

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## BETWEEN ZAGREB, BERLIN, AND AMSTERDAM: DUBRAVKA UGREŠIĆ AS A TRANSLOCAL WRITER

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Brought into focus as an important aspect of transnational mobility, the concept of the translocal offers an approach to living and writing across borders that foregrounds specific localities and avoids questions of national identity. At the same time, the translocal perspective is not static but agentive and affective; it refers to movements between localities and the creation of networks of relations between them. This paper reads Dubravka Ugrešić as a translocal writer whose work engages with three major cities that come together in her writing: Zagreb, Berlin and Amsterdam. The main argument of the paper is that the three cities are connected as sites of marginalization, which the writer/narrator turns into a position of creative power and a source of agency. Marginalization can be caused by different factors, from self-conscious withdrawal into the spaces outside the power structures to ostracization and migration. However, in each case, it is taken by the author/narrator as the position that allows for new ways of seeing that reveal what would otherwise remain invisible. More specifically, in Ugrešić's case, the concept of defamiliarization connects with feminist ways of seeing from the perspective of those who are marginalized and rendered invisible.

**Keywords:** transnational, translocal, Dubravka Ugrešić, exile, women

In this paper I want to talk about Dubravka Ugrešić as a transnational writer by focusing on one aspect of her transnational experiences: translocality. Approaching her work from this angle, I argue that a transnational perspective reveals some of the most important aspects of her writing, while the lens of translocality allows us to focus more precisely on some of them.

Speaking about Dubravka from this perspective, I cannot but recognize the many correspondences between our lives, which go beyond our mutual friendship that shall not be a part of this paper. But following feminist politics of location,

I have to say that I also see myself as a transnational critic with a distinctly set translocal referential framework, one which partly overlaps with that of Dubravka. But the main connection I see between the two of us is not based on friendship (only) or the shared experiences of transnational migration; it is the connection of a woman writer, whose gender consciousness grew over time, and a feminist critic, who also went through her own processes of finding her real voice.

A monograph on Dubravka Ugrešić that I have been working on for far too long is still missing its last chapters, but it does have a title: *Scheherazade in Exile*. I have had this title for years now, and I do hope that, in the end, it will not be changed.

The figure of Scheherazade literally overarches Ugrešić's work, from her early, still poetically very relevant "Love Story" in her book *Poza za prozu* (1978) to her final one, *The Age of Skin* (2020; Croatian original *Doba kože*, 2019). In "Love Story" the role of Shahryar is given to one Bublik, whom the narrator tries to please with a whole range of different literary samples, all of which he rejects as unworthy. And in her final, in many ways testimonial book, *The Age of Skin*, a reference to Scheherazade is evoked as part of Dubravka's strong articulation of her ethical positioning, both as an individual and as a writer:

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The tale of Scheherazade is one of the cruelest stories about beauty and the importance and vitality of artistic expression. It tells of the relationship between the artist and authority, suggesting that the creative act itself is an act of resistance; it conveys the message that there can be no authentic artistic act without personal risk. (Ugrešić 2009: 221–222)

Speaking about Dubravka as Scheherazade, I am also, in a way, speaking about myself, or rather, about my own theoretical feminist politics of location. If Dubravka is Scheherazade, who, then, am I in this story? To whom might the critic, as a privileged reader, be compared in this story? Shahryar would be the obvious choice: he is the one to whom the stories are told, and Visković reads *Poza za prozu* in such a way (Visković 1983). Shahryar is the one who judges Scheherazade's stories in the most immediate way; if he is not satisfied, the narrator will be silenced. Literally.

But it is not the position of Shahryar that I am interested in. It is Dunazade, Scheherazade's sister, who is invited into the chambers:

"So when it was night, their father led Scheherazade to the king, who was glad to see her and asked, "Have you brought me what I need?"

"I have," the vizier said.

But when the king took her to his bed, began toying with her, and was about to penetrate her, she wept, and consequently he asked, “What’s wrong with you?” “Your majesty,” she replied, “I have a younger sister, and I would like very much to take leave of her tonight before dawn comes.” So he sent at once for Dunazade, and she came and she kissed the ground and he permitted her to take a seat near the foot of the couch.” (*The Arabian Nights*: 22)

Dunazade has the role of the first catalyst in the story. She is the one who initiates the whole narrative process, inviting her sister to tell a story to her and to Shahryar to shorten the long hours of the night. Dunazade knows that her sister’s stories will be interesting. She trusts them, and in that sense, she is the first judge, the one who has decided before Shahryar that they are worth telling. Dunazade is also a good listener, from her place at the side of the royal chamber. She sees clearly both Scheherazade and Shahryar, the narrator and the reader, the text and the context. She sees it all from a female point of view. And she also knows that what Scheherazade is doing concerns her as well: if nothing changes with Scheherazade’s stories, if they are not heard, Shahryar will continue to take lives in revenge for his wounded pride. Then Dunazade might be the next to be sacrificed. Or some of her friends. Or their/our sons and daughters might be sacrificed in some new personal or national wars, for pride, for territories, for oil, in the war on terror, against clandestine migrants, or for any other reason that reduces people to a disposable commodity. Dunazade is the one who, like Scheherazade, believes that narrating and speaking out can bring about change. But above all else, she loves stories and places her trust in them.

