War on the Walls: (Re-)imagining Past And Collective Memories through Murals and Graffiti in post-Yugoslav Serbia

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1. Introduction

''*He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past*'' – George Orwell, 1984

In the last few decades, political scientists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists' interest in "collective memory" increased significantly (Assman & Czaplicka, 1995; Olick & Robins, 1998; Mistzal, 2003; Hałas, 2008; Maier, 2009). There are ongoing discussions about the coverage and the exact meaning of terms such as "social memory," "social remembrance," "collective memory'', ''public'' and 'national'' memory (Wood, 1999; Kansteiner, 2002). It seems that between all the bearers of these discussions, there is a consensus around one thing - a collective and often debatable representation of the past, which demarcates the boundaries between social groups, and at the same time, represents the fabrics from which social (thus, political) identity is woven, deserves to be the subject of a more detailed scientific inquiry.

More than thirty years ago, in April 1986, a historian from Erlangen warned his compatriots that "in a country without history, the future is won by the one who fills memories, creates concepts and interprets the past" (Strumer, 1987). That catchphrase became the motto of the stormy Historikerstreit, which took place a few months later, and its topicality and significance are confirmed not only by the profound revisions of history at the end of the twentieth century throughout Europe but also by the patterns of political culture that arose as a result of perverting and mystifying the past. Revision of the past has become the source from which new social and political forces draw legitimacy. The primary instruments facing the present problems have become the demonization or idealization of earlier states or personalities. It is enough to observe the Balkans, and it is possible to see several countries where such practices are present. After the collapse of the communist regimes in the region, there followed an extensive period of historical re-examinations in these countries. The underlying aim of these operations was to refute the communist interpretations of the past that represented a constant in the collective memory and dominant in the national historiographical discourses. This process has often led to the most extreme forms of historical revisionism. The rehabilitation of many historical figures best evidences this - Ante Pavelić and Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac in Croatia, Mikloš Horti in Hungary, and Jon Atoanescu in Romania, among others. (Volovici, 1994; Ramet, 1999; Shafir, 2002) Their status is changed, and they turn from criminals to victims and from criminals to heroes.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that there are patterns of political culture that are based upon the practice of politics of denial, silence, and constant (re-)imagination of the past in the areas of the former Yugoslavia. This region is a space which Croatian journalist Slavenka Drakulić once described as a, (...) space filled with too many memories and too little history.'' (Drakulić, 2015). In Serbia, this matter has recently become topical after, in Belgrade, the Serbian capital (and once the capital of Yugoslavia), two female activists tried to desecrate a mural dedicated to Ratko Mladić, a controversial figure in domestic historiography. General-colonel Mladić was one of the critical actors in the Yugoslav Wars, and he is a convicted war criminal, currently

serving a life-long sentence in the Hague.

The mentioned incident occurred in Belgrade's downtown area at the beginning of November 2021. One of the activists threw eggs at the mural. Shortly after, she and her companion were detained by force and taken to the police station by non-uniformed persons. Event information was reported by all mass media - not only in Serbia but throughout Europe. The public has raised some severe inquiries - is Ratko Mladić a hero or a criminal? What are the attitudes of the Serbian authorities regarding dealing with the past and the wars for the Yugoslav heritage? Shortly after the mentioned event, a cultural war followed in the urban space (mainly on the walls) - through a series of graffiti and murals. In the following period, public walls were sprayed with graffiti and murals with competing messages representing radically opposing ideological viewpoints: communism versus nationalism. Given that, this paper aims to examine the function of public art (such as graffiti and murals) in constructing cultural memory and collective memory in the context of the post-Yugoslav space.

For this research paper, the author relies on the notion of cultural memory developed by Jann Assman (1995) and utilizes the media archaeology approach, not just to examine communicative functions of street art in collective memory but also to note patterns and underlying mechanisms behind the conveyance of messages displayed on public spaces in Belgrade, as the former capital of Yugoslavia. The materiality of street art does indeed provide something uniquely affective and visceral to work with, and that is why they are more than suitable for archaeological excavation, hence being the ideal object for media archaeology studies. In the first part of the article theoretical framework, approach and context are elaborated. Then, methodology and data analysis is provided with the consequent discussion.

1.2. A Conceptual Approach To Murals And Graffiti – Media Archaeology and Cultural Memory as Communal Link between Past and Future

In the last thirty years, there has been a noticeable increase in interest, not only by scientists and scholars in the academy microcosm but also by the general public, in the phenomena of collective memory. Namely, this trend is particularly noticeable in societies where there is a discrepancy between collective and private/individual memories. Among others, these are the societies of the former Yugoslav states. After all, we are talking about social collectives, which underwent a series of traumatic episodes during Yugoslavia's bloody dissolution. As Hirschberger (2018) noted, collective traumas are cataclysmic events that are pretty potent and can destroy primary social connective tissues and fabrics. As it will be discussed later, these traumas are ongoing processes constantly being (re-)negotiated between and within groups. This leaves a vacuum that can be filled with suitable (re-)interpretations of the memories that political elites seemingly tend to utilize in their pursuit of power.

