

The “Children of Crisis” – making sense of (post) socialism and the end of Yugoslavia

In an article entitled “Did the Berlin Wall really come down on both sides?”, Janez Janša, a former high-ranking youth functionary, one of the main actors of the “Slovenian spring” and former Minister of defense and Prime Minister of Slovenia, referred disapprovingly to an ongoing process of “recommunisation of Slovenia and the Western Balkans.”ⁱ Positing himself as a member of a broader anti-communist group which allegedly was on the right side of history – “us political prisoners”ⁱⁱ – and referring to socialist Yugoslavia as “the small empire”ⁱⁱⁱ, Janša concluded that “the neo-Communist propaganda nowadays is extremely powerful.”^{iv} The post-Yugoslav space is no exception within the broader Eastern European context, where similar phenomena of portraying fascism and communism as moral equivalents^v and of “providing a heroic narrative that could provide the basis for political consensus in the present” have also been observed.^{vi} Indeed, the collective remembering of the past is essentially a political process that revolves around the establishment of new collective identities and new principles of political legitimacy.^{vii} Moreover, socialist political pasts have been left out from public profiles or are being used for contemporary political gains. As Daniel Singer put it, “From the Elbe to Vladivostok the number of former preachers of Marxism-Leninism now swearing by Frederick von Hayek and Milton Friedman tells us something about the moral flexibility of timeservers but also about the strength of their previous Marxist convictions.”^{viii}

Hence, the fact that, Janša’s Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS) boycotted the central ceremony on Slovenia’s day of independence in 2013 as a sign of protest

against the presence of the red star symbol at the central celebration should not come as a surprise. The previous year, World War Two veterans were prohibited from attending the ceremony when the SDS was still in power, as they were accused of displaying symbols of a “former aggressor” and of the “communist regime”.^{ix} Yet, such ideological maneuverings in the present hid a far more complex Yugoslav-era past. From a youth activist who led the section for General People’s Defense and Social Self-Protection in the Slovenian branch of the “League of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia” in the 1980s, a self-styled dissident and an icon of Slovenian independence, Janša has transformed into a conservative politician and a staunch anti-communist. On the occasion of the commemoration of the “trial of the four”^x in which Janša was involved and which has become one of the founding myths of the Slovenian independence, Dušan Keber, member of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights summarized the sense of disillusionment with the contemporary political reality:

“Could it have been otherwise? Was it necessary to throw out the baby with the dirty water of socialism? [Was it necessary] that we have forgotten about democracy the moment it became dependent on ourselves, that we did not set a vision about the kind of society and state we want to live in, that we have opened a hunt for the national wealth, that we started dancing around the golden calf of neoliberalism? Was that unavoidable? I am not convinced [that it was]. If we take into consideration the fact that rebels, whose rebellion brings them to power, are very diverse in their actions (the positive example of this is Nelson Mandela), I cannot escape the thought that the former dying regime should have thought twice when it was deciding its last victim.”^{xi}

How to account for the often radical shifts in political beliefs and personal trajectories among individuals who were not only socialized within the Yugoslav socialist framework and the officially upheld values of brotherhood, unity, solidarity, social justice, internationalism, but also voluntarily and actively participated in its institutional youth/political structures? Certainly, the “irreversible impact”^{xii} of the dramatic dissolution of Yugoslavia cannot be overstated in this regard. Yet, it is certainly not without a precedent, as major historical shifts and changes of socio-political paradigms condition certain generations to transform and adapt. Acknowledging the importance of what other scholars studying age cohorts/generations in related historical contexts have pointed out as “structural opportunities at particular life stages”,^{xiii} it could be inferred that every “loud” social/political generation has a constrained horizon of subversive, progressive potential and this generational horizon is confined within the boundaries of what had been considered politically, socially and culturally transgressive, alternative and new at a particular formative stage in a generation’s life span – generally between the ages of 18 and 28. Karl Mannheim’s original argument that posits early impressions as “tend[ing] to coalesce into *a natural view* of the world” and especially his assumption that “even if the rest of one’s life consisted in one long process of negation and destruction of the natural world view acquired in youth, the determining influence of these early impressions would still be predominant”^{xiv} appear as relevant in this context. Indeed, individuals such as Janez Janša, who adopted a fervent anti-Yugoslav rhetoric, actually built their new political identities *in opposition* rather than outside or beyond the Yugoslav/socialist frame of reference or their past experiences under socialism. As a matter of fact, the Yugoslav past and communism feature so prominently in Janša’s political discourse that one could easily conclude that “the

determining influence” of his Yugoslav experience/upbringing is not only “predominant”, but also defining of his transformed political views and post-Yugoslav self. Although he cannot be considered a typical representative of the last Yugoslav youth elite, Janša symbolises, most particularly for my Slovenian respondents, the downside of the post-1991 transition and embodies most of the negative aspects of post-Yugoslav politics.

This paper seeks to trace certain (dis)continuities in the ways the late socialist Yugoslav youth elite made sense of the late socialist political and economic crisis and makes sense of the present post-socialist realities. It maintains that a process of progressive disillusionment with post-socialist politics fueled the development of somewhat subversive, alternative frames for non-institutionalized individual memories. In most of the Yugoslav successor states, to varying degrees, weak institutions, “consolidation of special interest groups”^{xv}, and/or party politics rooted in identity politics have facilitated the consolidation of semi-authoritarian elites and a political culture that is a far cry from the once hoped for liberal democracy with a strong welfare component. As it was anecdotally observed, “The East Europeans, we saw, faced capitalism with great expectations. They thought they would be offered the choice between the Swedish and the German model. Instead, they were faced with a Latin American horizon.”^{xvi} A sense of loss, disillusionment and betrayed hopes permeates individual testimonies a quarter of a century after the disappearance of socialism and the Yugoslav federation.

