

# Forsaken Monuments and Social Change: The Function of Socialist Monuments in the Post-Yugoslav Space

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*Away with boundaries, those enemies of horizons! Let genuine  
distance appear!*  
*Oscar-Vladislav de Lubicz-Milosz*  
*L'amoureuse initiation (1910)*  
*Man is an imagining being*  
*Gaston Bachelard*  
*The poetics of reverie (1960)*

Monuments play an important symbolic role in people's lives. Each monument is built for a very specific reason and is intended to serve a well-defined purpose. Monuments are erected to remind us of something, some important event or individual. Yet the symbolic value of monuments—built to last eternally—can, and frequently does, change. They can gain or lose on importance depending on the political climate of the time. In Dylan Trigg's (2009) words, "what was once built to testify to a singular and eternal present becomes the symbol and proof of its mutability" (xxviii). Under the right circumstances, a monument built to mark a place or convey a meaning, to designate some commonly shared experience, give form to a socially salient story or event of the past and secure their remembrance in the collective memory of a group of people—thus serving as a symbol that binds—may very well grow into a symbol that divides. A good example is the Georgia's Freedom Charter adopted in 2011 (EASTWEEK, 2011), its primary purpose being the removal of all Soviet-era symbols from the public space, including monuments. This symbolic reinterpretation of monuments almost exclusively takes place in the

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times of social change. Indeed, monuments are virtually always the first to be targeted when regimes are overthrown, and people demand and forge a change in the political order of their country. We have witnessed these types of transformations—toppling of monuments that symbolically represent collapse of the ruling government and a changing political climate—on numerous occasions throughout our modern history. Some recent examples include South Africa, Egypt, Iraq, the former Soviet Union and the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, to name a few. The converse can also be true. A monument erected to symbolize a superior position of one group could be turned into a symbolic representation of a nation striving to be inclusive of all its citizens (for example, see Marschall's (2010) discussion of an attempt to reinterpret the Paul Kruger Monument in Pretoria from a symbol of Afrikanerdom to a signifier of "our [shared] history"). Whatever the nature of the symbolic reinterpretation may be, it appears that no major social transformation is possible without some form of symbolic reinterpretation. This, in turn, raises the fundamental issue of how the past is re-remembered and reinterpreted to fit the needs of the present. Could it indeed be that "history has become our replaceable imagination," as the French historian Pierre Nora (1989) proposed in his seminal paper on memory and history?

The primary purpose of the present chapter is to discuss the symbolism of socialist monuments in the context of the post-Yugoslav space, particularly that of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), a former Yugoslav republic. To achieve this, we first discuss the symbolic value of monuments more generally, followed by an analysis of the purpose of socialist monuments in the context of the transitional post-socialist, postwar, post-Yugoslav space. Finally, we examine the current status of socialist monuments as dividing symbols and whether and under which conditions these structures could reveal a potentiality for once again becoming symbols that bind. Although socialist monuments will be discussed in greater detail in the following pages, here we wish to briefly note that socialist monuments exemplify a strange quality of in-betweenness, symbolizing not only socialist past and antifascist struggle but also a past that has been appropriated differently by different people. Some perceive them as symbols of purportedly oppressive past that is to be forgotten and its traces removed, while others experience them as symbols of a time that is remembered as better than the present or simply as a time worth remembering. For the former, these monuments seem to provide a necessary "background" to set against and justify their presently held patriotic—and in some cases, nationalistic—sentiments, whereas for the latter, they appear to function as silent reminders—served cold with a dash of nostalgia—that the wished-for-future that is the present is not what they had expected or desired. Whatever the case may be, the past—epitomized by the monuments—is used as a resource or a reference in making sense of the chaotic perpetually liminal present, marked by lingering uncertainty.

While this chapter deals with a specific type of monuments in a specific context, the struggle—at both the physical and symbolic levels—associated with dealing with memorials that signify an ambiguous past is by no means unique to the post-Yugoslav space. In fact, it can be found in almost every society past and present that has gone through some radical social change. Examples include dealing with the communist monuments in Romania (Salecl, 2000), the legacy of the Soviet Union

in the post-Soviet space (Boym, 2001), the apartheid organizers and Afrikaner nationalist monuments in South Africa (Marschall, 2010), Italy's "divided memory" along the fascist—antifascist transverse (Foot, 2009), the "competing pasts" related to WWII in Germany (Moeller, 1996), and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the USA as an example of "commemorating a divisive defeat" (Wagner-Pacifici & Schwartz, 1991, p. 377), to name a few. Paraphrasing Father Jan Kapica, who in 1906 asked, "What is an Upper Silesian? Is he a German, a Pole, a Prussian, simply an Upper Silesian, or simply a Catholic or, perhaps, even just an abstract human being?" (as cited in Zahra, 2010, p. 99), we ask, "What are these monuments? Are they symbols of socialism, shared life, a period of darkness, a better life, or are they simply sculptures standing in remote landscapes now stripped of their intended symbolism or, perhaps, great architectural accomplishment of an aesthetic value unwilling or unable to assume any nationally relevant symbolic meaning?"

## Situating the Discussion in the Wider Symbolic Frame

Because of the pronounced purposefulness with which monuments are build and because they do not exist in a political, social, or symbolic vacuum, situating monuments in a wider symbolic power frame seems warranted for it is the symbolic power that lies at the heart of every political system. Monuments, erected to remind us of the past, to induce and enable reproduction of stories and narratives *embodied* in the stone, invoke predefined meanings that serve as symbolic organizers of social life and the lives of individuals. It is in the *nature* of a monument to always have a "target audience," an addressee imagined as an ideal recipient of its message, who will be called upon, cry, or stand proud before it. This target audience could be the entire globe or a small family. As such, monuments constitute an integral part of the wider *symbolic regime* through which people ascribe individual and collective meanings to the past and present. The term "symbolic regime" is used here to denote the network of dynamically interrelated semantic ensembles and agencies acting upon, within, and across imagined borders of social groups (Bourdieu, 1989). In a stronger sense, we use the same term to denote the social function of any symbolic regime—that is, its domination over means of symbolic reproduction, of which we conceive in terms of Althusser's (1969/2009) Ideological State Apparatuses: educational, religious, legal, political, informational, cultural and other aspects of social life—all the while not losing sight of discursive micro-relationships of power through which a system is maintained.

Any given regime surely exerts symbolic dominance by controlling these and other mechanisms. Thus, the distribution of ensembles, discourses and their material correlates, to a significant degree, demarcates the symbolic field that individuals navigate. This is not to imply that symbolic regimes are some absolutely overpowering structures. Individuals navigating a dominant regime are surely capable of distancing from that regime, opposing it, and even constructing new, hybrid, and idiosyncratic symbolic frames of reference and meaning systems. Indeed, the ongoing

co-construction of individual meanings occurs precisely at this intersection of socially mediated messages and personally held attitudes and beliefs stemming from prior experiences. In other words, even though they always act within the framework of some symbolic regime, individuals are continuously negotiating and renegotiating socially mediated messages to construct new meanings.