In order to understand mechanisms that make up a culture, it would perhaps be more rewarding to opt for an interpretive approach or else for (new) institutionalism. This direction refers to the values inherent in certain political institutions, not the structures themselves when explaining how particular socio-political behavior occurs. At the same time, political institutions represent all those conventions, strategies, roles, procedures, routines, technologies, and organizational forms around which a certain political activity is constructed and takes place. It is essential to point out that they include, among other things, paradigms, beliefs, codes, and knowledge in cultures that surround, elaborate, support, or otherwise contradict those routines and rules. In addition, it should be added that the behavior is directed or limited by cultural and social norms, whereby a specific action, first of all, appears as a direct "consequence of the identification of normatively adequate behavior, rather than a calculation of the return benefit from alternative choices." (March & Olsen, 1989, p. 22). However, graffiti and murals are not institutions, although in our particular case, there is a suspicion that state actors are behind them - why would police guard murals on private buildings? Besides that, we would make a fundamental attribution error by simply ascribing the mural or graffiti to a particular po-

litical actor(s) without hard evidence of their creation. Since, unlike various branches of the new institutionalism, culture studies treat "mental products" as created in an institutional vacuum (Grendstad & Selle, 1995), I believe that we should stick to the cultural theory in our analysis – namely cultural memory theory.

Cultural memory, as a separate theory within cultural studies, deals with the study of the mechanisms by which memories and remembrance form a collective identity and its relationship to past times, along with their transmission, suppression, inventing, and forgetting. Accordingly, cultural memory refers the the "politics of memory." As for the instrumentation of the cultural memory with which it is possible to reshape the collective identity, it should be pointed out that it contains numerous tools. Among other things, it is possible to use the creation of certain public narratives (through the financing of television series and projects, the establishment of museums, and galleries), the renaming of institutions, squares, and streets, the removal and installation of monuments, the organization of various types of festivities. Cultural memory is a form of collective memory, and as Wang (2008) has remarked, ''collective memory sustains a community's very identity and makes possible the continuity of it's social life and cultural cohesion'' (p. 307).

As Jan Assmann (2005) writes, the culture of memory concerns one of the exogenous dimensions of human memory. In connection with that, it is crucial to point out that the culture of memory refers to a group, unlike memory, which is an individual skill. , Assmann writes that the ability to communicate, and therefore to remember, can only be developed in interaction with others. "Cultural memory focuses on fixed points in the past. The past as such cannot be maintained in it either. Moreover, the past here congeals into symbolic figures to which memory clings. The story of the fathers, the exodus, the migration through the desert, the conquest of the land, the exile, are some of the figures of memory that appear in the liturgical form of the holidays, illuminating the current situation of the present. Myths are also figures of memory: the difference between myth and history is abolished here. For cultural memory, factual history is not important but remembered history. It could also be said that in cultural memory, factual history is transformed into a remembered one and thus into a myth" (Assmann, 2005, p. 61). Therefore, in order for a certain "truth" to become established in the collective memory, it is necessary to present it in the concrete form of a place, person or event.

As Assmann points out, the institutionalization of the culture of memory begins with the transition of accumulated memories into cultural memory, where cultural memory does not have to represent only a storehouse of memories but could also represent the embodiment of a specific function. At the same time, we must not forget that the past is not a static category and that it is necessary to observe the broader socio-political context and historical framework for its interpretation. Thus, the past has two levels: ontological and explicative. In other words, what once took place will remain a fact. However, the interpretation of it will change according to the social context, and the context can be recognized thanks to the political institutions within that society.

Therefore, it could be said that collective memory constitutes a whole series of contents, patterns, and rituals that people form, learn, interpret and change in order to incorporate into their own identity. Although, as Assman writes, memory is an individual act, it is socially organized and mediated. Several individuals will see the same event differently and accordingly interpret it differently. Following this, we cannot say that collective memory is only the sum of the individual needs of a group. However, we must remember that it also expresses the same group's needs. It is constituted and shaped by the constant tension between private memories and official politics of memory (Assmann, 2005, pp. 31-32). Therefore, Assmann concludes that it is possible to distinguish two basic types of collective memory:

a) communicative - that is, that memory that is transmitted through oral tradition;

b) institutionalized cultural memory - that is, that memory that appears in the form of monuments, festivals, and museums.

The question arises – to which type of collective memory do

murals and graffiti belong? As Michael Hebbert (2004) noted in his deliberations on community struggles over postwar urban clearances and "critical reconstruction" of modern Berlin – "the shaping of the street is an instrument for the shaping of memory. A shared space – such as a street – can be a locus of collective memory in a double sense. It can express group identity from above through architectural order, monuments and symbols, commemorative sites, street names, civic spaces and historic conversation; and it can express the accumulation of memories from below, through the physical and associative traces left by interweaving patterns of everyday life" (p. 592). In order words, human memory, thus collective memory, is spatial.