Seen as a feminist critic, Dunazade disrupts the traditional model of interpretation in which an interpreter is expected to be an objective, disinterested judge. Quite contrary to that tradition, Dunazade brings emotions and personal perspectives and histories into her readings. Her presence in the room, which is a synecdoche of the world, turns Scheherazade’s narration into a public event. And she brings into the room a real emotion and closeness between the two women. In this sense, the relationship between Scheherazade and Dunazade makes it possible to read the primary tale with an emphasis on the importance of female bonding and support, as well as on the gender aspects in her writings.

By appropriating the role of Dunazade, it is not my intention to translate the bonds between Scheherazade and Dunazade into a simplified, emblematic image of women’s sisterhood, or to escape my actual politics of location by resorting to the literary spaces of *The Arabian Nights*. However, I do want to emphasize that due to Dunazade’s presence in Shahryar’s chambers, Scheherazade’s narration

stops being a private event. Without her, Scheherazade would have to speak only to Shahryar, who is her ruler in more ways than one. Dunazade helps lessen that pressure and creates a space for the subversion of the patriarchal rule he represents. Her presence in the room which, as noted earlier, is a synecdoche of the world, turns the act of narration into a public event and brings a new set of social and ethical considerations. This is exactly the role of feminist criticism. By appropriating the role of Dunazade here, I am not alone, just one voice among the other Dunazades, other feminist critics who have been and will continue to burst into the closed chambers.

## TRANSNATIONAL AND TRANSLOCAL

In this light, I am proposing here to read Dubravka Ugrešić with an emphasis on the transnational, or more specifically, the translocal qualities in her writings. Numerous authors have already emphasized the transnational qualities of her writings (Karpinsky 2013: 42–60; Lukić 2014: 33–52; Young 2013: 159–182), supported by her own interest in the concept of transnational literature and a call for a new interpretative framework that would address specific qualities of this kind of writing. All these reasons are relevant for me as well, yet I am also aware that my decision to interpret her writings from a transnational perspective, be it Yugoslav, post-Yugoslav, or European, is not motivated only by textual reasons, however strong they might be, but also by my own personal investment in particular questions foregrounded by the proposed theoretical and contextual frameworks.

Discussing Dubravka Ugrešić as a transnational writer does not mean accepting one clear and inflexible critical position; on the contrary, the transnational critical framework is rather wide and open to interpretation. On earlier occasions when I applied this paradigm to Ugrešić's literature (Lukić 2014; Lukić 2017), I introduced diverse models of transnationalism, showing how they can all be productive for reading various aspects of her writings. But it is important here to start from her own reflections on transnational literature, which she sees as an opportunity to propose a new, more productive framework for interpretation that defies the rigidity of national literary canons. Those views can be found in several essays, most notably in "What is European about European Literature?" (Ugrešić 2005) and in "ON zone" (Ugrešić 2014). In both essays, drawing on what has now become a classical study by Seyhan Azade, *Writing Outside the Nation*

(2001), Ugrešić argues that a transnational approach to literary studies can offer new critical tools for reading writers who live in an Out-of-Nation Zone:

The writers who are writing the new literatures have mostly been dislocated from their original environments. They do not feel “at home” in the countries where they live, nor do they dream of returning to the countries from which they have fled. Those new writers are building their own place, a third cultural zone, a “third geography.” [...] An adequate language of interpretation has still not been found for the new literary reality. [...] A language which would include the overlapping interest of numerous groups, trans-local solidarities, cross-border mobilizations and post-national identities does not exist yet. What the name will be for this new alternative theory zone is a matter of agreement. Judging by the growing number of courses at American universities, the term “transnational literature” could be a term of choice. (Ugrešić 2005: 149)

Since this essay was written, a transnational approach to literary studies has been at first strongly developed and then partly sidelined by a more strongly pronounced interest in the concept of world literature and in the effects of globalization upon the literary field. But a transnational perspective is much needed for a whole spectrum of literary phenomena that cannot be explained within the framework of national literature and tend to get lost in a necessarily totalizing global perspective.

