘Yugoslav spaces’, confirming the complication of the naming in question.
- 19 *Postjugoslavenska književnost?* (Postnikov, 2012); “‘Post-jugoslovenska književnost’? Ogljedala i fantomi” (Rakočević, 2011).
- 20 “Jugoslawische Literatur. Kurzer Abriss zur langen Geschichte eines produktiven Phantoms” (Vidulić, 2015); *Jugoslovenska književnost: sadašnjost, prošlost i budućnost jednog spornog pojma/Yugoslav Literature: The Past, Present and Future of a Contested Notion* (edited by Adrijana Marčetić et al., 2019).

coherently existed (Vidulić 2017).²¹ The debate obviously arises from a not necessarily analogous relationship between the state of Yugoslavia and its culture, which is in reality the situation that has repeated in the post-Yugoslav period. Historians of Yugoslavia often point to the fact that the Yugoslav idea was principally communicated through the cultural socialization, restating that the Yugoslav culture predated the Yugoslav state itself (Djokić 2013; Stojanović 2015; Markovina 2017, 2018). In her text about the history of the Yugoslav idea, historian Dubravka Stojanović maintains that it was a rather strongly and comprehensively adopted idea, which is a fact that could help study the idea of togetherness in the Slavonic South, but also “the recent Yugo-nostalgia in many parts of the former Yugoslavia” (Stojanović 2015). The fact that *Yugoslavism* has been primarily conceptualized as culture is the point which is vital in understanding the post-Yugoslav cultural field, related to the ‘resilience’ of Yugoslav culture (Stojanović 2015), and Yugoslav society that outlived the state (Jovičević 2016).²² The state/culture opposition had been successfully theorized in the beginning of the nineties by the art historian and critic Jerko Denegri who introduced the term “Yugoslav cultural space”, observing “that the state and culture were not one and the same” (Djurić and Švaković 2003: xvi).

Yet, the recent introduction of Bourdieu’s term *cultural field* in the post-Yugoslav literary studies better fits this peculiar dynamic, succeeding in addressing the actual relationships constructing the ‘cultural space’ which is not solely ‘culturally’, or ‘symbolically’ determined, but is the effect of “historical and material relations in production” (Solar 2012: 88). Positively, a culture “does not present itself in a prearranged economic, political and social context; it is in itself always already an economic fact, a political factor and a social product” (Buden et al. 2013: 8). Hence, the whole debate has been quite effectively resolved by reminding on the material conditions and links within a ‘cultural field’ as a space that integrates both the administrative, institutional actors and those who act outside of this framework, demonstrating that also Yugoslav literature itself functioned as the ‘field’. Bourdieu’s concept resolves precisely the limiting ‘static’ definition of post-Yugoslav literature (but also: Yugoslav literature), as the concept of the field infers dynamic and fluidity. The multiplicity and interconnectedness of all the agents in the field constituted on the multiple (interest, power, material) positions represent the “the science of the literary field” (Bourdieu 1993: 30). It “is a form of *analysis situs* which establishes that each position [...] is subjectively defined by the system of distinctive properties by which it can be situated relative to other positions; that every

21 Relying on the works of prominent ‘Yugoslavists’ like S. Lukić, P. Matvejević, A. Barac and others, Vidulić in his other paper assesses unfavourably the ‘phantom’ literary project of the integrationist Yugoslav ideology (Vidulić 2015: 180–181), and expands his argument to affirm the insubstantiality of the post-Yugoslav literature too (ibid.: 182).

22 Stojanović puts forward a “hypothesis that Yugoslavism was stronger than either of the two Yugoslav states, outliving them both” (Stojanović 2015).

position, even the dominant one, depends [...] on the other positions constituting the field" (ibid.). That literary field is a dynamic battleground of *position-takings* and *positions* defined by the possession and distribution of capital, that is, that the "literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also *field of struggles*" (ibid.) demystifies also the prevalent perceptions about the autonomy of literature, and its 'organicism' appropriations (for example through the canonization of national literatures).

The application of the Bourdieusian theoretical materialist paradigm in interpreting post-Yugoslav literature was initiated in the works of several authors from Croatia (Duda, Postnikov, Kosmos, Kreho), and results in the recent circulation of the phrase 'post-Yugoslav (literary) field'.²³ Limits of the national literature concepts stressed the need to use the apparatus with a more "analytical, i.e. operational value" (Duda 2017: 45):

Analytical intention of the post-Yugoslav literary field construction, as the need to systematically approach the complex problematic of the recent literary configuration and the conditions of its production, is to a great extent the effect of the state of play of the national literary historiographies, i.e. their typical discourse, their historiographical practice, and, certainly, their reach. (Ibid.: 53)

This approach helps in addressing the reality in which the contemporary literary works are produced, clearly distinguishing the essential difference – besides the administrative one – between Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literary practices: "when we say post-Yugoslav, we also say a novel, we say capitalism" (ibid.: 49). Moreover, incorporating the concept of the field into the analysis of post-Yugoslav literature helps in recognizing the dynamic process of this field construction, together with highlighting the fact that what we mean by 'literature' is not exhausted inside a literary text. Part of the post-Yugoslav field is the infrastructure of publishers (particularly relevant are those publishing cross-borders), regional literary festivals and literary awards, together with mostly online existing journals that publish literary reviews, which, again, exists despite the restrictive and ignoring official policies and regulations:

The literary field is, together with writers and critics, shaped by the publishers. Publishing houses like Durieux or Belgrade-based Fabrika knjiga and RENDE are some of those responsible for reintroducing the authors from the broad post-Yugoslav space to readers coming from different [former Yugoslav] Republics. After the dissolution of the country, the grounds on which the broken cultural liaisons were re-established were the capitalist transition supported by the European integrations and the belief in the market. The other side of this narrative