Undoubtedly, certain symbols perform more crucial functions of ascription by mediating core ensembles of a particular regime, while others are more peripheral, designating simple elements of the regime. Yet whether crucial or peripheral, it is this facet of monuments that grants them their symbolic value. Moreover, public monuments, generally built to reinforce and be a factor in a dominant or competing societal narrative, principally exemplify the dominance of the power holders over institutional, economic, and sociocultural mechanisms used in the perpetual reproduction of these narratives. Frequently, and particularly during regime shifts and social unrest, various elites compete for social control by claiming their “exclusive” right to build, establish, and maintain narratives, including erecting monuments as integral elements of this process. Naturally, a monument erected for this purpose will *properly* address only those groups or individuals who subscribe to the dominant ideology, and leave others, who are indifferent to this ideology, unaddressed. But there are also those cases when a single statue, a memorial place, or a historical site *properly* addresses only one group while *inappropriately* addressing another, thus calling into memory different—often conflicting—stories and giving rise to feelings of repulsion, detest, and anger. It is precisely these cases that best demonstrate the symbolic power that monuments embody. This function of ascertaining and addressing an audience is the ultimate purpose of any monument, for without addressees, monuments and symbolic regimes as such are stripped of their symbolic efficacy.

The highly complex and dynamic past of the pre-1945 Yugoslav space had given rise to various and often conflicting regimes that, under concrete historical conditions and as a result of concrete material forces, were integrated into a broader—dare we say, less rigid—symbolic regime of post-World War II Yugoslavia. The establishment and historical development of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FNRJ) in 1945, renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ) in 1963, among other things, meant radical symbolic incision into the pre-socialist sociocultural fabric and continued *symbolic work* in and with pre-socialist *materials*. Indeed, the emerging Yugoslav symbolic system aspired to redefine the entire social system from the ground up, including establishing entirely new legal and political systems, with the ultimate aim of creating a society that rested on a previously nonexistent symbolic foundation. Ironically, the process of decline of the “actually existing socialism” was marked by a *rediscovery* of concepts, narratives and symbolism of the past and relentless prosecution of socialism, mainly on the basis of the “horrors it had inflicted upon *our* people.” Parenthetically, it should be noted that a dialogical co-constructivist approach is taken here, meaning that concepts, narratives, and symbols do not exist as such, independent of people and history. They emerge in the process of interactions and everyday practices of individuals immersed in a broader semantic field, assuming their properties only when

imbedded in a symbolic discourse. This means that they cannot be simply discovered but are continually reconstructed, reimagined, and reinterpreted.

Notwithstanding the almost unanimous verdict against it, socialism still stubbornly lingers in the post-Yugoslav space (and what this might mean we will touch upon later). For now, suffice it to state that the material expression of the lingering presence of this fallen system can be found in numerous objects, buildings, sites and monuments that it produced. While socialism is ostensibly a mere matter of the past, its monuments remain material reminders of it and stand like broken instruments of its once enormous symbolic apparatus. However, the truth is not only that their symbolic efficacy, though reduced, is still clearly present, but also that these monuments often act as symbolic—and de facto—targets of dominant regimes of today. Yet before we speculate about the function of these monuments today and whether and under which conditions they might be renegotiated as a new resource for emergence of alternative semantics and symbolism traversing the pronounced imagined and real ethnic boundaries that dominate these lands today, we first must ask what elements underlie and determine this symbolic relationship marked by tension and how and to what extent the symbolic efficacy of these “monuments of the past” still persist into the present. In order to arrive at these two points we first paint the wider panorama of symbolic relations structuring collective life, ultimately aiming at speculating about the symbolic burden and potentiality of these liminal “markers of the past” within the porous boundaries of their “heart shaped frame” (the geographic shape of BiH closely resembles the shape of a heart). It should be noted that because monuments can be treated as an empirical entry point into the symbolic worlds of a collective, we do not confine ourselves to any strict disciplinary approach; instead, we rely on insights from a range of disciplines and approaches attempting to arrive at a wider theoretical frame in which to situate these monuments.

## Historicizing Socialist Monuments

The formation of the socialist states in post-WWII Europe was marked by enormous changes, not only in economic and political but also very much in symbolic terms. This process entailed massive efforts at ideologically shaping and reshaping the immediate socialist past and the more distant past of the pre-socialist period. Nothing was to put a stain on *our* great past, *our* revolution, and *our* people. Nothing was to prevent a full realization of *our* socialist goals. The creation of the Eastern Bloc meant the establishment of a wide-ranging symbolic regime dominated by the Soviet Union. The national communist parties in power across this part of Europe were to translate this overarching ideological macro-ensemble into their own “national roads to communism,” establishing more locally suited micro-ensembles and identifying context-appropriate axes of communication with their surviving ensembles from the pre-socialist pasts.

Certainly, the communist elites were well aware that creating a new system demanded careful management of societal resources and vast symbolic work.

Consequently, they introduced massive *story building efforts*, constructing the revolution itself and its vocabulary. In some cases, this was accomplished amid a total absence of popular support, most notably in Hungary and DDR, employing the “discipline and punish” approach to prevent symbolic deviations, while forcefully severing ties with past symbolic regimes that still had some legitimacy for the people of those countries. The infamous case of Enver Hoxha proclaiming Albania the first ever constitutionally atheist state demonstrates the severity of these types of interventions. In the Yugoslav context, this symbolic incursion was probably experienced as most intrusive in Croatia where the idea of an independent state circulating for some time came to be attenuated only through the experience of the NDH (the Independent State of Croatia), essentially a puppet state of the Axis during WWII. Not surprisingly, after Croatia gained its independence in 1991, the Croatian elites resurrected many of the NDH symbols, but remained reluctant to fully assume the ideals of the NDH due to its blemishing role in WWII. Ironically, in 2013, following its accession to the European Union (EU), Croatia was clumsily represented by its old NDH flag in a welcoming message extended to this newest member of the EU on the official EU web portal, leading to a minor but noteworthy diplomatic scandal.

Generally, what this story building effort meant in terms of material expression is evidenced across the Eastern Bloc in the form of hundreds of thousands of monuments, sites, memorials, and buildings erected to actualize the grandeur of the idea guiding it. Analogous to the city-text concept proposed by Emilia Palonen (2008), we could view this material expression as a set of textual inscriptions that function “as a system of representation and an object of political identification” (p. 220).

It neither simply carries the ideologies of the holders of power nor mirrors political discourses. As a set of commemorations, it is a “representation” that aims to establish a world view through the inclusion of certain elements for (an illusion of) internal coherence. Contingent and containing contradictions, it highlights certain aspects and excludes others. (Palonen, 2008, p. 220)

So instead of thinking of these city-texts, including monuments, as mere carriers of political discourses, we ought to think of them as guarantors of the presence and authority of the regime of meanings of which they are a part, patrons of the regime’s coherence in appearance and discourse. Though likely applicable to all regimes but most visible in socialism, the form is to bear witness and to somehow represent the substance of the *text*.

Salecl (2000) provides an excellent analysis of an extreme case, the enormous project of Nicolae Ceausescu—the construction of “a grandiose palace and a broad avenue with neo-baroque fountains surrounded by neoclassic apartment blocks” (p. 7) in the late seventies. This huge construction project was devastatingly destructive. It entailed a radical transformation of the old center of Bucharest and demolition of many historic buildings. Salecl’s analysis also points in another direction, which is of particular interest to us: “What happens after the fall of a regime?” Framing her analysis in psychoanalytic terms, Salecl (2000) arrives at the conclusion that the palace “remains one of the most traumatic remnants of the communist regime.”

