THE EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF LIFE WRITING
VOLUME II (2013) T42–60

Postcards from Europe: Dubravka Ugrešić as a Transnational Public Intellectual, or Life Writing in Fragments

Eva C. Karpinski

York University, Toronto

ABSTRACT IN ENGLISH

The article explores Dubravka Ugrešić's ongoing project of interrogating and challenging different constructions of Europe from the perspective of "minor transnationalism", focusing on the relationship between European minority cultures and the West. She has developed a hybrid form of political life writing that I call the autobiographical fragment, which mixes autobiography, personal essay, cultural criticism, travel writing, autoethnography, epistolarity, and diary. I argue that the autobiographical fragment is uniquely suited to address the discontinuities and ruptures of history, experience, and memory that have accompanied Europe's post-communist transformations. In the texts that I examine, including *Have a Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream*, *The Culture of Lies*, *Thank You For Not Reading*, and *Nobody's Home*, she confronts the trauma of ethnic and gendered violence and integrates the personal and the "glocal", linking the former Yugoslavia, present-day Croatia, the European Union, the United States, and the globalized cultural marketplace.

ABSTRACT IN FRENCH

L'article explore le projet actuel de Dubravka Ugrešić sur l'interrogation et les défis contre les différentes constructions de l'Europe dans une perspective du « transnationalisme mineur » qui se concentre sur la relation entre les cultures européennes des minorités et l'Ouest. Elle a développé une forme hybride de l'écriture de la vie politique que j'appelle le fragment autobiographique qui mélange l'autobiographie, l'essai personnel, la critique culturelle, l'écriture du voyage, l'autoethnographie, l'épistolarité, et le journal. Je soutiens que le

European Journal of Life Writing, Vol II, T42–60 2013. doi: 10.5463/ejlw.2.55

fragment autobiographique est particulièrement bien adapté à traiter des discontinuités et des ruptures de l'histoire, de l'expérience, et de la mémoire qu'accompagnaient les transformations postcommunistes de l'Europe. Dans les textes que j'examine, qui comprennent *Have a Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream*, *The Culture of Lies*, *Thank You For Not Reading*, et *Nobody's Home*, Ugrešić confronte le traumatisme de la violence du genre et de l'ethnicité et elle intègre le personnel et « le glocal » qui lient l'ancienne Yougoslavie, la Croatie d'aujourd'hui, L'Union Européene, les Etats-Unis, et le marché culturel mondial globalisé.

Keywords: transnationalism, life writing, autobiographical fragment, public intellectual, ethnicity, European citizenship

As a writer from the former Yugoslavia who had lost her country and was coerced into a new national identity that she subsequently refused, Dubravka Ugrešić has been caught up in the complex postmodern trajectories of ethnicity, nationalism, European citizenship, and globalization. The push and pull of these contradictory forces has brought her to a place from which she emphatically articulates her choice of non-belonging and her suspicion of identity labels that would hamper her freedom of self-definition. With her prolific writing on the social, cultural, and political issues that shape the postmodern world, one might say that she has come very close to embodying the figure of the transnational public intellectual. Following the trauma of the Balkan war, the pillorying of Ugrešić as a Croatian witch,[1] and her self-imposed exile in the early 1990s, she now lives in Amsterdam and takes up teaching appointments in the United States and Europe. She functions across borders as a transmigrant, "participating in the daily life and political processes of two or more nation-states" (Glick Schiller 1997, p. 158). When she declares that holding a Dutch passport does not make her a Dutch writer, much the same as the fact that she writes in Croatian (which used to be called Serbo-Croatian) does not make her a Croatian writer, she signals her transnational position, unhinging citizenship from nationality or ethnicity, and language from territoriality. However, the difficulty of shaking off identity labels reveals how our habitual thinking about literature is deeply entrenched in ethnic and national categories, or even in larger classificatory constructs such as European literature. At the same time, it also shows the commodity value of ethnicized identities in the global literary marketplace which, according to Ugrešić, "always needs a Bulgarian, a Serb, a Croat, an Albanian. But only one. Two max" because more would be too confusing (Ugrešić 2007, p. 169). Taking a clue from Rilke,

who says that "The story of shattered life can be told only in bits and pieces",[2] I want to explore the relationship between Ugrešić's practice of the genre of the autobiographical fragment and her ongoing project of interrogating and challenging different constructions of Europe from the perspective of what Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih call "minor transnationalism", that is, transnationalism reconceived through lateral rather than mostly vertical power dynamics between European minority cultures and the West.

Touted by Clive James as an important 20th-century intellectual whose voice has contributed to our understanding of the Balkan ethnic and gendered conflicts (James 2008, p. 762), Ugrešić has developed a form of politicized life writing that mixes autobiography, personal essay, cultural criticism, travel writing, autoethnography, epistolarity, and diary. As a hybrid genre, the autobiographical fragment is uniquely suited to address the discontinuities and ruptures of history, experience, and memory that have accompanied Europe's post-communist transformations. In a succession of texts, beginning with *Have a Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream* (1994), to *The Culture of Lies* (1998), *Thank You For Not Reading* (2003), and *Nobody's Home* (2007), Ugrešić examines geopolitical and cultural changes that have led to the emergence of a new concept of Europe in the globalized world. Juxtaposing high and low registers, her essays tackle serious issues of war, torture, and death, next to such topics as nostalgia, gardening, celebrities and saints, flea markets, kitsch of all stripes (socialist, nationalist, and pop culture), Coca-Cola, and bagels. Her style and method demonstrate affinities with cultural studies analysis combining literary, anthropological, sociological, and historical approaches in order to account for the fractured dynamics of the individual's experience of multiple manifestations of postmodern life at the intersections of local, national, regional, and global forces. She produces narrative fragments that employ the autobiographical "I" and, like transnational cultural studies criticism,[3] try to integrate the personal and the "glocal", which encompasses the author's local milieu—her past and present communities in the former Yugoslavia or present-day Croatia and the European Union—and the global, which for her connotes Americanization and the global marketplace, as well as the presence of the racially or culturally marked migrant otherness in the metropolitan spaces of Europe and the United States.