A transnational approach is not one approach but, rather, allows for diverse methods and strategies of reading. In my previous writing on the topic, I applied several models for transnational readings of Ugrešić: Azade’s concept of the *exilic writer*; Mads Thomsen’s concept of the *constellation*, in which Ugrešić is seen as the central figure of post-Yugoslav literature; and, as representative of *minor transnationalism* in the sense of Shu-mei Shi and Françoise Lionnet (2005). Later in this analysis, I also refer to Stephen Clingman’s text-based interpretation of transnationalism as one more approach that applies well to her work. However, in this case, my primary focus is on *translocality*. The concept of translocality is most often seen as a tool to investigate “how social relationships across locales shape transnational migrant networks, economic exchanges and diasporic space” (Brickell and Datta 2011: 3). Seen as a form of “grounded transnationalism,” it represents “a space where deterritorialized networks of transnational social relations take place through migrant agencies” (Brickell and Datta 2011: 3). In this respect, translocality is primarily investigated further within a transnational turn in various disciplines, including geography, history, and area studies. As Greiner and Sakdapolrak argue, there are two central dimensions of the concept:

*mobility* and *place* (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 337). Analyzing a range of approaches applied to translocality, they conclude that "[a]uthors engaging in the development of a translocal perspective seek to integrate notions of fluidity and discontinuity associated with mobilities, movements and flows on the one hand with notions of fixity, groundedness and situatedness in particular settings on the other" (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 376). In other words, translocality allows for a more elaborated approach to transnationalism. "Grounded or rooted transnationalism in many ways has shaped the trajectory of translocality" (Brickell and Datta 2011: 9), underlining that through attention to situatedness and development of the notion of translocality, the research on transnationalism has become more complex and nuanced (Brickell and Datta 2011: 10). The concept has mostly been used in geography, anthropology and area studies, but there is also a productive use of the term in literary studies, most notably by scholars such as Derek Attridge, Kai Easton, Dorothy Driver and others gathered around a project of reading South African-British writer Zoe Wicomb. In the volume dedicated to her work (Easton and Attridge 2017), the concept of translocality is used to investigate various aspects of her writing with an emphasis on mobility and agency. In her reading of Wicomb's politics of location, Driver describes these aspects of translocality in the following way:

In the translocal, focus is on spatial interactions within and across spaces that reveal, generate, confirm and disturb relations between character and place, saturating spaces with meanings brought into being by different perspectives, discourses, events and behavior. [...] Translocal spaces, individuals and objects are by definition relational; they exist in a continual state of interaction stemming, *inter alia*, from the multiplicity of the ways they are experienced or inhabited, a multiplicity dependent on their complex histories and/or different discursive embeddings. (qtd. in Easton and Derrek 2017: 9–10)

It is obvious already from this short description that the concept of translocality, if interpreted within a larger framework of transnational theories and approaches, relates to a cluster of other concepts that belong to the same framework. Here, I think first of the borderlands, migration, cosmopolitanism, traveling, but also memory, identity, gender, transculturality, and worlding. Translocality also implies multiplicity – the connections between spaces, which can be established in various ways.

## FORDING THE STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

In the case of Dubravka Ugrešić, I want to engage with the three dominant sites of translocality in her writings: Zagreb, Berlin and Amsterdam, to demonstrate how they are constructed as translocal and what this means for the worlding processes in her fiction for each of these sites. In order to do so, I will focus on two more concepts related to translocality: travel and dislocation.

When it comes to Zagreb, the central example I will focus on is her novel *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* (1991; Croatian original *Forsiranje romana-reke*, 1988), which, in the year of its publication, was awarded three major literary awards at the time (Ninova nagrada, Nagrada “Meša Selimović,” and “Ksaver Šandor Gjalski” for the best prose work published in the Republic of Croatia and in Yugoslavia). In short, *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* is the work that fully established Dubravka Ugrešić as a major writer, as well as making her a very much beloved one. I emphasize this fact because only a few short years later that she would be ritually ostracized from the newly established Republic of Croatia for her critical thinking about the political situation, nationalism, and war.

From a contemporary perspective, *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* looks like a book with at least two major roles in the development of the author’s career. On the one hand, it was her last Yugoslav book. But it was also her first book to be translated into English, thus opening a new chapter for her. Not only for this reason, but also because of its many distinctive characteristics, *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* can be seen as her first post-Yugoslav, transnational book. As already discussed, there are different ways to approach the question of transnationalism in literary studies. In the case of this novel, I find the approach of Stephen Clingman productive, as he places emphasis on identity as a defining category for transnational fiction. Clingman understands identity as a property of “self” as it is articulated in fiction, while in the tradition of narratology, he wants to produce a textual “grammar of identity”. The premise is that there is “a correlation between how the self is put together and how we navigate ourselves through space and time. It is this *how* that we can understand as a form of grammar, and movement is intrinsic to its constitution” (Clingman 2009: 11, emphasis in original). Thus, “transnationalism” does not arise from the author’s biography, nor is it determined by the book’s destiny; rather, it should be understood as a question of form, i.e., from “recognizable formal characteristics” and from “the way of being and seeing,” from the ways in which transnational novels become “a *kind of world to be explored*” (Clingman 2009: 11, emphasis in original).



