Between Decolonial and Postsocialist Political Imaginations. Redescribing Present Failures in Mostar

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ABSTRACT: *This paper retraces the political imagination that serves as the background of an activist-artistic-scholarly project called Mostar's Hurqualya that commemorates the socialist heritage of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The main proposition of the paper is that postsocialist political imagination presents an epistemological and political project of re-describing the failures — those of socialist modernity as well as of the contemporary postsocialist moment — in a way that acknowledges disappointment, but still makes it possible to act. With its focus on redescribing failures, it might be different from a decolonial political imagination, understood as a project of prescribing new models, blueprints, and examples for how to organize reality beyond the hegemonic concepts and institutions that have been developed within the modernity/coloniality nexus. While postsocialist and decolonial political imaginations are interwoven in complex ways since both are critical epistemological and political projects, there are also differences between them.*

KEYWORDS: *political imagination, postsocialism, decolonialization, failure, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Introduction

> "How does [today] one think of Mostar at all? Is it two or three cities, or four hundred and four? Or maybe none at all? Can that inexorable autophagy called 'the division,' out of sheer boredom which grovels to it, be made by some other lines, to be measured and drawn by some other machines?"
> "Kako danas uopće misliti Mostar? Jesu li to dva, tri ili četiristo četiri grada? Možda pak više nije nijedan? Može li se ta neumoljiva autofagija zvana podjela, iz proste dosade koja joj zapravo tako često i podilazi, izvesti nekim drugačijim linijama, mjerenim i crtkanim nekim drugačijim aparatima?"

This quote from an interview with Alesz Lesz, a 24-year-old student from Mostar, opens a book called *Mostar's Hurqualya: The (Un)forgotten City*.[1] The book is the result of an artistic, scholarly, and activist intervention into a memorial site in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) — the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar. *Mostar's Hurqualya* is an activist-ar-

tistic-academic project dedicated to the Partisan Memorial Cemetery, a notable socialist monument in the town of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Partisan Cemetery was built in 1965 "to honour People's Liberation Struggle and Partisans who lost their lives during the Second World War" (Murtić/Barišić 2019, 81-82). Designed by a famous Yugoslav architect, Bogdan Bogdanović, "the Memorial was envisaged as 'the City of the Dead' — a shared resting place for Partisans from Mostar of different ethnic and religious background — overlooking and mirroring 'the City of Living', a place where their Mostarian families continued living" (ibid., 82). The monument has been largely forgotten by the public authorities in postwar BiH and parts of it have been ruined. Created by a group of activists and scholars from BiH and abroad, the book "presents an attempt to rekindle a critical dimension to the interpretation of Bogdanović's work" as well as "to encourage young people in Mostar, and in the region more broadly, to explore the possibilities of using and preserving their local heritage which has often been neglected by state institutions from the nineties onwards" (Barišić et al. 2017, 11), in the words of its editors.[2]

The focus on the critical reinterpretation of the *present*, characterized by "autophagic divisions" and similar failures, is an often-overlooked element of postsocialist political imagination, as I discuss in this article. Postsocialist studies predominantly tend to read the postsocialist present through the lens of the (socialist) past or, more recently, as an inspiration for envisioning alternative futures. There are sensible reasons for this: postsocialism was initially understood as a type of a transition towards a capitalist democracy (or, more complexly, as a type of a social transformation), so it made sense that the processes, characters, and relations that took shape within it were predominantly understood as transient indicators of something else, whether in the past or in the future. Yet, from our contemporary perspective, we know postsocialism has been an iteration of neoliberal capitalism from the very first days and that it never really ended (Collier 2011; Dunn 2004; Matza 2018; Thelen 2003). In some ways, postsocialism has been global since its very beginning. For instance, Nancy Fraser (1997) discusses postsocialism as a global condition that took place throughout the world after the end of Cold War. In her reading, postsocialist condition includes:

> "an absence of any credible overarching emancipatory project despite the proliferation of fronts of struggle; a general decoupling of the cultural politics of recognition from the social politics of redistribution; and a decentering of claims for equality in the face of aggressive marketization and sharply rising material inequality."
> (Fraser 1997, 3)

From such a perspective, there are clear parallels between social transformations that were orchestrated in Eastern Europe and those undertaken in other places, including the West/Global North. Postsocialism is, thus, not just a term that describes changes in the former socialist world, but a concept that refers to the reorganization of the "grammar of political claims-making" globally (Fraser 1997, 2) — a contemporary process if there ever was one.