Besides that, (collective) memory should be observed in terms of temporality. All events and persons must be placed in the temporal web of relations to be remembered and (publicly) communicated (see Barash, 2012; French, 2012) –otherwise, they have no symbolical value. For such an act – imagination represents a necessary precondition. As famous historian Benedict Anderson has pointed out in his seminal work "Imagined Communities" (1983) – both group cohesion and collective identity are deeply rooted in the shared reminiscences over the collective past. Nevertheless, the past cannot be preserved as it is not a static category, but it is the process of constantly reconstructing it in relation to the future (Halbwach, 1992, p. 40).In other words, collective memory represents the continuous (re-)imagination and reinterpretation of past experiences.

Collective memories are, hence, expressed and disseminated by publicly circulating signs. Nora has conceptualized these signs as sites of collective memory (fr. lieux de memoire) (1989). These signals are synchronously "simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed, there are lieux in three senses of the world – material, symbolic and functional" (pp. 18-19). In that sense, graffiti and murals could be assessed as ideal sites of media archaeology research. Human identity and memories are entrenched in bodily experiences and movements in material space (Fried, 1963). Umberto Eco, a renowned Italian philosopher and novelist, compared the process of remembrance to traveling through space and time – "memories are built as a city is built" (Eco, 1986, p. 89). Consequently, in our specific case, graffiti and murals should be seen as agents of collective memory, and this paper tries to answer the question:

Graffiti and murals, as visual media and specific genres of street art, tend to provide more or less unsanctioned transcriptions and representations on public locations (Whitridge & Williamson, 2021). That being said, street art should not be dismissed lightly as an alternative source of political information. Mitja Velikonja (2019), one of the few academics who approach street art and graffiti in post-communist countries holistically, notes that these are phenomena that have not been adequately approached from the scientific side and by social scientists. However, it is a massive, simple, global, and effective form through which neglected groups could enter the public sphere. He notes that graffiti as a genre of street art goes through the same process as some other forms of "profane culture", which were considered too banal and everyday to be the subject of serious scientific research. However, as Hamilton (2016) observes, everyday artefacts such as internet memes and graphic comics are one of the main drivers of political participation in the modern world. Furthermore, everyday life in the socio-political sense is a space through which resistance and dissent are realized (Migdal, 2013; Popovic & Miller, 2015).

In line with that, it should be emphasized that murals and graffiti should not be approached only from a mere archaeological point of view. It is necessary to deal with this topic from the aspect of media archaeology. Ultimately, both fields (archaeology and media archaeology) are deeply interested in examining the material culture that exists before a particular cultural creation but also after that particular creation. In this sense, we are interested and intrigued by the connective tissue, the glue between the past and the future - contemporaneity and contemporary forms of cultural and artistic expression. As Parrika writes: "The contemporary becomes articulated as the tension between past, present, and future, where that tension becomes a topic in itself; the contemporary is the political category that is able to address the multiplicity of times that stretch across the normalized

time categories of "past "and "present. ""(2015, p.9-10). Following that, the author believes that street art, thus murals and graffiti, should be observed as communal links between past and present.

2. Collective Memories in Context of Former Yugoslavia – Two Competing Identities (Yugoslavian versus Serbian)

Before going into the explanations of the research methodology and how the data was collected, it is necessary to familiarize the readers better with the regional context and to point out a few more strands of the theory of cultural memory along the way. The critical issue facing the societies of the former Yugoslav community is the issue of identity – or, to rephrase it: what makes one a Yugoslavian? How one stops being Yugoslavian?

In order to provide an adequate answer to this question, it is necessary to look back at the term's historical development. The creation of the state of Yugoslavia represents the realization of long-term efforts of the South Slavic peoples (primarily Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) to live within the framework of a common state. The idea of Yugoslav identity (and consequently, Yugoslavism) was fermented during the 18th and 19th centuries in the wake of the awakening of nationalist states across the European continent (Hudson, 2003; Troch, 2006). Decades of struggle for self-determination and mass sacrifices bore fruit after the Paris Peace Conference, which buried the three great empires (Austro-Hungarian, German and Ottoman), which were the main antagonists to the embodiment of the "Yugoslav dream." Without delving into the various ideological outlines and conceptions of the initial Yugoslavism, it should be pointed out that the primary elements on which it was based are the shared past and culture (primarily language). Etymologically, Yugoslavia stands for the land of the Southern Slavs; the Romantic idea about Yugoslavism could be summed up as the unification of South Slavic tribes that speak different dialects of the same language. The very beginnings of the idea that the South Slavs should be united in one state could be traced back to the Illyrian movement. " Illyrian movement's main thesis was that Southern Slavs, with different dialects, used the same language that they belonged to the same or similar people, giving them the right to unification." (Trgovr□ević, 2016, p.2). Ljudevit Gaj, one of the originators of this movement, believed that language represents a nation's distinguishing features.

