Under the Same Moon: a novel

A HOME LESS FRIENDLY: EXPLORING WAR TRAUMA AMONG THE 1990s SERBIAN EMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED KINGDOM USING CREATIVE WRITING AS RESEARCH

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A thesis submitted to the University of Gloucestershire in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD in Creative Writing in the School of Creatives

October 2023

Wordcount: 119653

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ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes that there is a type of war trauma that can be sustained by members of an ethnic group even if they have not had a first-hand experience of war. If they emigrate to a country where they become subject to a hostile political climate and where the host country is engaged in a military conflict with their country of origin, they can suffer some of the same mental health and identity issues which have been observed in trauma directly caused by the experience of war and displacement. The thesis also proposes that Creative Writing as an academic discipline is well positioned to examine such a trauma, in particular through autoethnography as a research method.

The novel focuses on the story of Jelena, a Serbian émigré to London who has been living there since her teenage years. We meet her on the cusp of middle age, with a successful life and a beautiful family. But under the surface, things are strained: her wheelchair-bound husband, an academic from a wealthy old family, has controlling tendencies. Her relationship with her teenage daughter is on hostile terms, and her younger child – her precious, prematurely born son Oli – has autism. To top it all, Jelena's small business is about to fold and, while it won't make any difference to the family's finances, it's another blow to who Jelena feels she is. When Mladen, an old flame she's not seen for sixteen years, turns up at her doorstep, Jelena knows that trouble has found her. After Mladen calls in an old debt, Jelena is caught between past loyalties and her family's safety. To find out the truth and recover the relationship with her daughter, she will have to return to Serbia and re-discover the person she once used to be.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed:…….. Date: ……16 October 2023…….

DOI: 10.46289/FZDR5714

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will forever be indebted to Dr Michael Johnstone and Dr Beatrice Hitchman for their expertise, support and encouragement in the development of my novel. I am also deeply thankful to Professor Melanie Ilic, who patiently waded through my early exegesis attempts and remained confident in my ability to complete this project, even when I doubted that myself.

This work is dedicated to my children and to my family in Serbia.

A HOME LESS FRIENDLY:

EXPLORING WAR TRAUMA AMONG THE 1990s

SERBIAN EMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

USING CREATIVE WRITING AS RESEARCH

POSITIONALITY STATEMENT:

In presenting this thesis, I acknowledge my standpoint as a female Serbian writer who immigrated to the UK in the 1990s. That I share the background and some of the experiences of my protagonist is key to my autoethnographic methodology. I cannot, and do not attempt to, separate my own biography from my findings. In particular, I acknowledge that the hostility of the political and media climate in the UK had a lasting impact on me and that this is reflected in the thesis. For the avoidance of doubt, I do not write with any intention of exonerating Serbia from its role in the 1990s wars.

1. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation presents a creative exploration of experiences that exist at the intersection of war trauma and displacement trauma. In this critical exegesis, I contextualise the creative work, arguing that the experiences of trauma which it explores are not fully addressed in the existing academic literature and that creative practice can bring forth unique insights about it.

This trauma is, I propose, sustained by people belonging to an ethnic group condemned to the status of a pariah because of their country's role in a particular war.[1] More specifically, it is the trauma sustained by economic migrants from this ethnic group in a host country that becomes involved in a military conflict with their country of origin, where they may still have family and which they may still regard as home.

Thus, the central research questions of my thesis are:

1. Can migrants suffer war trauma, created not by direct experience of war events but by a war-related hostile political and media climate in their new place of residence?
2. Is this type of trauma addressed in the current academic literature? If not, in what ways does this trauma differ from what we know about war trauma and displacement trauma?
3. How can Creative Writing as a research practice meaningfully contribute to identification and exploration of this trauma?

[1] Ethnicity and nationality are used as separate terms in this thesis, mostly to mean a Yugoslav nationality and a Serbian ethnicity, as a sub-national category. These terms have evolved over time due to geo-political changes, such as that Yugoslav nationality does not exist any longer, and nowadays both my ethnicity and my nationality are Serbian, as Serbia is now a sovereign state. For theoretical literature on ethnicity and nationality, see Gellner (1983), Hroch (1998) and Hutchinson and Smith (1994).