23 Dean Duda, "Prema genezi i strukturi postjugoslavenskog književnog polja (bilješke uz Bourdieua)" (2017); Dinko Kreho, "O čemu govorimo kada govorimo o postjugoslavenskoj književnosti?" (2015).

is made by the cultural policies of the newly formed states, not interested to create the basic conditions for the circulation of books from other former Yugoslav Republics and make them available to readers. (Konjikušić 2016)

While this unfavourable situation looks different in the world of internet sites and portals owing to which the post-Yugoslav literary field functions online uninterruptedly, the communication is actually virtually impossible to disrupt completely, because of the very nature of the field. Claims that commonly take shape of 'Yugoslav-integrationist', almost romantic visions of connections among people, are in fact empirical: there are "situations and contexts, like those linguistic or artistic ones, that are strong enough to 'connect' the territories" (Brebanović 2017: 61). The same logic helps define one's own authorial identity against that which plainly and unquestionably belongs to what has been constituted as a national literature:

I consider myself to be solely and exclusively a post-Yugoslav writer. The meaning of the post-Yugoslav literature reveals in the softness and flexibility of our identities, in our interfacing so to stay, and it is one of the strongest weapons against the ethnonational terror and a particularistic bigotry. Therefore, I don't consider myself a Serbian writer, except if that refers to a partition behind which they can count my blood cells, since in fact there is no other criterion to defend such a categorization. (Vladimir Arsenijević in Konjikušić 2016)

Moreover, theoreticians and critics who have discussed the notion of post-Yugoslav literature assent to the arguments that the motifs and themes in the works of post-Yugoslav authors "communicate" (Barzut 2012: 10), "relate to each other" (Crnković 2012: 5), are "impossible to understand outside the common context" (Kosmos 2015: 29), or represent a "mental geography" (Arsenijević 2010: 198). What is more, this awareness of the shared field is besides this contemporary, 'horizontal' spreading informed by the diachronic perspective of the Yugoslav past. One possible modus of its present existence is through the nostalgic memories, while on the other side there is a modus of *historicization* (Buden 2017), 'making of the experiences' (ibid.) that historically (and lastingly) connected Yugoslav peoples within the historical political entity of Yugoslavia. For this reason the insistence on the culture/state 'split' to an extent corresponds to the revisionist projects of the deligitimization of the SFRY. Precisely the role and the accomplishments of the SFRY as the institutionalized framework are at least interrelated, if not instrumental for the local cultural and artistic practices even nowadays. As will be shown next, Yugoslavia and its historicization are the 'platform' of the post-Yugoslav alternative, emancipatory social and cultural possibilities.

Some of the constitutive properties and socio-economic and cultural accomplishments of Yugoslavia have been invoked in the writings of the post-Yugoslav researchers and authors to criticize the current political ambience and suggest the

necessity of relying upon these very traditions. One of the basic characteristics of the Yugoslav society relevant for the understanding of post-Yugoslav nation-states constituted on the principle of the ethnonational identity was that it had been built on the basis of the antifascist struggle in the Second World War (Suvinić 2014; Markovina 2017; Bešlić, n.d.). This, namely, produced a specific new type of community, that is, a “non-identity-based, but emancipatory community” (Buden 2003), a “novel form of sociability” (Močnik 2018). Historian Dragan Markovina, among other researchers, sees also strong anti-fascist agenda in the post-Yugoslav societies as a part of the delimitation of the SFRY matrix. In nationalist narratives the antifascist struggle is suspended since it is “entirely built on the narrative of the brotherhood and unity of the Yugoslav peoples” (Markovina 2017: 38-39), principally contradicting the ideas of the dominant ethnonational ideologies. Markovina indeed offers one possible definition of the post-Yugoslav culture as a ‘parallel’ discourse based precisely in antifascism, as a single chance of the anti-nationalist and liberal left to withstand the regressive local politics: “to build a new society, namely, parallel institutions which would regard the whole post-Yugoslav space as a single cultural space of the common heritage, particularly that of the antifascist provenance” (ibid.: 43).

What also emerges as the critical element – as well articulated in opposition to the dominant societal matrices of the present time – are the emancipatory policies and practices of socialist Yugoslavia, a particular Yugoslav modernism which meant economic, cultural but also legal, institutional development and enhancement of the position of the Yugoslav peoples. The ‘post-socialist transition’ and the fundamental changes it generated, from privatization to pauperization and a general social and economic insecurity, are all executed by means of the greater anti-socialist (hence anti-Yugoslav) discourse. As mentioned accomplishments represent the historic reality of one actually better past, Viktor Ivančić rightly points up the importance of the “organized dementia” (Ivančić 2017) as an institutionalized construction of the present-day narratives about the past. Not only that the (discursive) discontinuity is necessary in the legitimization of the new ethnonational states, but also the denunciation of the Yugoslav project which by all means was a ‘better yesterday’. The very openness and future-oriented discourse of the Yugoslav socialist project – and not merely romanticized mythemes – inform the Yugo-nostalgia as the nostalgia for future (Kreho 2017). A critical ‘materialist interpretation’ of the Yugoslav wars also emerges from this analytical perspective, changing the focus from ‘national hatreds’ to the transition of the socially-owned, or collective property in the process of the capitalist restoration.

Clearly, “post-Yugoslav perspective politicizes” (Kreho 2015). Even if we consider it to represent “a nostalgia for [...] a vision of a better SFRY, which never came into being” (Perica 2012: 251), this “political mythological Yugo-nostalgia can assume utopian dimensions and serve concrete emancipatory politics [stretching] all the

way from the total escapism, passivity, to the new engagement, activity” (Velikonja 2010: 132). Therefore, the “subversion is nowadays founded on togetherness” (Borka Pavičević in Komarčević 2016), and the “notion of Yugoslavia has been working as a platform for resistance” (Slapšak 2011b: 311). That is why the works of post-Yugoslav literature could be seen as offering a possibility of a “different kind of literature” (Postnikov 2012: 15).

