Organized memory and popular remembering: The encounter of Yugonostalgia theories with socialism

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Abstract
The article first examines the contrast between popular remembering and the official presentation of Yugoslav socialist past in Slovenia. We examine the discursive patterns in political dignitaries’ declarations and reconstruct popular remembering as it emerges from the existing research. We focus on theories that conceptualize positive popular attitudes towards socialist past with the notion of ‘nostalgia’. Following the ways how researchers overcome the difficulties of the ‘Yugonostalgia’ approach, we note that they do not take into account the embeddedness of the positive achievements of socialism into the overall fabric of socialist system. According to our hypothesis, this omission induces the researchers to overestimate the present social and political impact of positive attitudes to socialist past. Furthermore, social struggles in which researchers are engaged seem to raise barriers to scientific practice. This study attempts to contribute to the project of Yugoslav memory studies.

Keywords
collective memory, memory studies, popular remembering, socialism, Yugonostalgia

Introduction
The vast body of literature dealing with popular remembering seems to ascribe a host of common features to very diverse practices of remembering (Assmann, 1995; Bajović, 2012; Coman et al., 2009; Dosse, 1998; Halbwachs, 1927; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994; Branche et al., 2012; Levy, 1999; Misztal, 2003; Nora, 1984; Olick, 1999; Pomian, 1998; Schwartz and Schuman, 2005; Tulving, 1972). It is believed that spontaneous remembrance practices typically follow major historical turning points after the collapse of large socio-economic systems, for example, the mining and
traditional industries in Great Britain during the late 1960s, the traditional farming in France in the 1970s or the socialist systems in Central and Eastern Europe at the turn of the 1990s. According to those theories, people begin to develop memories once it is clear that their previous lifestyles definitely came to an end – as if they want to conserve in their memories what they lost in real life.

While, on the one hand, the practices of popular remembering are believed to preserve at least the cultural existence of the community which lost its socio-economic existence, the literature also describes organized memorial practices which through the shaping of ‘memory community’ contribute to the establishment of a really existing community, indirectly via the creation of common culture. In the latter case, remembrance practices are believed to operate in the opposite direction: individuals for whom those practices constitute (or invent) the past of which they may have not been aware until now and had not thought of it as their shared past are constituted into a (new) real community thanks to implanted memory.

Although what we here call ‘popular remembering’ belongs to what Jan Assmann conceptualizes as communicative memory (arising in everyday informal situations), while organized memorial practices are part of cultural memory (distant from everyday, organized, institutionalized) (Assmann, 1995), these two practices (distinguished by Schwartz and Schuman, 2005: 185, as ‘popular vs elite memory’) resort to memory to fill a void: it compensates for a social group that no longer exists – or creates a group that does not yet exist. Popular remembering practices memories retrospectively: it preserves the past because it has been lost. Organized memory takes a prospective approach: it produces the past in order to create the future.

Accordingly, it would not be too risky to assume that both retrospective practices of remembering and prospective memorial practices create cultural groups. The core around which memory groups are formed is often conceptualized as ‘identity’ (Kansteiner, 2002). As a convenient initial simplification, we shall hypothetically conceive remembrance practices as identity practices that create and preserve identity groups or at least contribute to their emergence.

In the following, we examine organized memorial practices and popular remembering with respect to the socialist past in post-Yugoslav Slovenia. Pioneering academic research opened this problem-field with the study of Yugonostalgia practices, and it brought the focus on the socialist past at the moment when the historical experience of socialism was ideologically suppressed. While studies of Yugonostalgia were mainly interested in the ‘transformative’ potential of these practices and in their eventual contribution to the changes of the disillusioned present via socialist legacy, we will examine how these studies themselves approach socialism. After considering what is ‘shared’ in the two types of memorial practices, we therefore discuss the theoretical capacity of the Yugonostalgia approach. In conclusion, we suggest how a context-attentive research could explain some intriguing memorial phenomena.

Ambiguous theoretical balance sheet

Let us first look at the arguments that go against our starting hypothesis (Karamanić, 2012; Klein, 2011). First, the assumption that memorial practices produce and reproduce identity groups employs the same general notions (identity, memory group, social groups understood as cultural groups) to treat diverse phenomena, as the preservation of the memory of Shoah, on the one hand, and evocation of memories of ‘socialism’ in ‘post-socialist’ countries, on the other. The second reason for scepticism regarding this approach is the fact that the memorial practices started to be linked to identity constructions towards the mid-1970s when in various societies, in various situations and in various ways, spontaneously or in an organized manner, remembrance practices actually began to assert themselves. It is therefore fair to assume that academic practices were triggered by the pressure of simultaneous ideological production. Scepticism is even stronger when we know
that the theoretical production in question coincided with the advancement of organized identity policies, ‘politics of recognition’ (Taylor, 1995) and the historical formation of identity groups. Another suspect element is the fact that scholarly texts use the same terminology as popular or organized ideological practices (identity, recognition, collective memory). Finally, it is not clear whether the object of knowledge ‘shared memory’ matches any real object at all (Boisson et al., 2018; Candau, 2017, 2020).