Possessing a “sublime quality,” “it is beautiful and horrible at the same time, provoking both admiration and disgust” (p. 7). Without necessarily adopting her terms, we find her discussion relevant for the purposes of framing the discussion of socialist structures, as it reveals their inherent ambiguity. If trauma gives a sense of incision, of certain intrusion but also insistence on the chain of meaning, then monuments and other objects erected during the communist regime could be seen as material points of incision into the semantic and material space of a *community*, their ultimate intention being a complete eradication of “the previous symbolic order, which had been realized not only in the past political system but also in its material remnants—its architecture” (Salecl, 2000, p. 8). Unless they are physically removed—and often persisting long after they had been physically removed—these material objects continue to exist and insist throughout the process of transitioning from one symbolic regime into another, thus affirming their factual and symbolic in-betweenness.

“Ceausescu’s creationism tried to undo the old signifying chain in order to establish a totally new symbolic organization. By razing the historical monuments, Ceausescu aimed to wipe out Romanian national identity, the fantasy structure of the nation that is forged around historic old buildings and churches, and then to establish his own version of this identity.” (Salecl, 2000, p. 8–9)

The process of constructing and maintaining dominance of a symbolic regime is saturated with contradictions and is highly context-dependent. This is nicely exemplified through the public symbolic exchange surrounding the infamous Informbiro Resolution of 1948 (see, for example, Prebilič and Guštin, 2006), as a result of which Stalin, a beloved *drug* (comrade) and epitome of socialist victory was declared an imperialist and deemed unwelcome in Yugoslavia. Although this would lead to many prosecutions of those who failed to denounce Stalin, the crucial point is the ease with which an entire system was fundamentally restructured, simply by changing the position of a single socially salient symbol (for a captivating description of this ambivalence at the heart of the subject, see Lovrenović’s recollection of how he experienced Stalin’s death as a young man living in Yugoslavia in the 1950s (Lovrenović & Jergović, 2010)). Incidentally, a significant consequence of this breakup with Informbiro was “the emancipation of art from the paternalistic Soviet influence” (Potkonjak & Pletenac, 2007, p. 181). Indeed, it was this point that had marked the shift away from the so-called socialist realism and toward a more open—yet in no way free from regime oversight and scrutiny—and less rigid art paradigm which paved the way for experimentation in art forms and expressions in later years (Levi, 2009).

Transformations taking place at the heart of symbolic regimes easily reveal themselves if one traces stylistic architectural revolution of Yugoslav monuments. In her recent paper on monuments built in the post-WWII period, Horvatinčić (2012) provides a comprehensive discussion of the heterogeneity of architectural styles in post-WWII Yugoslavia. Monuments from the socialist era range from those that depict fallen soldiers and other celebrated heroes in the easily recognizable architectural style of social realism thus clearly conveying messages related to the

People's Liberation Struggle (NOB) to those erected on sites of major WWII battles. Monuments of the former architectural style, largely situated in urban centers or regularly frequented areas (e.g., along major roads), reveal the centrality of publically memorializing the WWII experience as a "founding myth." An illustrative example is the "unknown soldier" phenomenon, widely spread throughout Yugoslavia and other socialist countries (see Anderson, 1983/2006). Indeed, instances of institutionalized remembering and memorializing appeared at unexpected nexuses—in football clubs, for example. A large number of Yugoslavia's clubs had some sort of a designated memorial place or monument commemorating club members who gave their lives for the revolution and people's liberation (Mills, 2012). The latter type, on the other hand, was frequently built in a modern architectural style that could be described as abstract, if not outright ambiguous, nowadays even described by some as resembling UFO aesthetics. Indeed, Horvatinčić (2012) reminds us that sculptors active in the former Yugoslav space have created some of the most impressive modern monuments in Europe. If one dwelled on the symbolic meaning of this figurative-to-abstract representational transformation, one could argue that it follows the progression from exhausting symbolic efficacy of the war narrative and toward a more abstract expression of the already established new symbolic regime.

Even in spite of these massive story building efforts and attempts to account for the pre-Yugoslav organization of life by establishing explicit legal and political expressions of its diversity (*narodi* and *narodnosti*, terms that defined the *dominant Slavic peoples* and all other *national minorities*, respectively), Yugoslavia as an idea could not easily fully substitute the preexisting ways of knowing. Indeed, one could argue that numerous provisions created by the Yugoslav government, including the formal constitutional right to self-determination and independence for the constituent elements of the federation, strove to demonstrate that the shared origin of all South Slavs united under the umbrella of Yugoslavia was to serve only as a supplement, not a replacement. Ironically, the currently prevailing ethnic foundations that served as building blocks of another transformative narrative in the post-Yugoslav period seem to resemble the thin foundation on which the idea of Yugoslavia was built. Today's differential footings of these two types of narratives—Yugoslav and ethno-narratives—clearly demonstrate the relative significance of each in the wider symbolic system. Whereas the "South Slav" common origin narrative has seemingly entirely lost its symbolic efficacy, antifascist struggle, revolution, and attempt at achieving an egalitarian society still resonate in the popular imagination of a substrata of the population. Ironically, it is precisely the fact that the idea of Yugoslavia frequently raises less than welcoming reactions that demonstrates its lingering persistence.

Along analogous lines, a contemporary Bosnian thinker, Ugo Vlaisavljević (2006, 2007) establishes two broad theses on symbolic change underlying economic and political deterioration of socialism in Yugoslavia. The first is a proposition that the decline happened when the narratives of the heroic revolutionary past as fundamental building blocks of symbolic legitimization of the public order ceased to properly *address* its imagined addressees. The second is a seemingly incoherent thesis proposing that the system was overly successful at subordinating and dissolving those same competing symbolic regimes (of de-territorializing, to use his term



that he borrows from Deleuze) that will eventually emerge as new dominant regimes. In reality, it appears that the Yugoslav regime was not conceived to absolutely break ties with ethnic imaginaries but rather to give meaning to the revolution by adhering to an alternative ethnic base (Yugoslavs), which would encompass or supplement the existing—often conflicting—narratives. Such conception of a nation inevitably proved to be problematic in terms of constructing and maintaining the Yugoslav symbolic regime's command of the past, for the Yugoslav narratives had very little to say about those periods of the past that played the most important role in the alternative ethnic narratives. In other words, although attempting to construct a very wide ethnic base, one that would accommodate all, when it came to narrating the pre-Yugoslav past it could not compete with the existing narratives reinforced by their doubling with religious discourses. It, thus, had to place its hopes in grounding the narration in the present and the future of the revolution. Kuzio (2002) demonstrates this problem in detail in a different context, that of the Soviet Union. The Soviet regime, being well aware of this problem, had since the 1930s onwards systematically worked on reconstructing ties with Tsarist Russia as a unifying signifier, thus building its historical legitimacy on “reactionary” grounds.