This paper uses data from the last all-Yugoslav youth sociological study entitled *Deca krize: omladina Jugoslavije krajem osamdesetih* [The children of crisis: the Yugoslav youth at the end of the eighties]^{xvii}, as well as oral history interviews, to reflect on the political subjectivities of the last socialist Yugoslav youth elite, the ways

in which respondents have attempted to make sense of their experiences in these new contexts and the trajectories that have been followed in the wake of Yugoslavia's demise. It reflects on what in similar contexts has been termed "shifts across major moments of historical ruptures"^{xviii} and it addresses different patterns of remembering, i.e. how people's trajectories have shaped how they remember this period. My informants belonged to a range of groups who were active in the late socialist youth realm and/or contested the system from a variety of positions and from across the different Yugoslav republics. The excerpts cited in this article are drawn from a sample of forty oral history interviews which revolved around a pre-drafted set of questions, although the format adopted was in general "semi-structured".^{xix}

The first part scrutinizes the sense of frustration and disillusionment with post-socialist democracy and politics in general and demonstrates how these have fed into views of Yugoslav socialism as more inclusive, fair and emancipatory. The second part looks at the multi-layered meaning and shifting understanding of 'freedom'. Intertwined with reflections on the sense of 'geo-political dignity' that stemmed from Yugoslavia's unique position in international relations, 'freedom' relates to a variety of benefits, privileges or experiences which are unavailable in the present. Finally, in light of the conclusion of the sociological youth survey that an ethno-national and a Yugoslav sense of belonging were seen by the majority of the young as complementary rather than as mutually exclusive, the third part addresses regional specificities in reflections on (generational) failure, responsibility and loss that stem from Yugoslavia's violent disintegration.

The Past is a Foreign Country – perceptions of a political anticlimax

The post-socialist period saw members of the last generation of the Yugoslav League of Socialist Youth (LSY) take prominent roles in the political, media and cultural spheres of the different successor states. Many of those who had pioneered novel ideas, alternative styles and approaches in culture, journalism and politics in the 1980s became well-known editors, musicians, artists, senior managers, successful businessmen and high ranking politicians and have been at the helm of the contemporary cultural and political developments in the post-Yugoslav region. From the current Prime Minister of Montenegro, to the former President of Croatia, the current Macedonian President and the recently deposed Slovenian Prime Minister, the former socialist youth functionaries from the second half of the 1980s have controlled a significant portion of the post-Yugoslav political arena over the past twenty years. The violent break-up of Yugoslavia and the radical socio-political transformation shaped personal experiences and biographies in profound ways.

Like elsewhere in the former Communist Bloc, one of the dominant public narratives in the region of the former Yugoslavia over the past two decades has been characterized by a tendency to reduce the past to listing the crimes of communism and portraying it as a deviation from a hypothetical normal course of development.^{xx} At an individual level, some of the former youth functionaries who remained active in politics have tended to erase or suppress their Yugoslav/socialist past and the corresponding professional biographies.^{xxi} Although different groups followed different trajectories – some remaining progressive/liberal, some turning conservative – there is a significant part of this generation who have refused to appropriate the anti-Yugoslav/anti-communist discourse or to think about the socialist past in these terms. They tend to view the late socialist anti-regime, pro-

democratic youth initiatives as synonymous with a progressive wing of this younger age cohort, who lost in their progressive fights against an older post-WW2 generation who embraced nationalist politics in the late 1980s. In addition, in oral history testimonies, members of the last Yugoslav youth elite tend to frame their experiences through the narrative of the generation that “lost”: its freedom, its dignity, and its superiority to the countries of the former Eastern Bloc.

Arguably, social capital, i.e. membership in influential and well-positioned networks and technical ability, play a crucial role in elite reproduction.^{xxii} The fact that a large number of the youth functionaries from the late 1980s became successful businessmen not only suggests that ideological rigidity was no longer paramount in the second half of the 1980s and that the higher levels of the League of Socialist Youth were occupied by career-seeking individuals whose activism was largely formalized, but also that these networks survived the collapse of socialist Yugoslavia.^{xxiii} Moreover, these individuals were at the beginning of their professional careers in the late 1980s when the reforms of the federal government concerning private entrepreneurship were implemented and the Youth League itself got involved by acting as an umbrella for the so-called “new production units”^{xxiv} (many of which were set up as small computing firms) or by organising seminars “for training of entrepreneurial cadres”^{xxv} – like the Macedonian League of Socialist Youth did, for instance, in 1989.

The allusion to Janša as the very opposite of a figure such as Nelson Mandela in the above excerpt is illustrative of a sense of disillusionment which was present in many of the oral history testimonies I collected. Indeed, the progressively oriented part of the youth elite – in particular those who continued to work as journalists or entered the civil society sector – tended to be both highly critical of

post-Yugoslav politics, and to idealize the 1980s, at least to a certain degree. In this sense, the 1980s operate for them as a moment of lost possibilities^{xxvi} – not an era that they would wish to actually return to, but, rather, a starting point for the construction of a new post-socialist world that they were unable to defend. Criticism targeting the reduction of post-socialist politics to elections and the struggle for power and of the free market to ruthless capitalism and withering away of the welfare state was present in most of the interviews I conducted and appears as particularly common among the media and cultural elite. This is also the group which tends to embody the narratives of cosmopolitanism and loss of dignity. With the benefit of hindsight, individuals tend to critically distribute the burden of responsibility for the problematic post-socialist transition which stemmed from the Yugoslav wars between the different political and social actors. However, there is a shared belief that some things could have been done differently to prevent the disastrous outcomes of the Yugoslav crisis of the 1980s. Numerous testimonies and popular narratives reinforce the sense of disillusionment with post-socialist politics and underline the gap between the progressive vs. nationalist/conservative camp. This is conveyed strongly in the testimony of Nataša Sukič who was one of the founders of the lesbian youth activist core in Slovenia in the late 1980s and is still actively involved in the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA Europe):

I didn't think it was right not to have choice in the political sense, but if we compare it to today – what do we have now? We have an illusion, it's a huge trick. I think at the time there was more transparency. There was an opening up of the [social] space and there was a spirit, an atmosphere of freedom in the air. That disappeared with the dissolution of the country, with the rise of nationalism, with the strengthening of the church and of conservative values. With the death of

the welfare state and this brutal capitalism, I think Yugoslavia was great (laughs) – when I compare it to today. It was great. They should have done more to introduce political pluralism and it is such a pity it [the break-up] happened.