Embracing the fragmentary, Ugrešić inadvertently situates herself in the well-established tradition of the romantic and post-romantic literary and philosophical fragment that has been practiced by such writers as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Friedrich Schlegel, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Maurice Blanchot. According to

Christopher A. Strathman, fragmentary texts, by remaining open-ended and resisting closure, are suitable vehicles for obliterating the ego and turning to "what remains unthought in thinking" (Strathman 2005, p. 3). In his comments on Blanchot's philosophy of *écriture fragmentaire*, Strathman explains that the "fragmentary imperative" is "not so much a form of generation as it is a form of endurance, survival, way-making", movement or passage through the world (p. 5). By withdrawing resolution, fragmentary writing invites thinking beyond the text and privileges indeterminacy over totalization. When adopted as a life writing strategy, writing in fragments cultivates the heterogeneity of life, contests boundaries, and presents the self as an unfinished work in progress. Not surprisingly, Ugrešić resorts to a fragmented autobiographical writing where the literal ruins and fragmentation are tragic correlatives to an identity that exists beyond a war-torn and fractured national community. In doing so, she echoes romanticism's obsession with ruins and fragments as structuring forms of consciousness in the broken world. Rather than writing a memoir, premised on continuity of memory and narrative linearity, she opts for a loose form that allows her to evade categorization in her constructions of subjectivity. Her choice of the genre of the autobiographical fragment is consistent with her anti-essentialist politics of de-emphasizing the body and privileging instead one aspect of subjectivity related to the life of the mind and the intellect. Reading Ugrešić, one might consider her performance of the fragmentary as creating a space of concealment for those dimensions of her private self and embodiment that are not offered for public consumption. The fragmented form prevents the autobiographical subject from objectification and vulgar appropriation, especially in "a literary marketplace populated by anonymous consumers" (Bradshaw 2008, p. 78). It might well be that her preference for this flexible and expandable form of life writing is dictated in some way by her vulnerability to the market forces and her freelance status. Ultimately, the autobiographical fragment enables a strategic performance of the public intellectual "I", or an "I"(eye)-witness to history.

The aesthetics of the fragment operates on multiple levels in her writing, including her themes, structure, and composition. The short essay form that she usually employs is related to her practice of journalism, but even longer pieces in *The Culture of Lies*, for example, are written in short numbered sections. According to Gordana Crnković, one particular advantage of writing in fragments is that it allows Ugrešić "to avoid the superior position of an authoritative interpreter, and inherently [critiques] meta-narratives in general and cultural myths" (p. 544). The experience of fragmentation, and its concomitant disorientation and confusion, is doubly coded as a widespread postmodern condition, but it

is also a specific result of the break-up of Yugoslavia and the post-war situation in Croatia which has become "an utterly shattered world", characterized as "a cacophonic mixture of fragments of the former and present regimes" (Ugrešić 1998, p. 51). The newly created states recycle fragments of their usable (or unusable) past, reclaiming ugly nationalist ideologies such as the Croatian Ustashas, previously condemned by the Yugoslav state as Nazi collaborators. Such menacing "museum pieces", "splinters of the past", or "segments of former times" (pp. 84, 229) are used as building blocks in constructing new collective memory that replaces the forbidden one of the former Yugoslavia. At the same time, Ugrešić investigates the individual fragmentation of memory through nostalgia which accumulates "scents, touch, sound, melody, colour"—a collection of "emotional topoi" that index absent places and other times (p. 230). Like a cultural anthropologist, she keeps catalogues of things, objects, and trivia of everyday life. In a kind of performative paradox, she recognizes that fragments are also pieces of a past life or lived trauma that East European artists and writers are selling to the West as "souvenirs of a vanished culture" (p. 161). These fragments for sale only produce and reinforce stereotypes that feed the imaginary frustrations and fascinations between East and West Europe (p. 243).

Postcards, dictionaries, footnotes, palindromes—these are Ugrešić's tropes for a kind of writing that fragments identities and transcends geography, undoing stable boundaries between spaces. Postcards from Europe refer to her account in the essay "Europe, Europe", in *Nobody's Home*, of the event in which she participated, called Literaturexpress Europa 2000, during which 100 writers from 43 countries visited 18 European capitals—a train trip whose symbolic meaning was to bring European unification to the places they travelled. Of fragmentary nature, postcard writing, related to the memory of changing places and movement across the surface, becomes a suitable metaphor for both her search for an aesthetics that would be truthful to the experience of fragmentation and her recognition that knowledge is a matter of perspective and location. In the introductory essay to *Have a Nice Day*, she explains her fascination with the genre of the dictionary, yet another variant of the literary fragment that she links to the postmodern age with its intimations of chaos and oblivion and its skirting of the surfaces of meaning (Ugrešić 1994, p. 16). The title "Fictionary" is taken from the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut's *Petit Fictionnaire Illustré*, which for him is "a store of those words which are just a stimulus, a 'pre-text for a story'" (p. 17). Ugrešić's choice of this mutated dictionary form coincides with her displacement caused by the 1991 war in the former Yugoslavia, which has brought chaos and homelessness into her life. It also kindles her desire to

recompose the fragments of her world in the form of a dictionary as her country disappears and is "condensed into an encyclopeadia entry and, like Atlantis, moved into the *Dictionary of Imaginary Places*" (Ugrešić 1994, p. 16). Suddenly, becoming a footnote in history is a real possibility, which in turn leads to the problem of untranslatability and the need for further, explanatory footnotes. In *The Culture of Lies*, she uses actual footnotes, in addition to other liminal forms such as postscripts, epilogues, and the glossary. But mostly, the footnote functions as "a multiple metaphor, for the defeat of the writer and the human being" (Ugrešić 1998, p. 191). It is a defeat because the warlords write the main text of history and because her writing is insignificant placed next to the long lists of the dead. When she compares her writing to "self-defence by footnote" (p. 9), she acknowledges the marginal status of writing vis-à-vis such events as war as well as her own cultural marginalization. Yet, against all that, she contends as a writer that "the only thing left for her to do is to leave behind her fragile markers, dates" (p. 191).