The invention of tradition (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) is nothing new. Throughout time, the tradition and its organized invention were important mechanisms of maintaining cohesion of societies or important social groups within them. What is new though is that tradition now produces a special kind of large social groups – identity groups. The mechanisms and effects of the new remembrance practices cannot be understood if we use the same notions as they themselves use. Their ideology is part of their practices – but practices and their potential effects cannot be explained unless we also explain their specific ideologies and ways in which these ideologies support specific practices. It follows that our initial hypothesis about memorial practices as producing and reproducing identity groups cannot be situated on the level of theoretical conceptualization, but should first be conceived as a practical ideology of identity group construction.

**Organized memory practices**

Following the preliminary considerations, our hypothesis maintains that evocation of the past induces individuals to produce common memory and thus to come together in an identity group.

In contrast to the beliefs of identity groups, and indeed in contrast to our hypothesis, cognitive science holds that individual memories of experienced events (episodic memory) only rarely and only partly coincide and therefore cannot produce shared memory (Boisson et al., 2018; Candau, 2017, 2020). However, it is possible to have a shared memory of the past events which the involved individuals did not experience (semantic memory) (Greenberg and Verfaellie, 2010; Tulving, 1972). Semantic memory is produced and reproduced by discourses rather than by immediate impressions. It is also possible to say that semantic memory is produced and reproduced by discursive ideological mechanisms, and that this also holds true of the social memory in general. The actual basis of collective memory is not individual memories or only ‘memory milieu’ (individual narratives and conversations, schools, media, museums, etc.) (Coman et al., 2009), but the very belief that collective memory in fact exists.

Such belief is immanent to individual memory and certain institutional apparatuses as well, and it shapes shared memory from individual elements of memory milieu (Candau, 2017, 2020). Individuals narrate their memories believing that their narrative is part of the collective memory of a specific social group, and their audiences share that same belief. Belief in shared memory is an objective social form within which individual memories are communicated. Memory apparatuses (schools, media, museums, lieux de mémoire), on the contrary, are the material existence of that collective belief.

The belief that collective memory exists functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968). Memories are shared in the belief that shared memory does exist, so the stories that are related are mainly, or only, those that are likely to be part of the collective memory. Conversely, the audience, sharing the same belief, hears mainly, or only, what could be the shared memory. Those social exchanges are governed by the ideological assumption about the shared memory, so the circulation of materials which could be shared memory creates the repository which in fact is shared memory.

These mechanisms are utilized in official memory engineering in Slovenia. On the occasion of unveiling the monument to ‘all the victims of all wars and all war-related victims’, the President of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, opened his speech as follows:
The people, the nation, the mature nation is constituted by shared memories. [...] It is not to say that these memories correspond, that they are unified or same. But they are shared memories.5

Shared memory is generated when diverse individual memories are presented and received as shared memories. The same strategy was used by the former president of Slovenia, Milan Kučan:

Every one of us has his or her own memories and [...] personal experiences of the year 1991 [...]. But we are still convinced that the military victory and the grand feat of gaining independence could not be achieved had we not all been of one mind that we were taking the right step [...]. The inter-connectedness and unity were outstanding.6

President Kučan attempted to fabricate shared memory from individual memories by urging the audience to cherish their own memories and look upon the memories of others as shared memories. Although memories and experiences are individual matters, what he was suggesting is that the awareness of the experience was ‘one’ from the very beginning. This ‘conviction’ about the unity allegedly still persists, connecting the present and the past and uniting ‘all Slovenians’ through their shared memory. Validating the origins of the state he was presiding, Mr Kučan resorted to the ‘meta-memorial’ discourse, the device that is capable to weld the arbitrariness of the origins to the inevitable social effects of particular selection of events chosen as the ‘origins’ (in this case, the exclusion of those who do not partake in the ‘unity of Slovenians’).7

This process can also be conceptualized with the notion of discursive framing. In social studies in general (Goffman, 1974), and in theories of remembrance in particular (Irwin-Zarecka, 1994), it is conceived as an interpretive scheme (Aslanidis, 2016; Beim, 2007; DiMaggio, 1997), that is, as a formal tool that gives sense to otherwise chaotic, haphazard experiential content. Discursive frame is a way to connect or articulate these disparate elements and it is concretized according to the specific conjuncture of an utterance. In the quoted presidents’ utterances, we can see how the belief in shared memory is self-verified through the framing of individuals’ mnemonic material into the discursive frame of ‘our individual memories are collective memories’.