From a geopolitical point of view, Yugoslavia, as a newly composed state, was supposed to back up the process of dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Habsburg Empire was also known as the "dungeon of the people," in whose territory, among other things, the South Slavic peoples who lived on the territory of today's Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, as well as Vojvodina (the northern autonomous province in Serbia were "imprisoned." The primary governmental form of organization of this new state was the kingdom. Accordingly, in the period between the two world wars, the primary formative force behind the attempts to shape Yugoslav nationalism was the crown (see Zec, 2015).

During the Second World War, Yugoslavia went through its first death - the Germans dismembered it by handing Vojvodina to the Hungarians, Macedonia to Bulgaria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the newly created "Independent State of Croatia" led by the bloodthirsty Ustasha regime. The Germans and Italians occupied the significantly reduced territory of Serbia. In this period, the Ustasha authorities who led the Nazi puppet state committed genocide against the Serbian population, as well as against the Roma, simultaneously with the Holocaust, intending to create an ethnically pure Greater Croatia (see Steinberg, 2002). At the same time, relations between these nations are further complicated by the co-existence of two national liberation guerilla movements that were ideologically opposed - the Chetniks (monarchists) and the Partisans (communists).

Of these two movements, the communists took the upper hand - a new Yugoslavia was born in the form of the Socialist Federal Republic with a system that would prevent the dominance of any national group. The new connective tissue between these peoples became class equality - the new Yugoslavia was supposed to represent a pan-Slavic working community. Instead of a royal figure, the new symbol of the gathering was the dictator Josip Broz Tito, who insisted on political and economic unification and tried to erase religious

and ethnic differences (see Ognjenovic and Jozelic, 2016). One of the problems is that most of the crimes that took place during the Second World War remained unprosecuted. In a certain sense, they were covered up to maintain the idea of Yugoslavia.

The final disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s revived the ghosts of the past - all these societies went through the process of mutual (re-)traumatization (see Mirkovic, 2000). While one part of the collective remains trapped in nostalgia for the period of prosperity and peace that preceded the bloody dissolution (Vol□ić, 2007) - other parts of society, primarily guided by the mantra of nationalism, remain trapped in the framework of the politics of denial and forgetting (Dimitrijević, 2011; Mijić, 2021). It can easily be argued that a shared history of suffering inextricably links the peoples of the former Yugoslavia and that their members were perpetrators, heralds, observers, and victims of collective crimes at the same time. In this specific context, a collective crime could be characterized as any "act committed by a significant number of members of one group, on behalf of all members of that group, against individuals who have been identified as the object of attack based on belonging to another group." (Dimitrijević, 2010, p. 189). Although there is a complex network of relationships in the region, which would be almost impossible to untangle by placing the blame on one single group, the people of this region are prone to self-victimization, and when it comes to issues related to the Wars of Yugoslav Succession and the World Wars, disagreements regarding these issues they articulate, not through dialogue or debate, but one-sided accusations and blame-shifting.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that when we talk about the culture of memory, memory is generally perceived as the highest virtue, while forgetting is generally perceived as an omission (Legg, 2007). However, some researchers would not agree with that. One of them is Christian Meier, who, in one of his studies (1996), pointed out that forgetting represents a cultural legacy, while memories are quintessential for cultural survival only in extreme situations (such as Auschwitz). In this study, which deals exhaustively with the genesis and consequences of civil wars, Meyer examined the thesis that memory represents collective mental construction that serves as a defense mechanism against trauma. However, it is a means of preventing the repetition of the violence that actually contributes to fueling negative energy within society. In other words, if the memory contains revenge and hatred, forgetting could serve as a means of arbitration, reconciliation, and reintegration between the conflicting parties. It is understood that the state and its representatives cannot influence the personal memories of its citizens, but that does not mean that they cannot contribute to their ignoring and even erasing from the public discourse. In his study, Meier cited the so-called as one of the examples of good practice. The truce in the Athenian polis that followed the Peloponnesian War is, according to M, an example of good practice. For this form of forgetting, there was a word in the ancient Greek language - mnesikakein - meaning remembering the bad (persons/events). In contrast, in those ancient times, it represented an act of public censorship for the sake of the public good.

However, has forgetting proved to be a good strategy in the post-conflict societies of the former Yugoslavia, which at one time was not only a multicultural but also an intercultural creation? Famous essayist, Dubravka Ugrešić, performs a kind of cultural anamnesis of (post-)Yugoslav collective(s) in her famous collection ''Culture of lies: Antipolitical Essays". Through a series of obscure episodes, Ugrešić describes Croatian selective amnesia in the last decade of the last century and how that entire collectivity managed to replace the Yugoslav intercultural brotherhood with a toxic nationalist culture of a misunderstood (national) individual. In contrast, intercultural consciousness was submissively suppressed by a hegemonic cultural monopoly. Of course, Croatian society was not an isolated case, but these processes took place in almost all former Yugoslav states with, as Ugrešić carefully observes, certain features of a schizophrenic disorder: "In a completely disturbed, fractured, disintegrated world, fragments of past and present regimes are cacophonously mixed " (1996, p. 63).