The disillusionment with politics echoed above is a shared sentiment among the once aspiring journalists and artists some of whom have remained prominent as senior editors and well-known musicians. Bosnian journalist Senad Pećanin echoed a shared narrative among liberal circles in the post-Yugoslav region that it was ethno-chauvinism that replaced socialism and that the rise of politics leaning towards an exclusivist far-right ideology is the result of the nationalist euphoria and the political shifts during the break-up of Yugoslavia. It is this subjective experience of the past twenty years and the sense of a perpetual crisis that frames the perception of Yugoslav socialism as emancipatory and hence more benign:

The book by Koštunica and Čavoški^{xxvii} was banned and I made photocopies of it. I had Čavoški as a guest in my program, I thought they were democrats. Our tragedy here is that those who were “dissidents”, were actually fascists, nationalists. That’s the difference between here and Poland, the Czech Republic – there you had Havel as a dissident, while here you had Tuđman, Dobrica Čosić, Alija Izetbegović, Paraga, Šešelj, Šeks. That’s our tragedy. There lies the key to our tragedy [...] That regime was doubtless undemocratic, we shouldn’t glorify it. But, compared to this... That regime was not fascist. These are fascists. These are fascists. In that sense, that regime was one hundred times more humane. With all of its flaws – it was authoritarian, it was undemocratic, it had one hundred flaws. But it wasn’t a regime with prominent features of fascism, like these ones...

A sense of defeatism and disillusionment with the prospect of any vaguely liberal or civic-oriented political platform replacing a type of politics preoccupied with the (ethno) national is detectable among those who enthusiastically embraced vaguely defined liberal values in their youth. As the last war sealed an ethno-nationally coded consensus in Bosnia-Herzegovina and post-Yugoslav politics is mainly shaped around the ethno-national paradigm, Rasim Kadić, president of the Bosnian Liberal-Democratic party from its establishment until 2005, recently recalled: “Our assurance that multi-ethnic democracy was possible cost us dearly. My Liberal Party never won more than three percent of votes [...] Now, from this perspective, it is clear that, unfortunately, in the Balkans, in the region of the former Yugoslavia, there is an absolute and exclusive domination of ethnic collectivities, of tribes, and democracy is possible only within mono-ethnic tribal communities.”^{xxviii}

Some of the findings of the last Yugoslav youth survey shed light on this sense of betrayed hopes and pessimism. Namely, it revealed a notable decline in the support for the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and the self-management system in practice and an overwhelming discontent with the process of democratisation. Yet, the last Yugoslav generation still showed considerable support for “socialism as theory” (fifty-three percent of the respondents)^{xxix} and demonstrated a surprising level of “utopian consciousness”^{xxx}, i.e. a considerably large percentage of the respondents expressed hopes that their individual future and the future of the society in general would be better^{xxxi}. On the contrary, the wide horizon of expectations of this generation was curbed in the post-1991 period and many of the hopes for a better, less corrupt and more functional political and economic system were shattered.

The Elusive Dream – reflections on freedom

Two narratives featured prominently in a considerable number of the interviews I conducted, although none of the questions I posed had specifically raised it: the narratives of freedom and (loss of) dignity - the latter related to what has been termed “a sense of geopolitical dignity”.^{xxxii} This tells us as much about the struggles, debates and aspirations of this generation in the 1980s as it tells us about their present preoccupations and disillusionment with the contemporary state of affairs in the post-Yugoslav context. It also exposes a key semantic transposition of the concept and the very understanding of freedom. In the 1980s, it was a generational obsession with freedom understood as political and civil rights (primarily freedom of expression and speech). Today, the concept has been taken to its other extreme semantic pole and has become synonymous with the freedom of travel and the social and economic rights – two features of their lives under Yugoslav socialism which are now, to varying degrees, diminished. Interviewees often captured this idea by contrasting their sense of being free “then” and being unfree “now”. Freedom, thus, becomes a thread which links the past and the present and to a certain degree legitimises an oppositional subjectivity. The last Yugoslav youth survey hinted at a prominent sense of Europeanness and a perceived superiority of the West European economic model. Asked about the changes in the Yugoslav economic system, the respondents declared preferences for a market economy (“like the one in the West”), private property and an accession to the European Economic Community: for sixty-four percent of the respondents joining the European common market was a preferential option.^{xxxiii}

The narrative of geo-political dignity featured more prominently among interviewees who were citizens of those Yugoslav republics that were subject to a

restrictive travel visa policy and whose countries of residence still experience a high level of socio-political and economic difficulties (such as Macedonia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia). It was generally conveyed through reflections on Yugoslavia's former prestige and prominence on the international scene. The flexible contours of the Yugoslav geopolitical mobility map, the "red" Yugoslav passport which guaranteed the freedom of travel, the perceived relative superiority and competitiveness in the international arenas of culture and sport all act as symbolic devices and as channels of articulation of a strong internationalist/Eurocentric generational identity among the interviewees, which in itself mirrors a particular framing of the concept of freedom. Freedom understood as mobility within Europe and beyond and dignity understood as the ability to engage with the wider world and compete on a European or international stage (be it in sports or music) implicitly extend legitimacy to Yugoslav citizenship and the Yugoslav geopolitical stature. It also implies the proximity to Europe and the world "then", constantly positing it against a sense of isolation and remoteness from the centre-stage developments in Europe and the world "now".