Memory framing produces not only collective memory but also collective amnesia. By framing one part of the available material, it consigns to oblivion the part that is left outside the frame. Official discourses in Slovenia systematically use this strategy, taking the year 1991 as the beginning of Slovenia’s statehood and excluding from the frame the establishment of the Slovenian state during World War II. ‘Ten years ago [...] the positive energy [...] of succeeding generations of the Slovenes [...] was actualized and turned into the decision to establish our own state’;8 ‘tonight we celebrate the first 25 years of Slovenia’s statehood’;9 ‘slightly more than a quarter of a century since the establishment of our own state’;10 ‘general people’s enthusiasm which [...] led to the establishment of our own state. [Now], twenty-seven years later [...]’.11

The organized amnesia concerning the establishment of the Slovenian state during WWII and the socialist revolution is part of a broader strategy for manipulating the memories of the 1941–1945 Liberation War and socialism. There are two types of manipulation involved, and they are part of two broader strategies for fabricating social memory in Slovenia. Both strategies endeavour to undermine the semantic link ‘liberation war – socialist revolution’ which was a constituent element of the dominating ideology during the socialist era.

The first strategy (which could be called ‘centrist’ or perhaps ‘liberal’) aims to purge the 1941–1945 Liberation War of its socialist character and associate it teleologically with the gaining of independence in 1991. It reduces the liberation war to the ‘resistance against the occupying forces’ acknowledging at most its anti-Fascist character.
The first centrist-liberal strategy brushes aside the socialist project and its implementation, confining it to historical oblivion while substituting the void with the teleology of phantom continuity ‘the struggle for the northern border’ → liberation war → independence’. To avoid tedious citations demonstrating an absence, let us quote a representative passage, again by a president of the republic, unfolding the centrist-liberal strategy:

In their struggles for our northern border, general Maister and his fighters established the territorial bases that made possible the determination of Slovene national territory, and thereby the space for the establishment of the independent state [the topos: ‘the struggle for the northern border’ and teleology]. Let us remember the many victims of fascism and nazism and the resistance of the militant organisation TIGR [acronym for ‘Trst, Istra, Gorica, Rijeka’, antifascist movement on the territories with Slovene and Croat majority, allotted to the Kingdom of Italy after WWI, active 1927-1941; now manipulated by the political right to obscure the importance of the Liberation Front, 1941-1945]. [...] Let us also remember the national liberation and the partisan struggle of Slovene nation in the WWII, and the integration of our national territory that, half a century later, became the territory of the sovereign state of Slovenia [omission of the socialist-revolutionary nature of the national liberation struggle, and of its inclusion into the Yugoslav liberation movement].

The second strategy, practised by the right-wing official politics, equates the liberation war with the ‘communist’ revolution and relates it to the extra-judicial executions of collaborators in 1945. Within the political and ideological apparatuses, only the radical right-wing strategy preserves the memories about socialism, which it presents as a ‘totalitarian’ deviation from the normal historical flow. However, neither of the two strategies practised by the political and ideological establishment has succeeded to capture popular mind.

**Interpreting popular remembering: post-socialist nostalgia**

Researchers of post-socialist condition and its memories have established early that popular remembering is at odds with the past constructed through the remembrance strategies pursued by states and their ideological apparatuses (Lavabre and Mayer, 2006).

To illustrate this disparity and its history, let us present the attitude of Slovenian public to socialism and capitalism, which obviously does not tally with the official historical revisionism and anti-communism.

We are aware of the ‘ontological hiatus between survey data and political culture’ (Olick, 1999: 337). However, taken upon a longer period and with a constant methodology, survey data can indicate general trends in ‘what ordinary individuals believe about the past’ (Schwartz and Schuman, 2005: 184). Table 1 shows that contemporary economic processes strongly influence individuals’ attitudes (the collapse of the positive attitude towards capitalism and the surge of the positive attitude towards socialism in 2011 and 2013, the years of economic crisis in Slovenia), while official memorial engineering does not (the inverted trends of the attitudes, generally in favour of socialism, and the relatively stable value of the ‘neutral’ attitude). Table 1 also suggests that the arrival of new generations does not inflect the general picture, which concurs with the findings in Croatia where the family seems to be the major influence on the memory of the younger generations (Vuckovic Juros, 2018). Concerning socialist past, communicative memory seems to prevail over cultural memory (Assmann, 1995), and the coming of generations with no direct experience has so far not affected the survey data (as it still may over a longer period; see Schwartz and Schuman, 2005).
The same kind of indices could be found in other ‘post-socialist’ countries. Does this mean that people succumbed to ‘post-socialist’ nostalgia?