“Real socialism” in Yugoslavia and elsewhere was an ultimate expression of social constructivism—a revolutionary system almost openly declaring its contingent and constructed nature. No wonder then the size and grandeur of the socialist monuments! The system, revealing itself as openly “under construction” (in permanent revolution), had to ground its symbolic regime literally into the ground, and to make it, if not indestructible, then at least immovable. In contrast, ethnic thinking would destroy its very core, *de facto* signing its death sentence, by openly declaring itself “under construction.” After all, the possibility to project itself into the past where it reveals itself in its “absolute truth” that stands and shines even today has always been its major advantage. The reemergence of approaches to establishing and maintaining new symbolic regimes that project into the past should not surprise us then. Despite the trans-historical grounding of ethnic regimes, socialist intrusion, still echoing into the present, may have demonstrated the fragility that any symbolic regime faces, thus yielding the same urge for the “novices” to engage in mass-scale construction work that in many ways resembles what was attempted by the socialist regime. In principle, any symbolic and/or material *transition* incorporates two distinct requirements: (1) the establishment and elaboration of a new mode of material correlate, and (2) the elaboration of the mode of relationship towards the preexisting regime and its objects. Though both are parts of the same process—since *identity* of a new symbolic regime always requires a relationship of the aforementioned kind—we distinguished them analytically in order to take a better look at the preexisting regime, which somehow persists into the present.

The war(s) that devastated and eventually led to the dissolution of Yugoslavia, conditions that caused them and the enormous consequences they had for economic, political and social relations among ex-Yugoslav nations remain a topic for research. In short, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, a process that officially started after the 1990 elections and the secession of the Socialist Republic (SR) of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, has resulted in immeasurable human tragedy, damaged economic, political, and social relations, and a permanent tear in the social fabric of sociocultural life. In

1992, BiH followed suit of Slovenia and Croatia, declaring independence from Yugoslavia. Whereas the declaration of independence has led to a war in both Slovenia and Croatia, these wars were relatively short-lived compared to the long and costly war that materialized in BiH. The extent of human suffering and the damage caused to the social fabric and ties that once existed among people of this region is not surprising given that the SR BiH closely resembled ethnic makeup of Yugoslavia, with its population mixed to such extent that tearing it apart was possible only through massive bloodshed, destruction, and fabrication of fear and distrust. Indeed, what makes BiH unique, at least in the context of former Yugoslavia, is that it was the only Yugoslav republic that did not have a “titular nation” but was instead composed of three dominant groups (Muslims/officially Bosniaks since 1993, ethnic Serbs, and ethnic Croats) in more-or-less proportional shares. Unfortunately, neglecting the lived experience of the people sharing life in this small land, the West quickly adopted the notion of “ancient hatred” as an explanation for the brutalities the war had brought. More detailed observations, however, reveal complex processes of constructing and publicly disseminating nationalist discourses culminating in Milošević’s “anti-bureaucratic,” elite-driven patterns of ethnic mobilization and radicalization of inter-ethnic relationships that transformed once existing and relatively stable cross-cutting social networks into ethnically centered and segmented communities (Biro, 2006; Oberschall, 2000; for an early and rather informative account on the processes leading to the breakup of Yugoslavia, see Rusinow, 1991).

Hence, what differentiates Yugoslavia, and most notably BiH, from the general process associated with any symbolic and/or material *transition* is that the symbolic regimes of post-socialism have inserted, indeed had to insert, themselves not only as post-socialist but also as postwar regimes. This is what Vlasisavljević (2007) thinks when he articulates the constitution of “three nations as three war narrations.” What he maintains as a fundamental characteristic of a symbolic constitution is a war-centered self-constitution of “small peoples” in the Balkans as a century long experience (Vlasisavljevic, 2007). Naturally, whenever we speak about wars we speak about winners and losers, friends and foes, victims and perpetrators. A symbolic regime that establishes itself with these references inevitably has to elaborate on these semantic ensembles. This has been an almost universal experience in the post-WWII period—obviously leading to the formation of clearly opposing representations embodied in the Cold War opposition, but also an enormous variety of alternative elaborations. Interestingly, the symbolic regimes constructed out of the ashes of socialist Yugoslavia in the last decade of the twentieth century, once more emerged as postwar regimes. This, in turn, meant once again entangling and disentangling in the process of elaborating and building “new” symbolic structures through the prism of conflict, on graves and bones, in the most literal sense, thus adding yet another dimension to that state of “in-betweenness” of not only monuments but also the entire symbolic regime of which they are a part.

Socialist regime and its objects, although almost unanimously deemed criminal post factum, in a way withdrew into the shadow where they continue to haunt—if not undermine—the new national regimes, for whatever is assumed to be the principal semantic content of socialism, its alleged criminality seems almost benign in

comparison to the newly emerged national criminalities. On the other hand, deeming the conflicting radical nationalisms the principal wrongdoers of the present almost lifts the weight of socialism's guilt, albeit within the frame of decreasing its efficacy by fortifying divisions and borders, always through a new *agrarian reform*, against the idea of "brotherhood and unity." Indeed, a look into the more recent past and the introduction to the dissolution of Yugoslavia reveals accentuation of social (and symbolic) divisions framed primarily around *national questions*—a *specter* haunting socialism as an idea from its very onset (see, for example, Connor, 1984)—thus setting the stage for a radical national rework of a shared symbolic regime. Most prominent examples of national claims strongly entering the public discourse in the pre-dissolution period are the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU) Memorandum and the Slovene Academy of Sciences Declaration of the Serbian and Slovenian national programs, respectively, while still preserving the broader framework of Yugoslavia. Clearly, one of the most conspicuous and widely cited symbolic events marking the national revival and with it the definitive breakup of Yugoslavia was the infamous speech on the Kosovo Battle's 600th anniversary delivered by Slobodan Milošević at Gazimestan in 1989, a site near Priština where the Kosovo Battle, one of the crucial symbols in the Serbian national self-imagination, took place in 1389.

This over-accentuation of cultural difference is not unusual particularly in the process of the (re)birth of a nation. In Eley and Suny's (1996) terms, "Culture is more often not what people share, but what they choose to fight over." Indeed, it is precisely the cultural similarities that are constructed as the most significant differences in the time of a major social change. Illustratively, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where people speak one and the same language (with *regional* dialects), we presently have three official languages that are fully mutually intelligible. The actual linguistic and semantic differences among these three languages are mostly negligible. The essential "difference" among them is in their names—Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian (each to represent a purportedly culturally "distinct" *ethnic* group, which in the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina are conflated with religious denominations). Correspondingly, ethnic Croats and ethnic Serbs in this country are constructed as culturally distinct from each other and other "ethnic others" who inhabit this country and culturally identical to Croats and Serbs in Croatia and Serbia proper, respectively. Similarly, Bosnian Muslims or Bosniaks are constructed as the true guardians of the idea of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who unlike ethnic Croats and Serbs, do not have a "spare country" or matrix. This symbolic fight via cultural means can take any shape and renaming the language and appropriating it as ours, thus strictly distinct from theirs, is but one example. Vlaisavljević (1998) has aptly dubbed this process "reappropriation of cultural ownership." Analogously, marking of territory as ours by the means of erecting monuments that glorify the accomplishments of our people or the suffering of our heroes and symbolically cleansing the territory by removing monuments and other markers that signify the presence of an unwanted other or undesired interpretation of the past—typically occurring simultaneously—are integral parts of this "reappropriation of cultural ownership" process. This line of reasoning coincides with Benedict Anderson's (1983/2006)

theorizing of nations as “imagined communities” that are not based on actual interactions among all members of the community but are instead founded on some preconceived or constructed notion of what the nation to which one belongs is. It seems that precisely because nations are imagined communities, we need symbols—flags, coats of arms, monuments, national heroes, significant dates and ceremonies—to create a sense of confederacy, a bond, in individuals. It is through these symbols that a sense of belongingness to a group is established and maintained. Monuments truly epitomize imagined communities. Indeed, they are frequently erected to construct and maintain a notion of a nation, an imagined community par excellence. It is then not surprising that monuments are the first to be targeted when new communities are imagined or already existing imagined communities are reinterpreted to fit the needs of the present.