Yet, this different kind of literature, apparently produced exactly inside the ‘Yugoslav cultural sphere’ is what exists as different even before the post-Yugoslav period, as an alternative tradition, dubbed again by Denegri as “the second line”²⁴ of the art produced in Yugoslavia:

[F]irst is the decorative, vitalistic, and idealess moderate modernist art that became the official state of art of socialist Yugoslavia after the period of socialist realism. The second, the radical, experimental, and cosmopolitan art, [...] existing on the margins of official culture: the avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, and post-avant-garde phenomena of the twentieth century. (Djurić and Šuvaković 2003: xvi)

The “second line” is alternative also in the sense that it is unorthodox, or even marginal, comparable to the status of the Yugoslav avant-gardist art practices that remained outside of the dominant culture:

[I]nformation on avant-garde movements has not been integrated into the dominant discourse of national culture in Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia, or Montenegro. This is why [...] the problem of the avant-garde can be defined as a problem of impossible histories and impossible transfers of art to culture in historical Yugoslavia (1918–1991). (Šuvaković 2003: 6)

Again, a ‘Yugoslav cultural sphere’ could be seen as the sphere in which precisely Yugoslav (Neo-)avant-gardist artistic trajectories materialize, clarifying also a continuity the post-Yugoslav literature creates with the Yugoslav (Neo-)avant-gardist arts. While already a few authors theorized avant-gardist continuities in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav period, referring to stylistic and ideological propensities of the artistic practices,²⁵ the already-mentioned link between the two novels –

24 Though the use of the term “the other line” would also be fitting (“druga linija”).

25 One of the examples belonging to the Yugoslav literary historiography is Sveta Lukić’s interpretation of the link between the post-war Yugoslav fiction and historical avant-gardes (Lukić 1972). A ‘conscious’ act of establishing literary continuities among the Yugoslav Neo-avant-gardes and the post-Yugoslav writings is present in Vladimir Kopic’s 2003 text “Writings of Death and Entertainment: Textual Body and (De)composition of Meaning in Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde and Post-avant-garde Literature, 1968–1991”. Jelena Milinković in her 2010 article on contemporary poetry written by women conceptualizes its Yugoslav (Neo-)avant-gardist foundations (Milinković 2010). In the already cited 2017 article, Predrag Brebanović discusses

Bernardijeva soba and *Put u Birobidžan* – reveals the new possibility of historicizing the literary avant-gardes inside the post-Yugoslav context, and by virtue of it, the historicization of the post-Yugoslav literature itself. The stated feminist aspect of this link is the other end of this historicization, presenting the post-Yugoslav literature also as a feminist discourse, which will be further clarified in the following section.

However, this link emerges from one particular relationship towards the past, and towards temporality more generally. A true modern society – in the history of Yugoslav peoples represented by the society of the SFRY – “was believed to have been born in an emancipatory historical event and to be heading toward a better future” (Buden 2017: 346). But in the present-time “national post-socialism [...] the phantasm of tradition dominates” (Šuvaković in Radović 2005: 65). Unlike this commemorative interest in the past (Buden 2017), the past could be *actualized*, in the Benjaminian sense of the word:

[O]ne could speak of the increasing concentration (integration) of reality, such that everything past (in its time) can acquire a higher grade of actuality than it had in the moment of its existing. How it marks itself as higher actuality is determined by the image as which and in which it is comprehended. [...] To approach, in this way, ‘what has been’ means to treat it not historiographically, as heretofore, but politically, in political categories. (Benjamin 2002: 392)

The extent to which the fiction circumscribed by this research succeeds in “performatively addressing historical praxis” (Buden 2017: 348) of Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav past can become a necessary “memory-knowledge [established] as history” (Brebanović 2017: 61). Hence, whereas in the present-day culture of commemoration “[t]opicality is excluded” (Šuvaković in Radović 2005: 65),²⁶ the ‘past as history’ is the way of establishing a continuity with the Yugoslav past. The (post-Yugoslav) culture is “the past in its presence, topicality, uncertainty, openness. It is the past beyond its difference from the present and the future.” (Buden et al. 2013: 8). In this sense, the female continent as the figure of this research refers to the (Neo-) avant-gardist artistic and social imagination of a utopia, together with its negative assessments (as it shall be shown in the Chapter VI).

the concept of Yugoslav literature, offering at once the arguments for the post-Yugoslav literature constitution, by looking at the avant-gardist and revolutionary properties of Miroslav Krleža work (in his 2006 study *Podrumi marcipana: čitanje Bore Čosića* he also theorizes the theses). Again, together with mentioning some of the individual contributors, two projects in particular are important for archiving and producing new knowledges about the links among the contemporary artistic production and the Yugoslav (Neo-)avant-garde arts: the virtual *Museum of Avantgarde* (<https://www.avantgarde-museum.com/en/museum/collection/>) and the collective Centre for New Media *kuda.org*. (<https://www.kuda.org/>).

26 “Aktuelnost je isključena.”

By establishing this critical link, post-Yugoslav literature ceases being a provisional and even a problematic concept, but represents a relatively constant perpetuation of Yugoslav art, comparable to the “elusive and impossible” history of the Yugoslav avant-gardes (Šuvaković 2003: 5).