Overlooking the ways in which postsocialist places speak about our contemporary moment happens more often than we think, as can be illustrated by Lesz's first sentence cited above. In the Bosnian original, Lesz asks "How does today one think of Mostar at all?", while the English translation says "How does one think of Mostar at all?" Removing the temporal marker "today" was most likely the stylistic choice of the translator — that carries some theoretical implications. Fabian (1983) coined the term the "denial of coevalness" to explain how cultural anthropology makes its object of study by temporally displacing it. In his reading, anthropologists often approach various societies throughout the world

as living in a different historical period from the one of the ethnographer's society. While Fabian's criticism was initially published in 1983, it remains pertinent to different strands of anthropological research. For instance, Ramsay (2020, 385) argues that, when exploring refugee and migration issues, "anthropology denies coevalness with and between migrants and non-migrants and thereby reinforces the very logics of otherness that we might otherwise seek to critique". The criticism of temporal regimes of knowledge production is also relevant for the anthropology of postsocialism. Postsocialist studies tend to overlook and ignore, rather than deny, coevalness of postsocialism. They do so by analyzing people and places in postsocialist contexts as primarily shaped by their socialist past, or as anthropologically interesting because they point to possible futures. Yet, "it is also necessary to analyse postsocialist Eastern Europe not only in relation to the socialist past but also the global present" (Dzenovska 2013, 394). Intentional or not, overlooking the ways in which postsocialism is part and parcel of the global present contributes to Othering its people and places — and it shrinks our political imagination, I would add.

In this paper, I suggest that more analytical attention needs to be paid to the ways in which what I call "postsocialist political imagination" reworks the present moment. I propose that postsocialist political imagination can be understood as an epistemological and political project of interpreting the present moment in a manner that enables action from within a sense of disappointment with failures. Postsocialist political imagination is about figuring out what else there is to do after the utopian political project you pursued has failed, besides replicating patterns of (ethno-)racial capitalism. These patterns have turned Mostar into a city divided both spatially and socially, where pupils in the gymnasium follow separate Bosniak and Croatian school curricula, in two mutually completely intelligible language varieties (for more details, see Hromadžić 2015, Palmberger 2016).

With its focus on redescribing the failures of the present, it differs from decolonial political imagination, when it is understood as a project of prescribing new models, blueprints, and examples for how to organize reality beyond the hegemonic modernity/coloniality nexus. Importantly, in my reading, postsocialist and decolonial political imagination are ideal types and the relationship between them is not territorial. There are other kinds of political imagination in postsocialist societies, including the decolonial one (Rasza 2015; Petrović 2012; Kurtović 2019). Just like coloniality has been a global condition, so is postsocialism: postsocialist political imagination can be found in places that had never experienced real-existing socialisms.

I will develop this argument in several steps. First, I will offer a brief overview of how postsocialism has been linked to past, present, and future frameworks in anthropology. I will then explain what I mean by a "political imagination" and what shape it takes in decolonial and postsocialist projects. In the second part of the paper, I will discuss the Mostar's Hurqualya as an example of a postsocialist political imagination as the queer art of failure.

From Surviving Postsocialism to Envisioning a Shared Future

Anthropological studies initially explored how people "survive postsocialism" (Bridger/ Pine 1998) by attempting to find their place in the capitalist new normal, developing a range of local strategies and negotiating the elements of the old and the new in everyday life. The background assumption was that past socialist experiences profoundly shape, if not determine, people's responses to the capitalist present. Since BiH and other former Yugoslav countries experienced postsocialist *alongside* postwar transformation, the production of

anthropological knowledge on this region has taken place within a similar temporal frame that can be described as "(post-)conflict and in a period of crisis or precarity" (Petrović Šteger 2020, 5).

This overwhelming focus on the ways in which the socialist (and warring) past has affected every aspect of life in postsocialism has provoked a "turn" to the future. Inspired by the rising anthropological interest in temporality and how particular ideas of the future affect everyday practices (Guyer 2007), scholars started asking what understandings of the future have been articulated within the postsocialist region. Dominic Boyer (2010, 27) suggested that nostalgia for the socialist past in eastern parts of unified Germany "can also serve as a way of drawing attention to an emergent politics of the future that is by no means settled". Felix Ringel (2018, 10) explores social change that has taken place in postsocialism "through the perspective of alterations in temporal knowledge in relations to the future".[3] While his interlocutors in an eastern German town considered the personal and collective futures as matters of a much more pressing concern than their past was, they did not develop a coherent narrative or a clear manner of relating to the future. Instead, for them, "as the overall postsocialist experience [...] captures: things seem rather less determined and homogenous; they might radically change from one day to the other, and we should not be surprised by how (comparatively) easily humans adapt to this" (Ringel 2018, 11).