## Monuments and Collective Remembering

Having historicized and situated socialist monuments in the symbolic power framework, broadly defined, we now wish to move to the discussion of monuments in a different framework, that of memory—or perhaps more appropriately *remembering*. The reader will recall that in this chapter we do not refrain from borrowing from a wide array of theoretical considerations to scaffold our discussion of these monuments, a discussion that is not limited to the use of monuments by the ruling elites to establish and maintain a system, but also extends to what meanings and functions these monuments might have in the post-socialist space.

Over half a century ago, Maurice Halbwachs (1992), one of the most prominent scholars to theorize memory, has made a distinction between “history” and “collective memory,” a distinction that is made on the basis of the applicability of the past to the present. Olick (2008), summarizes Halbwach’s distinction between history and collective memory in the following terms, “History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an “organic” relation—the past that is no longer an important part of our lives—while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities” (p. 7). Although this conceptualization of collective history as “active past that forms our identities” is useful, it does not seem to fully capture what is at work in the process of reinterpreting monuments, and with it reinterpreting the past. The process of reinterpreting the past in the context of the Yugoslav space appears to involve both the more recent past (associated with the socialist system) and the more distant past associated with each ethnic group’s self-imagined “long-standing tradition” that is purportedly made culturally distinct from the alleged “long-standing traditions” of the other ethnic groups. The past, then, is not only continuously under the process of reinterpretation but also undergoing active construction at both the collective and individual level (see Misheva, 2010). Indeed, Čolović (2008), in reading a range of historic accounts of ethnic groups inhabiting the ex-Yugoslav space found in the works of contemporary historians, demonstrates that these imagined groups are frequently represented as having a history that is older than the history itself and constructed as extending into prerecorded times.

In reality, both of these *pasts* could largely be described in terms of “invented traditions,” to borrow from Hobsbawm (1992) that vigorously strive to achieve cultural distinctiveness from the ethnic other who, in reality, is not so culturally dissimilar. Indeed, the smaller the actual cultural differences, the greater the vigor with which the differences are constructed. Here, Barth’s insight about “real” and socially constructed group differences seems particularly poignant. According to Barth (1969/1998), the absence of “real” differences among ethnic groups does not destabilize the “organization of social differences” or diminish the social power of group constructs. Instead, the reduction of differences often means fortification of the “border-maintaining processes” (Barth, 1969/1998, p. 33).

Monuments are closely linked to memory, or more appropriately remembering as a process rather than memory as a compilation of static episodes contained in our minds. Because remembering always occurs in a specific context and is inherently dialogical and textually mediated (Wertsch, 2002), it is not surprising that in the time of major changes entire landscapes are symbolically unmade and remade to influence collective memory and the process of remembering. Indeed, wherever one goes in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, he/she encounters the strong messages mediated through symbols making it virtually impossible to remain uninfluenced by the intensive efforts at unmarking and remarking of the territory. For instance, in Sarajevo one could easily find oneself sipping coffee on the Street of the Bosniak (read Muslim) Brigade, whereas only a few kilometers away one could eat dinner on the Street of the Serbian Defenders, not to mention the numerous monuments erected in the postwar period, commemoration ceremonies, flags, and other markers that have been continuously and forcefully conveying their potent messages for the past two decades. The primary function of these markers seems to be a vigorous effort to create *our* collective memory as opposed to *their* collective memory, thus influencing the process of remembering of both members of *our* and *their* group. Wertsch (2002) describes this as “contested distribution” of collective memory, where different perspectives or ways of remembering function in “a system of opposition and contestation” (p. 24). In Wertsch’s (2002) words,

Competition and conflict characterize this sort of representation of the past. Instead of involving multiple perspectives that overlap or complement one another, the focus is on how these perspectives compete with or contradict one another. Indeed, in some cases, one perspective is designated specifically to rebut another. (p. 24)

This is precisely what seems to be at work in postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the territory markers—monuments, commemoration ceremonies, names of schools, streets, and institutions—from the pre-1990s period have been replaced en masse by new monuments, commemoration ceremonies, names, and collective histories. Interestingly, this was done in such a way that one meta-narrative (of socialist revolution and the historical unification of the South Slav peoples) and almost all markers associated with it were replaced by three mono-ethnic narratives and their symbols. This symbolic cleansing of territory has a dual purpose, to differentiate *us* from *them* and to make the ethnic other feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, and out of place in *our* majority-controlled areas. In that regard, they almost represent a continuation of war through other—symbolic—means aimed at cementing ethnic

cleansing and partition accomplished during the war. Indeed, the defining feature of “elite politics” in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina seems to be its ethno-directionality that strives to push people away from being and remembering as individuals and toward the centrality of ethno-group as the main source of meaning. This “enforcing and reinforcing of symbolic domination” has been primarily accomplished through the mass construction of religious buildings and symbols. There are numerous examples that effectively capture the intensity of this effort. In a symbolically important city of Mostar, that remains perpetually divided along Bosniak-Croat ethnic lines, Croatian dominance finds its material expression in the forms of a cross overlooking the city from a mountain top and an unnaturally tall church tower that through its height wants to compete with the minarets dominating the Bosniak part of the city (for example, see Greiff, 2011). Another example can be found in Foča, a town in Eastern Bosnia that was entirely cleansed of its sizable Bosniak prewar population, where a monument was erected to honor the fallen Serbian fighters. The fact that such monument was erected is not necessarily problematic in its own right; what is problematic is its message that conveys symbolic and de facto domination of one ethnic group, signaling to the expelled that they are not welcomed back. Numerous half built mosques can be found around Sarajevo, on more than one occasion built against the will of the local population, giving material expression to the underlying uncertainty of ever reaching the desired symbolic victory. Even when monuments are erected to communicate a message that is not limited to coqueting with the sentiments of one ethnic group, they nonetheless seem to assume this form. An abstract sculpture erected in 2009 in the Big Park in the center of Sarajevo dedicated to the murdered children of Sarajevo attempts to encapsulate a certain universal moral statement—wrongness of murdering children. The author, Mensud Keco (Postavljen spomenik, 2009, para. 5), explains its symbolism in the following terms,

The monument consists of a bronze ring made of bombshell and bullet brass. The brass were collected in the postwar period, melted and made into a ring. A group of children related to the children killed in the war imprinted their feet into the ring. Two freestanding glass sculptures in the middle represent a mother protecting her child.

A sculpture portraying a mother protecting her child surely aims at a universal message. Still, in the subtext, this object inevitably narrates the suffering caused by the ethnically *other* group—which, of course, is exactly what happened, but what is important is not the actual factum but the way it is interpreted and the way it resonates through the public use—and this is where the semantic of a monument as a symbol becomes contentious. Principally, the question really is, can it be any different when violent deaths are the theme materially represented in the form of a statue.

