



Beyond Humanities: Narrative Methods in Interdisciplinary Perspective

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This article looks at narrative approach as an integrative method of interpretation, applicable across disciplines. The emphasis is on basic methodological assumptions related to the use of the concept of narrative as an interpretative tool, with an emphasis on the role of closure in both structuring and interpreting given narratives. With the help of narrative method, three kinds of migrant narratives are analyzed: a collection of personal narratives of exiles from the former Yugoslavia; an essay on study of migration and exile, which is treated here as a piece of narrative; and a novel on exile.

The narrativist turn in humanities and social sciences

Concepts are not just tools. They raise the underlying issues of instrumentalism, realism, and nominalism, and the possibility of interaction between the analyst and the object. Precisely because they travel between ordinary words and condensed theories, concepts can trigger and facilitate reflection and debate on all levels of methodology in the humanities.

(Bal 2000, p. 29)

Interest in the nature of narrative and debates on its relevance far beyond frames of literature and its fictional worlds are very much the focus of contemporary theory, to the extent that some theorists like Martin Kreiswirth speak of a ‘narrative’, or rather ‘narrativist turn’, “that began about twenty-five years ago and is still gathering magnitude

and momentum today” (Kreiwirth 2000, 297-9)¹. Since the early decades of developments in theories of narrative, which focused mainly on literary texts, or rather, after Hayden White’s intervention in the field, on traditional humanistic disciplines, theoretical thinking on problems of narration went in very different directions, with the concept of narrative being used across disciplines, in diverse areas of knowledge. In recent years it became possible to say that the ‘narrative’ has become a kind of ‘buzzword’ that can be found in various kinds of scholarly texts. In many cases narrative is not used as a key concept with theoretical and methodological rigor, but rather as an indication of the author’s appreciation of the whole range of problems related to the recognition of the relevance narration, stories and narratives have in very different forms of knowledge production².

The way the term ‘narrative’ has recently become widespread, and used in very different contexts, makes it useful to remember the distinction that Mieke Bal makes between *concepts* and ordinary words, emphasizing the inherent power of concepts to ‘work as shorthand theories’ (Bal 2000, 23). The distinction is relevant here for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it is worth to keep it in mind when we speak about a term which is widely used, and with so little consensus about its possible meanings, as it is the case with *narrative*. On the other hand, it points to the methodological implications of the terminology we use. ‘Concepts are never simply descriptive, they are also programmatic and normative. Hence their use has specific effects’. At the same time, says Bal, terms are not stable. ‘Precisely because they travel between ordinary words and condensed theories, concepts can trigger and facilitate reflection and debate on all levels of methodology’. (Bal 2000, 28)

It is worth noting here that theory and methodology are traditionally closely related in literary studies, particularly within formalist approaches, which is the theoretical background from which narratology stems, with its systemic efforts to understand the nature of narrative and the rules that govern narration. And while early narratology was still very closely focused on literary texts, ‘[i]t was the legacy of French structuralism, more particular of Roland Barthes and Claude Bremond, to have emancipated narrative from literature and from fiction, and to have recognized it as a semiotic phenomenon that transcends disciplines and media.’ (*Encyclopedia*, 344) This

new understanding enabled the term to ‘travel’ more freely into other disciplines, beyond the scope not only of humanities, but also of social sciences.³ This shift is closely related with the main implications of the linguistic turn, and ongoing debates concerning the status of knowledge in a number of disciplines; interest in narratives is closely related with epistemological debates over status of knowledge in general, and the ways knowledge claims can be stated and transmitted.

Common grounds for a narrative method

The diversity of the approaches and uses of the concept of narrative does not speak only of interdisciplinary potential of the term; it also testifies to its inherent power of ‘propagation’. ‘[A] concept is adequate to the extent that it produces the effective organization of the phenomena rather than offering a mere projection of the ideas and presuppositions of its advocates’ (31), claims Bal. At the same time, through the processes of propagation, it gets to be continuously changed, and reevaluated. Still, the question remains if there is a common core behind the concept to be recognized and consciously re-addressed within various frameworks of its use. The other side of the same question is if continuous reassessment of this common core within new frameworks can also be seen as a way of protecting the concept and both its theoretical and methodological potentials against processes of diffusion.⁴ We will try to look for such a core, revisiting some basic theoretical assumptions concerning the concept of narrative, pointing to some of the basic methodological implications that the use of the concept carries within itself.

“Narrative” is what is left when belief in possibility of knowledge is eroded”, says Ryal. (In *Encyclopedia*, 344). In summing up possible definitions of the term, Ryal distinguishes between descriptive and more normative approaches to inquiry into the nature of narrative. The first line of inquiry, ‘aiming at description, asks: what does narrative *do* for human beings, the second, aiming at definition, tries to capture the distinctive features of narrative’ (ibid. 345). Within descriptive approaches, narrative is seen as a cognitive instrument, that is, ‘a fundamental way of organizing human experience and tool for constructing reality’; as ‘a particular mode of thinking’, as ‘a

vehicle of dominant ideologies and an instrument of power', as 'a repository of practical knowledge' (ibid. 345). As Ryal also points out in her text, there is a certain level of closeness between various descriptive views on narrative, many of them interested in the role narratives have in constituting and transmitting some form of knowledge. There is more disagreement when it comes to definitional approaches, with their intention of isolating the core distinguishing features of the concept. The range of possible positions may be summarized by two opposing views on the nature of narration: one which assumes the existence of anthropomorphic voice as pre-condition of a narrative (Genette, Prince, Rimmon-Kenan), and another which argues for the existence of narratives which are non-narrated (Chatman), or even non-verbal, as in the case of film narration (David Brodwell).

The definition of narrative given by Gerald Prince makes central several categories and related concepts that can also be found in most of the other well known definitions. In his view, narrative is '[t]he representation (as product and process), object and act, structure and structuration of one or more real or fictive *events* communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) *narrators* to one, two, or several (more or less overt) *narratees*.' (Prince 2003, 58). Since this is a definition from Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology*, emphasized terms should serve as an indication as to how the reader should pursue with further readings on the issue. At the same time, they can be taken here as an indication of the initial narrative frame for any narrative text, which includes at least three instances: *narrator(s) – event(s) – narratee(s)*. Keeping basically the same approach, Paul Copley's definition additionally puts an emphasis on two other strongly theorized elements that constitute a narrative. For him, narrative is '[a] movement from a start point to an end point, with digression, which involves the showing or telling of *story* events. Narrative is a *re*-presentation of events, and chiefly, *re*-presents space and time' (Copley, 237).