In the post-Yugoslav space, ethnographic explorations of how people imagine, evoke, and try to bring about particular futures have been overwhelmingly approached as politically promising and as a source of inspiration for political imagination. For instance, Maja Petrović Šteger (2020, 9) looks at how "visionary imaginations of the future attempt to mold the socio-historical in Serbia (and beyond)". Focusing on social entrepreneurs and their visionary futures, Petrović Šteger (ibid., 7) suggests that the practices of imagining alternative social scenarios are crucial for envisioning "inner processes of transformation and societal healing". Tanja Petrović (2012) convincingly argues that the dominant "politics of the future" (*politike budućnosti*) in former Yugoslav region are problematic. She demonstrates that memories of Yugoslav socialism as a progressive political project are denied today by the local national elites in the former Yugoslav countries as much as by the international observers who work on creating a "European future" for this region, which as a result has a colonized political imagination. Excavating the memories of the Yugoslav socialist past can, therefore, become subversive because it keeps "universal values and mobilisatory potential" (Petrović 2012, 139), creating possibilities for resistance and imagining solidarities differently. Similarly, writing about activist archives dedicated to the Yugoslav socialist past in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Larisa Kurtović (2019, 3) argues that "such archives are in various ways becoming crucial to efforts to re-seed the future and rediscover a progressive politics for a new era". Wolentz et al. (2019, 13) look at how youth activists in Mostar evoke nostalgia as a "form of resistance to the presently 'ethnically' divided Mostar, and as a way of envisioning a different future" (see also Carabelli 2013). While it makes a lot of sense to approach socialist heritage and postsocialist nostalgia "as a future-oriented basis for action" (ibid.), the potential of postsocialism for political imagination does not end there.

Some links between postsocialism and the present have been explored for a long time. Gilbert et al. (2008, 11) provide an excellent example of this by writing about "future in the present" and suggesting that "the study of post-Yugoslav societies may thus have something to teach us about democratic, capitalist and nationalist forms as such, and not just about their 'Balkan' versions" (see also Brunnbauer/Grandits 2013; Mikuš 2018; Vetta 2018; Thiemann 2019). Atanasoski and Vora (2018, 151) approach "postsocialism as a global condition which can serve as an analytical and theoretical entry point for understanding the

rearrangement of political action in the present in such a way as [to] introduce unexpected locations and local politics of decolonial praxis". Petrović (2012) analyses the present politics of the future in postsocialist Serbia and how it, in a certain way, "abducts" possibilities for political imagination (see also Kurtović/Sargsyan 2019). Yet, just because postsocialism speaks also about our shared, global contemporary moment, I do not want to imply that the present is the dominant temporal regime of postsocialism. Instead, postsocialism "marks a queer temporality" (Atanasoski/Vora 2018, 139). As Lendvai-Bainton and Stubbs (forthcoming) argue:

> "Certain features of post-socialist (and post-conflict) change may lend themselves to a kind of 'queer asynchrony' or 'temporal disjunction' (Mizielinska and Kulpa, 2011) in which long-term historical translations become bundled together in 'new' contexts, in new 'heres and nows', becoming very different assemblages in the process."

Despite the long-existing calls to explore the present tense of postsocialism, the question remains how come its covealness so often gets overlooked as a constitutive element of postsocialist change and what this tells us about our understanding of political imagination.

Decolonial and Postsocialist Political Imagination

In this paper, political imagination refers "to a particular realm of the imagination: to imaginings of political order, of how power works and how it should work" (Jaffe 2018, 1099). By "political imagination" I do not mean political assumptions inscribed in artistic (Severi 2018) and other kinds of imagination (although clearly any form of an imagination is premised upon and reflects a particular politics, cf. Rethmann 2010). Instead, following Jaffe, I take "political imagination" to refer to the various ways of envisioning how a political community works and how it should work, where its boundaries are and should be, how the decisions are and should be made, what kind of relationality links and should link its members, and so on. As this explanation makes clear, political imagination includes both a re-descriptive and a prescriptive dimension — it refers both to an (re)interpretation of how things *are* organized in the present and to a vision of how they ideally *should be* organized in some future moment.