## The Symbolism of Socialist Monuments

Socialist monuments are witnesses of a time passed. Some, mostly situated in the urban centers, are symbolically unambiguous. The message they convey is clearly related to the period in which they were erected—they represent the people’s

liberation struggle through depiction of fallen partisans and other notable individuals celebrated for their acts of heroism and dedication to the antifascist struggle and the “brotherhood and unity” idea. Others are quite ambiguous (Kim & Burghardt, 2012). Placed on the sites of significant battles fought during WWII, these oversized monuments built in a rather abstract architectural style, hardly have any apparent symbolic relation to the time in which they were designed and built. Indeed, these grandiose structures were intentionally abstract and free of any ethnic symbolism for it was through them that the idea of the victorious and revolutionary regime was publicly constructed and represented. By employing the “politics of leaving things unsaid” and promoting the culture of not publically speaking about the atrocities committed during WWII, these unsaid things were pushed under the rug but remained remembered and retold secretly in the *underground*, semi-private and private discourses. Arguably, by leaving things unsaid and actively choosing, banishing, erasing, and manipulating the past and constructing the official narrative about the past—a process termed Yugoslavia’s “policy of memory” by Iliana Bet-El (2002)—the Yugoslav regime provided a symbolic reinforcement for the “national awakening” that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Curiously, the new politics promote the suffering and greatness of *our* people while censoring the socialist past. Indeed, the past always seems to be in the service of the present—it is retailed, reimagined, retold, or sometimes blatantly reconstructed to fit the needs of the present. Incidentally, because of the ambiguous nature and the remoteness of the grandiose socialist monuments that through their abstractness sought to decontextualize the multifaceted and problematic experience of WWII, these monuments are often ignored if not outright forgotten by the current regimes.

So what is the purpose of these monuments? Do they have a purpose? Do they have a future? Could they become tools in the skilled hands of the masters of “heritage industry,” “who deem progress their right” and “seek zealously to convert, heal, and restore the fissures in which dogmatism has yet to flourish” (Trigg, 2009, p. 229)? Trigg (2009) recognizing a danger associated with this trajectory and cautions that the spin-doctors of the present conceive of progress in terms of “keeping an eye on error while eradicating the origins of dissent” (p. 229). Indeed, considering the absence of any unified stance toward the recent past in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina—actually the recent past has been almost entirely dialogically deserted—we can almost speak of a gradient of selectivity of remembering and forgetting (Karačić, 2012) in this society. Among ethnic Croats, the monuments from the previous system have been largely ignored or destroyed. They simply could not be integrated into the new official narrative of independent Croatia and its imaginary correlates among BiH’s Croats—in fact, they seem to stand in direct opposition to the independent Croatia narrative. One recent example shows this clearly. In May 2013, a memorial monument “Tito’s Rose” built in 1985 in Široki Brijeg, a small Croat-dominated town in west Herzegovina was demolished. Its demolition was initiated and carried out by local authorities and justified as an act of redeeming the past since, according to the explanation, although officially commemorating Partisan victims, beneath the structure, lay many victims of that same partisan army. The situation has been somewhat different among ethnic Serbs, as



there appears to be a degree of selectivity in deciding which monuments to neglect and which to integrate into the Serbian narrative. For example, the dominant Serbian post-socialist narrative has been ambiguously marked by attempts at rehabilitating “Chetniks” (see Hoare, 2006) who are in the contemporary Serbian discourse routinely represented as authentic antifascist forces, a representation that stands sharply in contrast to the official socialist narrative. The WWII crimes committed by the Chetnik forces are purposefully left excluded from the Serbian narrative, and, when discussed, strongly defended. Serbia has made yet another step further by legally rehabilitating Chetniks and equating them to the partisan army. On the ground in BiH this reinterpretation of the past is exemplified by the removal of a partisan monument in Bileća, a town in southern Herzegovina, in 2012 and the erection of a monument commemorating Chetniks in the exact same place. An even greater level of selectivity can be found among Bosniaks. Essentially, monuments supporting the thesis of continuity of the Bosnian state, drawing mostly from the medieval period, have been preserved and incorporated into the narrative of Bosnia’s statehood, whereas those that failed to support this thesis (in other words, the vast majority of the socialist monuments), remained largely ignored (Karačić, 2012). This sketch of how contemporary ethnic regimes related to the monuments of the past BiH falls nicely into the Forest and Jonson’s (2002) schema about the Soviet-era monuments in post-socialist Russia. Based on the “relative commemorative vigilance” and the divergent “political usefulness,” Forest and Jonson (2002) identify three categories: (1) co-opted/glorified, (2) contested, and (3) disavowed, each attribute designating the form of the relationship and the degree to which these monuments remain socially efficient.

Thus, monuments that once symbolized one nation are selectively reimagined to fit the newly constructed narratives if they can serve the purpose of propagating and sustaining new ideas of what life should be like in the ethnically parceled post-Yugoslav space. When convenient, the contemporary political elites occasionally use these monument sites to stage commemoration ceremonies that have very little, if anything, to do with the partisan struggle and are instead used as a backdrop for promoting their political—often nationalistically spiced—agendas. Interestingly, realizing the political potential of promoting daily politics on the sites of the partisan antifascist struggle, there has been an emerging enthusiasm for staging commemoration ceremonies in the recent years, only this time with an ethno-nationalist twist (Karačić, 2012). If, however, these monument sites cannot be used for the purposes of propagating political views of any faction, they are deemed functionally useless and thus either destroyed or ejected to the junkyard of history, in the sphere of forgetting.

Is an alternative trajectory possible, one that does not merely reduce these remote monuments to trivial “pastiches,” pale copies of their former selves or, even worse, tools in the skilled hands of masters of “heritage industry”? Allowing them to become ruins presents an attractive proposal, for the “ruin’s memory no longer belongs to anyone. Because of this, memory becomes indeterminate, and thus non-linear. The ruin does not bring us back to a definite temporal point. Instead, it



suggests a limitless potential of temporal points” (Trigg, 2009, p. 239). Could we even conceive of these remote monuments as ruins? Trigg (2009) makes a clear distinction between ruins as structures that are allowed to decay and monuments that present memory as “plastic and contrived” (p. 238). Even so, monuments that are of central interest in this chapter—remote, ambiguous, neglected, and forsaken—seem to have a genuine potentiality of becoming ruins in the true sense of the word precisely because they are remote, ambiguous, neglected, and forsaken. As such, they entail an inherent ability to interfere with the project of micro-nationalizing, thus disrupting a sense of linearity and order while maintaining their status as nationally indifferent.

The potential of ruins is indeed great as “the emergence of the past in ruins, as fragmented and incomplete” overrules the “false arrangements of the past, whereby the surplus remains are discarded, presenting history as an ordered, self-contained, and rationalistic project” (Trigg, 2009, p. 238). Although this trajectory presents an attractive alternative to either destruction or pastichification, a complete metamorphosis from monuments into ruins would require time and absolute neglect, allowing monuments to become entirely divorced from their original symbolic meaning. Might these monuments carry a potentiality that reaches beyond the ruins’ ability to liberate us “from the already formed definitions of history” (Trigg, 2009, p. 238)? Might their ambiguity and their status as neglected and forsaken remnants of a time past become a symbol that binds in the more proximate future?