Clingman's approach to transnationalism is very close to what Ugrešić does in *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*: creating a world, or rather a set of possible worlds, in which the identity of literary characters serves as one of the main vehicles for setting the parameters of the proposed or created worlds. The novel speaks about an international literary conference held in Zagreb, presumably sometime in the mid-1980s, with obvious references to the actual, and at the time quite famous, international gathering of writers and translators traditionally held in the city under the title *Zagrebački književni razgovori* (Zagreb's Literary Conversations). Dubravka Ugrešić does not use the name of the event directly but places her novel in the hotel where it was usually organized, thus leaving the informed reader the possibility to make an educated guess. Moreover, the structure of the novel problematizes the border between fiction and reality, playing with readers' expectations. There is a specific framing story which literally encircles the novel with two series of fragments: introductory ones numbered from 1 to 30, and closing ones numbered from 999 to 1029. These fragments belong to the voice of the author/narrator, that is, to the narrator who is presumably the writer of the novel. They refer to various events, more or less important, from the writer's everyday life. In the quoted interview with *Vjesnik*, Ugrešić describes them as both true and false "scraps of life" that can, but do not have to, be used as the material for the novel. The discontinuous numbering, which suggests that the fragments extend beyond the narration of the core part of the novel, is actually the flow, the stream of *roman fleuve*, which is used in the original title to generically describe the novel.

The introductory and the closing fragments seem to be collected haphazardly, but there are clearly significant topics directly related to the core part of the novel. Together, they construct Zagreb as a translocal city defined by networks of deterritorialized social relations. The first topic concerns movement. Numerous fragments speak of the author/narrator's travels, often to locations very distant from Zagreb, like the USA, Moscow, Cuba, or Spain. At the same time, in her communication with other people, there is a leitmotif used by the others to explain any problem the narrator might have, from sciatica to writer's block: "What you need is more action" (Ugrešić 1991: 10, 221). The obvious discrepancy between this sentence and the situations in which it appears has an obvious humorous effect, but its importance extends beyond humor: the dynamics between action and inaction, that is, movement and stasis, is one of the crucial relations in the book as a whole. This is clear in fragment 1027, which parallels the one opening this chapter:



I decided to write a novel, though I don't know quite what it will look like. *What you need is more action*, my friend Grga said while we were having coffee together. My friend Snježana dropped in one day and asked what I was planning to write about. *Oh, I like to use circular action*, I said rather vaguely. *Circular action makes no less sense than action in a clear-cut direction*. And Snježana said, *Sounds pretty boring to me*. (Ugrešić 1991: 222; emphasis in original)

The fragment tells the reader to look back and follow the circular motion of all the main characters. The author/narrator continually sets out on travels and comes back to Zagreb, thus drawing circular movements anchored in Zagreb. The city after these travels looks "tiny", and the streets are "impossibly narrow"; "what I need is less action", she concludes in fragment 14 (Ugrešić 1991: 8). Her characters/conference participants are also anchored in Zagreb inscribing their transnational spatial circles; they come from different parts of the world to stay in the city for four days, only to disperse again and go back to their original locations. These two types of movements create two chronotopes based on opposite principles: the first one, which is dispersive and marked by entropy, and the second one, which is cumulative and clearly coded. Their co-existence enables the novel to be read both in a linear and non-linear manner. It becomes a *roman fleuve* by opening a multitude of possibilities for rhizomatic readings of the plot.

Let me illustrate with a line of narrative connected to Cecilia Sørensen, a Danish woman writer and feminist. As a character, she is mostly present through her letters to an unnamed friend in which she describes her feelings, impressions, and views. Thus, the privileged genre of second-wave feminism autobiographical writing is introduced into the novel. Furthermore, Cecilia's style of writing is related to *écriture féminine*, being distinctly marked with her explorations of language, body and sexuality. As a character (and not a voice behind her letters), Cecilia is most strongly present in one scene in which three women writers—herself and two local women, Dunja and Tanja—decide to take revenge on a local literary critic who is known for his misogynistic comments on women's writing. The scene replicates the key moment from Märta Tikkanen's novel *Manrape* (1979; Swedish original *Män kan inte våldtas*, 1975), which was translated into Croatian in 1978. In Tikkanen's novel, a raped woman wants to take revenge on her rapist by doing the same to him, but when she calls the police after having violently forced her rapist into a sexual act, she is informed that the police would not come since "men cannot be raped". In Ugrešić's novel, the three women decide to humiliate the critic by luring him into Cecilia's room, tying him to her bed, and "gluing and feathering" him. The scene, however, ends with sexual intercourse

between Cecilia and the critic. We learn later in the novel that the two leave the conference together, leaving the reader to question whether sexuality is, indeed, an appropriate tool for addressing the problems of misogyny and the social exclusion of women. At the same time, this resolution to Cecilia's story recalls the ending of Kundera's first novel *The Joke* (1969; Czech original *Žert*, 1967), which ends up turning the hero's attempt at revenge through the sexual exploitation of a woman into its own mockery.