Svetlana Boym refers to Ugrešić's style as "patchwork literature—constructed of war documents and personal tales that, with uncompromising lucidity, addressed what nobody wanted to address: the violence, nationalist betrayal and banal sort of evil unleashed by the war" (Boym 2002, p. 75). Fragments acquire a sinister meaning when bodies become fragmented flesh and when writing turns into a practice of re-membering, of piecing together the ruins, broken pictures, and forgotten names. Watching "pictures of fragmented bodies in the Sarajevo market" on the TV screen, Ugrešić is a memory keeper collecting "the remains of the ruins in a little heap", memories of her "school, friends, journeys, cities, rivers, mountains, islands" (Ugrešić 1994, p. 217). Not only is her memory fragmented by war, but she herself is split up by "all kinds of voices… mixed up inside [her] and…tearing [her] apart. War is hell, among other things because it has a thousand faces", and as a writer she feels bound by a duty of witnessing, "of capturing all its grimaces, all its meanings" (p. 239). Ugrešić's writing is especially resonant when she mounts a powerful critique of war whose "radiation" contaminates us all (p. 240) and which she also defines as:

> an organized, collective criminal act waged by *chieftains*, *leaders* and warriors for the very tangible things: for political power, for territory, for this or that kind of profit. Wars are never waged for people. Wars are waged by one kind of people against others (Ugrešić 1998, pp. 192–193).

She confronts the trauma of ethnic and gendered violence that has been condoned by Western European countries despite their commitment to liberal democracy. While in the multinational and multicultural Yugoslav state heterogeneity and difference were harnessed in the service of mono-ideology, animosity between "religions, languages, and identities was not addressed but simply repressed" (Tighe 2004, p. 142). Identity based conflicts gave "legitimacy to war criminality, madness, hatred, collective and individual pathological behaviour, pleasure in killing, profiteering, territorial ambitions, as well as to patriotism as the right to self-defence" (Ugrešić 1998, p. 193). What remained a common denominator, according to Ugrešić, was male chauvinism coupled with militarism. The essay "Because We're Just Boys" offers a scathing analysis of pervasive misogyny and the culture of rape in the former Yugoslavia that was only exacerbated during the war which "simply activated what had always existed in the male mindset" (p. 118). Ugrešić links "the war mentality to the pattern of male behaviour in Yugoslavia", recognizing masculinist aspects of war in which women were raped on all sides (Tighe 2004, p. 147). She rejects the "war-pornographic rhetoric" used to rationalize the destruction, hatred, corruption, and the infringement of human rights (Ugrešić 1998, p. 118). After the war, the Croatian women journalists, writers, and intellectuals, including herself, who dared to protest against the war and the excesses of the new nationalist government were labelled, in a perverse twist of rhetoric, as "women who rape Croatia" (p. 124). Ugrešić provides solid evidence for the argument that "the male ethnic principle" is still the foundation of "the Croatian being" (p. 126).[4]

Her obsession with design, stretched over its multiple meanings as redesigned borders, histories, and identities, as well as product marketing, propaganda, and scheming, supports a larger inquiry into how people are transformed and affected by a postmodern re-design of public and personal space, body politics, and culture. The most interesting insight into this reality is her discovery of the palindromic character of truth, what she calls "the palindrome madness" (p. 31) or "'the devil's verse', the one that is read the same backwards and forwards, from left to right" (p. 73). The palindrome reality is a synonym of the culture of lies, its indispensable component, which allows the media to manipulate the same images and facts to tell different stories. One example she quotes is that at the time of war the same "photographs of dead bodies and burned houses have been adopted as *their victims* by both sides; both the side of the *victim* and that of the *executioner*" (p. 33). However, the palindrome truth, as the principle of reversibility of the self and other, carries within it the possibility of its subversion. As Ugrešić notes with irony, "In our normal understanding of European civilisation, it is normal for there

to be two sides, right and left, an East and a West, and it doesn't cross anyone's mind to suggest that they are identical" (p. 31). This idea that the truth "may be read equally in a Western and in an Eastern way!" (p. 27) collapses the difference between here and there, refuses absolute difference, and allows us to re-imagine spatial relations. Playing on space and identity, palindromes—those devilish designs—challenge the established hierarchies of East and West and remind us that in the end we will always get back to the same point where we started.

Passages about the criminal insanity of war and the absurdity of nationalism have earned Ugrešić critical praise and favourable comparisons with Virginia Woolf and George Orwell. However, she cultivates her own less cosmopolitan and more localized literary genealogy by introducing multiple quotations from Yugoslav novelists and masters of the political essay such as Danilo Kiš, Ivo Andrić, and Miroslav Krleža. What is interesting in her take on postmodernism is that she explores a darker side of European postmodernity as seen from a post-communist, messy angle, from a neglected perspective of what she calls "small peoples" awaiting their acceptance into the West (Ugrešić 2007, p. 112). Consequently, her writing problematizes the centre-periphery model premised on the palindrome principle. The following description of her background exhibits certain characteristics that are compatible with postmodernism at large:

> I come from a culture of crude, discriminatory humor, from a culture of duality and duplicity (submission to the authorities and at the same time an underhand skepticism towards any authority) from a culture of paradox and ambivalence, from a culture with a false bottom and fingers crossed behind its back, a culture which has developed strategies in its struggle for survival, just as all people have (Ugrešić 2003, p. 65).