## Monuments Divided

Monuments are inherently dividing. They divide horizontally and vertically. Horizontally, they cut time into two distinct periods—the time before and the time now. In the post-Yugoslav states, these structures represent a time period that is seldom mentioned by political elites; yet though not widely publicly present or discussed in the post-Yugoslav political landscape (and when discussed framed to serve the “daily politics” purposes of this or that political faction), these monuments still represent a shadow narrative—often poorly articulated but present—about an alternative political and social possibility. Vertically, they cut across socially salient ethnic groups thus disrupting the current social and political order, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Yugoslav successor state that most closely resembled Yugoslavia. In fact, because of its ethnic makeup (none of its three dominant ethnic groups is in the clear majority), BiH was frequently referred to as “mini Yugoslavia.”

Whereas some people (regardless of their ethnicity) remember and embrace this part of history as an integral part of their past and hence their identity, others reject this period and construct it as something that they never wanted, something that was enforced by a powerful and controlling state. These monuments, *de facto*, seem to stand in their way of distancing from the past in the most radical way—by forgetting the past. In fact, thousands of monuments from the post-WWII period have been

demolished, vandalized, or otherwise destroyed since the early 1990s onward. This destruction of monuments was evidently an attempt to eradicate a period that is perceived or experienced as undesirable because monuments, for as long as they stand, remain silent but constant reminders of a time that—if possible—should be expunged from the memories of the nation and its people. Some, in fact, perceive the period between the two wars (WWII and the 1990s wars) as a rupture in an otherwise continuous history of their nation, and monuments as their embodiment. In fact, this treatment or maltreatment of the monuments from this era leads one to believe that the monuments “do not just symbolize an enemy but *are* in themselves the enemy” (Bevan, 2006, p. 21).

This sentiment is perhaps most strongly pronounced in Croatia where these monuments are perceived as a symbol of Serbian dominance in a “union” that was never desired by the Croatian people. A good example of this position is Potkonjak and Pletenac’s (2007) article, in which the authors analyze the depiction of post-WWII monuments in Sisak as symbols of oppression. Ostensibly, once these monuments are removed, a sense of continuity—by mending the rupture of the Yugoslav period through reinterpreting or forgetting—can once again be established. As Jonas Frykman (2003) eloquently states,

What was once the triumph of the Yugoslav state has been redefined as monuments to a dictatorial power. The link between the monuments and the now detested Yugoslav army, JNA, was all too clear. In any parts of the country, memory has caught up with the monuments and made them reveal themselves as demagogic attempts at persuasion. When people in Croatia needed to gain access to their history, they had to remove the monuments that were blocking their path. That is why they stand today as destroyed monuments. Access to history must be gained *through* them—not *around* them. (p. 58)

On the other hand, for those who embrace this period as a part of both their personal and the collective past of their nation that informs the present, these monuments seem to represent a phase of their lives that not only do they not wish to forget but a phase of their lives that also serves as a source of memories that cannot and should not be merely reduced to longing for the lost past. Although the experiences associated with these monuments differ—some weave them into their personal narratives and the narrative of their nation and others either set them in stark opposition to their personal and national narratives or act as if they never happened—these monuments seem to be almost entirely stripped of their initial purpose and symbolism. As such, they could either be deposited to the junkyard of history (literally or symbolically) or they could be perceived as structured void of meaning. In the event of choosing the first route, these monuments will be either destroyed or museumized, thus largely rendered inconsequential, as in the case of Moscow where a mass of “disavowed” monuments once marking the city landscape now sits in the Park of (Totalitarian) Arts (Forest & Jonson, 2002, p. 536–537). If the second route is followed—if these monuments (especially those that are built in abstract architectural style and are geographically remote) are deemed void of meaning—they might become available potential markers of a new symbolic transformation.

## Socialist Monuments as Nationally Indifferent?

The notions of “symbolic regimes” and “symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1989), “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1983/2006), and “contested distribution of collective memory” (Wertsch, 2002) bring us closer to understanding the social and symbolic function of monuments and the underlying rationale for why they are so frequently targeted in a time of political change or social unrest. Still, they leave one important dimension unexamined—what happens at the margins of symbolic regimes, imagined communities, and collective memories? Zahra (2010), in her recent reassessment of the state of her field—history—proposed the use of “national indifference” as a unit of analysis, which she describes as “a response to modern mass politics” (p. 98). She asserts that national indifference as a phenomenon has existed in Europe for a long time (i.e., it has a long history), but, it had not been labeled until recently. Zahra (2010) conceives of this lack of vocabulary to describe populations that are nationally ambivalent as a testimony to the overemphasis of and oversaturation with nationalist-laden terminology in the social sciences. In other words, people are commonly described and their actions analyzed within the frame of nationalist assumptions. Naturally, the nationalist assumptions orientation, frequently adopted by social scientist, can have serious real life consequences. A good example is the “ancient hatred” approach to the 1990s conflict in the former Yugoslavia adopted by President Clinton and his cabinet, an approach that was shaped by Robert Kaplan’s popular book *The Balkan Ghost* (see Bet-El, 2002).

Drawing on examples of the twentieth century Upper Silesians, mid-nineteenth century Dalmatians, and others who chose to “remain on the national sidelines,” Zahra (2010) argues that national indifference is still present in modern societies, though it has become less apparent, especially in supranational states that compulsorily classified its citizens into one of the available categories. This same forcible classification can be found in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, its constitution offering four categories: Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, and others. However, in the context of contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, not all individuals subscribe to the aforementioned currently available mono-ethnic narratives or the exclusionary categorization along ethnic lines. There are those who are indifferent to them. In fact, how people declare themselves on official forms offers some evidence of the existence of national indifference (among the most popular nationally indifferent “categories” are penguin, Eskimo, and Chuck Norris). Another way of practicing national indifference is by adding names of candidates that are not listed (among the most popular candidates here seem to be superheroes, local celebrities, and curiously Chuck Norris again) or writing comments on the ballots (referring to the politicians as thugs, crooks, and swindlers). Both of these actions are examples of a “double expression” of national indifference, once by making the form or ballot invalid and once by rejecting being placed in one of the preexisting ethnic categories. As Zahra (2010) aptly notes, we should not conclude that national indifference equals political indifference. Quite the contrary; “inaction, evasion, and indifference” could all be analyzed “as potential forms of political agency” (p. 113).

Indeed, taking national indifference as a unit of analysis might shift the paradigm from thinking or theorizing people as “belonging to nations” to taking indifference as a starting point and studying “how and why people allied themselves politically, culturally, and socially from the ground up” (Zahra, 2010, p. 118).

Applying the concept of national indifference to monuments may seem like a stretch, for monuments are not human beings capable of making choices. At the same time, however, monuments are an integral part of every nation’s past and present. Indeed, as Goerges Bataille, a twentieth century French intellectual, has prolifically stated, “if one attacks architecture...one is, as it were, attacking man” (as cited in Hollier, 1992, p. 54). As it has been demonstrated many times throughout our modern history, monuments often meet a dire destiny when nations are unimagined. Many are destroyed in efforts to erase memories attached to architecture and place associated with an undesired past or unwanted others, a process that Bevan (2006) terms “enforced forgetting.” Yet others are pushed to the margins of society, ignored and neglected to the extent of becoming almost invisible. Much like the concept of national indifference can be useful in integrating the voices of those who are on the “margins of elite politics” as demonstrated by Zahra (2010), we believe that this construct could be potentially valuable in studying marginalized monuments and memories. Indeed, the monuments scattered in remote locations across the former Yugoslavia may be seen as embodying the idea of national indifference.