## FROM ZAGREB TO BERLIN

It is also important to look from a translocal perspective at Ugrešić's first collection of essays, *American Fictionary* (2018, as *Have A Nice Day*, 1994; Croatian original *Američki fikcionar*, 1993). It was written between Zagreb, Amsterdam and Middletown, the latter being her US destination for almost a year between 1991 and 1992. In the foreword to the first Croatian edition of the book, Dubravka describes the complex matrix of affects, emotions, connections and involvements with all three of these places where she lived in "exhausting mental and emotional simultaneity"; in a "nervous crossing of parallel worlds" (Ugrešić 2018: 11). This is a book written in a state of in-betweenness, during the war in which one world perished and a new was not yet created. It is a book that desperately strives for communication and connection between these parallel worlds, explaining them to each other across several patterns of (mis)understanding. From an American perspective, Zagreb still feels like home, with family and friends, people she loves and cares for there. However, the moment of returning to that home is also a moment of realization that "*reality does not exist anymore*" (Ugrešić 2018: 9, emphasis in original) that the reality of war in her former country erased borders between existing and non-existing worlds, and that the feeling of loneliness that permeates *Fictionary* will soon turn into a permanent feeling of homelessness (Ugrešić 2018: 9).

Soon after her return from the States, Dubravka would leave Zagreb again, this time permanently. It is well known how it happened, what kind of attacks she was exposed to, and what, in the end, made her leave her university position as well. However, this goes beyond the scope of this paper. After 1992, the city of Zagreb would become a city of trauma and – as with any other city she would live in further on – a city of displacement. If the Zagreb from *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* is a place where social relations are established, locally and in-

ternationally, across time and spaces, the Zagreb after 1992 is a place of broken relations and failed expectations.

This recognition is a process that also includes a shift in the position of the narrator/observer who engages with the city. In *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*, the narrator’s alter ego in the core/fictional part of the novel is Pipo Fink, a self-marginalized young writer who observes events from the sidelines (at one point from behind big ficus leaves). He lives in his dreams (fiction) rather than what constitutes his reality.

In her post-1991 writings, narrators in Dubravka’s writings are also observers from the margin. However, this is a very different margin that does not necessarily mean disengagement; rather, it is a place which allows for the articulation of a critical position against those in power. This new way in which Ugrešić uses narrative potentials of the margin, both in her fiction and in her essays, is very close to feminist strategies of knowledge production, and I see it as one of her profound connections to the logic of feminism.

The main principles of feminist knowledge production are based upon the need to problematize the idea of the universality of knowledge and the conceptual apparatus that sustains it. It is opposed to seeing the researcher as a superior producer of objective knowledge in a privileged position in relation to the researched. Equally important, it requires the researcher to be self-reflexive about her methods, her politics of location, and her relations to the researched subjects. The feminist version of “standpoint theory” (with Nancy Hartsock as one of its main proponents) argues for epistemic privilege of “the look from the margin”, from the perspective of the deprived. Donna Haraway extends this position, explaining that there is no universal point of view, that every look is from somewhere, and that the process of looking is also part of knowledge production:

The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision. All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see. (Haraway 1988: 883)

This call for partial perspective as the requirement for objectivity also involves ethical and political responsibility of the individual. There is no claim to neutrality of knowledge based on its universality. On the contrary, one bears personal responsibility for one’s knowledge claims. This ethical claim connects Dubravka Ugrešić with feminism. In her case, it is the recognition that one must

stand as an individual, alone, behind one's words and actions, and oppose them to the universalist claims of collectives. It is the way to resist and to be able to "speak truth to power" (Said 1994). The most important book in that sense is *The Culture of Lies* (1998; Croatian original *Kultura laži*, 1996). Although the book speaks about the whole post-Yugoslav region, Zagreb is, again, the central location: one of the spaces within the former country that gives relevant examples of the production of the culture of lies, one of its key components in the collective drama of its regional wars and destruction.