This East European version of postmodernism comprises a combination of political and aesthetic factors such as resistance to the homogenization and contingency of life under communism and emphasis on absurdity, parody, pastiche, and aesthetic eclecticism. It is a fertile ground from which to draw examples of first-hand experiences of such classic postmodern maladies as a loss of grand metanarratives, arbitrariness of historical truth, or obsession with identity and difference. Indeed, several features associated with the post-communist societies, such as the blurred boundary between fiction and reality,[5] admixture of high and low registers, commodification of art, or production of simulacra, correspond to Frederic Jameson's paradigm of postmodernity (Cornis-Pope 2009, p. 27). But Ugrešić is far more subversive than merely suggesting that the

West did not invent postmodernism when she puts forth a (palindromic) hypothesis that the West might be becoming more and more like former communist countries, and that judging by its increasing bureaucracy, rudeness, and impoverishment, "capitalism has waded deep into communism today" (Ugrešić 2007, p. 274).[6]

The fact that Ugrešić quotes and acknowledges influences from Russian and East European writers is an example of what Lionnet and Shih call "lateral networks", which are rarely explored in studies of globalization and transnationalism, where "minority subjects identify themselves in opposition to a dominant discourse, rather than vis-à-vis each other and other minority groups" and where we privilege vertical rather than horizontal exchanges, "but rarely examine the relationships among different margins" (p. 2). In this sense, Ugrešić's dialogue with East European traditions is a form of "minor transnationalism" that troubles the dominant model of transnationality based on Western Eurocentric universalism and "the prevalent notion of transnationalism as a homogenizing force" (Lionnet and Shih 2005, p. 5). Her relationship to the United States and Europe, conceived from an East European vantage point, approximates "the transnationalism from below" which is more scattered and aware of "the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national borders" (p. 7). According to Marcel Cornis-Pope, focusing their readings of "international postmodernism primarily around Western experiences, Western theorists ignore the historical experience of the former communist countries or exhibit a simplistic understanding of the fate of culture under totalitarian communism" (p. 27). Attention to both migrant subjectivities and East European variants of postmodernism may be productive insofar that it reveals the postmodern eruptions of heterogeneity that have been repressed through European modernity's obsession with the national and the universal.

Among recurrent motifs in Ugrešić's prose is a dialogic and contrapuntal articulation of the historic (and contemporary) relationship within Europe between the West and the East, which allows her to probe constantly the meaning of Europeanness as she ruthlessly deals with national fantasies and stereotypes on both sides. The concept "Europe" in her writing is always fractured and always constructed from her geographic point of origin (which is itself splintered and fragmented). Yet, there is a recognizable mythic structure attached to "Europe" (as a shorthand for the West) that commands the imagination of East and Central Europeans.[7] In a stylized discourse of mock romance between Eastern and Western Europe, Eastern Europe assumes the role of a secret mistress who has always confirmed "the Westerner's conviction that he lived in a better world" (Ugrešić 2007, p. 240), whereas for the Easterner, "Western

Europe was a dark object of desire…a world in which people lived more humanly" (p. 242). While the Easterner never doubted that he was a European, "his language gave him away. He never said 'We Europeans' but always 'Europe and us'" (p. 242). And although Western Europe occupies a large mental space in the minds of Eastern Europeans, for many Westerners "Eastern Europe is a mental empty space" (p. 239). It is a spatialized identity-making construct through which the allegedly superior Western Europeans (real and imaginary) knew themselves as bearers of "Western civilization", in contrast to what they were not, namely, the barbaric hordes from the East. As she sums up,

> The problem of orientation in Europe comes from the fantasies of its inhabitants about themselves and others. … It turns out that all the inhabitants of Europe would rather see themselves as part of its western than its eastern end. To be at its western end gives Europeans the feeling that they are on the right side of life (p. 111).

Ugrešić shows the persistence of "the imaginary boundary of East and West" (Chandler 2009, p. 4) even after the fall of communism. Although the concept of Eastern Europe has lost its original geopolitical significance, there are still divisions derived from Cold War polarizations, just as the disappearance of the Berlin Wall has not removed the separations between "Wessies" (Westerners) and "Ossies" (Easterners).

In her exposé of the culture of lies, Ugrešić describes "the confiscation of memory" that produces a collective historical amnesia (Ugrešić 1998, p. 70). She talks about the "terror of forgetting" whereby a Yugoslav identity and its past, together with "the mythology of everyday life", are wiped out, and about the "terror by remembering", a complementary strategy whereby the country's history and collective consciousness are refurbished and the citizens are forced to accept a new reality, new names, new institutions, and newly constructed historical continuities (p. 80). Her text includes insights into the uses of life writing such as autobiography and biography under extreme conditions, when the genre proves its usefulness for fabricating acceptable life stories and convenient truths, to manipulate and manufacture new personal and national identities. But she does not let us forget that the problem of historical amnesia that she so incisively diagnoses involves not only the Balkan case, where 10 years was enough to erase the memory of a country that had existed for 50 years, but that it seems to affect Europe at large, with its repressed memories of colonialism, anti-Semitism, and racism. She analyses "Euro-ego-centrism" (p. 223) as the product of modernity through which

Europe has become identified with the values of civilization, enlightenment, progress, and Judeo-Christian tradition, as opposed to "primitive" cultures and other religions. She mercilessly points to a sense of superiority and stereotypes that inform Western Europe's thinking about its others. According to her, "Europe is full of museums which are designed as places of collective shame [and this] 'musealisation' of shame is one form of expiation for [the] sins" of the past (Ugrešić 2007, p. 148).