A number of researchers (Bošković, 2013; Maksimović, 2017; Palmberger, 2008, 2016; Petrović, 2010a, 2013, 2016; Spasić, 2012; Todorova, 2010a, 2010b; Todorova et al., 2014; Todorova and Gille, 2010; Velikonja, 2008, 2013, 2017, 2019; Volčič, 2007; Vuckovic Juros, 2018) deal with the manifestations of alleged post-socialist nostalgias which, as they argue, overcome ideological blockades posed by official history-making policies. Their attention was captured by the revival of socialist past at the time when official politics adhered to strict anti-communist interpretations, and they were even more intrigued by the form of those nostalgic expressions. Nostalgia found its way into the public domain in the form of humour, entertainment, enjoyment and parodies, that is to say, the sentiments that stand in stark contrast to the gloomy representations of the socialist past as trauma. The result of this encounter between the official and popular practices is that attempts at suppressing post-socialist nostalgia have increased its popularity, since even if people no longer respond to socialist ideas they are still moved by their historical reinterpretations.

Contrary to the prima vista impression offered by the survey data that suggest a soft tilting of the scale in favour of socialism, Yugoslav past seems rather strongly to polarize at least certain individuals and groups.

To illustrate it, we chose an example that leaves one astonished by the stubbornness and zeal involved. After WWII, several large signs honouring the late Yugoslav president Tito appeared on the hillsides at the Slovenia-Italy border. We will concentrate here on the one reading NAŠ TITO (OUR TITO), constructed in 1978 on the Sabotin hill (Komel, 2008; Marussig, 2015; Velikonja, 2008). It was made of huge stones and maintained by the Yugoslav army until Slovenia gained independence. During the years that followed, it was largely forgotten, although renovated from time to time. In 2004, however, the stones began to be moved around. When in 2004 Slovenia joined the European Union (EU), unknown persons rearranged the stones changing the sign to read NAŠ SLO (i.e. OUR SLOvenia), but they were quickly rearranged back into NAŠ TITO. A year later, the sign was changed to NAŠ FIDO (i.e. OUR FIDO, Fido being a popular generic name for a dog) and then rearranged back into NAŠ TITO. Eventually, a Nazi flag with a swastika appeared on the hillside. Throughout that time, police and various inspectorates were swamped with complaints, so the Italian and Slovenian border municipalities turned the area into a Peace Park. Unfortunately, it was anything but the peace park. One year later, the inscription read NAŠ TIGR (OUR TIGR; the name of the pro-Yugoslav anti-Fascist organization), then NAŠ TITO again. During the anti-government protests in 2013, the protesters changed it into VSTAJA (Rebellion),

| Year | Socialism (Very positive) | Neutral (Very negative) | Don’t know | Capitalism (Very positive) | neutral | (Very negative) | Don’t know |
|------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------|----------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------|
| 1993 | 18                       | 34                     | 28         | 20                         | 21     | 34             | 29        |
| 2005 | 32                       | 38                     | 19         | 11                         | 14     | 34             | 36        |
| 2011 | 44                       | 35                     | 16         | 5                          | 13     | 38             | 40        |
| 2013 | 41                       | 33                     | 18         | 8                          | 10     | 36             | 44        |
| 2018 | 39                       | 35                     | 20         | 6                          | 15     | 36             | 42        |

Source: Jogan and Broder, 2015, for 1993–2013; Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovene Public Opinion Surveys, for 2018.
and curiously no one complained. When a year later the sign was rearranged into JJ – the initials of the leader of the strongest right-wing party – the stones were promptly reshuffled to spell out OUR TITO and have not been moved since.

This case manifests well the struggle of ordinary people for ‘the right to remember’ (Petrović, 2013), suppressed by designations of the socialist past as totalitarian by both European and national authorities. Researchers initially attempted to deal with these contradictions with the help of the concept of nostalgia.

In the introduction to her book about post-communist nostalgia, Maria Todorova writes that the concept of nostalgia is not only attractive but also ‘the most elusive of concepts’. (Todorova, 2010b: 1). Nostalgic practices are supposedly diverse, ranging from the marketing of esoteric past for the purposes of tourism, entertainment and consumerism (tourist destinations, souvenirs, bars and restaurants in socialist style, musical parties and trademarks) to the preservation and evocation of socialist ideas (commemoration of socialist holidays, restoration of monuments, spreading of socialist ideas through music, movies, posters etc.). They can be anything: profit-oriented, joyful, flippant, political or subversive. Their interpretations are similarly diverse: according to Dominic Boyer (2010: 27), they are a symptom of post-imperial Western Europe that after 1989 turned Eastern Europe into its colony through economic practices in which the concepts of freedom, autonomy and future are very malleable. Gerald Creed (as well as Daphne Berdahl, 1999) argue that by describing those practices as ‘merely’ nostalgic, the traumatic experience of de-industrialization, disappropriation and mass emigration during the transition period is trivialized and depoliticized (Creed, 2010). These conceptualizations therefore present nostalgia as a spontaneous practice, as a traumatic experience during the post-socialist period and also as a governing technique. Mitja Velikonja identified all these interpretations in music: they can be an expression of resignation and flight from reality, or a strategy adopted by the hegemonic discourse that fills the void created by the sense of pointlessness in contemporary capitalist societies or an act of ‘dissent’ discourse that subverts the present without an ‘action program’, although it may eventually come up with one, says the author. Like Velikonja, encountering the impossibility to fix nostalgia as a scientific concept, researchers resort to taxonomies seeking, in this way, to have a hold of its manifold appearances. It is important to note that while taxonomies provisionally fill the lack of a concept, they cannot provide for the construction of scientific object of knowledge.