The emphasis on *event* being constitutive for both *story* and *narrative* raises an important question of relations between the two, since theoretically a looser use of the concept of *narrative* goes towards conflating it with *story*. The relation is not simple, and the emphasis differs within different narratological theories. Thus Genette keeps the distinction between *story* and *narrative* as two aspects of *narrating*, where *story*

(*histoire*) refers to the ‘totality of narrated events’ in fictional texts, or ‘the completed events’ in non-fictional texts, and *narrative* (*récit*) refers to ‘the discourse, oral or written, that narrates them’. For him, these two terms make sense only if they are related to the third one, *narration* (Genette 1988, 13). A similar structure is proposed by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, who replaces Genette’s terms *histoire*, *récit* and *narration* with the English terms *story*, *text* and *narration* as three aspects of narrative fiction, remaining, also like Genette, focused on literary texts. Gerald Prince sees the story as a content plane of the narrative, ‘the “what” of the narrative as opposed to its “how”’ (Prince 2003, 93). This is also the position of H. Porter Abbott, who sees the story as one of the two basic dimensions of the narrative, which, contrary to narrative discourse, is bound by the laws of time (Abbott, 195). Finally, in her analysis of narratives Mieke Bal proposes distinction between *text*, *story* and *fibula*. Text is ‘a finite, structured whole composed of language signs’; story is ‘a fibula that is presented in a certain manner’, and fabula is ‘a series of logically and chronologically related events that are caused or experienced by actors’. (Bal 1997, 5)

In all of these cases – and we have mentioned just a few definitions of the term – the distinction made between narrative and story points to some important assumptions of narrative theory that have to be taken into account in narrative analysis. The first one comes out of the fact that narrative discourses are always constructed, which necessarily implies certain, even minimal, level of intervention, that is, interpretation of events included in the story to be told.

As we have seen, narrative discourse is always ascribed to some narrative agent⁵, whose particular characteristics necessarily affect the way a concrete story would be told. If narrative theories are applied beyond the scope of literary studies, the problems of narrative voice(s) and its/their relations with the text have to be taken into account. Working in that direction, narratology has developed rather complicated, but very useful scheme of narrative levels and typology of narrative voices which take into account their relations both to the story and to the narration. The status of a narrative voice in the given text is closely related with a degree of its reliability, which can be of interest in very different kinds of texts, not only literary ones. Thus narrative theory differentiates between narrators who are themselves involved in the narrated events (homodiegetic

narrators), and those who remain outside the story (heterodiegetic narrators)⁶. Reliability of a narrator is also an important issue, and it depends on a number of relevant aspects of the text. Reliability of the narrator is directly related to the mode of narration, where in the traditional, literary-oriented narratology the first person narrators were by the rule considered to be less reliable than those who narrate in the third person. But the later development in narrative theory relativized this assumption to a high degree, since every narrator has a variety of strategies at hand to increase/decrease reliability of his/her story. Thus in her analysis of *focalization* as an inherent aspect of every narration Mieke Bal points to the strong manipulative effects it can have, turning seemingly objective, reliable narration into an overly biased one. (Bal 1997)

Variety of approaches and differences in use of specific terms concerning both story and narration prevents us from reviewing them more in detail, but a reader can visit any of the more comprehensive volumes on narrative theory to get a general idea (G enette, Chatman, Rimmon-Kennan, Bal, Lothe, Abbot). Just as an indication for the further readings, we can say that, apart from concepts related with the status of narrator and narrative levels (which include distinctions between author, implied author and narrator, as well as between narrate, implied reader and actual reader), for an interdisciplinary use of narrative method some other concepts like space, time, actors, characters, events and clusters, can be very useful.

In this case we are going to focus our attention on more general problems of interpretation and epistemological claims behind narrative forms of knowledge production. In his analysis of simple oral narratives, William Labov claims that every narrative performs two functions:

‘Narrative will be considered as one verbal technique for recapitulating experience – in particular, a technique of constructing narrative units that match the *temporal sequence* of that experience. Furthermore, we find that narrative that serves this function alone is abnormal: it may be considered empty or pointless narrative. Normally, narrative serves as additional function of personal interest, determined by a stimulus in the social context in which the narrative occurs. We therefore distinguish two functions of narrative: a) *referential* and b) *evaluative*.’ (Labov, 2)

It is obvious here that Labov relates evaluative function of any narrative with its communicational aspect – a narrative is told by a narrator to a narratee in a particular social context, which makes it impossible to be devoid of certain social values and judgments related to the narrated events. If we follow Labov’s statement, it is the evaluative function of narrative which cannot be disregarded in interpretation.

On this particular occasion, having in mind narratives on migration which are so deeply embedded in social context, we would like to give more space to some of the narratological categories that can help us recognize this evaluative function of narrative, and its relevance for interpretation of narrative’s meanings. One of these concepts is *closure*, and two others are mutually related concepts of *unnarrated* and *disnarrated*.

As emphasized by Abbott, closure should not be equated with the actual end of a narrative, although it often occurs towards the ending. “The term *closure* has to do with a broad range of expectation and uncertainties that arise during the course of a narrative and that part of us, at least, hopes to resolve, or close. Closure is therefore best understood as something we look for in narrative, a desire that authors understand and often expand considerable art to satisfy or to frustrate.” (Abbott, 53) In that sense, closure contributes to an interpretation of narrated events on the part of both the narrator and the reader.

It is worth noting here that Noël Carroll (2001) similarly theorizes narrative connection, and its relevance for narrative comprehension. Firstly, he claims that ‘a narrative connection obtains when 1) the discourse represents at least two events and/or states of affairs 2) in a globally forward-looking manner 3) concerning the career of at least one unified subject 4) where the temporal relations between the event and/or states of affairs are perspicuously ordered, and 5) where the earlier events in the sequence are at least causally necessary conditions for the causation of later events and/or states of affairs (or are contributions thereto).’ (Carroll, 32) On the basis of narrative connections, readers form their narrative anticipations and expectations. ‘Following a narrative involved understanding what is going on in the narrative. This is a matter of assimilating what is going on into a structure – of integrating earlier and later events into a structure. That structure is comprised of possibilities opened by earlier events in the discourse that function at least as causally necessary conditions. (...) Stated negatively, following a

narrative is a matter of not being confused when later events arrive in a narrative. Stated positively, following a narrative involves a sense of the direction of the narrative as it unfolds, and a sense of intelligibility or fitness when earlier events are conjoined with later events in the narrative.’ (Carroll, 39) In other words, narrative connections guide a reader through a narrative, enabling him/her to translate it into an intelligible, meaningful text. Integration of events into “a structure” inevitably gives it certain frame, and leads the reader towards a range of possible closures, if not towards one which is clearly recognizable.

Explaining the relevance of narrative connections for the intelligibility of narratives, Carroll uses the same example that Hayden White uses in his essay on narrativity (1981), that is, he opposes chronicle and ‘narrative proper’. I will use this obvious intertextual link to return to White’s text, where he emphasizes the importance of closure for the meaning of narrative. White is primarily concerned with historiography, explaining that readers tend to accept the illusion of objectivity produced by historical text. But in his view, ‘narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized “history”, has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, *authority*’. (White 1981, 12) This authority behind the narrative inevitably shapes its interpretation of described events (events which have already been interpreted through various processes of emplotment before they come to be a part of the given story; if we are talking about real events and not invented ones in literary texts, then the very process of remembrance of historical events represents a form of selection/interpretation). White reinforces this statement later in the text, when he speaks about the ‘moral meaning’ of closure, and of the readers’ demand for closure. For, in every narrative, it is closure which gives the final frame for the included interpretation of events. (20) In White’s view, it is particularly important for history, which aims for objectivity, that is for a high degree of reliability.