Furthermore, she notes the paradoxes of European unification under the banner of unity in diversity, the union which supports the emergence of ethnic nationalisms (while watching the bloody dismantling of the Yugoslav state). She accuses Western Europeans of indifference and self-serving opportunism in using the war in Bosnia to exorcise their own historical traumas and to move on to the 21st century "cleansed" of their own nightmares. In light of their past and present history of human rights abuses, it is highly hypocritical of the members of the European Union to demand "rigorous respect for the rights of minorities as a key requisite for joining its ranks" (p. 178). According to Ugrešić, Europe's chauvinism is closeted today under the guise of politically correct cultural pluralism that essentialises and fossilises identities. Such blatant culturalism leads to the marketing of pre-packaged national cultural identities on the post-unification European "bazaar" (p. 119). Moreover, this European version of "multiculturalism"—unity in diversity—in fact demands self-ethnicization and perpetuation of cultural stereotypes, much the same as the global literary marketplace needs to produce commodifiable ethnic and cultural differences. In this sense, her refusal of a linear and coherent narrative of self and the splintering and fragmentation of her identity may be seen as preemptive of any possibility of branding and recuperation of the autobiographical subject as essentially "ethnic" or embodying any particular locality. Her resistance to performing any token or representative self for the market consumption permits only the continuity of a bemused, ironic tone in the voice of the speaking and thinking "I".

Gradually, Ugrešić also incorporates into her critique a condemnation of consumerism, showing how the sweeping forces of globalization (which she increasingly identifies with Americanization), the marketplace, and the American-bred culture of optimism change the face of Europe through the imposition of new discursive and economic regimes. Questioning "how big is Europe and where is it?" (p. 110), she shows multidirectional migrations and exposes the fantasies of belonging in the "West" which now stretches to the south and the east. As she points out, it is no longer just the case of the East moving westward, "as very anxious West European chauvinists [had] feared", but of the West moving eastward and finding

"life in the freshly incorporated countries of Europe…cheaper and more fun than life in the expensive West European ghettoes" (pp. 182–183). A shift in power dynamics caused by the inclusion of Eastern Europe within Europe necessitates a search for new definitions of Europeanness. It also means that impoverished Westerners can be empowered by cheap investment and visits to the former communist countries, where they can afford consumer products, dental and medical treatments, cosmetic surgeries, even sex (p. 270). Since the logic of money "does away with…state borders and identities", she predicts that "In the future, instead of nation and state, the new 'identity maker' may be a powerful corporation" (p. 182). Always situating herself as an outsider, she becomes what one critic calls "the ex(centric) mind of Europe" (Kuhlman 1999, p. 423).

As a transnational public intellectual, Ugrešić inhabits shifting physical and discursive sites, different zones of non-belonging that constitute a philosophical space outside the walls of the city, which is necessary to practice dissent and interrogate the status quo:

> ...all my life I had been doing everything in my power to retain my right to my one single privilege. The privilege of being a writer. I refused to be a member of any parties, organizations, commissions and juries, I avoided being left or right, upper or lower. I was a damned outsider. I refused membership in mountaineering, feminist or diving clubs. I believed that a writer should have no homeland or nation or nationality, a writer must serve neither an Institution nor a Nation, neither God nor the Devil, a writer must have only one identity: his books, I thought, and only one homeland: Literature… (Ugrešić 1994, p. 138).

In her romanticized notion, writers should be "true independents, servants not to any ideology and certainly not to money, but to imagination and their own craft" (Velčić 2003, p. 702). Despite its hyperbolic character, this passage articulates the writer's demand of the right to autonomy and her consistent strategy of self-decentering. She finds a temporary identification with "transnationals", a group of new inhabitants of Europe who are its "cultural mutants" and who disrupt the liberal pluralist contract that is still invested in the concept of discrete and bounded identities. This group includes

> the stateless, nomads, bastards, wossies…Those who unite in themselves the traumatic Wessie and Ossie genes…They belong to a new tribe of people of no fixed abode…They do not consider Europe a privilege…Europe is for them just a temporary place of residence,

> the choice of country is most often random (Ugrešić 1998, pp. 250–251).

Decrying the 19th-century concept of nationality and literature by blood as outmoded, Ugrešić recognizes the existence of "a large grey zone of non-territorial literature…growing in the European (and other) literary inter-spaces:

> That zone is inhabited by 'ethnically inauthentic' authors, émigrés, migrants, writers in exile; writers who belong simultaneously to two cultures, bilingual authors who are writing 'neither here nor there', in any case beyond the borders of their national literature. The literature of the grey zone is now being written by writers in their native tongue while they are surrounded by the language of their host country, and by other who choose the language of the host country over their own (Ugrešić 2007, pp. 172–173).

She contemplates processes of creolization and hybridization that lead to the emergence of new languages, "new dialects" of this gray zone, such as Moroccan-Dutch, Chicano-Spanish, Turko-German, Algerian-French, or Russian-American. To describe the overlapping interests, trans-local solidarities, and post-national identities of this group, she adopts the term "transnational literature" and identifies its key concepts and themes: "archiving ethnic, linguistic and national memory, dislocation and displacement, cultural shifts and translation and transplantation of culture, the narratives of remembrance, bilingualism, or multingualism, [and] exile". These themes "constantly mutate, change, multiply, and overlay their meanings in an uninterrupted process of interaction" (p. 175). They also reveal that transnationalism is simultaneously rooted in a place of origin and forsaking the possibility of absolute belonging. To quote urban theorist Michael Peter Smith, transnational discourse "insists on the continuing significance of borders, state policies, and national identities even as these are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices" (p. 4).