Strictly speaking, monuments erected during socialist times in Yugoslavia were hardly nationally indifferent at the time they were built. Rather, as we explained earlier, they stood as symbols of a different conception of a nation, a nation whose foundations are rooted in the past, but whose substance is to be constructed in the future. This was to be accomplished through a collective action of its people embedded in a setting that crosses rigidly constructed symbolic (national) boundaries. Indeed, the often futuristic architectural style of these monuments additionally underscores this forward-looking orientation. It may be argued that precisely because of its inability to fully assume this future orientation, Yugoslavia’s dissolution was marked by a strong reemergence of ethnic and nationalistic orientations that resulted in ghastly violence and massive destruction. Analogously, nationally indifferent populations or individuals, at least ideally, do not withdraw from politics altogether; instead, they seek to redefine politics. Rather than succumbing to the dominant national reworking of history or completely distancing from the realm of politics, nationally indifferent populations or individuals frequently aim at instigating open and communicative incorporation of historical legacies into current or future communal or societal discourses and visions.

Surely, the monuments of interest here have lost the symbolic power they once had. Nonetheless, they are silently, albeit persistently, demonstrating the possibility for subversion of prevailing mass politics of ethno-nationalism by invoking what has been purposefully left out. For an illustrative example see Todorova’s (2010) narration of her personal experience of an “absent site.” A monument that once marked her personal city map of Sofia, the Mausoleum of Georgy Dimitrov, erected to commemorate a post-WWII state prime minister and a notable communist figure

from Bulgaria's past, though physically removed still ghostly persists and functions as a reference point.

It is impossible—even inappropriate—to predict whether these monuments could ever become symbols that traverse, destabilize, and transform socially and politically salient group boundaries, but due to their great abstractness and remoteness, they surely seem to entail a potentiality for symbolic transformation. Representing the disavowed past on the margins of the unraveling present, they appear as fundamentally open to a new symbolic work of *language games*, reinterpretations, inscriptions, attributions, and story-building efforts. Though this does not necessarily lead to any easily predictable outcome, it is here where their potentiality for reemerging as symbols that bind lies. This may seem as an ambitious proposal, but past events have shown that reinterpretation of monuments or significant figures is not only possible but also probable (e.g., Boym, 2001; Marschall, 2010), for meaning is not entailed in the monuments; rather, monuments are imbued with new meanings generated in the ongoing process of rememorization (Frykman, 2003; Nora, 1989; Potkonjak & Pletenac, 2007). The preserving efficacy of many of the sites and monuments surely further supports this assertion. Certainly, these monuments need not (and indeed hardly can) reassume their intended symbolism invoking the values of antifascist struggle or socialism. Yet divorced from their historical burden, these monuments could reveal a more universal purpose of strivings for liberty, solidarity, community, and thinking in terms of novel ways of democratic self-management. One thing remains certain. Ultimately, the fate of these forsaken structures is in the hands of the people. They may well remain perpetual pariahs; however, they may also find their place in the symbolic systems of the future. Only time will tell whether collective imagination of tomorrow will find a formula for situating these monuments in the collective narrations of the past, if nothing else than as tourist attractions or oddly looking playgrounds.

## Conclusion

In an effort to eradicate one epoch and create an illusion of ethnic continuity, socialist monuments—along with religious symbols of ethnic others—became some of the most favorite targets of destruction in the wake of the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Similarly, the period symbolized by these monuments was frequently dialogically constructed as the “time of darkness.” In the general euphoria of the so-called national awakening, the efforts were placed on removing or rendering inefficient any symbols that served as reminders of shared life. To illustrate, if we conceived of an EKG as a pulse of a nation, then the period between the two wars (WWII and the 1990s wars) would be represented in the shape of a flat line (effectively signifying the state of rest or death) and the continuous waves composed of spikes and dips would represent the exciting pulse of a nation (or in the case of BiH, where there is an absence of a nation in the nation-state sense of the word, we are better positioned

to speak of three distinct pulses, each representing one of the three dominant and constitutionally recognized ethnic groups). These monuments disrupt the wavy flux of markers of ethnic continuity. By their mere presence they constantly remind of the historic fact that a different social order once existed and make palpable the possibility of an alternative social organization. To symbolically erase that past, one would have to either erase or otherwise mute the symbolism that these structures carry. Alternatively, one could incorporate these monuments as markers of a period that has now passed but that still represents a part of one's personal history as well the history of one's nation, however undesirable or unappealing it may seem.

Indeed, in any society past and present it seems possible to talk about two populations, those who have been institutionalized to accept and embody the dominant political and social order and those leaning toward national ambivalence. In the context of contemporary BiH, the former are loyal members of their ethnic group, who routinely perceive these monuments as symbols of a period of darkness that needs to be forgotten. They frequently seek to achieve radical separation from this period by demolishing the monuments, and with them all physical evidence of the "unwanted past." The latter are nationally ambivalent in so far that they disassociate with these monuments, fail to associate them with a malicious historic period or political system, or simply integrate them as markers of a period that constitutes an integral part of both their personal histories and the history of their land, without overly dwelling on them. Indeed, there are also those who seem to experience these monuments (among other triggers of remembering) as representations of the only meaningful alternative to the present perceived as void of any kind of viable sense of being or belonging. While it is possible that this yearning for the lost past may be associated with nostalgia for the time when one did not have to think much as the government was thinking for you, as suggested by Salecl (2000), it could also be that the present is indeed perceived to be so bleak that people are looking to the past to make sense of the present marked by uncertainty. Whatever the case may be, it appears that two parallel *memories*—complicating the dominant neatly organized *ethnic memories*—are at work, the *memories* constructed by the ruling elites and the *memories* as remembered by ordinary people. In spite of the effort to omit the recent past from the national narratives, the past still lingers in the memories of individual persons, who frequently speak of a time before and time after as two distinct periods in both their personal lives and the history of their country. In this sense, the monuments represent dividing symbols that split time into "then" and "now," but at the same time they also could be thought of as symbols that unite, as they are constant reminders of the shared life that—however much denied and however distant from the absolute harmony—indeed existed before the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Although it is hard to tell what the future holds for these once significant monuments, we would like to conclude this chapter on a constructive note. Perhaps, in not so distant future, the time will come when more people will grow tired of keeping up with "the exhausting demands of the nationalist lifestyle" (Zahra, 2010, p. 103) and will "organize around non-nationalist concerns and issues" (Zahra, 2010, p. 103). In fact, it appears that there already is a growing body of individuals who are becoming or have for a while been nationally ambivalent. These individuals

refuse to organize their lives or political allegiances according to the national priorities. They choose to self-marginalize by being nationally, but not necessarily politically, indifferent. It seems that the monuments discussed in this chapter have potentiality for national indifference in a similar vein. Precisely due to their location (geographic remoteness) and the non-nationalist architectural style in which they were built, they seem to—at least—symbolically challenge the nationalist orientation and invoke national ambivalence.

Although it may sound like an ambitious proposal, pairing nationally indifferent populations with nationally ambivalent monuments could lead to a productive process that could potentially move the country toward processes that would go beyond the tension constructed around ethnic division and toward a recognition of genuine distances and differences as a universal condition of being human rather than a source of resentment and acrimony. Yet, in order for this to happen, the initiative must come from the people themselves.

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