I would like to relate White’s claims on closure with another narrative instance discussed in greater detail by Gerald Prince: the category of the *unnarrated*.⁷ My intention here is to claim that in any given narrative some kind of closure is always implied, both on the part of the narrator and the reader. In some cases, this closure is explicit, while in other cases it remains in the domain of the unnarrated. Nevertheless,

unnarrated closure also has a significant impact on the possible readings of a given narrative.

What Prince calls *unnarrated* refers to ‘everything that *according to a given narrative* cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating – either because it transgresses a law (social, authorial, generic, formal), or because it defies the power of a particular narrator (or of any narrator), or because it falls below the so-called threshold of narratability (it is not sufficiently unusual or problematic: that is, interesting).’ (Prince 1992, 18). It is closely related with another closely related category that Prince is interested in, that of the *disnarrated*, which ‘covers all the events that *do not* happen though they could have and are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text.’ (Prince 1992, 30). Seen together, these two categories point to a wider frame of interpretation without openly challenging the format that the narrator visibly sets for his/her narrative. From this perspective, it becomes less important whether a narrative contains an explicate form of closure, for it is up to the reader (or a researcher in the role of either proper narratee, or a reader of the narrative) to look for implicit closure in the domain of unnarrated and/or disnarrated aspects of the text. At the same time, while performing this interpretative move, a narratee (and/or a reader) has to be extremely conscious of his/her own locatedness in a number of related stories which can affect the actual processes of interpretation. Thus a politics of location has to be strongly employed at this point, with self reflexive strategies on the side of the interpreter that avoid a misreading through the imposition of false closure.⁸ The same logic, of course, applies to the narrator, but it can be less obliging, since a narrator can have very different claims concerning his/her narrative (a piece of fantasy fiction will function differently than a statement before a jury in a criminal case, although both texts can be seen and interpreted as narratives).

In other words, in order to understand the process of interpretation that lies behind narration of a story, be it a literary or non-literary one, we have to take into account the narrated or non-narrated closure of that story, which will help us to understand in a more comprehensive way various aspects of the narrative agent’s involvement with the text. At the same time, it means that the narratee or reader, as interpreter, has to bring into the picture his/her own related narratives, with the aim of understanding if and how these

affect the process of interpretation. In research, methodological frameworks also function as a form of narrative, since they ultimately rest on some kind of implied 'story' about the given discipline and the ways it produces knowledge. The self-reflexivity of a researcher has also to include personal views and the implied narratives on which these views are based. For example, if a researcher is in the position of a narratee listening to migrant/exile stories from the Balkans in 1990s, he/she has to be aware not only of the closure that narrator is including or assuming in the narrative, but also of his/her own understanding of the whole situation regarding that very same war.

Feminist perspectives on narratology

The proposed model of narrative interpretation follows epistemological claims of feminist theory calling for situated knowledge. Following narrative theory, we can say here that situatedness of knowledge is produced through the intersection of narratives that are explicitly or implicitly employed in narrative production and reception. In this way, an interpretative context is brought into analysis without losing the central position of the narrative in interpretation.

In its main line of argumentation, the logic underlying previous part of this paper, and the proposed emphasis on the terms closure, nonnarrated and disnarrated as useful for narratological analysis, this article is going in similar direction pursued by feminist narratologists like Susan Sniader Lancer and Robyn Warhol, who wish to reconcile feminist criticism of the universal knowledge claims with objectivity claims of classical narratology and theoretical precision of a narrative interpretative model. In my view, as well as in Lancer's and in Warhol's views, particular importance is given to that which is marginalized or repressed in narratives, but turns out to be significant in their readings. A good example is Lancer's famous reading of an anonymous letter by a young woman, in which real meanings are concealed behind the dominant line of narration (Lancer, 9-15). Although Lancer does not use the concept of disnarrated, she actually shows how what is seemingly disnarrated in the text proves to be the real source of meaning.

Lancer's model of feminist narratology brings into focus the question of the narrative voice, and the narrative authority ascribed to it. Unlike Umberto Eco, who

strongly argues that narrative voice is by definition genderless (Eco, 1994), Lancer emphasizes the importance of gender as one of the ‘constituents of power’ that strongly influences both narration and the interpretation of narratives. “I maintain that both narrative structures and women’s writing are determined not by essential properties or isolated aesthetic imperatives but by complex and changing conventions that are themselves produced in and by relations of power that implicate writer, reader, and text. In modern Western societies during centuries of “print culture” with which I am concerned, these constituents of power must include, at the very least, race, gender, class, nationality, education, sexuality and marital status, interacting with and within a given social formation.’ (Lancer, 5-6) When it comes to the narrative itself, these relations of power affect the status of narrative voices, since they are involved in the production of authority ascribed to them. ‘In thus linking social identity and narrative form, I am postulating that the authority of a given voice or texts is produced from a conjunction of social and theoretical properties. Discursive authority (...) is produced interactively: it must therefore be characterized with respect to specific receiving communities. (...) At the same time, narrative authority is also constituted through (historically changing) textual strategies that even socially unauthorized writers can appropriate.’ (Lancer, 6-7) In this way, both textual and contextual elements are brought together in understanding how narratives are both produced and interpreted.

Using the concept of *authority*, Lancer develops a typology of narrative voices, or rather, three modes of narration, differentiating between the authorial, personal and communal voice. ‘Each mode represents not simply a set of technical distinctions but a particular kind of narrative consciousness and hence a particular nexus of powers, dangers, prohibitions and possibilities.’ (15) Lancer uses the ‘authorial voice’ to indicate situation which are ‘heterodiegetic, public, and potentially self-referential’, but also where a narratee/reader is ‘analogous to a reading audience’ (15-16). The ‘personal voice’ refers to narrators who are ‘self-consciously telling their own stories’; finally, the communal voice refers to a ‘spectrum of practices that articulate either a collective voice or a collective of voices that share narrative authority’, and which is primarily to be related to marginal and suppressed communities (21).

At the same time, taking into account the kind of narratee/reader assumed by the narrator, Lanser also differentiates between *private* and *public* voices. In the first, narration is oriented towards a fictional character, while in the second, the narratee/reader is assumed to be ‘outside’ fiction and is analogous with the historical reader. It is obvious that this distinction, although applied primarily to literature in Lanser’s case, works well for very different kinds of narrative discourses.

Without going into the details of Lanser’s typology and how it functions, it is important to recognize that every one of these categories includes as its constitutive element a space for negotiation of authority claims: that is, contextual, marginal, less visible interlocated nexi of power relations. Those will be partly examined in the case study, where Lanser’s categories will be used together with a proposed emphasis on closure and nonnarrated and disnarrated elements in the given texts.

Robyn Warhol, who does not only focus on women writers, argues for dissociation between the narrator’s gender and the author’s sex, which enables her to point out the cultural constructedness of ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ narrative discourses. Warhol emphasizes that ‘strategies of narrative perspective change over time’, depending on the literary period, but are also ‘influenced by [the] ideology that informs each text’. (Warhol, 17) Thus she points to the relevance of contextual interpretation of narratives, and the necessity of taking into account both text and context in an intersectional perspective. In her view, the association of certain techniques with either male or female texts is strongly dependent on historical context.