It seems accurate to say that the national, with its shadow of the colonial, still haunts the transnational in Ugrešić's writing and that she maintains this dual frame of reference when talking about the former Yugoslavia, Croatia, the Netherlands, or the United States. As a transnational migrant, she lives more or less comfortably in a world that encompasses more than one national structure, and she continues "to relate to the discrete structures and practices of societies that are both interconnected yet discrete" (Glick Schiller 1997, p. 163). However, despite her critical deconstruction of the unequal power relations between the

East and the West, she appears to be less alert to the plight of subalterns like indigenous peoples or the Roma population, who also occupy spaces of transnationality but whose "transnational" identity and agency are largely denied. In fact, she often uses metaphors of subalternity for rhetorical purposes and appropriates identities of homeless, indigenous, and nomadic peoples, inadvertently contributing to their marginalization. She calls herself a "Bulgie-Gypsie" (Ugrešić 1998, p. 184); former Yugoslavs are homeless, Gypsies, new nomads (p. 7); she collapses an immigrant's dream with an Aborigine as a dreamer (Ugrešić 1994, p. 213). But in the most surprising example she offers, she describes a scene that amounts to a fantasy of going native, when she and other displaced East Europeans "dance an Indian dance" and chant "*Ha-ya, hayana, ha-ya-na, hayana, hayanaaa*" in Central Park (pp. 85–86). Such ahistorical and romanticizing fantasies of fluid subjectivities in the "borderless world" overlap with the use in transnational studies of the concept of "borderland" as a construct that celebrates transgressive identities and replaces the relevance of the nation-state in the current phase of globalization. Yet, as Nina Glick Schiller reminds us, "while borders may be cultural constructions, they are constructions that are backed by force of law, economic and political power, and regulating and regularizing institutions" (Glick Schiller 1997, p. 159). In this context, the "borderless world" argument is a fantasy of the powerful who can ignore the continuing impact of colonialism and the ongoing policing of boundaries by the capitalist nation-state. In this approach, globalization and transnationalism do not have to concern themselves with the postcolonial state and political economy, instead privileging a culturalist view. Unlike dominant accounts of transnationalism, which still adhere to vertical, binary models and construct transnational subjects as "flee-floating signifiers without psychic and material investment in one or more given particular geopolitical spaces" (Lionnet and Shih 2005, p. 8), transnational processes must be seen as products of particular histories, times, and places. And while Ugrešić's "minor transnationalism" partly challenges these dominant articulations through her transversal identifications and minor-to-minor networks, she overlooks the muting of some painful histories in narratives of the borderless world.

Quite possibly, Ugrešić may resemble what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan call "the cosmopolitan subject as a mystified national subject in the guise of a 'world' or global citizen" (Grewal and Kaplan 2001, p. 669). The reason for the persistence of the national in her writing has to be found in the latency of trauma. For Ugrešić, who rejects any nationalist pretensions to singularity and authenticity, a site of national trauma still constitutes "the shadowy side of the transnational" (Lionnet and Shih 2005, p. 11).

With her space of citizenship lost, is she a melancholy minor transnational subject? One critic who views her as a melancholy subject is Sanja Bahun, who describes Ugrešić's work through Walter Benjamin's concept of "the 'melancholic state' of a commodity in search of buyers on the open market" (Bahun 2010, p. 64). Moreover, according to Bahun, framing Ugrešić through melancholy is also appropriate because of the constant seepage into the present of a different "chronotope" of the displaced and traumatized narrative subject, that is, "the time-place of the former Yugoslavia that orchestrates" her texts (p. 64). But rather than simple Yugo-nostalgia she is often associated with, which would postulate "a fixed, unified chronotope", Bahun argues that Ugrešić configures "the 'impossible' Yugoslav chronotope as flexible and *relational*", always-already split along gender lines and coloured by "affects, discourses, projections and fantasies dominant at the time of its production" (pp. 65–66).

Transnationalism, as practiced by Ugrešić, is a process, rather than a fixed position of displacement. Her life writing exemplifies a shift from the constative "I am" of this or that particular identity, to the performative "I write," a refusal of any stasis of identity. But does her secession from identity manage to prevent her, or anyone else for that matter, from "belonging"? How successful can such an escape from identity and ideology be? Her politicized life writing seems paradoxically a-political at times.[8] With nationalism and identity politics as her obvious targets, she neglects to focus her critique on capitalism and neoliberalism (as she previously did not engage in ideological battles with communism and socialism). There is an acquiescence to the status quo, to the fact that capitalism is here to stay. It is as if "with the death of communism" we have reached the end of history, "the collapse of the 'social imagination'". She proclaims that "There is no one who is seriously considering possible alternatives to capitalism. We live in a post-historical, conflict-free time, or a time of apathy" (Ugrešić 2007, p. 251), a visual era when we all "mull over the same images" (p. 11). Part of her assumption is the "death of ideology" thesis and her opting for a type of cultural studies analysis that prefers to examine the surface rather than depth; hence her operative concept is the marketplace which synthesizes the idea of economic interests and cultural currency. While for her, images disseminated globally are "innumerable fragments of the postmodern hell" (Ugrešić 1998, p. 199), the work of hegemony may be invisible, hidden under the seductive surface of the image that becomes a screen for ideology. In proclaiming that "the demands of the market have no ideology" (Ugrešić 2003, p. 43), she runs the risk of mimicry of neoliberalism whose ideology is not gone but reinvented in dispersed, invisible ways. Consequently, it seems that she constructs ideology and the market as belonging to two separate

models of literary institutions and cultural politics, based on the historical contrasts between the Soviet and the Western systems, hence still steeped in the Cold War rhetoric. Even though she ironically notes that in both models "high-caliber professionals were tempered" (Ugrešić 2003, p. 45), still for her ideology is associated with "neo-communists, Marxists, anti-capitalists," whereas capitalism and neoliberalism, which replace ideology with money and programmatic optimism, appear to be almost free from ideology (pp. 85–86).