Written alongside *The Culture of Lies*, the novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998; Dutch original *Museum van onvoorwaardelijke*, 1997; Croatian translation *Muzej bezuvjetne predaje*, 2001–2002) introduces the second translocal toponym in Dubravka Ugrešić's fiction. For this analysis, it is significant that the structure of *The Museum* replicates the structure of the novel *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* by repeating the same framing story made from a series of fragments that are ascribed to the author/narrator. The problem of authenticity of these fragments is addressed in the introductory note to the reader in the form of a warning that "the question as to whether this novel is autobiographical might at some hypothetical moment be of concern to the police, but not to the reader" (Ugrešić 1998b: 1). The sentence is both referential and auto-poetical. On the one hand, both bitterly and ironically, it addresses the conditions under which Ugrešić left Croatia, as a condemned "witch".<sup>1</sup> However surprising the formulation might be, its poetical meaning is equally important, reaffirming Ugrešić's firm position that the writer and the narrator can never be fully equated.

The main forces structuring *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* and *The Museum* are opposing in nature. In the first novel, it is the force of implosion that brings diverse possible worlds together at one point, which is the city of Zagreb. In the case of *The Museum*, there is an explosion behind the narrative effort to make the city of Berlin a stable point of gravitation, but it is always a failed attempt. In *Fording*, Zagreb is a city of writers who, by coming together, allow for the erasure of all kinds of borders, from geographical and physical to symbolic and generic, opening the novel to a complex mixing of genres. In *The Museum* the whole world is in pieces, Berlin as well. It is an assemblage of fragments, and yet, through this looseness, the structure of the novel resembles the container evoked in the introduction, in which all the objects found in the stomach of the walrus Roland are collected and exposed to the world. Separate stories occur in very different places, extending the novel spatially and establishing translocal

<sup>1</sup> For more on "Croatian witches", see Tax 1993.

connections. In already mentioned quote by Greiner and Sakdapolrak, we can say that Berlin in this novel allows for "mobilities, movements and flows" to come together with "notions of fixity, groundedness and situatedness" (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013: 376).

Zagreb is invoked here as the location for two major parts of the novel: "Family Museum" and "Group Photograph". However, it is a very different Zagreb from before. If, in *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*, Zagreb is at the center of various traveling experiences, both for the narrator and the visitors of the Zagreb conference, in *The Museum*, Zagreb is referred to as yet another city of displacement. In "Family Museum," one of the dominant feelings is that of displacement, strongly felt by the narrator but also ascribed to the narrator's mother as the central figure in this section. The feeling is both described and strongly manifested as a bodily affect in both characters. The second part of the "Family Museum" is "[t]he notebook with the flowery cover," based on the mother's diary. The text of the diary enters into a complex dialogue with the narrator's (and more generally Ugrešić's) poetic standpoint on literature and (auto)biographies. The quotes from the mother's diary end with the following lines:

*It's all of no importance now... Now I no longer know who I am, or where I am, or whose I am...* (Ugrešić 1998b: 58, emphasis in original)

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Immediately after that, the narrator adds in a Postscript:

I added the sentence *Now I no longer know who I am, or where I am, or whose I am...* to the text I had already written, later on in the day when my mother uttered it: 20 September 1991. (Ugrešić 1998b: 58, emphasis in original)

This sentence sums up the shared feeling of both the mother and the daughter, a moment in which the *mise en abyme* structure, upon which this whole part is built, collapses into one shared moment of affect caused by leaving one's home, be it for a shelter or for another country.

However, it is important to add here that the geography of home is never simple in the writing of Dubravka Ugrešić. For transnational writers there are often spaces outside the given frames of geopolitical borders that create borderlands in unexpected places. For Dubravka it is Varna and the Black Sea, the places of her childhood memories and of her mother's origin, which blend into the spaces of Kutina, where she grew up. Varna is present in *The Museum* as well, as a toponym that creates her personal, inclusive geography and undermines official exclusive ones. Varna is introduced into the novel as a place of remembrance; it belongs to the past that is not fully embraced; it evokes various kinds of differences and

otherings, suppressed feelings of being hurt and being loved. One of the six stories in part four of "My Grandmother in Heaven" lends itself to various readings, from memory studies to feminist psychoanalysis. But I want to evoke it here as a perfect example for reading affect through feminist lens, a story about the ways in which our bodies carry and produce knowledge about ourselves and shape our relationships with others.

Berlin in *The Museum* is a city of artists and migrants who always see it from the margin. Dubravka describes the state of exile in a similar way both towards the beginning and at the end of her novel, pointing to the twofold process that characterizes exile: taking away the quality of "reality" from that part of experience that relates to what used to be known as "home", and the "reification" of the domain of dreams as something that is the link with the lost "reality" in one's experience.