Studies of nostalgia then belong to the epistemic model first elaborated by the ‘new history’ which emerged when the economic history was substituted with new subjects (cultural history, oral history, the history of everyday life and the like); after all, humans cannot live by bread alone (Le Goff, 1974: 111). By situating the research of nostalgias into the ‘new history’ model (to denote with one word a host of new practices of ‘history making’ whose sole common trait is resistance to presumed economic determinism), nostalgia studies also distanced themselves from official post-1989 interpretations of history. These interpretations are deeply rooted in the paradigm of totalitarianism and look into the field of historiography through the lens of political history that is close to political science and political philosophy from where it takes its basic concepts – totalitarianism, democracy, civil society, transition and so on. Reduction of history to its political dimension weighs heavily on this type of historiography.

The study of nostalgia, researchers argue, calls for ‘softer’ approaches, for the use of research tools employed by oral history, the history of everyday life, anthropology and cultural studies where the concept of nostalgia was initially formed (Berdahl, 1999; Boym, 2001; Stewart, 1988). For this reason, the study of post-socialist nostalgia appears as an ‘up-to-date’ project. It seems to be catching up with the latest historiographic approaches, which during the socialist era were allegedly suppressed by dominant Marxist understanding of historical processes (in which class struggle is the driving historical force and the material production determines all other relatively
autonomous spheres of social life). By operating in this field, the scholars took upon themselves the worthy task of updating historiography and ‘catching up’ with the Western world.

The research strategies mentioned above also enabled them to avoid direct confrontation with official interpretations of history and to polemicize with them only indirectly (‘without engaging in a dialogue with the dominant interpretations of Yugoslavia’s history’; Petrović, 2016: 505). Investigating the ‘really existent socialisms’, the life experiences and personal attitudes of ordinary people – their support for actual politics and socialist ideas as well as their resistance to those – researchers simply introduce a different perspective on the socialist past. In this way, they do not need to confront directly the official interpretations. They can shift away from that paradigm without challenging it.

The studies of post-socialist nostalgia often contain a symptomatic disclaimer by the author, which is unusual in historical studies to say the least. For example, Chris Hann the researcher of East German nostalgia, established that ‘(n)ostalgie seldom reflected a sincere wish to restore the encompassing world of ‘actually existing socialism’ (Hann, 2012: 1126). Dominic Boyer writes that nostalgia is not ‘a desire to return to state socialism per se’ (Boyer, 2010: 18). Tanja Petrović and Mitja Velikonja argue that Yugonostalgia does not ‘imply any desire to restore the previous state of affairs’ (Petrović, 2010a: 64) and that it is an ‘evocation of something which clearly cannot come back’ (Velikonja, 2008: 22). It is unusual that historians feel the need to explain that the past cannot be brought back.

Although such disclaimers appear odd, they suggest that nostalgia is not the kind of subject that gives a researcher the option of taking a critical distance when observing and analysing past events. The circumstances obviously demand self-positioning from the authors. As Dominic Boyer says, the study of nostalgia is never value-neutral and it forces the authors to take their stance towards the state-orchestrated memory policies. Nevertheless, as disclaimers symptomatically suggest, the authors first need to express reservations about the socialist past in general to be able to take a stance towards post-socialist ideologies. Consider this conclusion in Velikonja’s (2017) study, ‘Active nostalgia [. . .] must also account for the various mistakes, injustices, delusions and crimes of this very same Second Yugoslavia, the unpleasant and painful memories, rather than denying, avoiding, forgetting or excusing’ (p. 11).

These theories resist the pressure of post-socialist official simplifications by bringing to the stage post-socialist nostalgias. At the same time, however, they seem to be driven to distance themselves from the historical socialism, as Velikonja’s quote above testifies. Since they study ‘mere’ nostalgia (Berdahl, 1999), that is to say, selective, non-critical memories of socialism (let us remind the reader of the medical origin of this term, which draws attention to pathological behaviour as a consequence of false, idealized representations of the past), they can, simultaneously, uncritically reproduce discourses about ‘the dark sides’ of the Yugoslav socialist regime which feed the repressive memorial ideologies they want to oppose. As a consequence, they expose themselves to the ideological operation lucidly diagnosed by Tanja Petrović (2016): while ‘memories of life and work in socialism are dismissed as nostalgia, the memories of those who testify about crimes and violence [. . .] are taken as objective testimonies with the legitimacy of historiographical sources’ (pp. 508–509).