Following Warhol’s argument, it is possible in this context again to raise the related questions of what remains nonnarrated in the text due to the social/historical context as such, and/or because of the way author/narrator positions himself/herself within the given order; further, along the same line of argumentation, the question of how a reader/interpreter interprets both the narrative discourse in its singularity, and different aspects of social/cultural reality, into which narratives have to be integrated.

In this context, the ideology which informs each text, as Warhol sees it, provides a kind of implied closure for the narrated story, functioning as some kind of ‘intrinsic genre’. This is often a nonnarrated closure which works behind the text, affecting narrative choices as well as the overt claims of the narrative agent.

Narratives on the Balkan Wars, Migrant Perspectives

I will test some of my assumptions on several examples of narratives from the Balkan Wars of the 1990s, as they were told from the perspective of migrants. This perspective is highly relevant, since the Balkan wars have produced an enormous number of migrants. According to some estimates, there were some 4 million ‘displaced persons’, including internal (within the region of the former Yugoslavia) and external migrants⁹. I have decided to analyze here three different genres: a collection of migrant narratives, an ethnographic essay on narratives of exile, and a piece of fiction on exile. The first relates seemingly unmediated stories of young migrants from the former Yugoslavia in early 1994. The second is an ethnographic study of migrant stories which uses the concept of narrative as a main critical tool. The last is a piece of fiction which speaks of experiences in exile.

Children of Atlantis, Voices from the former Yugoslavia, edited by Zdenko Lešić, is a collection of personal experiences of exile related by students from the former Yugoslavia: applicants for financial support from the Soros Foundation to continue their studies abroad in 1994/95. This means that the statements of these students were made during the war by young people living all over the world, who had been displaced, and who wanted to continue some kind of normal life and pursue a program of education in their new environment.

The statements were given in response to two questions to which applicants to the Fund had to respond:

1. What were your reasons for leaving the former Yugoslavia and your reasons for wanting to continue your education abroad?
2. How do you perceive your future and the possibility of returning to your home country once you have completed your studies? (Lešić, 15)

The way questions were phrased obviously called for applicants to include some parts of their personal stories, that is, narratives of their own lives. At the same time, the given questions framed these application essays as a form of written interview, whereby

applicants as narrators addressed a specific addressee, that is, a reader to whom their personal narratives were told. Since the personal stories were told with a reason – to obtain a scholarship – it can be assumed that this particular function given to the text created a shared frame of references for both narrators and narratees, that is applicants and members of the Board giving the grants. In fact, these grants and the story of how they were institutionalized, told in the book by Celia Hawkesworth, one of the Board's members, can be seen as one of the narratives shared by both sides: a narrative of life in the former Yugoslavia and of its destruction. And although these texts are not historiographic works in the proper sense of the term, they speak of history in a way which brings them close to oral histories and memories.

There is a high level of similarity between the texts in the book, all of them telling essentially the same story: that of a young person who is forced by the war to leave his/her country and go into exile. In that sense, all the narratives have similar story line, structured around few basic moves. All of them are told in the first person, which means that a narrator is a part of *diegesis* (homodiegetic narration, Rimmon-Kenan; autodiegetic narrative, Lancer 1981, Prince 2003). Focalization is character-bound (Bal, 1994).

But the similarities between the narratives in the collection go beyond these initial narrative features of the texts. It is immediately observable that all of them share not only the same plot, but also similar attitudes towards the described events. In all of them, the initial situation is that of a peaceful life in the former country, which is as a rule described with nostalgia, and in a dominantly positive perspective. Then came the war as the main 'villain' in the story. Again, as a rule, the war is described as an agent of its own, as a faceless, non-human force which has destroyed all that was good in previous times. It is important to note here that almost none of the narrators in the collection blames a particular person, or - which is more important – a particular nation for the war. By the time these narratives were written, Yugoslavia did not exist any more; thus a feeling of loss, characteristic of any exile, is reinforced here by the recognition that there is to be no return to the country one left behind: this country no longer exists. This feeling also contributes to the almost utopian framing and representation of narrators' previous lives in the home country. Any problems they faced in their previous lives remain in the domain of the unnarrated, erased within a nostalgic retrospective gaze.¹⁰ Very often, an

indication of alternative (im)possibility - what if the war had never broken out? – appears as an undercurrent of these texts: a privileged, disnarrated story.

The central feature of all the narratives is the decision to leave as a response to the war, and subsequent threats to the narrator's way of life. The move is always seen as a kind of temporary solution, and it does not produce closure for the narrative, since exile is seen as a temporary state, a phase to live through in order to reach a real and often explicitly anticipated closure, which is returning back, 'home'. At this point, all the narratives, told at first in a retrospective mode, use prolepsis - turning towards some undefined future in which such a move would be possible. It is obvious that the genre of the narratives (applications for a stipend), and the questions asked by the grant-giving Board frame this kind of structure.

Nevertheless, there are some elements which are of importance, and cannot be reduced to these functional reasons. Wishing to go 'home', most of the applicants avoid specifying more closely what this 'home' might be. Toponyms cited are often particular cities (many of the exiles come from Sarajevo), or, less often, there is mention of some regions, but not the new states which were formed out of the home country. It is obvious that "home" is not necessarily located within the borders of new states, but rather seen more locally, as a concrete place where the narrators used to live, and where it would be eventually possible to live again. A careful effort to avoid identification with any particular national group, and/or to take sides in the war is visible in many of the narratives, and, apart from a general rejection of the war as an unnamed and de-personalized evil force, more specific political views on current events remain in the domain of the unnarrated. Very often, the only identification that narrators are willing to accept (apart from their feeling of belonging to their own family and peer group) is that of a "Yugoslav", which is not really a national identification (since Yugoslavs were never recognized as a nation by the former Yugoslav authorities), but rather a cultural and to a certain extent political position. In the given context, this form of identification carries with it an obvious non-nationalist legacy. Thus an implied closure— returning 'home' as a possible 'happy ending' – also implies not only the formal end of war atrocities, but also a re-created atmosphere of tolerance and civil life, with all its civil values.

It is also obvious that the 'grant application genre' brings a certain tension to bear upon the way most of the narratives are structured, since narrators have to justify their need for financial support. Hence in all the narratives, education is given a central importance, and the possibility to enroll on a chosen program of study appears as the first point of immediate closure. The genre also influences the way narrators represent their situation: on the one hand, they describe a range of problems related to life in exile, but on the other, they are obviously making an effort to represent themselves as positive, future-oriented persons, able to overcome any obstacles in their path. Thus, their personal experiences and sufferings remain underplayed, even unnarrated to a certain extent, since narrators do not want to represent themselves exclusively as victims of the war, but equally as agents potentially capable of exercising control over their lives, and even influencing, in a positive way, the future course of events in their former country. Thus helplessness related to war and exile is countered with the future project of positive development, not only for the applicant, but also for his/her 'people' and/or 'country' back home. But this expected closure is not related to any particular expected or wished for outcome of the war, but with a general condemnation of the very fact that it happened, and a wish to re-establish something of the previous order of things, not in a political or ideological sense, but in the domain of human relations. In that sense, there is a clear ethic of anti-war claims behind all of these narratives.