The exile feels that the state of exile has the structure of a dream. All at once, as in a dream, faces appear which he had forgotten, or perhaps had never met, places which he is undoubtedly seeing for the first time, but that he feels he knows from somewhere. The dream is a magnetic field which attracts images from the past, present and future. (Ugrešić 1998b: 9)

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The city of Berlin is constituted here in a similar way. As an actual city and as a fictionalized space in which the materiality and stability of the real Berlin are continually transformed into highly personalized subjective spaces. Equally important is that Berlin carries in itself a history of a divided city with history built over inscriptions and erasures of various borders. Thus, it is not only the present reality but also its history that inscribes itself as a recognizable narrative context, a wide frame in which various individual (exile) stories develop. "Berlin is an archeological find," says Ugrešić. "Layers of time pile one over the other, the scars heal with difficulty, the seams are visible" (Ugrešić 1998b: 231). Berlin is a mutant city that has its Western and its Eastern face, sometimes one appearing within in the other. And on the face of Berlin, there are holographic reflections of some other cities. This statement is repeated at least two times in the novel (Ugrešić 1998b: 110, 246), indicating the importance of its hybrid nature. All of these make Berlin both stable and unstable as a toponym; its vibrancy echoes explosions that happened through its history, replicated in the structure of the novel.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For more on Berlin as a city of migrants and artists, see Lukic 2017.

## AMSTERDAM, AMSTERDAM

The dynamics between remembrance and forgetting, another important topic for Dubravka Ugrešić, also positions memory as one of the central topics in the context of reading the translocal. As is well established in memory studies, new experiences affect old ones and reframe them, giving them a different status in the hierarchy of the past. Both *The Museum*, located in Berlin, and *The Ministry of Pain* (2005; Croatian original *Ministarstvo boli*, 2004), located in Amsterdam, deal with the memory and experience of exile and migration. There are obvious correspondences in the ways the two cities are described in these novels. It is visible in the following excerpt from *The Ministry*, where the perception of the city in many ways parallels the one in *The Museum*:

The city, which was like a snail, a shell, a spider's web, a piece of fine lace, a novel with an unusually circular plot and hence no end, never ceased to baffle me.

I was constantly getting lost and had the greatest trouble remembering street names, to say nothing of where the streets themselves started and stopped. It was like drowning in a glass of water. I had the feeling I might well – if like Alice I should lose my footing and fall into the hole – end up in the third or fourth parallel world, because Amsterdam itself was my own parallel world. I experienced it as a dream, which meant it resonated with my reality. (Ugrešić 2006: 28)

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Amsterdam is the most fictionalized translocal city in Ugrešić's writing. The narrator in this novel is furthest removed from the figure of the author, although certain points of connection remain. As regards memories, *The Ministry* works differently from *The Museum*. There seem to be different kinds of loneliness that structure these two cities for the narrator. The city of Berlin in *The Museum* is structured through the work of a narrator who tries to keep together disparate, fragmented experiences and memories – material that is unstable and perishable. As described in the part named “Group photograph,” amongst all those who have forgotten what happened in the past, she is the one who remembers. *The Ministry of Pain* engages with memory differently. It brings together a large group of people who have left a devastated country and who are trying to build a new life in a city that seems to be distant and different enough from the places they have left to enable them to do so. Alfred the angel in *The Museum* makes people forget. The narrator in *The Ministry*, on the other hand, wants to make her co-patriots remember, believing that it is helpful for all of them. However, in one of the key scenes of the novel, her student and future partner, Igor, asks her bluntly:



Tell me, has it occurred to you that all that time you may have been torturing us? Has it occurred to you that the students you forced to remember were yearning to forget? That they made up memories to indulge you the way the Papuans made up cannibalistic myths to indulge the anthropologists? Your students aren't like you. They love this country. Flat, wet, nondescript as it is, Holland has one unique feature: it's a country of forgetting, a country without pain. People turn into amphibians here. Of their own accord. They turn the color of sand; they blend in and die out. Like fucking amphibians. That's all they care about: dying out. The Dutch lowlands are one big blotter: it sucks up everything—memories, pain, all that crap... (Ugrešić 2006: 207).

It is this painful love, linked with loss and forgetting, and with the sense that life is no longer real, that only some surrogate of it remains, that permeates the novel. It is a strange case of a failed happy ending: the travesty of a successful escape.

At the beginning of *The Ministry of Pain* Ugrešić says: "The narrator, her story, the characters and their situation in the novel you are about to read are fictional. Not even the city of Amsterdam is wholly real" (Ugrešić 2006: np). It is an interesting epigraph for a novel that is more realistic in its narrative procedure than any of her previous books. This unreal dimension of Amsterdam introduced here refers to a dream-like quality of experiencing space in exile that Ugrešić refers to so often. It is part of processing some kind of trauma that is part of migration.