In its attempt to oppose the official discourses that flatly discredit socialist past as totalitarianism, or skip over it in an act of denial, the nostalgia approach seems to have paradoxically interiorized the contradiction between the popular remembering and the official engineering: it presents the generally positive ‘nostalgic’ memories – and then warns us that we should not forget ‘the dark sides’.

An exit from this trap has been to look for the source of ‘nostalgia’ in the disappointment over the restoration of capitalism (Maksimović, 2017; Palmberger, 2016; Spasić, 2012; Velikonja, 2008; Vuckovic Juros, 2018, etc.) and to bring to the fore the contrasting features of the socialist past.
In the introductory part of *Remembering Communism*, Maria Todorova (2010a) writes that the turn which will bury the ideology of the cold war is already happening: ‘[T]here is a gradual but perceptible shift from the dominance of the totalitarian paradigm [. . .] to the modernization one, something, in fact, closer to the (at least official) self-perception of elites and the population at large during socialism itself’ (Todorova, 2010a: 18; our emphasis) Todorova argues that it would be ‘instructive to look not only at the record of violence of communism, of authoritarian and totalitarian practices, but [. . .] also at the communist legacy in education, culture in general, health care, and welfare’ (Todorova, 2010a: 13). Similar reasoning can be found in many other studies concerned with the content of nostalgia for socialism, as can be seen in the following examples. Mitja Velikonja writes that nostalgias refer to ‘the previous, now neglected values such as social justice, common property, health and social security, solidarity within society, linking of nations etc’ (Velikonja, 2008: 116). Reports on the workers’ collectives in mining industry in Transylvania (Kideckel, 2001), on the workers in the Serbian cable factory (Petrović, 2010b) and on textile workers in Slovenia (Vodopivec, 2010) recall the projects in which workers were personally involved, their affiliation to worker collectives, greater equality and justice – features that contrast with the present era of the degradation of the working class. Although the same topoi can be met across former Yugoslavia, studies have also detected some variations. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, most affected by the war, interviewees evoked times of peaceful multi-national coexistence and secure life (Palmberger, 2016). In Serbia, focus groups attendants say their life in socialism was ‘normal’ as opposed to abnormality in the post-1990s (Spasić, 2012). For East Germany, Chris Hann believes that nostalgic persons are capable of distinguishing between the good and the bad in socialism and that in the era of neoliberal economic crisis they place value on the security of jobs, social programmes, kindergarten networks, which enabled women to work, and other amenities they enjoyed in the past (Hann, 2012).

This approach does away with the issue of socialism by highlighting what is considered its positive traits, like general access to education and health services, social security and labour protection, and absence of ethnic conflict. In this way, it separates positive achievements of socialism from its ‘authoritarian and totalitarian nature’. By separating one part from the whole, this approach construes an ‘emancipatory potential’ of nostalgias and argues that they can be ‘a strong social, cultural and political force, producing practical effects in [their] environment’, with almost transformative capabilities (Velikonja, 2008: 28).

**Limitations of the nostalgia approach**

There is a question which theories of nostalgia cannot answer even if they wanted to – at least not using their present research tools. Can the analysis of socialist societies be reduced to such an extent that a part is separated from the whole, that is, particular achievements of socialist redistribution (health care, education, social security) from the socialist economic system? Anthropologist Katherine Verdery questions whether all those (positive) outcomes of socialism to which nostalgias refer do not result from a specific manner of socialist accumulation. She writes (Verdery, 1996: 26; Hann et al., 2002) that while the logic of capitalism is accumulation of the surplus value, the logic of socialism is accumulation of the means of production. In capitalism, individual capitals (under the pressure of competitors and organized work) are forced to revolutionize productive forces. Since individual capitals create surplus only by incessantly increasing productivity, meaning that the same amount of labour is pressed to produce an ever larger volume of goods, they renew themselves and expand. In the capitalist style of accumulation, a multitude of individual capitals develop social productive forces.
In socialism, development of social productive forces is not left to the mercy of individual capitals, since in socialist accumulation of the planned economy or of the market socialism, as was in place in Yugoslavia, this role is performed by the state or its bureaucracy. This means that social development is not a private matter but a social one, and consequently, the concepts like private property of means of production and intellectual property are incompatible with the socialist system. This has important effects on the ways in which social activities are organized, for example, in science, education or culture – all of these fields are required to enable general access to their resources. This fundamental difference between the socialist and capitalist type of accumulation indicates that distribution depends on the system of accumulation. After all, principles of social equality and deicommodification of labour, from which social achievements result, have their own material existence in the socialist type of accumulation.