A similar position is held by the editor of the volume, professor Zdenko Lešić, who, at the time of his work on the volume, shared the identity of an exile along with the applicants. As the editor, he obviously wanted to present the applicants' narratives in an unmediated form. The idea was that these personal stories speak for themselves. However, his introduction reveals how deeply he sympathizes with the applicants and how much he wants to help them. It also reveals the importance of the ethical dimension underlying these narratives. In a way, through the process of editing the volume, Zdenko Lešić himself constructs a narrative on the war with a strong message, organizing the material in such a way as to tell a 'complete' story of exile: how one decides to leave home, and what happens after that. Thus the book is divided into two parts with their own 'subchapters': "Stories of War and Exile" and "Stories of Disillusionment, Despair and Hope", in which these dynamics are clearly presented. Apart from the fact that personal

narratives are taken from the application essays, which is already a level of intervention, there is an obvious effort to de-personalize them to a certain extent, in order to take away the possibility of ‘misreading’ the applicants’ statements on the basis of their eventual nationality or religious background. “As we listen to these voices, it should not matter whom they belong to, what part of the former Yugoslavia they come from, what nationality they are or what political convictions they hold”, say Lešić, and that is why all the texts are marked only with an initial, and an indication of the present location of the narrator. (Lešić, 17) Thus, a politics of location is pushed into the domain of the ‘unnarrated’, because, in the given context, it is assumed that it might take away the strength of arguments from the narrators.

But such editorial policy comes with a price. Together with the concealment of the national identities and places of origin of the applicants, other dimensions of personal identity are also suppressed: in particular gender identity. The applicants are all represented as ‘*human* voices’ (Lešić, 18), with an obvious insistence on the universality of the perspective that the book wants to support. But the narratives themselves, although written within the rather narrow frame of grant applications, reveal some gendered aspects of stories of exile, in particular when it comes to the first question asked: reasons for leaving the country. A number of applicants spoke of their fear of being drafted as the major reason to leave. They did not want to participate in the war that in their view did not have any sense nor justification, and consequently refused to perform their traditional masculine role of soldier. And while exiles who left to avoid immediate perils of the war (or were forced to leave by the enemy forces) were able to hope for a safe return after the war, military deserters were in much harder position, not knowing when and if they would be allowed to return without serious consequences.

The specificities of women’s positions are harder to detect within the given format, unless gender is openly referred to, but it is possible to assume that the applications as a whole might provide interesting material for a gender analysis.

To conclude, Lešić is also clearly aware that there is a shared feeling behind all the stories which is not simply a typical feeling of loss that any exile experiences. In the first place, he refers to an overtly present ‘Yugoslav’ identity, which many narrators in the volume clearly share. “Unlike others who found or will eventually find their place,

and happiness, in one of the new national states, these young people have indeed become the “children of Atlantis”, people without a home or homeland.’ (Lešić, 19) He emphasizes that it is those people whose feeling of identity has been threatened with the loss of the common country, and who are losing their past while their future is also in jeopardy. Thus, one of important aims of the collection was to give a voice to those who have found themselves in a position of a new subaltern group in Europe, deprived not only as individuals, but also as members of a non-existent national group from a ‘no-longer-existing’ country. In their voices, Lešić hears a message he want to support, and in that sense he inscribes the same closure to his book as his narrators, which is the wish to rebuild mutual understanding rather than setting up other institutional frame(s) as the precondition for returning ‘home’, whatever the name of ‘home’ might be. At the same time, in naming the book *Children of Atlantis*, Lešić is bringing into the story a clear recognition that then, at the time of writing, it is closure which most clearly belonged to the spaces of disnarrated – and it is an open question to which extent it still does.

My second case study is taken from the collection, *War, Exile and Everyday Life*, edited by Renata Jambrešić Kirin and Maja Povrzanović (1996). It is an article by Renata Jambrešić Kirin entitled “Narrating War and Exile Experiences”, which can be also seen as a self-reflective narrative on the position of a researcher who deals with migration studies. The article is interesting not only because Jambrešić Kirin herself is using the concept of narrative in her own research on displaced people, but because she is inscribing competing narratives in this piece.

Jambrešić Kirin speaks of herself as an ethnographer of everyday life, and reflects here upon the range of theoretical and practical problems that a researcher encounters while working on extremely sensitive topics, with a vulnerable population, and in specific social conditions. Her starting point is the understanding that ‘[e]thnography as a kind of cultural critique questions the position of culture in the war conditions as the realm within which cultural images of self, community, territory, as well as patriotism, solidarity and the attitudes towards the enemy are constructed.’ (Jambrešić Kirin, 63). She points to a number of competing discourses which participate in the construction of given cultural images, in particular those which bring together a historical perspective and the present moment with the aim of charging the present moment with definite, socially controlled

meanings. She also points to a *discourse of sacrifice* and *discourse of renewal* as being extremely influential discourses at work in the public sphere.

Jambrešić Kirin is also aware of the constructedness of her own position as a researcher. She speaks more generally of ‘theoretical and methodological ambiguities regarding the process of recording, presenting and analyzing any kind of *personal narratives* in folkloristics and ethnography’ (68), but also of very specific problems that an ethnographer who is working in the situations of high social tensions and conflicts have to face. And this is a point where competing narratives can be recognized in her essay. Speaking from narratological point of view, these two competing narratives are represented with two distinct voices recognizable in the text, one which belongs to Jambrešić Kirin as an individual researcher, and the other in which she is speaking as a representative of a larger group of people, gather around common task. In the first case, Jambrešić Kirin positions herself as a constructionist, following closely postmodern and postcolonial theories, as well as theories that deal with globalization processes and global/local relations. She is well aware of the implications of both the linguistic and narrativist turns. What is particularly important here is her alliance with feminist theory and her gender-conscious approach to the problems of exile and displacement. At the same time, there is another voice recognizable in the text, which supposedly does not belong only to Jambrešić Kirin herself, but to a larger group of people with whom she identifies. This is a group of professionals who produce ‘new ethnography’ in Croatia and who are associated with the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research in Zagreb (63-64). Jambrešić Kirin is careful to underline the scientific character of the group, and at the same time to emphasize the group’s independence from government influence and policies (64). But this is also a group of researchers who happen to work in very particular times, when Croatia is under attack, and the war is going on in the country. This is a situation which brings forward another kind of legitimation. Thus, in the first part of the article, Jambrešić Kirin speaks of ‘Croatian ethnography’ and the specific position of the ‘Croatian ethnographer’ in particular conditions of war and in the post-war times of the early 1990s. The following passage is indicative in this sense:

‘Croatian ethnographers try to take part in contemporary research on identity as conjunctural not essential. They also try to point out that shared feelings of disorientation,

placelessness, and strategies of imagining the lost home(land) by migrants or uprooted individuals existing in every modern society are neither of the same origin nor of the same kind as the identity crisis of people who suffered the forced exile, mass resettlement, and deportation. For them, the potential political critique of ethnography is manifested as the argumentation of the importance of the locale in shaping the displaced persons' identity in the world of "lost certainties" – where (inter)national interests are often prone to misuse of the feelings of homeless people – but, at the same time, as a warning that the desired return, first of all, depends on political stability, interethnic tolerance and economic growth of Croatia.' (Jambrešić Kirin, 64)

I am quoting this rather long passage because it indicates the way in which 'collective voice' of 'Croatian ethnographers' is introduced in the text, and also points to two distinct and sometimes conflicting positions that Jambrešić Kirin takes up in her article. As an individual researcher, she promotes a complex view on identities (which implies here all the other characterizations of her position we have already pointed out), but as an individual who lives in Croatia in 1990s she feels a need to take a clear political stance in her professional work as well. This move is realized through her professional identification with 'Croatian ethnography', a group identity in which national identity merges with professional identity. Thus, the collective 'we' that appears in the first part of the article is used here to bring together two rather distinct positions: a need to articulate the researcher's personal position, with regards to her theoretical and methodological views; and her feeling of belonging to a collectivity which gives additional legitimation to her views on an actual social situation.

Why distinguish between these two positions as two distinct narratives, and not as two views taken by the researcher, or two aspects of our multiple identities? Simply, because these two positions imply somewhat different narratives on the war and exile, with the emphasis on different narrative connections in interpreting the war (hi)story, with somewhat different closures as well. On the one hand, the theoretical and methodological framework that Jambrešić Kirin sets out for her work suggests an understanding that *all* social categories and values are constructed. This also necessarily implies a complex understanding of the war (as it would be the case with any other complex social situation), the one which has to look at the events contextually, and to

question simple distinctions. Here, both group and personal identities are seen as complex and multiple, and gender perspective is of particular importance as a category which goes beyond and against some other immediate group identifications. Hence, despite social pressure characteristic for war as an excessive situation to overtake national identity as an overarching category that includes and to a great extent overwrites all the others, a researcher keeps more complex view on social relations and identity politics.

This is, in fact, the first line of inquiry that Jambrešić Kirin establishes for herself, and in a number of places in her article such a perspective is clearly indicated. In describing her own research on the testimonies of exiled and displaced people, she underlines her interest in *personal* experiences, and not in collective aspects of war migrations. Later on, she wants to help displaced people to get their voice back, in order to help them heal the traumatic experiences they have lived through. (67-69). In the case of the former Yugoslav wars – in this case the war in Croatia – this brings again a contextual perspective, since exiles from these particular wars have also a lot to share, among themselves, and with other exiles who suffered from a violent treatment anywhere else.

Still, this complex view fails to be fully developed in the article since there is also a competing narrative, that of a more simplified, group-identity covered story which puts emphasis only on Croatian victimization and suffering in the war. At this point, Jambrešić Kirin's article has also to be read contextually,¹¹ since it was written at a time when certain assumptions about the war and its outcomes were not easily questioned in public discourses¹². In that sense, Jambrešić Kirin's article has an important critical potential since it speaks of work of ideology and of political pressure in rewriting both personal and collective histories, but at the same time it fails to develop in quite a consistent way its own assumptions. A narrative behind the collective 'we' that is included in the article seems still to be in accordance with the official interpretation of a just battle in which sides are clear and where more complex view on one's own position is not needed.

Again, neither this second narrative is clearly established, but rather implied and indicated through significant details; the collective voice as it is heard in the article is just one of its indications. Focalization is the other narratological concept that can help us to

recognize the presence of this other, more ‘official’ narrative. Namely, when it comes to concrete examples brought in the article, it is obvious that they are selected/viewed from the Croatian side only. They speak of aggressive acts and ideological repression carried out by the enemy, that is, by the Serbians, while the same practices on the side of local institutions of power, although hinted at in a more general sense, are indicatively missing in a form of concrete case. Material and examples given in the endnotes and a discussion of ideological reinterpretations of more distant historical events are indicative in that sense. For example, Jambrešić Kirin claims that she wants to ‘analyze exile testimonies and life stories i.e., how they reinterpret the (family) history in light of the recent traumatic experience,’ and her finding is that ‘the coexistence and peace of the last fifty years seems to acquire less importance than the centuries long national and family histories of economic and forced migrations, political repression, wars and human suffering.’ (65) But if this is uncritically applied to the war in Croatia of 1990s, the picture can be easily blurred, since the histories evoked here go far beyond the reasons and scope of the last war, and such a perspective also tends to ‘rewrite’ more distant history in accordance with recent events.¹³

Two competing narratives on the war, as they are indicated here, also influence gender perspective in the article, to which a special section is devoted with a subtitle ‘The Role of Female Testimonies in Public History and Publicity’. Due to the limited scope of Jambrešić Kirin’s article, and subsequently of that subchapter, it is understandable that it offers rather simplified insight into the problem. But the fact that gender perspective is present in an early study of war exiles from 1990s is primarily important here. The author also comes to indicative conclusions concerning participation of women in discourses on war and exile. She notices an absence of women’s voices, as well as of the voices from other marginalized groups from the written testimonial literature (74), which means that women’s voices are easier to find in form of interviews and oral histories.

It is indicative that Jambrešić Kirin works with a simple distinction between ‘men’ and ‘women’, which is not problematized at any level. Within such a frame, she finds significant differences between male and female representations of the past experiences and the sufferings to which they were exposed. According to her findings, ‘[t]he narrative rendering of male and female experiences differs with respect to the basic

semantic guideline – a conception of one’s suffering as a personal sacrifice for the benefit of the community.’ (76) It is in the male testimonies that personal sufferings are given a sense through relating them to a higher cause; also, men tend more often to reconstruct their remembrances in an organized way, following some precise time-line, and putting an effort to give some support to their evidence (‘itemizing data about deeds, places and people, as well as data from the mass media’, p. 76) Women’s remembrances, on the other hand, seem to be more fragmented and devoid of external justification of the fight for the right cause.

Again, in commenting Jambrešić Kirin’s views on these matters we have to take into account the time when the article was written. A rather simple division between men and women can be seen as a legacy of an early phase in the development of feminist theory, which the author considers to be a useful framework for the given situation. Nevertheless, there are problems with such a decision, even if we do not question it from the point of view of more recent theories of difference. Jambrešić Kirin sees the main reason for fragmented structure of women’s remembrances primarily ‘in the experiences of the past as already disintegrated’ (76). On the one hand, it is because of the actual social pressure to avoid any positive reference to the socialist past, which is immediately negatively labeled as an act of ‘Yugo-nostalgia’; but on the other hand it also stems from women’s own critical insight into troubled sides of life in the pre-war country.