1.2. A Feminist Framing of the post-Yugoslav Literary Field

Recimo, dakle, da se osjećam post-nacionalnom književnicom. Za moj snažan otpor prema mome vlastitom etničkom svrstavanju u književnosti kriva su dva faktora. Jedan je nacionalizam i ustroj književnosti koji se ne razlikuje mnogo od ustroja novih postjugoslavenskih država. To su u principu organizacije slične mafijaškim zajednicama. Dakle, dok god si netko uzima pravo da ugura u književnost mamu, tatu i tetku, a izgura nekog drugog zato što je ‘Srbin’, ‘komunjara’, ‘partizančina’ i slično – ja takvoj zajednici ne mogu i ne želim pripadati. Drugi je razlog rodni: to je zajednica u kojoj vladaju muškarci: Hrvati u hrvatskoj književnosti, Srbi u srpskoj. Pitam vas: zašto bih onda ja, kao spisateljica, hrlila da pripadam takvoj književnoj zajednici?

(Dubravka Ugrešić)²⁷

In her text on the transnationalism of post-Yugoslav literature and its feminist perspective Jasmina Lukić proposes that a book that marks “both the end of Yugoslav literature, and the beginning of post-Yugoslav literature is a collective project

27 Let’s say I feel like a post-national author. There are two reasons I strongly oppose being grouped under ethnic criteria. One is the nationalism and the organization of literature not very different from the organization of the new post-Yugoslav states. These are actually organizations similar to mafia communities. Therefore, as long as someone feels entitled to take in their mom, dad, aunt, and throw out somebody because they are ‘Serbian’, ‘a comie’, ‘a damn partisan’ and the like – I cannot and will not belong to that community. The other reason is gender: it is the community ruled by men: Croats in Croatian literature, Serbs in Serbian. I ask: why would I, as a woman writer, rush to be a member of such a literary community? (Dubravka Ugrešić in Konjikušić 2016)

and a book which undermines any kinds of borders and divisions, from state to generic ones" (Lukić 2018a: 336), the *Vjetar ide na jug i okreće se na sjever/Vetar gre, proti poldnevu in se obrača proti polnoči* (1994, *The Wind Blows toward the South and Shifts toward the North*). A correspondence between four Yugoslav women writers, Rada Iveković, Biljana Jovanović, Maruša Krese and Radmila Lazić in the midst of Yugoslav dissolution and war is not only a collective, but also a transnational book, considering the history of its publishing, but also linguistically and politically: "Mi smo uvek bili transrepublikanci, transnacionalci, tada se to zvalo biti Jugoslovenkom" (We were always trans-republicans, transnationals, back then it was called being Yugoslav; Iveković in Jovanović et al. 1994: 17).²⁸ Moreover, for its "subversively open structure and mixture of languages, the book can easily be seen as a local version of Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, a mestiza text which promotes mestiza consciousness during a time when monolithic and simplistic readings of identity overtake a region already plunged into a series of local wars" (Lukić 2018a: 336). Besides making a clear pacifist and anti-nationalist statement, the authors also publicised women's involvement in the nationalist politics and discussed the problematic female 'emancipation' enabled by it (Iveković in Jovanović et al. 1994: 89; 95; 195). Moreover, a specific feminist discourse of the book redefined the very notion of authorship. While on one hand the collective writing shifts the focus from the question of authorship to the possibilities and forms of communication, it deconstructs the singular, universalist, centred and in reality culturally male-coded notion of authorship. The authorship as the effect of communication is enabled by the figure of a listener, without whom the story-telling could not take place (Felman and Laub 1992; Anderson 2006). The fulfilment of the precondition of telling a trauma, it is as well a reciprocal and plural conception of telling a story, of being an author. This principle is executed even beyond the four authors' collective 'correspondence' authorship, by inserting the texts of some of the Yugoslav artists and authors like Jelena Trpković, Mira Furlan, Stevan Tontić, or incorporating various anti-war proclamations, but also practical instructions (i.e. in case of arresting the anti-war rebels).²⁹

The relationship towards authorship as collective and collaborative, writing/narrating as the activity inseparable from listening/responding, anti-nationalist and anti-war communication, together with the all-embracing principles of Yugoslavism and feminism actually indicate an alternative public, or the *feminist counterpublic*, from which the very post-Yugoslav cultural and literary discourse

28 The book was first published by the German Suhrkamp in 1993 as *Briefe von Frauen über Krieg und Nationalismus* (Women's Letters on War and Nationalism), and a year later in Belgrade.

29 "Upustvo za ponašanje pobunjenika protiv rata u slučaju hapšenja" (Jovanović et al. 1994: 100).

emerged.³⁰ Jasmina Lukić in her 2018 interview also reminded of the anti-war and anti-nationalist character of the women studies grounded in Belgrade during the war in 1992, and in 1995 in Zagreb, adding that precisely this feminist engagement was formative for the civil scene (Lukić 2018b). Hence, the *Vjetar ide na jug* is, while being the last and first book of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav literatures, the book which connects the histories of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav feminisms. A utopian female continent indicates also the significance of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav feminisms in identifying the links between patriarchy, nationalism and war, and the overall impact this made on the creation of this alternative public space. Feminist anti-nationalist and pacifist discourse is an integral part of this space in which “networks and alliances beyond national borders [and] gender-conscious ‘new literacy’” (Lukić 2018a: 335) are created. These ‘feminist literacies’ have been incorporated in the argumentation and represent the conceptual background of this analysis.