The key argument of this paper is that we should keep in mind this duality of redescription and prescription: while political imagination can speak about visions of the future, it also includes interpretative labour that needs to be invested to conceive of the present moment and its failures differently. I use the term *re*-description in order to stress how important it is to critically *re*-read the present in a way that does not accept its hegemonic interpretation as a failure. As we will see in the second part of the article, *Mostar's Hurqualya* demonstrates that focusing on everyday life can help to interpret the disappointments of the postsocialist present in a new way. The difference between prescription and (re)description is also important for thinking about relations between postsocialist and decolonial political imagination.

In my understanding, postsocialist political imagination is interwoven with decolonial political imagination in complex ways as both are critical epistemological and political projects. However, there are important differences between them and one cannot and should not be reduced to the other. "Postsocialist" and "postcolonial" are not very helpful as analytical terms on their own (Boatca 2021). The same could be said for "decolonial" which

in the last few years in Western academia has been used to address very different forms of intervention (Tlostanova 2019). However, these terms gain new relevance when used to "frame a dialogue in the context of transnational critical thinking and mobilisation" (Boatca 2021, 186). This is how I approach the terms too: "postsocialist political imagination" makes sense when placed in a dialogue with "decolonial political imagination". I suggest that the point of difference between them lies in re-description. As an ideal type, decolonial political imagination is an epistemological and political project of envisioning and implementing *new* models, blueprints, and examples for how to organize reality itself beyond the hegemonic concepts and institutions that have been developed within the modernity/coloniality nexus, imposed by the European colonizers and reproduced to this day. Postsocialist political imagination, as an ideal type, is an epistemological and political project of re-describing the failures — including those of socialist modernity — in a way that acknowledges disappointment, but still makes it possible to act.

A good example of some of the crucial elements of decolonial political imagination can be found in the closing pages of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Although sixty years old, Fanon's call to develop alternative models, blueprints, and examples of organizing "states, institutions, and societies" beyond European models is still urgent as ever:

> "It is all too true, however, that we need a model, schemas and examples. For many of us the European model is the most elating. But we have seen in the preceding pages how misleading such an imitation can be. European achievements, European technology and European lifestyles must stop tempting us and leading us astray. [...] Let us decide not to imitate Europe and let us tense our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us endeavor to invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving. (Fanon 2004 [1963], 236).

In more recent years, Fanon's focus on the "man's condition" as a universal category has been side-lined in order to go beyond the modernity/coloniality nexus (Quijano 2007; Tlostanova/Mignolo 2012). Contemporary attempts to develop decolonial imagination strive to create new ways of approaching the relationship between human and natural worlds (De la Cadena 2015). Decolonial imagination also means working towards overcoming the boundary between forms of knowing and forms of being (de Castro 2012). The background assumption is that the distinction between epistemology and ontology stems out of Western, Eurocentric philosophical imagination and that it is necessary to overcome it in order to articulate decolonial alternatives to the modernity/coloniality nexus. For instance, in Savransky's (2017, 13) reading, decolonial imagination "may enable a global sociology to move beyond the very abyssal line that bifurcates knowledge from reality, or 'epistemology' from 'ontology', and to reorient itself not just toward a decolonisation of knowledge, but also of reality."

Various actors in the former socialist world have been engaging with Fanon's call too. The case in point concerns grassroots leftist activists and anarchists in Croatia and Slovenia who strived to organize their communities beyond the frameworks of the state, police, private property, and nation while affirming "a distinct vision of social justice" and experimenting with "expressions of fundamental political hope that would have been unimaginable a few years earlier" (Rasza 2015, 9). However, the relationship between postsocialist and decolonial projects remains "awkward", to borrow the term from Marilyn Strathern (1987). The key point of contention is whether experiences of socialist modernity can be used for developing decolonial political imagination and practice — or not. Tlostanova (2015) sug-