Indeed, a sense of a different engagement with the western world was central to the generational self-definition found in interviews almost three decades later. In the majority of the testimonies the first memories of one's youth are associated with foreign things, in particular foreign travel. This could be said to be primarily linked to the 20-year trauma of restricted visa travel in the post-Yugoslav states (with the exception of Slovenia and Croatia), as well as to the phenomenon of the a posteriori mythologisation of the Yugoslav passport.^{xxxiv} This arguably persists in the form of a trans-generational sense of entrapment which had only recently been alleviated with the visa liberalisation process for the Western Balkans. As has been observed,

“moving down the generations, to a degree, the sense of humiliation persisted vicariously, whereby the point of reference became the (possibility to) travel that the red [Yugoslav] passport had granted one’s parents”.^{xxxv} Macedonian guitarist Vlatko Stefanovski fused a narrative of dignity with the narrative of freedom, while recalling his first trip to Britain:

As far as freedom, the feeling of freedom is concerned...the feeling of being in possession of a red passport with which you could travel freely all around the world without having to apply for visas – from today’s perspective, that was utopia. Now I realize that we lived in a very happy and stable time. I remember when aged 18, I went to London to buy my first guitar... On Oxford Street in London you could exchange Yugoslav dinars into pounds. How does this sound to you now? As mission impossible, right? So, at the currency exchange point on Oxford Street you had “Yugoslav dinars”. So, you gave your dinars – I don’t remember exactly what the exchange rate was – but it’s been a long time that I haven’t experienced that sense of freedom... All these social uncertainties, political uncertainties, security-related uncertainties now... as if the world starts to lose its nerves and starts to burst at its seams.

Alluding to the past as a utopian “chronotope” and to the opportunity to exchange currency in the heart of London as “mission impossible” from a contemporary perspective clearly delineates an attitude of disappointment with the present state of affairs. By reminiscing about the past, about the freedom to travel without restrictions and to exchange money on Oxford Street, the interviewee made a statement about the present inability to travel without a visa to Britain or see the Macedonian currency quoted on an exchange rate board in London. Bearing in mind that this is a testimony of a highly successful musician who still regularly tours and performs abroad, and yet so strongly conveys a sense of loss, one could infer that

this narrative thickens, as it were, and that it becomes even more prominent moving down the social strata towards those who were more severely affected by the break-up of the state and the transformation of the socio-political system.^{xxxvi}

Dragan Kremer was a music critic and journalist in several youth media in the 1980s. He also chose to begin his testimony by pointing out the freedom and the opportunity to travel, as well as by mapping out the geopolitical and the cultural imaginarium of this generation:

To be honest, I don't envy the contemporary young generations. Very few young people can and do travel and this is not only valid for Serbia's smaller cities, but also for Belgrade. People from my generation, from Belgrade, used to go on their first bigger trip after turning 18 – hitchhiking, Inter-rail. Of course, both here and abroad those were safer times – we can only dream of that now. The only way my parents could know where I was during those one or two months was by me phoning them twice per week – I could have as well been in London, in Amsterdam or in a roadside phone booth in Sweden.

Indeed, mentioning London, Amsterdam and Sweden serves to map out the contours of that (Western) European space, its width and accessibility. Hence, Western Europe and Britain in particular stand out as the cultural points of reference.

A prominent thread within the narrative of (loss of) dignity is the conviction that Yugoslavia was at least in two spheres equal to the otherwise superior West: sport^{xxxvii} and music. The youth of the 1980s in popular memory features principally as an embodiment of a phenomenal musical/cultural/artistic output. Indeed, new music styles, regional scenes, a burgeoning domestic music industry, the openness to Western cultural influences and a youth organization that began to accommodate and promote alternative cultural expression elevated youth music culture in the

1980s to a new level. This generation was also the initiator of a novel attitude which was one of a will to interact and compete with the West and Western culture, and not simply consume, follow or copy Western European trends. Mirko Ilić, an illustrator and a designer from Zagreb associated with the “New Square” group of comic book artists connected with the New wave scene and the youth magazine Polet, conveys this sense of ambition of competing on a larger, global scale: “It was a time of idea exchange, matching intellectual wits... I learned to be daring and ask for the impossible. We had the feeling that we were shattering institutions, we did not want to succeed here, we wanted to compete with the entire world, because we believed that there were no limits.”^{xxxviii} Branko Kostelnik, a young journalist in the 1980s, echoed this sentiment in the introduction for his book of interviews with prominent rock/punk Yugoslav artists by evoking the common trope of urban, cosmopolitan cultural identity: “I sincerely hope that this book will give a little contribution to the struggle for urbanity, freedom and equality, for... In memory of the time when the world was young and when, except in sport, even for a moment we were equal to the West. In opposition and despite everything which is happening to us today. There!”^{xxxix}

Essentially, freedom becomes an umbrella term which denotes and connotes all sorts of experiences which seem unavailable in the present and were available in the past in a wider framework – Yugoslav, European or international. The following excerpt from the testimony by Macedonian journalist and political analyst Sašo Ordanoski refers to “cosmopolitanism” as the very source of that freedom:

Freedom is not necessarily related only to the fact of whether a regime is repressive or not. Freedom comes as a result of the possibility to be exposed to the resources of some kind of cosmopolitanism. I haven’t been to the theatre in

the past few years – there is nothing to see here. While at the time I used to watch fifty plays a year. So, when you find yourself in a situation when there is not one theatre production which would motivate you to visit the theatre, of course you don't feel free. When I had a chance to watch the greatest names in world drama in Macedonia and not to mention Yugoslavia, of course I felt freedom as if it was being administered intravenously – it comes with the air you breathe [...] Talking from my own experience as a journalist, at the time I was able to write what I wanted, when I wanted, where I wanted...

While a legitimate grievance of a segment of the population that became culturally and politically marginalised in the post-Yugoslav era, this pattern of reminiscing could be also interpreted as illustrative of a rather exaggerated sense of superiority and over-confidence that was at least partially a result of the projected and publicly reinforced image of Yugoslav exceptionalism. In that sense, this retrospective appropriation of official state narratives could be interpreted both as a result of the negative experiences of the 1990s, but also of a widely shared belief at the time that by not aligning itself with either Bloc in the Cold War, Yugoslavia pursued a morally superior foreign policy.