The backbones of the history of socialist Yugoslavia’s feminisms are the foundation of the AFŽ (Women’s Antifascist Front) during the Second World War and its dismissal in 1953, a threshold year 1978 when the first feminist conference in the socialist country *Drug-ca žena* (Comrade Woman) was organized and a henceforth progressing of feminist theory, arts and activism.³¹ Nevertheless, as regards the topic of this research, the feminist anti-nationalist and pacifist discourse articulated in the late 1980s by the Yugoslav feminist activists and theoreticians is the most relevant and corresponds to the way already Virginia Woolf in her *Three Guineas* (1938) linked “the male domination of the cultural heritage with exploitation, violence and war” (Spender 1997: 24). Yugoslav feminists voiced and publicized the wartime sexual violence, theorizing also the general gendered discourse of nation and nationalism in the beginning and in the course of war:

In most of the writing of former Yugoslavia’s feminist theory the reality of war and the discourse of nationalism is gender identified [...]. What also runs like a thread through these writings is the need for these feminist authors to ground themselves in the sanity of peace, absolute rejection of any nationalism, and a reminder of multicultural frameworks of the former Yugoslavia. (Duhaček 1998: 134).³²

30 The concept of the feminist counterpublic has been recently employed in the study of the interwar periodicals by Stanislava Barać (Barać 2015).

31 The period ‘in-between’ the removal of the AFŽ and the *Drug-ca* conference does not represent a ‘break’, but is simply still not well researched.

32 The persecution of Jelena Lovrić, Rada Iveković, Slavenka Drakulić, Vesna Kesić and Dubravka Ugrešić in 1992 known as the *Witches from Rio* ‘case’ is the consequence of their publicizing of the war violence and war rape.

The bibliography of the feminist interpretations of war, nationalism, violence, patriarchy and break-up of Yugoslavia is quite extensive, and it is for this reason difficult to select a few among the numerous authors of this outstandingly productive theoretical, political and activist corpus of knowledge. A small excerpt from the bibliography and a few prominent names of the ‘new Yugoslav feminists’ – referring to the Yugoslav Neofeminism articulated in the mid-seventies – who provided critical contributions on the topics represent here the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav feminist discourse: Žarana Papić, Lydia Sklevicky, Biljana Jovanović, Jasmina Tešanović, Vesna Kesić, Rada Iveković, Svetlana Slapšak and many others.³³

Nevertheless, reminiscent of Dubravka Žarkov’s suggestion that a connection between the anti-war and feminist engagement is not necessarily neither ideologically grounded nor politically appropriate,³⁴ Tatjana Rosić maintains that “the interests of patriarchy are often represented as the interests of the nation” (Rosić 2015: 243). Part of the war technology was “the gendered dimension in the intensification of ethnic conflict and the incitement to violence” (Kesić 2001: 315), that is “gendering [of] the war propaganda” (ibid.: 315). Discussing the “patriarchal management of the crisis” (Slapšak 2009: 288), Svetlana Slapšak suggests that the “presence of misogyny in the public discourse [is] also an important sign of the cultural readiness to war, or at least a hint of the war culture” (ibid.: 292). Svetlana Slapšak is one of the most prominent proponents of understanding Yugoslav nationalisms and war as correlated to misogynist and patriarchal culture, while she is as well one of the most important theoreticians of the post-Yugoslav discourse. By building on

33 While this by no means exhaustive list is just a part of the bibliography spread throughout this paper, the texts have been also purposefully selected to display the temporal and thematic scope of the continuous production of the feminist knowledge on the topic: Rada Iveković: “Women, nationalism and war: ‘Make love not war’” (1993), “The Fiction of Gender Constructing the Fiction of Nation: On How Fictions Are Normative, and Norms Produce Exceptions” (2005); Žarana Papić: “Women in Serbia: Post-Communism, War and Nationalist Mutations” (1998), *Feminists Under Fire: Exchanges Across War Zones* (editor, 2003); Svetlana Slapšak: *War Discourse, Women’s Discourse: Essays and Case Studies from Yugoslavia and Russia* (editor, 2000), “Posleratni rat polova. Mizoginija, feministička getoizacija i diskurs odgovornosti u postjugoslovenskim društvima” (2009); Vesna Kesić: “Muslim Women, Croatian Women, Serbian Women, Albanian Women...” (2002), *Žene obnavljaju sjećanja* (editor, 2003); Jasmina Tešanović: “Women and Conflict: A Serbian Perspective” (2003), *Dizajn Zločina, Suđenje škorpionima* (2009). I expand this restricted choice of texts by suggesting the titles of a few significant edited volumes: *Gender and Identity: Theories from and/or on Southeastern Europe* (edited by Jelisaveta Blagojević et al., 2006); *Neko je rekao feminizam? Kako je feminizam uticao na žene XXI veka* (edited by Adriana Zaharijević, 2007 a); *Feminist Critical Interventions: Thinking Heritage, Decolonising, Crossings* (edited by Biljana Kašić et al., 2013).

34 Ana Miškovska Kajevska’s 2017 study *Feminist Activism at War: Belgrade and Zagreb Feminists in the 1990s* (New York & London: Routledge) contributed greatly to the debate on the anti-war activism, feminism and nationalism in the dissolving Yugoslavia.

Simon de Beauvoir's writings on patriarchy after the Second World War, Slapšak interpreted the present day historical revisionism in all former Yugoslav Republics as being in fact directed against the historical achievements of women's struggle as one of the most important social transformations of the time, "precisely because it represented a substantial symbol of the changes generally" (Slapšak 2009: 285). Therefore, parallel with the analysis of the Yugoslav wars, the revision of Yugoslav history is by way of feminist analysis seen as an aspect of the same project of marginalization of women and their struggle, and the retraditionalization of the society, together or by means of transforming the notions of 'femaleness', and 'femininity'. Likewise, perceptions of 'masculinity' and the actual destabilization of its traditional properties are interrelated with the principal societal processes: "Isn't the whole project of the rehabilitation of a wounded masculinity just another in a line of regional state and cultural projects, aimed at silencing and whitewashing of historical memory, hence representing the postponement of the confrontation." (Rosić 2014: 25).