gests the latter, because, while it may have been an alternative, socialism was still a form of *modernity* and, as such, cannot provide us with the necessary conceptual tools to imagine the world beyond the modernity/coloniality nexus, in a radically non-Eurocentric way. Echoing Gržinić (2019), Kušić et al. (2019, 21) disagree and argue that "the experience of socialism may provide new entry points and potentials for thinking and working towards decoloniality". Indeed, unpacking the ways in which decolonial struggles and non-aligned forms of modernism intersected with and drew inspiration from one another may be the key to resolving this contradiction (Stubbs 2020). The Non-Aligned Movement during the Cold War brought together indigenous perspectives, anticolonial struggles, and alternative forms of modernist thinking in socio-political, economic, and aesthetics knots that have yet to be explored in-depth. In the domain of arts and culture, we can speak of non-aligned modernism as a specific form of both socialist *and* postcolonial aesthetics (Videkanić 2020). Further research is needed to address whether the real-existing intersections between the postcolonial movement and the socialist, non-aligned interventions into modernity sketch a kernel of political imagination otherwise (but see: Bonfiglioli 2021, Stubbs forthcoming).

In my view, there can be no singular answer to the question of whether we can develop decolonial projects from the sediments of socialist modernity because the place of the Global East in the modernity/coloniality nexus is anything but straightforward. Socialist modernity was ambivalently positioned as both a resistance to and a variation of modernity/coloniality nexus. For instance, as Stubbs (2019) argues, the position of socialist Yugoslavia within the Non-Aligned Movement was an example of "liminal hegemony", whereby Yugoslavia pursued anti-racist progressive goals of developing politics critical of both the Western and the Eastern blocs — *and* simultaneously reproduced racially shaped hierarchies between members of the Movement (see also Bockaj 2016). Liminal hegemony is analytically incredibly interesting, but it makes for a complicated terrain when attempting to formulate a political project from its grounds.

The relationship between real-existing socialisms and decoloniality also depends on how we understand decoloniality and the direction of its critique. Kušić et al. (2019, 23) approach decoloniality as "coevalness, global solidarity, and joint struggle" rather than as an otherwise to modernity. The same idea is present also in Mbembe's (2021, 79) understanding of what he calls "decolonial"/"decolonization" project as aiming to expand "our conceptual, methodological, and theoretical imaginary" in a way that would "embrace multivocality and translation as a way to avoid perpetuating the knowledge/power asymmetries that currently fracture global humanity". Mbembe (ibid., 80) argues that decolonial project should not be conceived of as "an act of disconnection and separation (a gesture by which one is cut, or one cuts oneself off from the rest)". Instead, it is a way of learning about the world "through the embrace of multiplicity, of a plurality of narratives from silenced voices and invisible places" (ibid., 88). His "dialectical, relational and entangled picture of the relations between colonized and colonized" (Appadurai 2021) does not attempt to conceive of the world without Europe and its institutions of nation-state. Instead, Mbembe (2021, 89) suggests that:

> "the project of decolonization can have appeal only if it refers to a set of continuous topological folds of the whole. For "decolonial acts" to achieve their maximum effect, they must work through connectivity and elasticity, continuous stretching, and even distortion. They must attend to the planetary and the biotechnical infrastructures that are reorganizing the boundaries of life on Earth."

Contemporary uses of post- and decolonial perspectives to analyse (post)socialist people, places, and practices are timely and productive. However, I would warn against conflating nuances between postsocialist and decolonial political imagination, if for no other reason, then to consider what kind of a twist postsocialist experiences can introduce to the "continuous, entangled folds of the whole" (Mbembe 2021, 80). One important point of difference can be found among the postsocialist actors who faced the question of what to do with the disappointing present? How to *re*describe its greyness? What can we do with the ruins, disappointments, and failures that are a constitutive part of our lives *today*? How can we use political imagination to see and make something other of the present than an apparent failure and disappointment? Under what conditions can disappointment and failure become productive conditions that enable action, rather than melancholy or apathy?

These questions form the background of postsocialist political imagination that informed the *Mostar's Hurqualya* project. In the words of the book editors, they approached "the Memorial as a means for exploring, deconstructing, and negotiating the societal status quo" (Murtić/Barišić 2019, 80). For them, the memorial "exists as a reserve of ideas that can be periodically (re)activated to bring new social imaginaries" (ibid., 98). Their project presents an attempt to "re-activate" the ideas that have become a part of this memorial in order to challenge the status quo in the divided city of Mostar. In this case, postsocialist political imagination means reinterpreting the present, that is, creating a kind of an alternative vocabulary through which it would be possible to frame Mostar's present differently. In order to fully understand the complexity of their task — and of what is involved in postsocialist political imagination, queer approaches to failure are particularly useful.