In this perspective, the relation between the cause and the effect, between the determinants and the determined is turned upside down in the studies of nostalgia. This inversion enables the authors of these studies hygienically to excise from socialist past its ‘mistakes, injustices, delusions and crimes’ (Velikonja, 2017: 11), ‘dark sides’ (Velikonja, 2008: 120), ‘questionable past’ (Petrović, 2010b: 149), ‘non-justifiable policy of the socialist regime’ (Vodopivec, 2010: 229), ‘oppressive regime’ (Berdahl, 1999: 198) and so on. After this elimination, they can easily distinguish between historical socialism, from which they distance themselves, and its achievements, which they support. However, considering the embeddedness of socialist achievements within a particular type of accumulation, the separation of the two seems hardly imaginable. The presumed emancipatory potential of nostalgia-based projects necessarily runs up against the limits imposed by the logic of capitalist accumulation. Its resilience against social pressures is much stronger than in the times of state capitalism when regulative barriers to capital accumulation made welfare policies possible.

These considerations suggest that the problematic side of nostalgia studies lies in their basic epistemology, the absence of a systematically constructed object of knowledge. The notion of ‘nostalgia’ operates as a meta-memorial device that excises the memorial material from the complexity of its past socialist context and homogenizes its occurrences in a vast variety of present situations.

Conclusion

A closer attention to the processes that produced the positive traits of Yugoslav socialism to which popular remembering refer, may open a critical dimension to the already productive dialogue about the present meaning and eventual political potential of these memories and their nostalgic component. Appreciations vary from the warning that Yugonostalgia is ‘an avoidance mechanism’ (Volčič, 2007: 35) or dismissal of ‘folkish nostalgia’ (Horvat and Štiks, 2015) and appeals ‘to structure a non-nostalgic remembrance of Yugoslav socialism that would be capable of bearing some meaning for any future socialist imagination’ (Dimitrijević, 2017: 39), to the estimate that ‘nostalgia [is] a practice with a mobilizing, legitimizing, and even an emancipatory character’ (Petrović, 2017: 26) and the postulation that ‘acknowledging Yugonostalgia as a subversive and strongly political phenomenon, Yugonostalgic agents regain their political subjectivity’ (Popović, 2017: 49), with, connecting the opposed poles, the distinction between ‘passive, sentimental’ and ‘active, engaged nostalgia’, where even the passive kind is valued as implying ‘social criticism’ (Velikonja, 2017: 9–12).

Given the precariousness of post-Yugoslav peace, instability of some successor states and authoritarian tendencies in the others, one can sympathize with the tendency to interpret positive memories of Yugoslavia as prospective remembrance practices with transformational potential. Still, what could be the possible reach of their impact? For Palmberger (2008, 2016) who made research in Bosnia and Hercegovina, Yugonostalgia is an aspiration for the future and can help
surpass ethnic hostilities; Maksimović (2017: 14) anticipates that it ‘can support the challenging process of trust-building and reconciliation in the entire former Yugoslavia’. One could continue quoting statements in this vein that conceive post-socialist nostalgia as prospective remembering, which may lead towards the construction of a new political subjectivity. These theories compose a selective patchwork of semantic memorial material, under the meta-memorial operator of ‘nostalgia’ that blends diverse pieces into collective memory. As ideological mechanism, this procedure does not differ from the selective retrospective remembering presented by official discourses as ‘shared’. Formally analogous ideological mechanisms produce aggressive identity politics in state-building discourses, a mirage of resistance to ethnic hatred and excesses of peripheral capitalism in scholarly discourses.

The evident difference that the former represses socialist past, while the latter enforces the pressing right to remember it, should not prevent us from recognizing that the procedure is the same. The hypothesis of post-socialist nostalgia has intervened on the just side of contemporary social struggles. However, perhaps under the pressure of urgency, it intervened ideologically, not in a theoretic way.

Counteracting repressive memorial engineering, post-socialist nostalgia hypothesis got caught in the field of ideological struggles, unable to break out of the reproductive mechanisms imposed by identity politics. It has confused social engagement for scientific practice and created an ideological object instead of the theoretical object of knowledge.

What does this mean for the future research about the memory of Yugoslav socialist past? Recollections and evocations of socialism should be studied contextually, with attention to concrete occasions when they emerge, to precise situations where they intervene. Apparently identical memorial content is an integral part of differing practices where it acquires its meaning and exerts its effects. Failing to take into account contextual specificities, researchers may fall into the trap exposed to irony long time ago by Maurice Griaule (1948): collecting superficial traits from heteroclite phenomena and connecting them into a series is like connecting weddings and funerals through the notion of ‘cérémonies à cloches, ceremonies with bells’ just because both rituals involve bell ringing. Certain provocative findings already call for a closer study. While historiographical knowledge of national-liberation struggle and socialist federation is declining with each subsequent cohort, positive attitude to socialism resists the change of generations (Jogan, 2016; Jogan and Broder, 2016). Despite considerable efforts by educational and political institutions, and by mass media, engineered presentation of socialism seems only weakly to impress people’s minds. Memory of socialism seems predominantly transmitted in everyday environments, in small groups linked by kinship or friendship, in neighbourhoods – the reason why we call it ‘popular memory’.