Therefore, national memories and experiences within the collective of the former Yugoslav republics are fragmented. Political elites turned to politicization and revision of historical events - which was initially reflected through historio-

graphic publications, commemorative activities, and monuments. This sort of personality split is also reflected in street art. Accordingly, this paper intends to provide an answer to the question:

RQ2: *What functions does street art have in the processes of public remembrance in Belgrade, the former capital of Yugoslavia, and the current capital of Serbia?*

Before elaborating on the methodology and methods of data collection, it is necessary to refer to one more fact - that in almost all former Yugoslav republics, including Serbia, we can see the widespread logic of populism in the party system, but also in political life in general. In that case, we could define populism as "'interactive process in which both elites and masses participate, but in which the rules of the game are written by elites" (Archer, 2020, p. 479). As Luca Manucci (2020) has noted in his ruminations on the relationship between populism, collective memories, and political power – the legitimacy of populist parties and politicians is strictly determined by collective memories and collective remembrance. This is extremely relevant for our case since populist forces tend to divide society along the lines of those who are members of the society ("people") and those who, due to their largely different cultural, moral, religious, or economic behavior, are marked as invading alien corps ("enemies of the people "). Shortly put, populists drive their power from divisions among the community and between communities. Therefore, it is in their interest to make the public constantly relieve past traumas and conflicts through any possible means – street art included. This implies that the conflict between right-wing ideas of Serbianhood and the communistic idea of Yugoslavism has to remain reflected in murals and graffiti.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

Belgrade is a vibrant city – filled with many fascinating public art pieces (Arandelovic, 2020). Graffiti started showing up on its public walls back in the 1980s and gained popularity during the 1990s as resistance forms against the Slobodan Milošević regime (Dragi□ević-Šešić, 2001). As Dragi□ević-Šešić has noted, the massive students protest against war, the rigged results of local elections in November 1996, and the authoritarian regime has taken the form of Carnivalesque. "The street and the square became a kind of fair, in which symbolic artifacts of protest were sold. " (Dragi□ević-Šešić, 2001, p. 81). Graffiti alongside flyers and banners were one of the best-selling artefacts. Therefore, public art is a not-so-new phenomenon in the Serbian capital.

As it can be read from previous passages, initially, graffiti was used as a form of contentious political participation (Waldner & Dobratz, 2013; Tolonen, 2021) among Belgraders. The same cannot be said for murals – this form of public art started gaining popularity during the 2010s (Levitt, 2009). City authorities became interested in them alongside the revitalization of its industrial zone – as they present the ideal solution for embellishing former "grey belt "areas which are being turned into nightlife and urban-art hotspots (Krsmanovic, 2020). Interestingly, many of those contain environmental protection motifs, yet there is much potential left to be utilized to turn street art into eco-art in the complete sense of that term (Tunić, 2020). This is not so surprising, as sustainability has been a more frequent theme in street art worldwide (Xyntarianos-Tsiropinas, 2020). At last, murals seemed to the city officials as a relatively convenient way to pay homage to well-respected members of society.

Along with the popularization of murals in Belgrade, it seems that a proliferation of graffiti, which could be characterized as hate speech, took place simultaneously - without enough attention being paid to these processes. At one point, they became a tool with which hooligans and football fan groups, mainly ultra-nationalist members, settle accounts with each other. Over time, messages of bigotry towards minority groups became more frequent in the public space (Canakis, 2018), and city and state authorities acted rather sluggishly towards such phenomena, with a noticeable absence of sanctions against the perpetrators. Although – the question of the illegality conditions in street art is a rather complex one, as it is a matter of free speech (Chackal, 2016).

For this research, the initial time point of data collection was November 9, 2021, when an activist threw eggs at a mural dedicated to Ratko Mladić. The activist was detained by non-uniformed persons, who, at that moment, were secur-

ing the mural, which had been there for a few months. After the arrest, a" war on the walls" followed in the public space - through murals and graffiti. The author tried to follow the situation ethnographically from November 2021 to June 2022 - following the changes on the walls. Several murals were identified, around which there were frequent "fights," and the analysis was mainly focused on them. These are murals dedicated to the following personalities: Dr. Zoran □in□ić, Patriarch Pavle, and Ratko Mladić. With the exception of occasional field checks of the mentioned places of graffitology research (Velikonja, 2019), the author also followed media reports, as well as posts on various social networks, in order to gain as comprehensive a picture as possible of the patterns that are present in these "graffiti wars" in the public space. For better contextual understanding – it is crucial to mention that local, general and Presidential elections took place in April. Most votes were taken by the Serbian Progressive Party (sr. Srpska Napredna Stranka), which is considered to be a populist party.