Dubravka Ugrešić's epigraph above shows how this interrelationship of nationalism and patriarchy reproduces in the cultural field. While she identifies ethnonational and male prerequisites of post-Yugoslav masculinist 'official' literatures, Olja Savičević Ivančević illustrates this dynamics in the concrete example of the curriculum:

A single woman author in four years of high school – that was the curriculum. At the university the number of the integral works by women authors we read pushed as far as four or five. In that moment you either agree to it, or the thought of the experience of the half of the world's population which is mainly lost, makes you feel restless. (Savičević Ivančević in Andrijašević 2016)³⁵

While the declared focus of the study has been the last decade of the century, the two exceptions from the temporal focus illustrate well this process of exclusion. The uneven, sporadic, delayed presence in the literary scene of the two authors – Ildiko Lovas and Snežana Andrejević – identify quite accurately the character of the mainstream literature. A Serbian-Hungarian author, Ildiko Lovas' works were published in Serbian in the interval between 2005 and 2012, while the other author, Snežana Andrejević, wrote the first version of her future novel already with the outburst of war, but the full text was published first in 2007. The works of Ildiko Lovas are silenced for their multiple 'minority' discourses – from the minority language they were written on, to the feminist take on the (post-)Yugoslav history, whereas the name of Snežana Andrejević remains barely known in the literary scene despite

35 "Samo jedna autorica u četiri godine srednje škole – takav je bio program. Na faksu je broj autorica čija smo djela čitali integralno dogurao do četiri-pet. Tad ili pristaneš na to ili ti misao da je iskustvo polovice čovječanstva uvelike izgubljeno ne da mira."

the fact that she wrote a unique text on the Yugoslav wars, refracted in the theme of female authorship. Nevertheless, her absence from the literary scene is possibly a part of a conscious reproduction of the female authorship's invisibility.

This kind of play suggests that “literary production is gender ambiguous” (Lovell 1990: 84), meaning that the lines between ‘female’ and ‘male’ authorship could be more porous than it seems. Literary production as “deeply ambivalent” (ibid.: 83) discourse is an experimental space in which the sexual difference, that is the female difference exists, or ‘becomes’ past its ‘negative identity’. French feminists “evoked and revoked the tradition of Western thought, by seeing the female Otherness and the negative attributes that accompany it” (Čale Feldman and Tomljenović 2012: 57). Luce Irigaray’s concept of sexual difference has been developed precisely along the recognition of the absence of the actual sexual difference, and the existence of the domination of the philosophic logos that “stems in large part from its power to *reduce all others to the economy of the Same*. [...] And, in its greatest generality perhaps, from its power to *eradicate the difference between the sexes* in systems that are self-representative of a ‘masculine subject’” (Irigaray 1985: 74.). The aim of the ‘politics of sexual difference’ is “to change the symbolic order, and accompanying social practices, to create a positive feminine subject-position.” (Stone 2016: 874). Hence, the feminine place of the “no-body” (Braidotti 1994: 47) can be also “a point of view (a site of *différence*) from which phallogocentric concepts and controls can be seen through and taken apart” (Jones 1981: 248). The concept of sexual difference is a basis to conceptualize the female subjectivity, hence the female authorship and its relationship to the language and the symbolic order, determined by the (Lacanian) phallus (Rosić 2015: 246).

Becoming the author – in de Beauvoir’s sense of becoming a woman, but also in the sense of a debated Deleuze and Guattari’s *becoming* as “the affirmation of the positivity of difference, meant as a multiple and constant process of transformation” (Braidotti 1994: 111) – is the process this analysis follows. This *becoming* relates to the women’s occupying of the literary scene and the ‘authority’ of a writer, traditionally imagined as a masculine figure. Nevertheless, it also means transgressing the notorious “anxiety of authorship” (Gilbert and Gubar), and thereby instituting the female authorial figure as the sovereign creative, and narrating subject. This struggle is not only a theme, but a textual procedure thorough which the writings analysed in this research materialize.

This theme and a process are noticeable initially through the authorial status of narrators, their writer’s vocation, as a rule accompanied by the mentioned anxiety in the form of a writer’s block, or discernible on the level of the diegesis, as an undecided and non-authoritative narrating. Importantly, the modern breakthrough of women into the literary sphere is inseparable from the transformation of the very understanding of ‘femininity’ and the already mentioned masculine figure of an author: “Vocation – the will to write – nonetheless required a genuine tran-

scendence of female identity. Victorian women were not accustomed to choosing a vocation; womanhood was a vocation in itself." (Showalter 1977: 21) Regular usage of the term 'autofiction' in this paper owes to this process of self-examination, almost tangible process of the separation/integration of the author and the narrating self, as one of the critical properties of the women's writing. The autofiction, as the procedure of narration, that is the discourse which comprises the tension between the reality and fiction is the term used to reference the ambiguity of a possible autobiographical inscription, yet without ever finally secluding it. By quoting Kosinski, Linda Hutcheon restates that the term autofiction is "'fiction' because all memory is fictionalizing; 'auto' because it is [...] 'a literary genre, generous enough to let the author adopt the nature of his fictional protagonist – not the other way around'" (Hutcheon 2004: 10). While it is on one hand a mark of the discourse's ambiguity, the autofiction is the sign of the author's presence. It is the tool that can help organize fictional texts in an expressly political way. The fact that the narrators-protagonists are authors, writers by vocation upholds the need to open the literary text for the public speech about the injustice, but also marginalization and silencing. Technically performed as the "homodiegetic" narration (Genette), autofiction is "the fiction I have decided, as a writer, to give myself of myself, including, in the full meaning of the term, the analysis experience, not only as regards the subject but also the production of the text." (Doubrovsky in Bouzonviller 2015:148, fn 2). The figure of an autofictional narrator is essential for the post-Yugoslav fiction: the possibility offered by 'practicing autofiction' signals the need for a public space of speech and communication, and a (narrative, narratological) "platform for resistance".