In this explanation it is once again visible in this article that individual experiences end up being interpreted with a help of more general categories that foreground group identifications. At the same time, the social and the historical tend to overwrite contextual and generic aspects of the given problem. Thus, a possible relation between a more fragmented form of women’s remembrances with a medium (oral testimonies as opposed to written ones, where it is easier to acquire higher level of control over the text), and/or genre (traditional autobiography as a masculine genre where personal life is represented as a role model for the readers as opposed to women’s autobiographies which bring into focus relevance of private sphere and women’s lived experience) are not discussed.

It is very difficult to make generalizations here, and translate in a simplified way all these conclusions back into the framework of competing narratives in Jambrešić

Kirin's article. But if we keep this framework in mind while reading it, it becomes visible that a number of interpretative decisions on larger or smaller scale were made in regards with these two narratives, which in this particular case form very specific interpretative context to be taken into account. In recognizing that, it is also important to distinguish between different narrative voices which merge in the article, and which can be differentiated with a help of Lancer's typology. In a way, Jambrešić Kirin merges here all two types of narrative voices indicated by Lancer. Firstly, when she speaks in the name of her discipline, as an ethnographer only, she uses authorial voice, and speaks as a heterodiegetic narrator, out and above the story to be told. At the same time, when she speaks about herself as a concrete researcher, she takes the position of a homodiegetic narrator, one who speaks in a personal voice, and who is intellectually and emotionally involved in her research. Lancer emphasizes that discursive authority is produced interactively, and that it depends upon receiving communities. In this case, it seems that the article intentionally addresses different receiving communities, both at home and abroad, and this multiple narratees with their different narrative expectations also contribute to the specific structure of the text, as it is described here.

My final example is taken from literature. I want to look at a novel by Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998), which speaks of exile and displacement.

If we want to discuss the problem of the closure and its importance for reading narratives, the case of novel – or for that matter, any literary text - is obviously more complex than in case of other kinds of narratives for a simple reason that literature tends to avoid straightforward explanations, and strives towards 'unbound semiosis'. Bakhtin's dialogic theory, or Umberto Eco's theory of the open work of art are based on this particular feature of literary texts, and in both theories it is the openness of textual meanings which is cherished as the most important literary quality.

In his study *The Sense of an Ending*, Frenk Kermode speaks of the 'skepticism of clerisy' that 'operates in the person of the reader as a demand for constantly changing, constantly more subtle, relationship between a fiction and the paradigms' (Keromode, 24). We all expect an ending while reading the books, '[b]ut unless we are extremely naïve, as some apocalyptic sects still are, we do not ask that they progress towards that

end precisely as we have been given to believe. In fact, we should expect only the most trivial work to conform to pre-existent types.’ (Kermode, 23-4).

Still, even the most open texts suggest in the end a range of possible readings, where some of them will seem to us more relevant than the others. Our readings are also always contextual, which is of importance for the choices we make within the range of these possibilities. In this case, the emphasis will be on the way the topic is represented from a narrative point of view. We will try to indicate some important aspects of the two novels, pointing at the similarities, but also to the differences between them, since they are structured in rather different ways.

The Museum of Unconditional Surrender has an open, highly fragmented structure, which in itself mimes the fragmented existence of displaced people. It intentionally minimizes the role of narrative connections between different parts of the novel, claiming that these connections will establish themselves later, ‘of their own accord’. The book thus represents itself a kind of ‘container’ of various stories which are all in some way dealing with issues of memory and displacement. Narrated events are not framed as primarily fictional, although the book is labeled as a novel, and the voice of the narrator is close to the voice of the author to the extent that the book can be looked at as a kind of autobiographical narrative. But in a short preface to the book, which is highly relevant for its reading, the author, in a somewhat ambiguous move, precludes such a reading as improper: ‘And one more thing: the question as to whether this novel is autobiographical might at some hypothetical moment be of concern to the police, but not to the reader.’ (1)

It is important here that the author does not deny the presence of autobiographical elements in the novel, but denies the relevance of their immediate recognition for the reading. Still, it is hard to avoid relating to the biography of the author a bitterly ironic invocation of the ‘police’ in the quoted sentence, since the novel was written at the times when Ugrešić became a voluntary exile after an intense media lynching. On the other hand, in the context of the novel as a narrative on displacement and exile, evocation of the ‘police’ in the quoted sentence can obviously refer to exhausting, complicated, and often rather humiliating if not painful procedures that exiles have to undergo in order to obtain state legitimation in their new environments.

The same mechanism of hovering between factual and fictional is characteristic of the whole book. The author obviously does not want to sign ‘autobiographical contract’ (Lejeune), but also does not want to claim it as ‘mere’ fiction. The Balkan wars, with their millions of exiles, are too strongly present in the novel.

Using Lancer’s terminology, we can say that Ugrešić uses here personal voice as her primary narrative tool. On the first level, narrative voice is extradiegetic, (Rimmon-Kenan); it is the voice of the author-narrator (Chatman), but the loose narrative structure leaves a lot of space for the second level, that is, diegetic narrative voices to appear, like in “Family Museum”, where mother’s voice tells her own story in a form of a diary. Significantly enough, what the mother manages to write down/tell about herself is just a chronicle, a record of her everyday life which fails to become a narrative of one’s life. Actually, it misses narrative connections and a closure to give it some kind of coherence. This is added to the mother’s story by her daughter, who uses her mother’s diary in her own narrative on exile. This diary is again used in an ambiguous way. It is a form of giving a voice to those who are marginalized and displaced (the mother is represented as an internal exile, a person who has a history of migration, who has experiences identity changes and who finally lost any sense of belonging and locatedness with the war); on the other hand, mother’s diary also speaks of difficulties that marginalized people can have in obtaining a voice in the public space, for it is not enough to get a pen a start writing. Mother’s diary exhaust itself in notes on everyday life, series of everyday trivialities, remaining mute in regards to articulation of real problems and worries.

But it is also important to note here that a personal voice of the primary narrator in a number of places in the novel merges with a communal voice of exiled and displaced people, who are subalterns of the modern times. Thus, Spivak’s question: who can speak for subalterns appears to be highly relevant here. Dubravka Ugrešić is too good as a writer to attempt to speak *for* exiles. Rather, she opens a space for experiences of displacement to be inscribed in the loose structure of her narrative. A number of very different figures appear in her novel, all of them speaking of their feelings of loss, inadequacy, displacement. As a rule, they are women who struggle with everyday life in very different conditions and with personal ambitions, in a failed attempt to organize their lives in meaningful ways. Suggestively, the male figures that appear in the novel tend to

be gender-benders, like Fred, or gender-performers like Antonio, or those who dwell in some kind of border space. A gallery of characters includes several figures of artists, both male and female, who work on the margins of the society, thus bringing together issues of forced migration, gender marginalization, and artistic practice as a form socially marginalized activity. Thus gender identity intersects with exile identity, and border spaces of displacements of any kind are always seen as highly gendered.

The novel speaks of memory as the only retreat exiled and displaced people can have, but it strongly problematizes the ability of memory to perform this task. In the same way as mother's diary fails to represent her real life and real feelings, memory fails to contain 'true' and reliable data. In the end, it is tied up with some material, factual traces of the past event, 'proof' that what we remember has actually happened. In the first place, such a role is given to the photographs, which usually serve as 'containers' of our memories. But they are far from truthful and reliable containers, since they are also re-read and re-interpreted depending on the given context.