Indeed, allusions to Yugoslavia's cultural "Europeanness" reveal an awareness of a contemporary state of inferiority. Hence, the trauma of the break-up essentially becomes a trauma of losing an equal footing with regard to Europe, the perceived equality being a reflection of present-day grievances about the domination of everything which stands in contrast to subjective memories and to individual perceptions of "urbanity, freedom and equality".

Wither Yugoslavia - loss and responsibility

Not only the sense of achievement in two international arenas such as sport and music has fed into the narrative of loss of geopolitical dignity, it also significantly conditioned the way this generation perceived Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism before 1991. Senad Pećanin recalled the last appearance of the Yugoslav national soccer team at the 1990 World Cup in Italy and echoed the prevalent perception of Yugoslavism through a cultural lens:

We perceived Yugoslavism as a cultural concept, but also through sport. In 1990 we went to Italy for the World Cup. Ever since, I love [footballer Dragan Stojković] Piksi as my own brother. We watched the match against Spain, Piksi scored two goals and we won 2:1. That was actually the last appearance of the Yugoslav team... I told my friend: "Bro, keep an eye on me, if the Spanish score, I might have a heart attack." In that sense, we really felt Yugoslavia as our country, our homeland.

When asked to declare whether and to what extent they were prepared to personally engage in the preservation and realization of some group interests and tendencies, the majority of young respondents in 1989 – fifty-four percent of them - chose "SFR Yugoslavia as a whole".^{xl} Although the authors of the survey noted that there were differences along national/regional lines, the research found that the preparedness for engagement for the interests of one's nation and the interest of Yugoslavia as a whole were actually connected as "for the majority of the young these two attitudes do not appear as incompatible."^{xli} Indeed, an ethno-national and a Yugoslav sense of belonging seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive persisted until very late into the decade.^{xlii}

However, the last few years before the disintegration of Yugoslavia, at the apex of ethno-national homogenization, cultural Yugoslavism became unpopular and ostracized. The Bosnian student magazine *Valter*, for instance, referred to those who “nourish a sense of Yugoslavism” as “Balkan Palestinians”, who “know very well where and how far the territory which is supposed to be their homeland stretches, but, unfortunately, it is nowhere to be found.”^{xliii} Hence, a sense of failure and personal responsibility is often more acute nowadays among those who appropriated a wider, non-ethnic, Yugoslav cultural identity. Branko Greganović, former president of the federal League of Socialist Youth and currently involved in the business sector observed:

We, the Yugoslavs – quote/unquote, turned out to be very naïve. We definitely did not have a critical mass... Have you read Andrić’s novel *Gospođica* [The Woman from Sarajevo]? Andrić writes there how every forty years the ragtag descends from the mountains. Those are Andrić’s words. That is that cycle that no one was aware of at the time, no one [...] Our generation was not up to the task.

Zoran Kostov, currently university professor of journalism and media, was editor-in-chief of the main student magazine in Macedonia. He also reflected in a self-critical manner on this generation’s responsibility, highlighting the specific role of that generation in the Macedonian context:

That generation had a chance. In this sense, I am also self-critical. [I was] editor of a magazine, member of the presidency and first president of the Youth Council. I am in a refuge, I am a refugee, this is my refuge [points to his office], instead of jumping into the flame. You can’t change anything if you don’t enter there. Somehow, I never jumped into the flame and always remained on the side.

I carry part of the responsibility that that generation is an unsuccessful story [...] Sometimes it's about the combination of circumstances, sometimes it's about the responsibility of a generation. Did the generation fail to consolidate itself? I don't know.

Although there are overlapping narratives and patterns in how the interviewees relate to the socialist past and the post-socialist present, they also differ in many ways, which is primarily conditioned by the different socio-political contexts of each of the Yugoslav successor states. The wars in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia in the 1990s, the high levels of inflation in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo in the 1990s, the peaceful secession of Macedonia and the rapid "Europeanisation" of Slovenia engendered diverse post-socialist experiences and consequently different reflections on the past. Among the Macedonian interviewees a sense of loss and disappointment prevails, along with manifestations of the small-nation syndrome that one comes across in Slovenia, too. As Ordanoski put it:

Yugoslavia was a big country. Macedonia is small [...] There was a clash of histories, mentalities, traditions, which allowed you to participate in debates which opened up all possible aspects. And this provincial spirit which exists today because of the dimensions of the state we live in, did not exist at the time. Secondly, it's also a numbers' game: when you live in a country of twenty two million the opportunities are understandably bigger than in a country of two million. Today I say that Macedonia has two buses full of smart people, around one hundred people who can fit in two buses. Yugoslavia was "only" ten times bigger. After all, that comes up to twenty buses. Thanks to that there was a debate. The communism I remember was not oppressive and was already waning, the regime missed its chance to reform itself in the sixties, it was too fragmented to forge some authoritarian action on Yugoslav level...

Nataša Sukič similarly underlined the benefit of living in a larger multi-cultural environment, where cultural differences cross-fertilised in the realm of culture and the arts:

At the time I was very young. But if I look back now, I think in every sense there was a functional multicultural community – in culture, in art...a sense of solidarity in everything. It all contributed to having a broader worldview than today. Obviously there was nationalism, if there wasn't those terrible things would not have happened, but I never saw or felt that people carried that inside themselves. Then you had the media campaign for several years which unleashed the hatred...

In terms of context-specific narratives, understandably, a significant part of the testimonies of my Bosnian interviewees revolved around the violent conflict which for them accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia. Senad Pećanin related his scepticism towards a generational label with the profound personal disbelief and disappointment caused by the eruption of the war and the departure/exile of many public figures who belonged to that generation,^{xliv} among whom was an iconic representative of the Bosnian youth cultural scene and the New Primitives movement – musician and actor Nenad Janković (Nele Karajlić):

I don't know if I could talk in generational terms, if all of that happened by accident... if perhaps we were just moving in circles of like-minded people. I don't know to what extent we are a representative sample of our generation [...]

I mean... Nele... Awful... One can't explain that. How, how can I then speak about a generation? Nele is also part of our generation... We are not representatives [of that generation], we don't have the right [...] We constantly move within the same circle of ten people, we think in the same way, we joke in

the same way. We actually don't know, things have changed so much [...] I mean – a war in Sarajevo! I don't know what would have been more improbable than a war!