In the next section, findings will be presented alongside the discussion. At first, multimodal analysis of chosen mural will be provided with consequent elaboration on symbolic "disruptive confrontations "happening on the particular site. For multimodal discourse analysis, several modes were taken into consideration. It is important to note that all chosen archaeological sites represent places depicting places of polysemiotic multimodal street artwork (see Stampouldis, Bitouni & Xyntarianos-Tsiropinas, 2018; Stampouldis, 2019). They (murals) are polysemiotic since they consist of both pictorial and verbal elements.

For this research, it is the author's decision to operationalize both murals and graffiti as works of art generated on a wall surface. Since they are fabricated in the public sphere – exteriors of private buildings are also part of the public sphere as they are visible to the whole community (see Molnár, 2017) – the author would argue that any form of street art becomes congenial with public political discourse.
Furthermore, it is necessary to remember that street art as a form of public transgressive semiotic communication combined with street signs (street names and landmarks) contributes to the formation of the urban Linguistic Landscape. Linguistic Landscape refers to the" language in the environment, words, and images displayed and exposed in public spaces" (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). This is particularly relevant for Belgrade street art and investigated cases because the Serbian language is digraphic. There are two scripts in use: Cyrillic and Latin. As Mladenov Jovanović (2018) has noted in the study on assertive discourse on the Cyrillic script in Serbia, "linguistic nationalism has proven to have been among the more relevant instances in discursive construction national identity and new languages, dubbed as 'administrative successors' of Serbo-Croatian. "(p. 611). In a recent ethnographical study, Canakis noted that one's ideological affiliation can be read based on one's choice of the script (Cyrillic or Latin) when it comes to the public street as a linguistic Landscape (Canakis, 2018). The choice of the Cyrillic alphabet is thus linked to Orthodoxy and nationalism, while the Latin alphabet is attributed chiefly to advocates of Yugoslav identity and Yugo-nostalgics. In certain instances, Latin script is presented as an "invasion "of the Others (Croats/Yugoslavs) which is in line with Mladenov Jovanović's findings. Additionally, besides the script's choice and the linguistic meaning of specific messages, the spatial-temporal context of murals and graffiti was considered in our study since they" provide clues about thoughts and ideologies behind desires that cannot be translated into the words" (Lowe & Ortman, 2020).

4. Findings and discussion

As previously emphasized in the text, several murals in the period of observation (November 2021-June 2022) became the battlefields on which opposing conceptions of Serbian identity were being weighed through constant graphitological modifications. The author focused on three figures whose public murals were fought over. Those figures are Ratko Mladić, Dr. Zoran □in□ić, and Patriarch Pavle.

4.1. Ratko Mladić

One of the "busiest" positions in the frequent propagation of graffiti (re-)modifications is the mural dedicated Ratko Mladić with accompanying message written on Cyrilic letter ''General, thanks to your mother''. This mural is located in the very heart of Belgrade, in the municipality of Vra□ar, on Njegoševa Street. The street is named after Petar II Petrović Njegoš, a renowned philosopher and poet. His literary works

are considered to be some of the essential pieces in Serbian and Montenegrin literature. Njegoš (1813-1851) penned epic verse work titled" The Mountain Wreath," describing the extermination of the Muslim converts in Montenegro at the beginning of the 18th century. Specific scholars observe this piece as a glorification of violence towards Muslims, arguing that it was one of the central literary pieces whose (re-)interpretations were helpful in the politicization of" collective memory" in Serbia during the 1980s, at the dawn of the war that befell Yugoslavia one decade after (see Adams & Halilovich, 2021; Posavljak, 2022). Furthermore, it is claimed to be among the main literary inspirations behind the ethnical cleansing of Muslims during wartime years in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cigar, 1994).

So, as mentioned earlier, after the ''eggs accident'', the media throughout the region and Europe reported on these events. A few days later, protests under the slogan "Mural must fall" (sr. Mural mora pasti) were held. The initial idea was to gather activists from various non-governmental organizations with citizens to remove the mural, but the police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs banned that gathering. Admittedly, the rally was held on Cvetni Trg, the small square in the immediate vicinity of the mural. A small group of citizens gathered nearby and chanted in support of the general Mladić. The entire event passed without any significant incidents, thanks to the police cordon between the opposing groups. Although, shortly after this ocassion ended, a series of banners appeared placed next to the mural, evoking the traumatic events for the Serbian population from the late 1990s (see figure 1), such as the NATO bombing or massacres over Serbian population in villages Bratunac and Kravice which preceded the Srebrenica massacre carried out by Bosnian government soldiers who were under the command of Naser Orić at the time. Admittedly, it would be essential to refer to the choice of a script for banners. Two banners have messages written in Cyrillic script ("Serbia without Kosovo and Metohija is the same as a man without a heart," "Goodbye Kindapovani Serbs, goodbye justice for Serbian and Kosmet victims") and they primarily relate to the events in Kosovo and Metohija during 1999 War. Based on the sentence construction and the choice of words and script (a eulogy for justice and Serbian victims), it can be concluded that these two messages are directly intended for the "domestic audience." Other banners are intended for the international community and the other nations that made up the Yugoslav collective. They accuse the international community of the selective distribution of justice and an unfair approach toward Serbian victims. Namely, they evoke the events around Kravica and Bratunac, but also the missing Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, who most likely ended up as victims of organ trafficking (see Bowden, 2013; Troude, 2018). Also, it seems that banners indirectly tell the regional communities that the Serbian community will not recognize the crimes committed against others until the recognition and confrontation with the past are reciprocated.