Nevertheless, the concept of autofiction is related to the broadly discussed problem of autobiography inside the feminist criticism. While the autobiography provided the "privileged space for women to discover new forms of subjectivity" (Anderson 2006: 119), the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist authors "instead insisted that subject did not pre-exist the process of its formation within language" (ibid.). On the other side, by reminding of the names of the feminist journals and books (they by rule involve a *voice of voicing*) Wilson negotiates the idea that "if there is a typical literary form of feminism it is the fragmented, intimate form of confessional, personal testimony, autobiography, the diary" (Wilson 1990: 182). Nevertheless, Wilson also asks whether the testimonies could and should be really taken as transparent and straightforward evidence of an experience, while Cowie argues that the novel itself as a first person realistic narrative allows identification with the genre of autobiography. This has both emancipatory and limiting effects:

[A] form which is ideologically appropriate to feminism; authors see it as a way of telling women's story for the first time in an undisguised voice. The result has been an identification of author with protagonist, and of both with 'women',

a result emphasized when commercial publishers use it as a marketing device, selling women's writing as subversive, sexual autobiography – the autobiography of a gender. The attempt has been to present women for the first time as active, speaking subject; the effect has been to obscure as well as mystify the activity of displacement present in all forms of imaginative writing. (Cowie 1990: 127)

Clearly, first person narration is not in itself emancipatory, though it is often theorized as the epochal opening of the literary space for the female voices. On the contrary, besides the problematic 'sexualizing of the genre', it can function as a substitute for the actual social and political transformation:

[T]he woman speaker, deliberately collapsed into the 'real' writer, is represented as an author with writer's block, seeking both sexual gratification and release into prose. A double triumph is equated with liberation. Neither writing nor sexual pleasure as valorised activities are queried in their relation to social and political meanings. Both are complacently offered as individual satisfactions, and silently substituted for a feminist politics. (Cowie 1990: 127)

Moreover, while some authors make a clear distinction between feminist politics and women's experience³⁶, the other maintain that we cannot completely separate one from another, for feminism could not "take women to be a dispensable category" (Barrett 1990: 163). This dynamic in a specific way reverberates in the context of the market, where "the notion 'women's writing' defines all those literary texts written by women and is primarily used as a market category" (Grdešić 2015). An easy analogy of 'genre and gender' prompts a ghettoization of literature written by women, comparable to other 'minority' literatures: a heterogeneous space is conceptualized as a single genre (ibid.).³⁷

Coming back to autobiography, autofiction seems to be the possibility that resolves the 'trouble between the autobiography and the feminist subject' (Anderson 2006). The concept of autofiction suspends the often misleading autobiographical reading of fiction, but leaves the narrative space open for the first person accounts. The subject constructed through the procedure of autofiction is the 'speaking subject', someone who has a voice, which is why the 'autofictional vocation' of the fe-

36 "Feminism can never be the product of the identity of women's experiences and interests – there is no such unity. Feminism must always be the alignment of women in a political movement with particular political aims and objectives. It is a grouping unified by its political interests, not by its common experiences." (Coward 1980: 63)

37 Grdešić further explains: "It is enough to look at Wikipedia, Amazon, or even Goodreads and understand that the women writers are placed in special categories: 'women's', 'women's writing', 'women's fiction'. The only authors not grouped under any of the categories labelled by an identity aspect are male white hetero cis writers. There are no, for example, categories such as 'men's writing', 'white fiction', 'straight fiction', 'cis writing.'" (Grdešić 2015)

male (and feminist) narrators in the analysed fiction is as a rule that of a writer, as the 'privileged narrator'. Yet, this position materializes in different forms, from the 'regular' anxiety of authorship, to the narrator's split (for example, by altering grammatical gender in the work of Snežana Andrejević), or complete suspension of the conventional narrator (in Luka Bekavac's fiction), but also manifests as the narrators' inquiry into their gender or sexual identities, often felt as alien, or in the process of transformation (Slobodan Tišma).

Nevertheless, the recognition and distinction of the female difference, female subjectivity, ironically coincides with the poststructuralist 'removal' of the universalist subject. But, then the question "what kind of political and moral accountability is possible within a feminist position that works without a notion of a universal subject or stable self?" (Butler 1992) must be asked. Judith Butler in her writings resolved this paradoxical situation by taking on "the radical position that [...] the absence and the dismantling of the fixed categories does not lead to the collapse of the whole political project of feminism, but discloses the new meaning of the political" (Zaharijević 2006: 70). Instead of the totalizing categories, for Butler 'a woman' exists only in plural, not anchored, "a never fully accomplished project" (ibid.: 69). A feminist standpoint itself is never complete but is rather a "flexibly developing standpoint that can handle whatever emerges in the process of eliminating sexism" (Moi, 1989: 132).

