

DAY 28 — the shameless procession

SERBIA

The bus journey from Sarajevo to Belgrade takes eight hours. 4 hours spent crossing the misty mountains, spinning from one bend to another above the rivers, by fifteen degrees, until Zvornik. There, we passed the respective customs on one side and the other of the banks of the Drina. Again, four hours going north, first along dry or burned cornfields, and finally a highway that enters Belgrade.

Little time yet to see. We walked in the pedestrian center, bewildered by the contrast between the softness of Sarajevo, nestled between the hills, and the verticality of Belgrade, Slavic, and inhabited by the pulse of summer.

Songs attracted our attention in the distance. A polyphony that reminded us of the Bulgarian Orthodox churches. We approached. We could smell incense. The procession numbered several thousand people, who wave Serbian flags, hold crosses of all sizes, brandished icons. Among them are Orthodox priests, long beards, full black robes and veils. Parents accompanied by their children All sing. Of the liturgy apparently, and the national anthem too. Very few messages, or signs, and otherwise in a language we didn't understand.

It is afterwards that we found the information. On a website that lists events taking place in Belgrade. I quote in English: "*Liturgical procession for the salvation of the traditional family in contrast to the LGBTQ Euro pride*". This must indeed be held in the Serbian capital in September 2022. For the Serbian government, it constitutes an important element of communication to promote accession to the European Union.



DAY 29 — the possibilities of resistance

1. Kulturni centar GRAD

The GRAD cultural center in Belgrade is a hotspot for alternative circles.

It is a bar, first, added to a terrace under the trees, with upstairs, a hall of residence, where, for example, at the moment, painters are working. To give an idea, they organise tomorrow a language café, and the day after tomorrow, a screening of *M le Maudit* by Fritz Lang.

Since 2021, this place has been at the initiative of setting up a museum of the 90s, to counter political rhetoric and museums to the glory of Serbia and Yugoslavia. The place is due to open in 2025.

Here is their own presentation:

"The 1990s cast a long shadow over the former Yugoslav societies. The situation has not been stabilised and, in some areas, has even worsened. Regional political establishments seem unwilling or unable to deal with the legacy of the 1990s that keeps poisoning the present and threaten the future of the region. In the times of post-truth and national populisms conflicted narratives presented by various state and non-state actors create further confusion among citizens. Moreover, the younger generations are not fully aware of the tragic events of our recent history and therefore are extremely vulnerable to political influences of twisted, partial and biased narratives. Aiming to provide a much-needed space for discussion and learning about our region's recent and contemporary history, the project has an ambition to create a long-term, polyfunctional and multi-media platform that will effectively respond to the challenges of our turbulent times. empower the wider process of reconciliation and the building of regional and pan-European collaborations with a new and innovative methodology and practices, as well as to provide a space for discussion about and imagination of our common future."



2. Krokodil Engaging Words

Hidden in the middle of a staircase that goes up to the old town, again, a bar that also does food.

KroKodil defines itself as a platform dedicated to the defense of contemporary literature.

It organises events and publishes young Balkan writers. Its objective is to build bridges, to promote reconciliation and dialogue between the different countries formerly at war.

It is one of the pillars of the 2017 Declaration of the Common Language.

Here is the beginning: *"The answer to the question whether a common language is used in Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia is affirmative. This is a common standard language of the polycentric type – one spoken by several nations in several states, with recognisable variants, such as German, English, Arabic, French, Spanish, Portuguese and many others. This fact is corroborated by Štokavian as the common dialectal basis of the standard language, the ratio of same versus different in the language, and the consequent mutual comprehensibility. The use of four names for the standard variants – Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian – does not imply that these are four different languages."*

And then, by chance, on a newspaper extract slipped into the first issue of the magazine l'Infini in 1983, this quote from John Donne: *"No man is an island that forms a whole in itself; each is a piece of the continent, a part of the great land; if a clod is washed away by the sea, Europe is diminished, as much as if it were a mansion belonging to your family or to yourself; death of every man diminishes me, for I am involved in humanity."*



DAY 30 — a potential typology of nationalism

There are objects of investigation, -even if we suspect them, almost, we expect them-, we must not force them, nor provoke them, and remain as naive as possible in order to look at them as they will present themselves, by themselves, with their own words, their own face. By completing a tour of the Balkans outside the European Union via the city of Belgrade, it was necessary, at the very least, to recognise that we arrived loaded with images, sensations, informations, which converge in a direction, of which we are waiting to see if it will turn out to be a lure or a possible path.

A Russian who has just arrived in Belgrade explains in English to his Serbian friend how close they are, because Russian is the mother tongue of a line of which Serbian would be the last offspring. On one wall, a drawing glorifying Putin representing him sees his face covered in red paint, embellished with graffiti: *no to war*. Gazprom is, to this day, still the official sponsor of the Serbian men's national football team.

The existence of a nation often depends, or perhaps rather a political class, on the idea of an external (or internal) threat. If it is not present, we will look for it in History.



The Military Museum located in the fortress at the origin of the city of Belgrade unrolls nearly fifty rooms extremely provided with maps, models and weapons from the very first steps of Serbia until the first and second world wars. The country is presented to its advantage, it is expected.

Then comes Yugoslavia, Tito and a certain silent glorification. Last two pieces come to close the unfolding. The first testifies the presence of Serbs in the UN, and its Blue Helmets, sometimes in very important command positions until recently. The second proposes to stand in front of a television screen which films us and, like a contemporary application, adds a fighter pilot's helmet to our head, which triggers a very short voice-over, subtitled in English in very small, which explains how Serbia withstood the attack of NATO in 1999, and narrowly escaped ground invasion. Supporting maps, providing information on the air routes (and thus the corridors that certain countries have authorised or not) to come and shell Belgrade.