When looking beyond the two novels to her other writings as well, Amsterdam stands in direct correlation not to Berlin, but to Zagreb. Those are the two cities that at some point Dubravka Ugrešić called home: Zagreb at the beginning of her writing and Amsterdam when she fully adopted the role of a migrant. She writes often about Amsterdam in her essays as well, always with the attention of an observer and with the critical edge of a viewer who speaks from the margin. The Amsterdam that she lived in and she wrote about is and is not a real city. But its instability is very different from that of Berlin. Amsterdam is a space of in-betweenness that becomes a home to somebody who does not believe in homes anymore. The essay "Amsterdam, Amsterdam," from the collection *Nobody's Home*, reveals this complex relationship, her deep fascination with the city and the feeling of both belonging and not belonging. There, Ugrešić takes on the role of a *flâneuse* and discovers different facets of the city in long walks, reminiscing over its various faces and its specific way of life. The city she is discovering takes her breath away when she sees it for the first time; she is dazzled by a beauty she has never seen before, comparing it with some other renowned cities. "Amsterdam stirred an unconditional delight in me" (Ugrešić 2005: 214),

she says, only to take away the seriousness of the claim with a statement that shifts perspective into the sphere of fiction when a passer-by tells her: “Grown-ups don’t live in Amsterdam....” (215). At this point, the narrator turns into Alice who is discovering a new wonderland, built on soil that is in-between the sea and the land, full of colored dollhouses along canals, strange inhabitants who become one with their bicycles, and people coming from everywhere to become part of it, at least for a short while:

So, a visitor reads Amsterdam like a book, a book that is thrilling and enjoyable, but the reader feels stabs of a fleeting discomfort. It seems to him that he has read this book somewhere before, but he can’t remember where or when, it seems so familiar and yet so strange. He’s confused that the borders between the two worlds, the one that is make-believe and the one that is real, keep slipping out of his grasp. (Ugrešić 2005: 116–117).

In this city she is going to stay. This is the decision made by Alice, who once again asks herself, “Who am I?” as in the short story of the same title based on Dubravka’s rewriting of *Alice in Wonderland*, included in *Lend Me Your Character* (2004). But the scene described also evokes *The Wizard of Oz*: ruby red slippers lost by a woman in an Amsterdam café at the end of the essay “Amsterdam, Amsterdam” belong to Dorothy from the famous 1939 film. The scene is described as a possible experience of a visitor: a woman sits in a café to rest her aching feet:

“Excuse me, have you seen my shoes?” the woman will ask the waiter, after getting up, lifting the chair she’d been sitting on, and looking all around.

“What did they look like?”

“Ruby red slippers...” (Ugrešić 2005: 152)

The waiter does not find them, but Alice/Dorothy seems not to care:

“First I’ll buy a new pair of shoes, and then a home, so that I have a home to go to,” says the woman.

That, or something very much like it, was what happened to me, I speak from experience. (Ugrešić 2005: 152)

In previous years, when Dubravka was still with us, I would emphasize the fictionality of the scene, the playful way in which the idea of home is displaced into the realm of fiction and childhood remembrances. Now, with Dubravka gone and her archive entrusted to the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam, these words evoke a sad prophetic note.

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## S a ž e t a k

### IZMEĐU ZAGREBA, BERLINA I AMSTERDAMA: DUBRAVKA UGREŠIĆ KAO TRANSLOKALNA SPISATELJICA

Pojam translokalnog postao je zanimljiv kritičarima kao jedan od aspekata transnacionalne mobilnosti jer omogućuje da se pitanjima življenja preko granica bavimo fokusirajući se na specifične lokalitete, izbjegavajući tako pitanja nacionalne pripadnosti. Istodobno, translokalna perspektiva nije statična, već uključuje aktivan (*agency*) kao i afektivni odnos (*affect*) unutar tih mreža. Predloženo izlaganje nudi čitanje Dubravke Ugrešić kao translokalne spisateljice koja se posebno bavi trima gradovima, Zagrebom, Berlinom i Amsterdamom. Ključni argument izlaganja je da se ta tri grada u njezinom pisanju povezuju kao mesta marginalizacije koju autorica/naratorica preobraća u poziciju i ishodište kreativne, aktivne moći. Marginalizacija može biti rezultat različitih faktora, od svesnog povlačenja u prostore izvan struktura moći do ostrakizma i migracije, ali u svim slučajevima autorica/naratorica prepoznaje marginu kao

mesto koje omogućuje nove načine viđenja i otkrivanja onoga što bi inače ostalo nevidljivo. Specifičnost pisanja Dubravke Ugrešić je što se kod nje koncept očiđenja povezuje sa feminističkim postupkom promatranja iz vizure marginaliziranih i nevidljivih.

**Ključne riječi:** transnacionalno, translokarno, Dubravka Ugrešić, egzil, žene