The Queer Art of Postsocialist Failure

What exists between the optimism of a success and the resignation of a failure? How can we think about an evident failure in a way that finds in it something productive and that encourages action around it? As Jack/Judith Halberstam (2011, 1) asks in his queer theorization of failure:

> "We are all used to having our dreams crushed, our hopes smashed, our illusions shattered, but what comes after hope? [...] What is the alternative, in other words, to cynical resignation on the one hand and naïve optimism on the other?"

Postsocialist political imagination — or what I understand by it in this article — has important parallels with queer approaches to failure. From the queer perspective on failure, at stake is not so much criticism of the hegemonic regimes of value that determine thresholds of success and failure and how to recognize, remember, and question them (Appadurai/Alexander 2019). In other words, the issue is not so much to turn postsocialist failures upside-down and to reclaim postsocialist experiences as a form of success that capitalist regimes of value fail to recognize as such. The larger question is what can be done from within an apparent failure.

Existing ethnographic research suggests that this question of the relationship between failure and agency presents one of the key dilemmas for people who live in postsocialist countries as well. For instance, Jessica Greenberg suggests that student activists in Serbia, after the fall of Slobodan Milošević, abandoned utopian hopes in some undetermined future

when things "will be better". Instead, they focused pragmatically on improving the present. Students refused teleological narratives and the revolutionary zeal and incorporated disappointment "into the very model of action itself" (Greenberg 2014, 49). Francisco Martinez (2018) explores the treatment of Soviet heritage in contemporary Estonia, suggesting that postsocialist experience is profoundly shaped by repairing and re-purposing things from the past, especially those that seem wasted, and that repairing "wasted inheritances" is a way of shaping political subjectivities (see also Duijzings 2010).

This question seems to have formed the background of the work of Mostar activists too. Echoing Kirn (2020), their project can be understood as an exploration of how to think about the divided city of Mostar in a way that acknowledges a long list of failures and disappointments — brought about by Yugoslav socialism, subsequent ethno-nationalism and postwar and postsocialist transformation, as well as by the attempts to 'Europeanize' BiH — but that is not paralyzing. I see their project as a way of investing "interpretive labour" (Graeber 2012) to offer an alternative reading of the Partisan monument — and with it, to offer an alternative political imagination of how things work in the everyday life of Mostar. In doing so, they create "not an optimism that relies on positive thinking as an explanatory engine for social order, nor one that insists upon the bright side at all costs" (Halberstam 2011, 5). Instead, the kind of optimism that can be found within the *Mostar's Hurqualya* project can be understood as "a little ray of sunshine that produces shade and light in equal measure and knows that the meaning of one always depends upon the meaning of the other" (ibid.).

Postsocialist Political Imagination: Redescribing Mostar's Partisan Monument

During and after the 1992-1995 war in BiH, the Mostar's Partisan Monument started turning into a ruin. Although added to the list of national monuments of BiH in 2006, and thus placed under the protection of the state, it "suffered damage, neglect, and vandalism for many years that rendered the complex unsafe, unpleasant and inaccessible" (Murtić/ Barišić 2019, 83). The authors of the *Mostar's Hurqualya* decided to do something about it.

They initiated an activist-artistic project, gathering a group of activists who, in the course of three years, conducted interviews with fourteen residents of Mostar about experiences they had with the Partisan Cemetery during and after Yugoslav socialism. The activists published the collected stories and photographs of the monument in the book as an attempt to create "an alternative testimonial which, were it not compiled, would forever remain on the margins of memory" (Barišić et al. 2017, 2).

The book places together widely different perspectives of the Mostar residents on the monument. Some interlocutors saw in the monument a symbol of "red terror" (ibid., 74) and an instance of the architectural heritage of "yet another totalitarian regime" (ibid., 10). Others thought that "it doesn't have any direct connection with communism whatsoever" and that it is "unique, mainly because of the memories attached to it" (ibid., 91). Some interlocutors say they were "too young" to develop any connection with the monument (ibid., 92), while for some it was a painful reminder that the Yugoslav socialist project of "brotherhood and unity" — that they fought and killed for — failed (ibid., 75). Such heterogeneity of perspectives illustrates that the *Mostar's Hurqualya* does not propose a clear narrative on the Cemetery, whether leftist, ethno-nationalist, or Europeanizing one. Yet, the project does not go

in the opposite direction either. The book does not represent the monument as a symbol that just needs a better narrative in order to point towards a better future. Shortly, the book is not prescriptive, but multivocal. The same commitment to multivocality is present in the editorial linguistic choice to avoid following a single linguistic standard and to instead include language varieties that people spoke in everyday life and that could be clearly distinguished as "Bosnian/Bosniak", "Croat", or "Serbian".[4]