Nationalism needs a living memory. This NATO operation, still controversial today, took place during the Kosovo war, after the failure of negotiations and the refusal of evacuation corridors for NATO personnel. On April 23, 1999, planes bombed the Serbian Radio-Television, causing the death of 16 people. Some recent information attempts to demonstrate that NATO warned Serbia of this bombardment, which did not inform the personnel in time. Still, the building, cut in two, like a model, is still there, in the same state. 16 trees were planted in memory of the victims.

Nationalism needs palpable tensions. In a district of Belgrade appeared graffiti to the glory of Ratko Mladic, a month after his conviction. I tell it shortly. He is the general of the Serbian army in charge (in particular) of the siege of Sarajevo, and the command in charge of the genocide of Srebrenica. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia sentenced him to life imprisonment. The graffiti depicts his face against a background of the Serbian flag, along with a comment thanking his mother for giving birth to him. Quickly, a battle raged to try to erase it, in vain. The graffiti is protected by bands that threaten anyone who approaches it. This provocation has created emulation and sees other tags appearing mentioning him as a hero, in blue paint, in many other places.



Thank you Ana for guiding us so well around the city, and for hypothesising that with fair and decent economic conditions, no one would seek to be better than the other, to crush it to have its place, and therefore to fall back on a national identity. And thank you Heidi, and European Theater Convention, for allowing this fascinating encounter.

This painting comes from the exhibition of the Historical Museum of Serbia.
I would love to know who the artist is.
It's like an escape from war whose ravages we always carry behind us.



I end by absolutely recommending the film
The voice of Aïda by Jasmila Žbanić. To understand who
Ratko Mladic is, and to see what it means to be human.

NB: The term genocide is recognised by the International
Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.
Russia vetoed UN recognition.

DAY 31 — the future of ghosts

Who is there ? This is how the first scene of Hamlet begins. *Who is there ?* Bernardo asks.

It's not yet the ghost, but simply Francisco, that he doesn't recognise at first.

Unfold yourself! he replies.

In the Balkans, the present is inhabited by ghosts. They can remain completely hidden, or on the contrary, appear at every street corner, like memento mori or vanitas. Abstract painting already seems contained in reality.

It was in Sarajevo, in 1914, that a Serbian nationalist assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie Chotek. It was the start of the First World War, from which the Second ensued. You could say history repeats itself, I just believe it continues. What is not resolved after a conflict, like a ghost, comes to haunt time, inhabit the thoughts of beings, and transforms the future into the past.

I believe, I put forward the hypothesis, that Russia's war against Ukraine is seeing the emergence of ghosts from the past century to whom we had forgotten to speak.

Hamlet discovers the spectrum for the first time. He summons him to answer him and names him Hamlet, his father's name, which is also his name. The specter sends him a sign of recognition. The conversation can begin.

I finally dared to ask: can joining the European Union change things? Someone answered me: *no, on the contrary. The European Union needs stability, not regime change. As long as the economy is running, there is no risk of a crisis, it will always prefer the system in place*, be it nationalist or extreme right, rather than supporting alternatives.

There's a ghost in Europe called war, and which continues on its way, which passes from body to body, from country to country, as long as it has not been recognised for what it is: our ghost, ours.



So I close here by writing to the ghosts.

I saw the korzo of Pristina, the mosques, the bazaar, and the old swimming pool of the Grand Hotel.

I saw the green corridor and the center of narrative practices.

I saw the National Ballet rehearsal room and the grilled corn stalls.

I saw the huge fake old statues of Skopje, antiquity reinvented, and the stone bridge that separates the communities.

I saw the images of Donbass on top of the fortress.

I saw the moved eyes of those who struggle in Pristina and Tetovo so that children do not live as separate worlds.

I heard the singing of the minarets and the fantasy in F minor of Schubert rock the shores of Lake Ohrid.

I tasted the flavours of the Orient from Albania to Bosnia, without confusing anything, knowing how to differentiate between pistachio and walnut.

I endured the nationalist screams and the scorching sun, and my skin survived.

I took refuge in a very small Orthodox church when the storm broke.

I heard the testimonies, the explanations, the stories of many people with crossed destinies, and I kept their generosity very much in me.

I saw the tour of the Mouths of Kotor sink into the mountains to cross the border.

I saw the resurrected bridge and the stone hills turn into forests along the river.

I saw the bridge we left broken to remember, the bombed building still half standing.

I read the memories of the children and their faces thirty years later.

I drank so many kinds of coffees without paying for them.

I saw Maidan sitting in a cinema.

I heard Aida's voice and the tears flow.

I recognised in each landscape a part of who I am, a piece of the story of our lives.

Today ends the first set of our crossings for ENEMY.
I left traces day after day, confessions, signs of recognition,
which, I hope, will continue to haunt me throughout this creation.

Tomorrow, Croatia, and the reunion with our partner Pogon -
Zagrebački centar za nezavisnu kulturu i mlade, then Slovenia,
and the Mladi Levi Festival at the generous invitation of Bunker,
with all the partners of Stronger Peripheries.



Infinite thanks to all the organisations, places,
people who have helped, advised, spoken,
guided us during this full month, and in
particular, to end today, Catherine and Tanja,
in French!

PS: I borrowed my title from the latest issue
published by Dispozitiv Books and KAJET
Journal, an inexhaustible source of inspiration.



SERBIA

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ZONE -poème-