This strong conviction about the improbability of war and disintegration of the country was widely shared up until the escalation of the first armed conflicts. Dejan Jović was involved both in the Croatian youth press and in the League of Socialist Youth. His testimony echoes Pećanin's refusal to consider a violent break-up as a probable outcome of the Yugoslav crisis:

The break-up of Yugoslavia was absolutely nowhere near our horizon, we never thought about it. On the other hand, we feared nationalism and the disintegration of the cultural and the political space, which was already becoming visible [...] We had a dilemma. We did have a Yugoslav view on things [...] I wrote a lot about the church in the youth press [...] A lot of the things the church was doing seemed nationalist and hence unacceptable. No one expects the church to be pro-communist, of course, but it seemed to me that they were deliberately provoking nationalist sentiments. So, my attacks and my critique were motivated by that, by a fear from nationalism. Retrospectively looking, it seems we detected some things correctly, but if you ask me if we thought whether Yugoslavia could fall apart – I personally never thought that Yugoslavia could fall apart.

Conclusion

The last Yugoslav generation has been generally remembered through its achievements in culture and sport in the 1980s. It has been often represented^{xlv} as a generation which epitomizes urbanity, cosmopolitanism, non-conformism and late

Yugoslav culture. In reality, individuals who were actively involved in late socialist youth politics, media or culture followed diverse trajectories – some pursued their “non-conformist” engagements in the realms of media, culture and arts, some remained wholly or partially faithful to their liberal/progressive youthful ideals, while some chose to abandon/erase their socialist past and redefine their politics.

Narratives of defeat, generational responsibility, loss of “geo-political dignity” and disillusionment with the post-Yugoslav reality and post-socialist politics were intertwined among my interviewees with wider reflections on the Yugoslav past, as well as with evocations of a sense of cosmopolitanism, a different way of engaging with both the Eastern and the Western world and a somewhat generational obsession with freedom. Indeed, individual professional trajectories and the different post-Yugoslav trajectories of the federation’s successor states prove to be determining of the ways individuals reflect on their generational experience, on the 1980s and on the Yugoslav past.

The paper sought to shed light on the ways the late socialist Yugoslav youth made sense of the crisis and the impending reforms at the end of the 1980s, articulated its values and envisioned its future, and framed the memories of that past a quarter of a century later. The paper maintained that a process of progressive disillusionment with post-socialist politics has spurred the emergence of alternative, non-hegemonic mnemonic frames which deviate from the official public narratives that tend to reduce Yugoslav socialism to totalitarianism. A somewhat inflated horizon of expectations in 1989-1990, betrayed hopes and a contemporary crisis of liberal democracy and lack of political alternatives generally underpin the individual memories of the Yugoslav “crisis generation”, memories that are nevertheless not uncritical of the Yugoslav socialist past, but certainly echo Nancy Fraser’s vision of

“another “postsocialism”, one that incorporates, rather than repudiates, the best of socialism.”^{xlvi}

ⁱ J. Janša, “Did the Berlin Wall really come down on both sides?”, *European View* 8 (2009): 204.

ⁱⁱ Janša, “Did the Berlin Wall really come down”, 203.

ⁱⁱⁱ Janša, “Did the Berlin Wall really come down”, 204.

^{iv} Janša, “Did the Berlin Wall really come down”, 206.

^v K. Ghodsee, “Tale of ‘Two Totalitarianisms’: The Crisis of Capitalism and the Historical Memory of Communism”, *History of the Present: A Journal of Critical History* 4/2 (2014): 115-142.

^{vi} J. Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe* (Yale University Press, 2011), 24. See also: M. Kopeček and P. Wciślik, eds. *Thinking Through Transition: Liberal Democracy, Authoritarian Pasts, and Intellectual History in East Central Europe After 1989* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015).

^{vii} See: M. Bernhard and J. Kubik, eds. *Twenty Years After Communism. The Politics of Memory and Commemoration* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

^{viii} D. Singer, “1989: the end of communism?”, in *After the Fall: 1989 and the Future of Freedom*, ed. George Katsiaficas (New York/London: Routledge 2001), 16.

^{ix} “Slovenia Marks National Day”, *The Slovenia Times*, <http://www.sloveniatimes.com/slovenia-marks-national-day> (accessed 28 February 2014).

^x Following the arrest of journalist and youth functionary Janez Janša, Yugoslav People’s Army sergeant major Rajko Borštner, youth magazine *Mladina* journalist David Tasić and *Mladina* editor Franci Zavrl on 31 May 1988 on suspicion of disclosure of military secrets, the ensuing trial at the military court in Ljubljana sparked mass protests, shook the Yugoslav political scene to the core and led to a relative homogenisation of the Slovenian public. The “Committee for the defence of Janez Janša”, which was later renamed into “Committee for the defense of human rights”, came to represent all oppositional voices - the main points of contestation being that civilians were tried at a military court and the trial was conducted in Serbo-Croatian language.

^{xi} Dr. Dušan Keber, “Čigava je obletnica JBTZ?”, *Mladina* 22, 31 May 2013.

On the 25th anniversary of the trial against the “four”, on 31 May 2013, Janez Janša, Franci Zavrl and David Tasić unveiled a commemorative plaque at the entrance of the former military court in

Ljubljana. Only few days later the place was covered in graffiti calling the protagonists “Thieves”, “You’re finished!”, “Shame!”, “JBZ in prison”, and eventually the plaque was removed. The commemoration of the major event of the “Slovenian spring” happened in the same year when Janša was forced to resign following popular mass protests, faced corruption and money laundering charges, while his close associate and former leader of the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights and first Slovenian Minister of Interior Igor Bavčar was sentenced to seven years in prison for money laundering. Moreover, Bavčar was pointed as one of the main culprits in the case of the “Erased”, when *Mladina* published official governmental documents from the early 1990s. On the “Erased” in Slovenia, see: Tomaž Deželan, “In the name of the nation or/and Europe? Determinants of the Slovenian citizenship regime”, *Citizenship studies* 16/3-4 (2012): 413-429.