'A photograph is a reduction of the endless and unmanageable world to a little rectangle. A photograph is our measure of the world. A photograph is also a memory. Remembering means reducing the world to little rectangles. Arranging the little rectangles in an album is autobiography. (...)

Both the album and autobiography are by their very nature amateur activities, doomed from the outset to failure and second-rateness. That is, the very act of arranging pictures in an album is dictated by our unconscious desire to show life in all its variety, and as a consequence life is reduced to a series of dead fragments. Autobiography has similar problems in the technology of remembering; it is concerned with what once was, and the trouble is that what was once is being recorded by someone who is now.' (Ugrešić, 30-31)

A number of significant indications are given here which concern the whole of the book. Here, we can find possible artistic reasons why Ugrešić precludes the reading of her book as an autobiography, since in her views it would be simplification of her narrative, its translation into a 'verbal album', a series of 'dead fragments'. Another problem raised here concerns the work of memory, which is always problematic, because past events are always mediated to a certain extent, even when one is telling one's own

story. That is why Ugrešić in this novel consciously replaces photographs as containers of memory with photographs as pre-texts for inscription of new stories. Among the personal photographs that author-narrator carries with herself in her displacements, one has particular importance, that of three unknown women in swimming costumes, taken sometimes at the beginning of the previous century at the river Pakra. It is a photograph she looks at most often, and in it she finds very relevant meanings for herself. The photograph is reproduced at the cover page of the novel as its textual part, and it contributes to the problematization of the border between fictional and factual in the novel. Being factual in its visuality, it is at the same time speaking of failure of memory and of trust in its material traces.

The fragmented structure of *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* speaks also of this mistrust in memory, and of the impossibility of giving coherence to any personal narrative of displacement without turning it forcefully into an ‘album’ which consists of ‘dead fragments’. Thus the novel is intentionally constructed as a *scriptible* text (Barthes), a narrative which lends itself to various re-interpretations of its readers. In a way, a whole novel is like a picture of three unknown women: it is not important who they were, but the fact that they *were*, and that the traces of their lives can generate meaningful stories for the readers of the picture that is left behind them. A closure of this novel is in a way inscribed before it starts – it is the act of exile, the act of displacement which inscribes itself as the central organizing principle of lives of all the characters, folding back onto the beginning of all the narratives, but also projecting itself into the future, and marking all its possible outcomes. It is setting the frame of the album, indicating the borders of each photograph in it. The reader is invited to look carefully at the pictures and to see how much of his own narrative is inscribed in it

What remains unnarrated in *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* is exactly that which keeps the novel in the area of in-betweenness: in between facts and fiction, a novel and autobiography, an open and yet closed structure, a mistrust in memory which is still to be reverted to. May be it is this *in-betweenness* in all its different forms that reproduces most closely the state of exile.

Instead of a conclusion

Following my own theoretical assumptions, as a self-reflective researcher, it would be proper for me to introduce here also my own perspective on the topic of the narratives analyzed here. I am a feminist scholar coming originally from the former Yugoslavia. I am also a displaced person of a kind and have, in the last fifteen years, lived in different places and different countries. My decisions to move were personal; I was not threatened nor forced to leave any of the places that I was attached to, but my decisions to move were definitely war-related. But details of my personal story are not relevant here, apart from the fact that I share with exiles a feeling of uprootedness and of loss. As it is the case with Jambrešić Kirin, I am also bringing here two distinct voices, that of a heterodiegetic narrator, a disinterested researcher who discusses theoretical and methodological problems of narrative theory and narrative method in an authorial voice, indicated here in an impersonal 'we'. At the same time, while reading my examples, I am obviously acting also as a homodiegetic narrator, involved in the story of migration myself, a researcher who can easily change her position with her researched subjects, who brings her own lived experience in her readings and who uses personal voice to argue for validity of her readings. And I share nostalgia for the time when Yugoslav identity (although never simple) could be claimed without all the baggage of misunderstandings, hatred and loss in human lives that was attached to it in the last wars; and without misappropriation of its name by those who have actually helped in its destruction. In that sense, I would like to contribute to a lasting, rational and self-reflective discussion about the meaning of this cultural rather than national identity for a generation of former Yugoslav citizens to which I do belong. A set of historical circumstances keeps on pushing this debate into the domain of the disnarrated. The question which remains open for me is whether it was possible to avoid the war, and how such an outcome could have been facilitated. And of course, how this whole history was, and continues to be gendered. This is a part of narrative and an unnarrated closure that I bring to my readings of the given examples.

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¹ Two among numerous recent publications on issues of narrative give evidence of this interest, are Rutledge Encyclopedia of narrative theory, published in 2005, and 4 volumes collection of studies in narrative methods published by SAGE in 2006.

² It is exactly the situation that Gérard Genette is arguing against, when he advises that both the term *narratology* and the word *narrative* should be used in a strict sense, referring to a mode of narration, while he is at the same time recognizing that the term *narrative* is being ‘*threatened by inflation*’ (Genette, 1988, 16-7).

³ Thus Kreiswirth points to the importance the concept of narrative is getting in medicine, for example (1995). For different uses of the term across disciplines see Atkinson (2006).

⁴ ‘“Diffusion’ is the result of an unwarranted and casual “application” of concepts. Application in this case entails using concepts as labels that neither explain nor specify, but only name. Such labeling goes on when a concept emerges as fashionable, without the search for new meaning that ought to accompany its employment taking place.’ (Bal 2000, 33)

⁵ There are debates whether it is possible to have ‘non-narrated’ texts (Chatman), but other theorists (Rimmon-Kenan) oppose this view.

⁶ More detailed typologies of narrative levels and narrative voices can be found in Genette, 1971; Rimmon-Kenan; Chatman; Bal, 1997.

⁷ It is interesting to note here that Prince is not interested in closure as a narrative category, and that he even does not include it in his *Dictionary of Narratology*.

⁸ Post-colonial interpretations of the role of narratives in constructing both the traditional orientalist position and post-colonial responses to that situation are indicative for these processes.

⁹ More detailed information can be found in Jambrešić Kirin and Povržanović, p. 3-4.

¹⁰ It is relevant to note here that many former Yugoslavs – and in that sense this book is not an exception - refer to their previous lives as the time of material abundance, which is only partly a nostalgic re-writing of the part-time. A combination of protective social policies (job security, paid leaves, medical care, free schooling, etc.) with not so low incomes and open borders made everyday life in the former country quite comfortable for a large number of its inhabitants.

¹¹ The article was written for an international conference “War, Exile, Everyday Life” held in Zagreb from March 30th to April 2, 1996. (Jambrešić Kirin and Povržanović, p. ix)

¹² This refers primarily to a general understanding of Croatia as a victim of the war who only fought for a just cause, which in many cases precluded more complex debates over its role in the wars (Bosnia included), and the strategies used to fight it.

¹³ It is worth mentioning here that the war in Croatia was actually the first one in modern history when Serbians and Croatians were directly opposed under their own national flags.