With its focus on multivocality, the book re-describes the failures of the present by offering an alternative vocabulary focused on everyday experiences. In it, the ordinariness of everyday life is a locus of an almost imperceptible resistance to the hegemony of ethno-racial capitalism rather than the cloth in which violence is firmly interwoven (cf. Das 2007). With this effort to re-describe the everyday life in the present, the book offers a great example of "low theory" — the kind of knowledge that, according to Halberstam (2011), has potential to explore alternatives to the opposition between success and failure, or between hope and cynical resignation. Echoing Katz's (1996) notion of "minor theory", Halberstam defines low theory as:

> "theoretical knowledge that works at many levels at once, as precisely one of these modes of transmission that revels in the detours, twists, and turns through knowing and confusion, and that seeks not to explain but to involve." (Halberstam 2011, 15)

Involving Mostar residents — by recalibrating their relationship with the Monument — is precisely what the authors of the project tried to do. The book does not offer a particular explanation of what the Monument means — or what it could or should mean, ideally, if Mostar was to be transformed into a city that is not divided. Instead, its main focus is on the process of involving the residents of Mostar into a shared reflection on the place of the Monument in their *everyday life*. As the authors explain in their introduction:

> "When the emphasis is placed on such exclusive interpretations [the Monument as a symbol of Yugoslav socialism as a progressive versus as a totalitarian project, as an example], the complexity of everyday encounters of people and this public space remains neglected, rendering it outside the dominant discourse. The material world and experiences resulting from these everyday interactions are precisely the focus of our research." (Barišić et al. 2017, 10)

The project focuses on the everyday encounters people had with and around the Monument during and after Yugoslav socialism. Readers learn that the Monument was strongly immersed in the everyday life of Mostar residents because it offered opportunities for a variety of activities. For instance, we find out people learned to swim in the Monument's ponds (ibid., 21), went for a picnic in its green areas (ibid., 22), made love there (ibid., 23, 90), participated in school events (ibid., 91), and so on. Yet, the Monument does not bring just pleasant memories. Some residents see the Monument as "a wound of the city" (ibid., 107) where you can feel "the destruction and violence of the monument. You feel the violence in the space" (ibid., 108). Here, everyday life serves as an anchor point of "in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony and speared by the seductions of the gift shop" (Halberstam 2011, 2). In other words, the project's focus on everyday life allows avoiding the impasse between seeing the monument either as a clear failure or as a blueprint for the utopian future. The book invites Mostar residents to reinterpret their

everyday experiences by acknowledging that the Monument might evoke both a sense of violence and pleasant memories and that it may be impossible to resolve this tension.

Halberstam (2011, 15) suggests that another characteristic of low theory is that it "unleashes new forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence, to lost genealogies than to inheritance, to erasure than to inscription". This is also noticeable in the *Mostar's Hurqualya*, which ignores the heroic and grand narratives of recall, whether socialist, ethno-nationalist, or pro-European. By placing such a strong focus on the heterogeneity of everyday experiences with and around the Monument, the project also presents a form of intentional forgetting of the totality of the grand narratives that have shaped heritage in BiH.

Finally, the project privileges the naïve and the silly over the formal structures of sense-making, which is the third characteristic of low theory according to Halberstam (2017, 12). The intentional privileging of the naïve and the silly is visible not just in the stories and in the photographs of the Monument, but also in the fact that, although two of the authors pursue academic careers in Germany and the UK as PhD students, they invested almost three years of work in a project whose experimental format cannot bring them any formal academic recognition in scholarly venues. In other words, from the perspective of career-making, it would have made more sense for them to conduct standard ethnographic or other research, write peer-reviewed articles and/or edit a book, than to invest time and effort in a participative knowledge project with an experimental format that combines activism, anthropology, archaeology, and art.