Ugrešić's stance as a cultural critic and detached public intellectual resembles a postmodern incarnation of a flaneur,[9] a reinvented form of applied epistemology associated with urban modernity, with the names of Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin and, in particular, with the figure of a person who walks the city in order to experience it. The postmodern flaneur moves at jet speed, navigating the spaces of several global cities (triangulating between Zagreb, Amsterdam, and New York City), refusing to make a permanent home in any place. In a tongue-in-cheek passage she describes the connection between writing and walking that she finds in a self-help manual for writers:

> Then I leave my writing and go out for a walk, just as Thornton Wilder, William Saroyan, Thomas Wolfe, Ray Bradbury, Carlos Fuentes, and many other writers used to do. The author of the Tool Kit for Writers maintains that when writers take walks they are not wasting time but working. In other words, walking is writing in one's thoughts. That is why I take care not to return from my walk until the end of the working day (Ugrešić 2003, p. 32).

In the neighboring chapters on Amsterdam and New York in *Nobody's Home*, she watches herself walk through these metropolitan spaces in a throng of other migrants.

Her method of flaneurism is also evident in a chapter called "Cappuccino" which describes her walking through New York, taking "the pulse of the city" (Ugrešić 1994, p. 202), insisting that all the truth is on the surface, not in depth. Fortuitously, flaneurism as back-and-forth movement and passage through the city also belongs to the aesthetics of the fragment and incompleteness.[10] The idea of the flaneur is linked to the embrace of the unexpected, exploration driven by curiosity, and wandering without destination. It is both a lifestyle and a method of observation and analysis, a philosophical way of living and thinking based on experiential fact collecting and experimenting with randomness rather than top-down academic research. As the Flaneur Society in its Internet "Guide to Getting Lost" puts it, it is about "discovering what is right under your feet, in front of you, above you, and around you"—in fact, a congenial description of

the contemporary practice of cultural criticism obsessed with documenting dailiness. What is striking in the case of Ugrešić is the importance of "losing oneself," in the multiple senses of Benjamin's "losing oneself in the forest of the city" and refusing to settle into any permanent address or identity. Whether viewed as a transnational public intellectual, postmodern flaneur, or disengaged and cynical voyeur, she is simultaneously part of and apart from the scene of her critical exploration. Yet, there is always a residue of pain lingering in her words.[11] Despite her irreverent irony and sarcasm, Ugrešić remains a moralist who never loses sight of the heaps of real bodies behind the mass marketed stories of "human perversion" (Ugrešić 2003, p. 58) and who implicitly indicts the consumer market of indifference to actual victims.

END NOTES

1 In 1991, Ugrešić was publicly attacked as one of the "Croatian witches", that is, unpatriotic women intellectuals and writers who spoke against President Franjo Tudjman's government.

2 These lines are used as an epigraph to Zygmunt Bauman's book called *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*, which Ugrešić references in *The Culture of Lies* (1998, p. 244). Bauman's influence on Ugrešić is visible in several places, including echoes of such phrases as "self-assembly identity kits" (Bauman 1995, p. 240), or her pronouncement that after the collapse of communism there are no more genuine alternatives to capitalism.

3 According to Nina Glick Schiller, transnational cultural studies are "focused on the growth of global communications, media, consumerism, and public cultures that transcend borders" (1997, p. 155). As a cultural critic, Ugrešić adopts a method of triangulation corresponding to the cultural studies approaches to the relationship between the local, national, and global (community, nation, world) contexts. In her own words, the East European intellectual "sends messages to three addresses, to three imaginary recipients, three hypothetical sponsors. The first addressee is his own local community; the second is 'Europe', 'Western Europe' or the 'European Union', whatever those mean, while the third is the global marketplace, the 'world'" (*Nobody's* 2007, 190).

4 Crnković critiques Ugrešić's excessive tendency to depict "all men inhabiting former Yugoslavia and its successor states…as male chauvinists " and to create "types" rather than "individuals" (1999, p. 545). Interestingly, a similar charge of overgeneralizing can be applied also to her writing about "America," which suffers from obsessive binarism of West-East and America-Europe. In particular, Ugrešić's assumption that her American colleagues, Western writers, travel "without luggage" (*Have* 1994, p. 137) is rather myopic, ignoring the legacy of slavery and indigenous genocide. But despite her tendency to overgeneralize, she has a visceral reaction to all kinds of hypocrisy and stupidity, both here and there.

5 According to her translator Celia Hawkesworth, in all her works Ugrešić is intrigued by the interrelationship of fiction and reality, and especially to what extent human beings are trapped within fictions ("The Insider's" 1990, p. 439). Significantly, after 1991, there is a shift in Ugrešić's writing to the preoccupation with "the projection of reality as fiction," as the title of her collection *The Culture of Lies* indicates (Hawkesworth "Dubravka" 1997, p. 389).

6 This hypothesis extends onto "the rules of market-oriented literary culture" that remind

her "of good old socialist realism" in that "most of today's literary production bases its success on the simple socialist-realist idea of progress" and self-improvement (*Thank You* 2003, pp. 25–26).

[7] Ugrešić explains that, in contrast to Eastern Europe, "Central Europe is an artificial construct (and at the same time the third point of reference)" adopted by East European writers in response to "the cultural sovietisation of the majority of the Eastern Bloc countries" (*The Culture* 1998, p. 160).

[8] She would prefer the label "antipolitical," as the subtitle of *The Culture of Lies*: *Antipolitical Essays* suggests in a clear reference to Gyorgy Konrad's essays.

[9] Other critics who have noticed this similarity include Nicole Rudick, who compares Ugrešić to Walter Benjamin's Baudelalaire, "the flaneur cast into the streets, nowhere at home" (2008, p. 46), and Vedrana Velickovic, who describes her as "a migrant *flaneuse*, an aimless wanderer who is streetwalking the metropolis…an alternative observer, constantly sliding in and out of her double role of the observer and the observed and to whom the city is a non-homely place waiting to be inscribed, re-read from the margins" (2009, p. 146).