Two new murals appeared near the Mladić mural a few days after this episode. Initially, a mural dedicated to the First World War leader of the Serbian army, Živojin Mišić, appeared on the building across the street. Then, right next to the mural of Mladić, a mural dedicated to Draža Mihailović (see figure 2) appeared - the Chetnik commander Draža Mihailović with the lyrics of a Chetnik song, written in Cyrillic. As mentioned earlier, the Chetniks were guerilla fighters for the liberation of Yugoslavia and acted simultaneously as a partisan movement. However, we are talking about two groups of opposing ideological movements that, in parallel with the anti-fascist liberation struggle, also waged a civil war between themselves. The Chetniks were monarchists, and after the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, they were undesirable and characterized as traitors and collaborators with the German authorities. Draža Mihailović was rehabilitated in 2015. Apart from that, it is essential to point out that certain mass crimes committed by the Chetniks against Muslim lives during the Second World War are historically documented (see Sindbæk, 2009; Jareb, 2011), and his placement alongside General Mladić, therefore cannot be accidental. In the following months, both murals were repeatedly destroyed and restored - by different means (see figure 3).

Furthermore, regarding Ratko Mladić, it should be pointed out that during the observation period, dozens of graffiti inspired by Ratko Mladić appeared all over the city walls. Some depicted him as a criminal, while others praised him as a hero.

Figure 1. Mural dedicated to Ratko Mladić and accompanying banners. Source: https://www.dw.com/bs/veli%C4%8Danje-mladi%C4%87a-bi-se-moglo-ka%C5%BEnjavati-kad-bi-dr%C5%BEava-htjela/a-59813739

Figure 2. Murals dedicated to Ratko Mladić and Draža Mihailović. Private archive.

Figure 3. ”Coloured” murals dedicated to Ratko Mladić and Draža Mihailović. Source: https://mondo.rs/Info/Beograd/a1588776/Unisteni-murali-Ratku-Mladicu-i-Drazi-Mihailovicu.html

Figure 4. Ratko Mladić graffiti sprayed on the walls of First Belgrade Grammar School. Source: https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/foto-u-beogradu-prekrecen-skandalozan-grafit-posvecen-osudjenom-zlocincu-mladicu/

For this paper, we will refer to those written on the walls of the First Belgrade Gymnasium and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in February 2022. On one of the oldest Serbian high schools, messages like: “Coffee, sweet, Mladić Ratko” (sr. Kafa, slatko, Mladić Ratko) and “Mladić Ratko Grammar School” (sr. Gimnazija Ratko Mladić) were written (see figure 4) - in Cyrillic script. At first, it seems like they are messages of support - but considering the ironic tone and choice of locations, it seems that the intention is actually to put pressure on educational institutions and Serbian community. However, the disputed question remains: who wrote these messages? Video footage was never released, despite both buildings having installed video surveillance systems.

4.2. Dr. Zoran Đinđić

One of the locations where graffiti wars were apparent is the mural of Zoran Đinđić (see figure 5), which is located on the plateau in front of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, near the Student Square. This place has a special symbolic significance because it is the position from which the route of student protests against the regime of Slobodan Milošević began in the 1990s (see Dragićević-Šešić, 2001), among whose leaders was the late Dr. Zoran Đinđić. On the mural, a part of the famous quote “Look to the future... (you and I will meet there)” (sr. Gledajte u budućnost… tamo ćemo se sresti Vi i ja!) is written in Latin script (see Milic, 2010).

Zoran Đinđić is presented in the domestic historiographical discourse as a figure of the democratic and European future of Serbia - and is, therefore, a kind of antipode of the nationalist conception of Serbia Serbian identity. He, as Prime Minister, has strongly advocated pro-democratic reforms along with the integration of Serbia within the European Union. He is the one who has sent Milošević to stand trial in front of the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague, and alongside that, he has been marked as a transitional justice champion (Gordy, 2014). Nevertheless, for some, that meant that he was a traitor to national interests (Christensen, 2004). Months before his assassination, that label was attached to him in the domestic press. It could be argued that his death left a void in the domestic political culture (Samardžić, 2008),

Figure 5. Mural dedicated to Dr Zoran Đinđić. Private archive.

which is reflected, among other things, in the partial presentation of the quote on the future (sr." Gledajte u budućnost.."). Building the European future for Serbian citizens and democratic consolidation remained unfinished processes for Serbia. The void which was left after □in□ić's death was filled by populist forces, embodied in the current president, Aleksandar Vu□ić, who at one time declared himself Djin□ić's successor. However, years ahead the establishment of the currently ruling Serbian Progressive Party, as a radical, he renamed himself Zoran □in□ić Boulevard to Ratko Mladić Boulevard. (see video clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6q-4MEei7wI).