^{xii} M. Fulbrook, “Changing States, Changing Selves: Generations in the Third Reich and the GDR”, in Mary Fulbrook, ed. *Uncivilizing Processes? Excess and Transgression in German Society and Culture: Perspectives Debating with Norbert Elias* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 281.

^{xiii} Fulbrook, “Changing States, Changing Selves”, 291.

^{xiv} K. Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations”, in *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge, 1964), 298.

^{xv} For a transnational analysis of state weakness and institutional incapacity, see: Denisa Kostovicova and Vesna Bojicic-Dzelilovic, eds. *Persistent State Weakness in the Global Age* (Ashgate, 2009). On the varieties of post-socialist transformation, see: Dorothee Bole and Bela Greskovits, *Capitalist Diversity on Europe’s Periphery* (Cornell University Press, 2012).

^{xvi} Singer, “1989: the end of communism?”, 15.

^{xvii} S. Mihailović et al. *Deca krize: Omladina Jugoslavije krajem osamdesetih* (Beograd: Institut društvenih nauka/Centar za politikološka istraživanja i javno mnjenje, 1990).

^{xviii} M. Fulbrook, *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.

^{xix} The questions differed among different activists in order to address the specificities of their particular public engagement. Some of the questions I most often posed related to some of the major themes of a wider research on youth politics and cultures in late socialism, such as, for instance, becoming an activist; the relation to the institutional youth space(s); the understanding/critique of Yugoslavism; the perception of and participation in official youth rituals, such as the Baton of Youth or

the voluntary work camps; perceptions and experiences of the Yugoslav People's Army and military service; the break-up of Yugoslavia.

^{xx} A. Pók, "On the memory of communism in Eastern and Central Europe", in *Writing the History of Memory*, eds. Stefan Berger and Bill Niven (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 173-198.

^{xxi} The current President of the Republic of Macedonia Gjorge Ivanov began his career in the League of Socialist Youth of Macedonia in 1976 as a member of the presidency of the "municipal conference" in his home town of Valandovo. As a member of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) since 1976, he was actively engaged in the Macedonian LC: between 1982 and 1986 he was president of a commission for ideological-political education at the municipal branch of the LCM. However, his socialist political activism is omitted from his official biography which imprecisely notes that he was "politically active in the liberal and reformist-oriented youth organizations" (available at <http://www.president.gov.mk/en/president/biography.html>).

"Биографија Ѓорѓе Иванов", *Републичка конференција на ССММ*, Archive of Macedonia, box 1/1989.

Similarly, the biography of the president of the Croatian Social-Liberal Alliance Darinko Kosor, the last president of the Zagreb branch of the Croatian League of Socialist Youth, begins in 1991 with his voluntary role in the Croatian "Homeland War" (<http://www.hsfs.hr/predsjednik/>). A recent media exchange with Dejan Jović (himself active both in the Yugoslav youth press and in the Croatian League of Socialist Youth) over the 1989 leadership elections for the Zagreb branch of the LSY revolved around claims by Kosor that he, unlike Jović who was allegedly the candidate of the Party, was nominated by the "alternative" youth organisations such as the youth radio "101". Claiming this was factually unfounded, Jović warned of an attempt at labelling him a "socialist Stalinist" as opposed to Kosor's posing as the "democrat" and observed that Kosor was "only one of the many representatives of the "culture of lies" and fraudulent manipulation dominant in our public space".

"Dejan Jović odgovara na intervju Darinka Kosora "VL, 28.8.2015)", *Večernji list*, <http://www.pressreader.com/croatia/vecernji-list-hrvatska/20150901/281981786349558/TextView> (accessed 1 August 2015).

^{xxii} As it has been rightly observed, "we have two opposing images of elite reproduction, one in which former cadres retain positions of relative privilege by becoming private entrepreneurs, and another in which former cadres retain their privileges by remaining bureaucratic administrators [...] Szalai argues

that, by and large, the collapse of state socialism did not remove young technocrats from elite offices, since the human capital which they had acquired in school and on the job made them indispensable.” See: E. Hanley et al. “Social trends: The Making of Post-Communist Elites in Eastern Europe”, *Working papers of the research project “Social Trends”* 4 (1998): 4-5.

^{xxiii} One of the largest and most profitable business projects in the Balkans and Eastern Europe is “Studio Moderna”, which was established in 1992 by former Slovenian youth functionary Sandi Češko and former President of the League of Socialist Youth of Vojvodina Branimir Brkljač. Češko is regarded as one of the richest men in Slovenia. In Croatia, the former president of the Croatian and of the federal youth organisation Goran Radman worked as Microsoft’s director for Southeastern Europe and an associate of Bill Gates. The Croatian press in 2009 ran an article entitled “Youth functionaries on the wings of business: The secretaries of SKOJ in a better future”. Available at: <http://arhiva.nacional.hr/clanak/52777/sekretari-skoj-a-u-boljoj-buducnosti>

^{xxiv} D. Korade, “Kako je nastajala in se razvijala ideja o malih produkcijskih enotah”, in *Kompendij za bivše in bodoče politike* (Ljubljana: ZSMS, 1989), 69-81.

^{xxv} “Иницијатива за разгледување на можноста за основање на Семинар (Школа) за оспособување на претприемачки (менаџерски) кадри”, *Републичка конференција на ССММ*, Archive of Macedonia, box 1/1989.

^{xxvi} Reflecting on 1989 in a global perspective, George Lawson underlines the “*liberal* utopia that underpinned 1989” and argues that “revolutionaries in 1989 rushed to embrace what they *imagined* the West to consist of...” On the “ambivalent legacy” of 1989, see: George Lawson, Chris Armbruster and Michael Cox, eds. *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

^{xxvii} Referring to the book *Party Pluralism or Monism: Social Movements and the Political System in Yugoslavia 1944-1949*, originally published in 1983 and again in 1990.