[10] One is tempted to see the aesthetics of the fragment as paradigmatic of this aspect of life writing that concerns the relation of a part to the whole. Applied to life writing, the philosophy of the fragment reveals one of the paradoxes of autobiography, namely, its necessary preservation of a sense of incompleteness in a desire for a remnant of self-presence, precisely in the absence of the whole subject. In pursuing a delusion of *non omnis moriar*, autobiography is, indeed, salvaging fragments.

[11] Velickovic refers to the figure of a migrant *flaneuse* and that of a *Trümmerfrau*, the "rubble woman" who "mentally clears the ruins" (*The Culture* 1998, p. 250) as conflating two aspects of exile: "the trauma of remembering" and "the trauma of living where one does not feel at home" (Velickovic 2009, p. 146).

WORKS CITED

Bahun, Sanja. "There Was Once a Country: An Impossible Chronotope in the Writings of Slavenka Drakulić and Dubravka Ugrešić." *European Journal of English Studies* 14, 1 (April 2010): 63–74. Print.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995. Print.

Boym, Svetlana. An Interview with Dubravka Ugrešić. *BOMB* 80 (Summer 2002): 74–80. Print.

Bradshaw, Michael. "Hedgehog Theory: How to Read a Romantic Fragment Poem." *Literature Compass* 5/1 (2008): 73–89. Print.

Chandler, Aaron. "Introduction: Imagination without Walls." In Moraru and Chandler, *Postcommunism*. 2009. 1–24. Print.

Cornis-Pope, Marcel. "Shifting Paradigms: East European Literatures at the Turn of the Millennium." In Moraru and Chandler, *Postcommunism*. 2009. 25–45. Print.

Crnković, Gordana P. Review of Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies*. *Slavic and East European Journal* 43, 3 (Autumn 1999): 544–546. Print.

Glick Schiller, Nina. "The Situation of Transnational Studies." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 4, 2 (1997): 155–166. Print.

Grewal, Inderpal, and Caren Kaplan. "Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7, 4 (2001): 663–679. Print.

"Guide to Getting Lost." http://flaneursociety.org/guide.pdf. Retrieved March 30, 2012. Web.

Hawkesworth, Celia. "Dubravka Ugrešić." In Vasa D. Mihailovich, ed. *South Slavic Writers Since World War II*. Detroit, MI: Gale, 1997. 388–392. Print.

——. "Dubravka Ugrešić: The Insider's Story." *Slavonic and East European Review* (July 1990): 436–446. Print.

James, Clive. *Cultural Amnesia: Notes in the Margin of My Time*. London, UK: Picador, 2008. Print.

Kuhlman, Martha. "The Ex(centric) Mind of Europe: Dubravka Ugrešić." *World Literature Today* 73, 3 (Summer 1999): 423–428. Print.

Lionnet, Françoise and Shu-mei Shih, eds. *Minor Transantionalism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005. Print.

Moraru, Christian and Aaron Chandler, eds. *Postcommunism, Postmodernism, and the Global Imagination*. Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 2009. Print.

Rudick, Nicole. "When In Roam." *Bookforum* (September–November 2008): 46. Print.

Smith, Michael Peter. "Transnationalism and Citizenship." Address delivered at the International Conference on Immigrant Societies and Modern Education, Singapore, August 31–September 2, 2000. http://hcd.ucdavis.edu/faculty/webpages/smith/articles/transnationalism_and_citizenship.pdf. Retrieved May 10, 2013. Pp. 1–25. Web.

Strathman, Christopher A. *Romantic Poetry and the Fragmentary Imperative: Schlegel, Byron, Joyce, Blanchot*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005. Print.

Tighe, Carl. *Writing and Responsibility*. Florence, KY: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Ugrešić, Dubravka. *Nobody's Home: Essays*. Trans. Ellen Elias-Bursac. London: Telegram, 2007. Print.

——. *Thank You for Not Reading: Essays on Literary Trivia*. Trans. Celia Hawkesworth and Damion Searles. Champagne, London, Dublin: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003. Print.

——. *The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays*. Trans. Celia Hawkesworth. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998. Print.

——. *Have a Nice Day: From the Balkan War to the American Dream*. Trans. Celia Hawkesworth. New York: Viking, 1994. Print.

Velčić, Vlatka. Review of Dubravka Ugrešić, *Thank You for Not Reading*. *Slavic and Eastern European Journal* 47, 4 (Winter 2003): 701–703. Print.

Velickovic, Vedrana. "Open Wounds, the Phenomenology of Exile and the Management of Pain: Dubravka Ugrešić's *The Ministry of Pain*." In Agnieszka Gutthy, ed. *Literature in Exile of East and Central Europe*. New York: Peter Lang, 2009. 139–154. Print.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Eva C. Karpinski teaches in the School of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at York University in Toronto. Her research interests include contemporary fiction, autobiography and life writing at visual/textual interfaces, trauma studies, translation studies, and feminist theory and methodology. She has published articles in edited collections and journals, including *Literature Compass*, *Review of International American Studies*, *Men and Masculinities*, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, *Canadian Woman Studies*, *Atlantis*, *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, and *Resources for Feminist Research*. She has edited a special Issue of *Canadian Woman Studies* on "Women and Cancer." Her book *'Borrowed Tongues': Life Writing, Migration, and Translation* was published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press in 2012. Her next book, *Trans/acting Culture, Writing, and Memory: Essays in Honour of Barbara Godard* (co-edited with Jennifer Henderson, Ian Sowton, and Ray Ellenwood) is forthcoming from WLUP (2013).