Admittedly, among the graffiti that were found under the mural of Zoran □in□ić, there was also one graffiti targeting both of them (Zoran □in□ić and Aleksandar Vu□ić) as traitors (sr. "Vu□ić and □in□ić – ista govna," eng. "Vu□ić and □in□ić are the same type of shit). Other graffiti marks the late □in□ić as an enemy of the working class, and one graffiti glorifies Ratko Mladić as a hero. One graffiti also asks a counter-question: "Maybe the problem is in you?" (sr. ''Možda je u vama problem?) Interestingly, this entire discussion is written in Cyrillic script, so this ''wall tête-à-tête parley'' is intended exclusively for domestic readers. It could also summarize the dialectic of transition processes and relations towards history and modernity in the Serbian society of the 21st century.

4.3. Patriarch Pavle

The third mural covered by this research is a mural dedicated to Patriarch Pavle (see figure 6), the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the period from 1990 to 2009. The mural itself was created on November 17, 2021, and the political movements/parties of the Democratic Party of Serbia and the Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia, a right-wing party, were signed as authors. Serbian flag colors were painted below the image of the late patriarch and the date of his birth and death, with a message written in Cyrillic script, "Let us be people/humans." (sr. Budimo ljudi), were included.

Together with Dr. Zoran □in□ić, the late patriarch played

Figure 6. Mural dedicated to Patriarch Pavle. Source: https://nova.rs/magazin/lifestyle/novi-mural-patrijarhu-pavlu-na-dorcolu-s-porukom-koja-treba-da-odjekne-foto/

Figure 7. Sprayed mural of Patriarch Pavle. Source: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/beograd/3951257/ostecen-mural-patrijarhu-pavlu-na-dorcolu-huligani-ostavili-skandaloznu-poruku-foto-video

an essential role in attempts to democratize Serbia. Namely, as an institution, the Serbian Orthodox Church is one of the most important political actors in the socio-political life of Serbia, even though it is a formally secular state (see Mylonas, 2003; Vukomanović, 2008). For centuries, when the Serbian people lived under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, it served as a kind of pivot and guardian of national identity and language (see Aleksov, 2010; Sotirović, 2011) and is, therefore, the emissary of enormous social capital. Furthermore, Patriarch Pavle himself played one of the critical roles in the overthrow of Milošević's authoritarian regime - among other things, student protests in the 1990s became mass thanks to his involvement and efforts. Additionally, as Veković Marko (2020) has noted in a comparative analysis of democratization processes in Christian Orthodox Europe, the Serbian Orthodox Church was not a supporter of Milošević's regime, despite the widespread belief. He reported ''that the Church often criticized the regime, asked for its resignation, participated in the demonstrations, and thus it labels the political role of the Church, a leading actor." (p. 63).

Many print and online media reported the mural's creation, conveying its original message on importance of being/acting human. However, the mural again became one of the main topics in the media when the image of Patriarch Paul was desecrated with pink spray (see picture 7) in June 2022. A few more words were added to the original message, and it changed its meaning to: "Let us be people and not Gojko". Besides that, on the side is written in Latin, "Gojko shithead" (sr. Gojko govnar). Gojko was the birth name of Patriarch Pavle, which he bore until he became a monk. The choice of spray color was not accidental - it was supposed to evoke citizens to the activities carried out by feminists in 2019 before the traditional feminist March protests. On that occasion, they left purple aprons with different feminist slogans on monuments of prominent male figures in Serbian history. Although they formally did not damage the monuments, among which was the monument to Patriarch Pavle, part of the public and the media characterized the mentioned action as vandalism. One of the few things objectionable to Patriarch Pavle is his

public advocacy of leading a traditional way of life in which women should stick to their traditional patriarchal roles. In this way, one gets the impression that the Patriarch and the Christian way of life are under attack from leftist forces. It seems that audience should remain thinking that you can't be both religious and feminist (see Devic, 1997) . In this way, the public discourse on the conflict between Yugoslav and Serbian identity is further strengthened.

5. Concluding Remarks

This study is part of an ongoing inquiry into the function of street art in the context of collective memory, remembrance and identity construction. Bearing in mind the thesis about the constitutive role of memory in self-image processes, the author tried to examine the expediency of murals and graffiti in the public political discourse of Belgrade, the capital of the Republic of Serbia and the former capital of Yugoslavia. Approaching the street walls as a vernacular space - one gets the impression that street art is, to some extent, expedient for populist forces for the needs of (re-)constitution and (re-) imagination of the collective past. Murals are used to maintain the Yugoslavia-Serbia dichotomy because, in this way, the citizens are kept imprisoned in the traumatic experiences and grievances they lived through during the 20th century. It is necessary to conduct more extensive research in other major cities of the former Yugoslavia and to conduct interviews with citizens as consumers and creators of urban art.

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