Feminist reading of literature enables avoiding the attributed, 'inherent' feminist characteristics of texts, transferring the focus from this question to a relational link between a work of fiction and its possible interpretations. This shift from the characteristics of a 'feminist text'³⁸ to a feminist reading helps also resolve the ambiguity of the autobiographical inscription. Interpreting Barth's 'death of the author' as an actual 'birth of the reader', Grosz theorizes this position from the feminist perspective as decisive in the deconstruction of the patriarchal and masculine texts. The creative advancement of the reader enabled the "feminist appropriations and recontextualizations" (Grosz 1995: 16) of any text, no matter how 'patriarchal' it might be. This also explains why the privileged text of the feminist analysis are the phallogocentric texts of Lacan, Freud, Levi-Strauss, and Marx. For: "Any text can be read from a feminist point of view, that is, from the point of view that brings out the text's alignment with, participation in, and subversion of patriarchal norms." (Grosz 1995: 16)

38 Elisabeth Grosz distinguishes three types of such texts: "And when I refer sometimes to 'feminist texts', sometimes to 'feminine texts', and sometimes to 'women's texts', I am purposely being vague. Exploring the relations between the 'women's texts' (texts written by women, largely for women), 'feminine texts' (those written from the point of view of feminine experience or in a style culturally designated as feminine), and 'feminist texts' (those which self-consciously challenge the methods, objects, goals, or principles of mainstream patriarchal cannons) is precisely my purpose here." (Grosz 1995: 11)

Feminist reading is the 'oppositional reading' (Stuart Hall),³⁹ effectuated by the poststructuralist conception of a standpoint which is "not, strictly speaking, a *position*, but rather a critical interrogation of the exclusionary operations by which 'positions' are established" (Butler 1992). While Kate Millet in the beginning of the seventies theorized "the social, institutional and personal power relations between the sexes" (Moi, 1989: 118) as *sexual politics*, refocus of the feminist theory to gender also enabled the constant questioning and awareness of "the other categories of difference that structure our lives and texts, just as theorizing gender emphasizes the connection between feminist criticism and other minority critical revolutions" (Showalter 1997: 229). 'Other categories of difference' is what the feminist reading of post-Yugoslav literature is clearly also aimed at. In the same way the feminist criticism is not "single and uniform, given and forever established, systemic, let alone normative" (Čale Feldman and Tomljenović 2012: 19), there is "no autonomous set of the regulatory terms, operations and interest of the feminist critique" (ibid.).

1.3. Summary

The works selected represent a contemporary post-Yugoslav literary production, and more concretely those 'crossover texts' that constitute the post-Yugoslav literature as a feminist discourse. The works have been also decided on by the specific kind of reception, taking into account the literary prizes, reviews, presence in the regional network of publishers, but also the reoccurring underrepresentation of some of the authors and their works.

The analysis opens with the three stories by a Serbian-Hungarian author Ildiko Lovas (b. 1967) in the following Chapter II. The three stories represent the most common modifications of time: Yugoslavia as a nostalgic memory, when it takes form of a chronotopic figuration, traumatic remembering of Yugoslavia and a disillusioned present-day narrative. A critical feature of the narratives is that all three temporalities are cut across by the *event* of the female authorship, as an (autofictional) precondition of the story being told in the first place. Obstacles to this authorship, but also its realization which is meaningful only when it articulates a transnational, diasporic, minority spaces are the themes of this fiction. Finally, Lovas explores the possibilities and limits of the *écriture féminine*, together with the importance of not only writing, but *listening* to a story one must tell.

Chapter III is an experimental analysis of the three novels as the post-Yugoslav *écriture féminine*. While the textual presence of the female author, that is, the aut-

39 Opposed to the 'hegemonic reading', this kind of reading relates also to other traditions of non-conformist reading, like Ricoeur's 'hermeneutics of suspicion', or Althusser's 'symptomatic reading'.

fictional narrator is the essential aspect of these fictional realities, the authors respond differently to the contests of the *écriture féminine*. Death of the mother, and the father unfold as a Cixousian precondition of writing. Tanja Stupar Trifunović's (b. 1977) novel could be read as a textbook of the *écriture féminine* – its rhetoric, the figure of the mother, romance narrative and a hybrid, 'fluid' narration complete this 'anachronistic' second-wave text. Tea Tulić's (b. 1978) narrator focuses on the mother and the female family as a reverberation of the 'sisterhood' as that non-hierarchical 'horizontal' relationship among women. In her novel Tulić touches upon the space of the semiotic as the source of the female authorship and the role of the mother in mastering the usage of language. Finally, Ivana Bodrožić's (b. 1982) war-novel narrativizes the trauma of war and father's death, reflected in the coming of age story. The novel explores the dynamic among fictional and autobiographic writing that is relevant for the feminist debates about the emancipatory possibilities of the self-narratives.

Novels of Luka Bekavac (b. 1976) and Snežana Andrejević (b. 1956) are contrastively read in the Chapter IV in order to show, on one side, the continuities among the seemingly disconnected literary texts that in fact structure a single literary field, and on the other the interruption in the reception and general position of women authors in the literary mainstream. The subject of the female voice re-emerges as the possibility of communicating the past, but also as a not less puzzling relationship between this voice and the (belonging) body. While the stress on the diegetic narration enables the analysis of the 'gendered story-teller', the 'mimesis of war' in the novels by the two authors unveils the correlation between war and gender/sex. Finally, the avant-gardist perception of temporality and history defines the possibilities of narrativizing the past in the first place, indicating along the way the links among Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav writing.

Chapters V and VI are also comparatively structured, but in the way which would show alternative possible answers to the same question about 'what to do with the past'? It seems that the past, which haunts the protagonists in the post-Yugoslav fiction, is here finally confronted. In the case of Olja Savičević Ivančević (b. 1974) it is the interruption of a 'normalizing' narrative of the transition, an homage to the socialist Yugoslavia but also the envisioning of some kind of a utopian future. Going back and forth through the time unfolds as, again, a necessary element on the way to the narrator's authorial, bodily and feminist emancipation. Slobodan Tišma (b. 1946) performs the connection to the artistic practices of the Yugoslav Neo-avant-garde, he himself was the protagonist of, instituting a link between the past and the present beyond a mere commemoration. This act activated the historicization of the very post-Yugoslav literature as a part of a broader avant-gardist, alternative or also leftist literary practice. Tišma touches upon principal questions of the literary history and canon and offers an answer to the question who writes 'for, in place of, as' women?