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**Notes**

1. Jeffrey K. Olick (1999) points out how the German government’s commission ‘to inquire into the subjective sentiment of national identity’ opened the way to important epistemic innovations and scientific findings. He adds that the innovative conceptualization ‘marked a decisive shift in the basis of German identity, at least in some quarters’.
2. For example, Roman *mos maiorum*; the search for the ‘Trojan origins’ by medieval dynasties; Petrarca’s exclamation in *Invectiva contra eum qui maledixit Italiae*: *Quid est enim aliud omnis historia, quam romana laus?* – What else, then, is all history, if not the praise of Rome?; romantic fabrications: *Ossian* cycle by James Macpherson, *Manuscripts of Dvůr Králové and of Zelená Hora* by Václav Hanka, and the like.

3. In this form, the hypothesis might be viewed as the formulation of a particular mechanism of ideological interpellation in Althusser’s sense (Althusser, 1995; Močnik, 2014). However, Althusser’s original intuition and its elaboration in the terms of the analysis of discourse (Močnik, 2014) lead into the difficulties highlighted by the cognitive science approach and resumed in the sequel (Candau, 2017, 2020).

4. By situating the analysis into the intersubjective dimension, the discursive mechanism approach offers two advantages: it avoids, at least to a certain extent, the individualist/collectivist dichotomy (Olick, 1999); it allows a dynamic analysis that views collective memory as an ‘ongoing work [. . .], which involves a continuous negotiation between past and present’ (Olick and Levy, 1997: 934; see also Levy, 1999).

5. The speech of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, at the celebration on the occasion of unveiling the monument to all victims of all wars and all war-related victims, Ljubljana, 13 June 2017. Available at: http://www.predsednik.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/objave/D2FB2A48C140B6F7C125815C005D947 C?OpenDocument (accessed 4 November 2019).

6. The speech of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Milan Kučan, at the Assembly of Veteran Organizations and Liberation War Fighters in Cerklje na Dolenjskem, 23 June 2001. Available at: http:// www2.gov.si/up-rs/1992-2002/mk.nsf/1e111804c207f77f3c125678b0043205b/60d7f7136d29d998c1256 a77002816ef (4 November 2019).

7. ‘A repeated and shared narrative of a supposed origin and its supposed memory, the collective meta-memory is a meta-discourse that produces, as every speech, extremely strong effects: it feeds the group members’ imaginary helping them to think about themselves as the members of a community and, strongly performative, it contributes to shape a world where the sharing is ontologised [. . .]’ (Candau, 2020: 23).

8. President Milan Kučan’s speech delivered on the occasion of the Statehood Day, 25 June 2001. Available at: http://www.slovenija2001.gov.si/10let/praznovanje/govori/govor-kucan/ (4 November 2019).

9. Speech by the President of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor, delivered on the occasion of the Statehood Day, 24 June 2016. Available at: http://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/objave/9EC2CE1085633 78CC1257FDD003AF2F0 (4 November 2019).

10. President Borut Pahor’s speech delivered on the occasion of the Statehood Day, 24 June 2017. Available at: http://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/objave/B0328B76B6F44CD2C1258148002472EB (4 November 2019).

11. President Borut Pahor’s speech delivered on the occasion of the Statehood Day, 24 June 2018. Available at: http://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs.nsf/objave/3F6A1106D6DE490CC12582B6005C8150 (4 November 2019).

12. The operation carried out by Slovenian militias during the late 1918 and early 1919 aimed at pushing the Slovenia-Austria border towards the north to match the ethnic border.

13. President Danilo Türk’s speech at the 21st anniversary of the departure of the last soldier of the Yugoslav People’s Army, 26 October 2012, available at: https://www.bivsi-predsednik.si/up-rs/2007-2012/turk-slo-arhiv.nsf/dokumentiweb/26A64548427957B2C1257AA402AE68C?OpenDocument (9 May 2021).

14. The most recent variation of this position was formulated in the ‘Declaration of Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts about the reconciliation at the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the independent Slovene state’, available at: https://www.sazu.si/events/604f373d12416e9924eac7 (9 May 2021). The Declaration refers to socialist revolution in the terms of ‘revolutionary terror’ and embraces the collaborationist propaganda slogan that collaboration with the occupier was the response to ‘this terror’.

15. Compare the ‘European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe’ and the list of similar declarations in its preamble: https://www. europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2019-0021_EN.html (10 May 2021).

16. For a more elaborate discussion of the ‘new history’ epistemic model, see Breznik (2013).

17. The author drew this conclusion in her analysis of the film ‘Houston, we have a problem’. She further claims that the film releases the aesthetic pleasure when, by way of fictional documentary, it liberates spectators of their duties to ‘justify their attachment to that history’.
18. In political economy and sociology, modernization paradigm was abandoned in the 1950s when it appeared that the 'catching up' strategy of peripheral societies in Latin America and the Caribbean will lead to increasing dependence upon and submission to the centre of the capitalist system. For an overview of the debate and the presentation of alternative approaches, see Kay (1989).

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