^{xxviii} R. Kadić, “Were there Yugoslav alternatives?” (presentation at the conference “Debating the End of Yugoslavia”, Graz, Austria, 4-6 November 2011).

^{xxix} S. Mihailović, “Zbrka u glavi i strah u srcu: omladina Jugoslavije krajem osamdesetih”, in *Deca krize*, Srećko Mihailović et al., 280.

^{xxx} M. Jilek, “Omladina između nade i predviđanja”, in *Deca krize*, 258-269.

^{xxx} Patrick H. Patterson rightfully pointed to an “inflation of desire”, which “came not from unending frustration and scarcity but from instead from the *fulfilment* of desire – from the lived experience of abundance.” Moreover, “The apparent success of government policy in the 1950s, 1960s, and most of the 1970s built up huge popular expectations that the good times would continue and that the future would, in fact, be even brighter.” See: Patrick Hyder Patterson, *Bought and Sold: Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Cornell University Press, 2011), 314-317.

^{xxxii} S. Jansen, “The Afterlives of the Yugoslav Red Passport”, *Citizenship in Southeast Europe*, <http://www.citsee.eu/citsee-story/afterlives-yugoslav-red-passport> (accessed 2 March 2014).

^{xxxiii} S. Mihailović, “Zbrka u glavi i strah u srcu”, 282.

^{xxxiv} With the exception of the USA, China, Albania and Israel, from the 1960s onwards, and in particular during the last two decades of Yugoslavia’s existence, the Yugoslav passport allowed uninhibited visa-free travel to all of the non-aligned countries, and to most of the countries in Western and Eastern Europe.

^{xxxv} S. Jansen, “After the Red Passport: Towards an Anthropology of the Everyday Geopolitics of Entrapment in the EU’s “Immediate Outside””, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15/4 (2009): 821.

^{xxxvi} See: C. Bonfiglioli, “Gendering Social Citizenship: Textile Workers in Post-Yugoslav States”, *CITSEE Working Paper Series* 2013/30, available at: http://www.citsee.ed.ac.uk/working_papers/files/CITSEE_WORKING_PAPER_2013-30a.pdf

^{xxxvii} The prominence of Yugoslav basketball or football in personal testimonies has to do with the rise of a new generation in Yugoslav sport in the 1980s - a generation unit of the generation under scrutiny. A crucial event was Yugoslavia’s victory at the 1987 FIFA World Youth Championship in Chile, with a group of young footballers born between 1967 and 1969. While Yugoslav player Robert Prosinečki won the Adidas Golden Ball, the Yugoslav team set a new FIFA World Championship scoring record 2.44 goals per game. The international successes of Yugoslav team sports in the 1980s compensated for the economic decline and political skirmishing at home and fed into a sense of dignity and pride. Moreover, in 1987 the Yugoslav junior basketball team won the FIBA Junior World Championship, scoring two victories against the team of the USA as the two-time defending champion. Toni Kukoč (born 1968), Vlade Divac (born 1968) and Dino Rađa (born 1967) as new

rising domestic and international basketball sensations brought the Yugoslav team a victory in the final against the USA.

^{xxxviii} D. Kršić, *Mirko Ilić: Fist to Face* (New York: F+V Media, 2012), 51.

^{xxxix} B. Kostelnik, *Moj život je novi val* (Zagreb: Fraktura, 2004), 8.

^{xi} M. Vasović, "Percepcija društvenih sukoba" in Srećko Mihailović et al. *Deca krize*, 68.

^{xii} M. Vasović, "Percepcija društvenih sukoba".

^{xiii} For a more detailed account, see: Ljubica Spaskovska, *The Last Yugoslav Generation: the Rethinking of Youth Politics and Cultures in Late Socialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

^{xiiii} Goran Todorović, "Zbogom Jugoslavijo!", *Valter* 24, 9 February 1990, 3.

^{xv} Indeed, exile and migration stand out as markers of the post-socialist trajectories of a significant number of representatives of this generation. Mainly driven by the war and the siege of Sarajevo, many well-known cultural figures from Bosnia-Herzegovina left the country. Apart from Nenad Janković (born 1962), among them were Branko Đurić, actor, musician and comedian (born 1962), Saša Lošić, musician (born 1964), Miljenko Jergović, writer (born 1966), Aleksandar Hemon, writer (born 1964), Emir Kusturica, film director (born 1954), Milomir Kovačević, photographer (born 1961) – all from Sarajevo.

^{xvi} Documentary films such as *Srijetno dijete* [Happy child] (Igor Mirković, 2003), *Orkestar* [Orchestra] (Pjer Žalica, 2011), *The Last Yugoslavian Football Team* (Vuk Janic, 2000), *Once Brothers* (Michael Tolajian, 2010); series dedicated to various aspects of post-WW2 Yugoslav popular culture and everyday life, such as *SFRJ za početnike* [SFRY for beginners] (Radovan Kupres, 2012) or *Robna kuća* [Department Store] (Igor Stoimenov, 2009); the "NEXT YU" season at Belgrade theatre Atelje 212 and plays such as *Rodjeni u YU* [Born in YU] (Dino Mustafić, 2010) and *Zbogom SFRJ* [Goodbye SFRY] (Kokan Mladenović, 2011); and scholarly and non-scholarly books which have dealt with particular cultural phenomena of the 1980s, such as Pavle Levi's *Disintegration in Frames: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Yugoslav and Post-Yugoslav Cinema* (Stanford University Press, 2007); Dalibor Mišina's, *Shake, Rattle and Roll: Yugoslav Rock Music and the Poetics of Social Critique* (Ashgate, 2013); Ante Perković's *Sedma republika: pop kultura u YU raspadu* [Seventh republic: pop culture in the Yugoslav dissolution] (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2011) or Mitja Velikonja's and Vjekoslav

Perica's *Nebeska Jugoslavija: interakcije politickih mitologija i pop-kulture* [Heavenly Yugoslavia: the interaction of political mythologies and pop-culture] (Beograd: XX vek, 2012).

^{xlvi} N. Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York/London: Routledge), 4.