Furthermore, the project and the book reflect the vision of education as a counter-hegemonic practice. In the context of Mostar, this primarily means going counter to the ethno-national hegemony. In such a context, the decision to focus on the stories of the *residents* of Mostar — rather than making sure the stories of Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, and Others[5] are all represented on the pages of the book in a proportional manner — is counter-hegemonic. Such a decision intentionally ignores people's ethno-national identities in favour of their everyday experiences as residents of this town. The book does not attempt to offer a multi-national, reconciliatory perspective on the future of the Partisan Monument — a perspective from which people would still be seen primarily as representatives of particular ethno-national positions. Instead, the book and the project are focused on personal experiences of living in Mostar. This focus is apparent also in the composition of the research team. The research team included a mixture of 'locals' and 'internationals', who all lived in Mostar, but did not necessarily speak the local language. Over the last thirty years, Mostar has become home to various workers and activists in international agencies and organizations — and their presence is also made visible in the book. The composition of the research team, the choice of interlocutors interviewed for the book, the stories themselves all demonstrate that, in the *Mostar's Hurqualya*, the focus is on the possibilities of rereading the present tense of the Partisan cemetery beyond the hegemony of the ethno-national idiom. In my understanding, the book demonstrates to everyone interested in Mostar and its heritage that there is already more to this town than ethno-national divisions, notwithstanding pain and problems they cause — and that this more can be seen if we make an effort to reread the present from the perspective of the everyday.

The focus on the coevalness of postsocialism is noticeable also in the academic article in which Murtić and Barišić, two of the authors, explain their theoretical approach to the Partisan Cemetery and socialist Yugoslav heritage more broadly:

"In the city full of ruins and damaged facades, the Memorial was decaying in a manner not comparable to other Mostar's rubbles. Close to Mostar's urban arteries but hidden by vegetation, the Memorial existed outside the dominant space and time, simultaneously animating and disturbing existing social structures. It was a powerful tool of comparing the old and new political systems, social values and forms of everydayness, hence, being a reminder of losses and gains in the processes of post-war and post-socialisttransformation. With its layers of historicities and spatialities, the Memorial has evoked and produced pockets of space-time conjunctions, opening opportunities for people to act and relate to it in different ways. Unruly monument, as we decided to describe it, refuses to conform to a prescribed set of rules and blurs the borders between built and natural, life and death, past and present, imagined and experienced." (Murtić/Barišić 2019, 83)

Notice that Murtić and Barišić do not suggest that the monument is a repository of ideas of what a utopian future could look like. Instead, they say that Monument's distance from both ethno-nationalist and Europeanizing political projects makes it seem to exist "outside the dominant space and time", evoking Ringel's (2018) suggestion that temporality should be understood as a form of knowledge practice.

Conclusion

In the more recent years, both queer and postsocialist studies have started exploring the contours of the progressive yet-to-come. Inspired by Muñoz's (2009, 1) call to go beyond the stagnant present and to "dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds", studies of queer temporality refocused attention on utopian futures. The claim that queer aesthetics "frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity" (ibid.) resonates strongly with decolonial political imagination.

Yet, queer studies started discussing how to create blueprints and models for a better future after an intense exploration of the failures and present tense of queerness — which cannot be said for postsocialist studies. If queer studies developed an important conversation about anti-relationality as a challenge to hegemonic notions of reproduction (Ruti 2017), postsocialist studies have largely overlooked the coevalness of postsocialism. Focusing on the political potential of "ugly feelings" (Ngai 2007) of the people in postsocialist settings can shed light on the diversity and breadth of their political imagination and help us see postsocialism as a constitutive part of the global present. Distinguishing postsocialist political imagination, with its focus on how to act from and how to repair what has failed, from the decolonial one which builds things anew, is useful for such a task.

Acknowledgments

Endnotes

1   The website of the research project and the open access electronic book can be accessed here: https://nezaboravljenigrad.com/index.php/knjiga/?lang=en, accessed on 21.11.2020.

2   I first came across the book in 2017, when one of the authors, Marko Barišić, asked me to review it for the publisher.

3   Ringel (2018, 9) starts from a discussion of Bourne's call to presentism, but then uses this to "reconceptualize the anthropology of time with an increased and explicit attention to the future".

4   Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin, and Serbian present four perfectly mutually intelligible standards of a polycentric language that used to be called Serbo-Croatian during socialist Yugoslavia.

5   The four groups mentioned here are defined as constitutive peoples by the Bosnian Constitution.

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