1.1 Historical and Biographical Context

I was born in Serbia, which at the time was a republic in Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a country in South-Eastern Europe created after World War Two. I emigrated to London in 1993 at the age of seventeen, during the war between Serbia and its former Yugoslav co-republics, Croatia and Bosnia. Yet I was not a refugee. Like many Serbian people of my generation, I came here primarily for economic reasons and was unprepared for the hostility of the political environment regarding Serbs. I was still living in London in 1999 when NATO countries, including the United Kingdom, bombed Serbia during the Kosovo conflict. Again, like many of my compatriots, I was caught off-guard not just by the military action against Serbia conducted by its World War Two allies, but also by the immense anti-Serb sentiment in the British media, which I discuss in the next section. I remain living in the United Kingdom as a British national, but I have, for many years, felt that my relationship with my ethnicity and root culture is unusual in the degree to which I am distanced from it. Like me, most people I knew in high school were also at least considering or at best actively organising a departure from Serbia, whether through student exchange programs in the USA, au-pair work in London or various other schemes in other countries. My parents' intention was for me to spend six months as an au-pair in London, improve my knowledge of English language and culture and return to Serbia in the summer to sit a university entrance exam, a plan I broadly agreed to although I secretly harboured longer-term ambitions regarding the UK. However, by May 1993, Serbia was in the midst of hyperinflation, the second most severe and the second longest in recorded history (Petrovic et al.,1999, p. 336) and my parents strongly advised me to postpone my return home. Months turned into years, and I

found myself remaining in England for the entire duration of the war, including the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and onwards, to this day. However, several curious things became apparent from early on: other than with my parents who had stayed in Serbia, I never spoke my mother-tongue anymore. Even when in the company of close Serbian friends in London, people I had gone to secondary school with, English was the language we spoke to each other. I also actively neglected those friendships, almost entirely cutting ties with other people of my ethnicity. This is unusual because, as Waldinger writes, 'The migrants begin as newcomers, a source of considerable vulnerability: treated as outsiders, they do not know how to navigate the unfamiliar context, which is why they often fall back on others of their own kind' (2017, p.5). This is also because 'When people migrate, they often leave behind important sources of social support – their close friends and family members' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002, and Parrenas 2001, 2008, cited in Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p. 172) and logical compensation for this loss is making and maintaining at least some connections in the expatriate community.

Instead, I put all my efforts into creating an English circle of friends and did not frequent the Serbian bars and restaurants nor the church and the community centre in London. When I met someone new, I avoided saying where I was from. On a personal level, I also avoided Serbian music, art, and literature, even though I had come from a family where Serbian and Yugoslav culture were treasured. When, some years later, I had children, after a brief initial period I stopped speaking Serbian to them in public, which soon extended to not speaking it at home either. I did not cook any Serbian food nor participate in any Serbian traditions, cultural or religious.

On the contrary, I systematically leaned into all the English cultural dimensions available in my new life. This went beyond typical efforts towards assimilation, 'a social psychological process [involving] the active *negotiation* of

identities' (Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p. 174, my italics).[2] Alba and Nee defined assimilation as 'the decline of an ethnic distinction and its corollary cultural and social differences' (2003, p.14). We can think of it as 'a succession of events in which the boundary between the mainstream and the ethnic outsiders evolves' (Waldinger, 2017, p. 4) and which, according to the influential 1990s migration scholars Portes and Zhou, can be segmented between generations (1993), with (subject to social class) the children or the grandchildren of the original immigrants achieving 'a fundamental dissolution of the ethnic ties and loyalties with which the parental generation arrived' (Waldinger, 2017, p.4). Not only does this process take time, but we also know that 'the encounter with a foreign environment and treatment as unwanted foreigners often deepens, rather than weakens, identification with the nation left behind' (Waldinger, 2017, p.8). This can be especially true where there is a strong perception of discrimination, where 'the greater the level of perceived discrimination, the more likely participants [are] to identify with their ethnic group' (Padilla, 1980, quoted in Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p.178). However, this was entirely the opposite of what had happened in my case.

What differentiated my experience from those described above is that it was not a negotiation but a *negation* of identity, with a dissolution of ethnic ties (at least as far as my existence in the UK was concerned) achieved not across two or three generations, but in just a few years of my own life. Furthermore, as Waldinger argues, the process of assimilation is 'the gradual, continuous, almost *unconscious* acquisition of competencies and dispositions that make immigrants and their

[2] Assimilation theory has been criticised for, for example, assuming homogeneity of the host society, for being teleological and for essentialising ethnicity. Another 'major flaw of assimilation theory is that it has tended to treat assimilation as a natural, inevitable process of immigrant adaptation, measurable through a standard set of indicators, not as an uneven and contentious process by which immigrants and host societies negotiate the boundaries of social membership' (Nagel, 2002, pp. 981–982). However, an evaluation of assimilation as a theory for understanding migration phenomena is beyond the scope of this PhD.

descendants increasingly like the people among whom they live' (2017, p. 7, my italics). However, my efforts to achieve 'Englishness' were entirely conscious and pursued at a far steeper rate, suggesting different mechanisms and motivations. My experience of this identity shift, as someone who emigrated for economic reasons albeit under wartime conditions, was all-encompassing and was accompanied by feelings of shame and emotional anguish. The root cause of these feelings was the negative collective portrayal of Serbs in the UK media and politics, evidenced in the section titled Media Representations of Serbs in the UK in 1990s, which I felt compelled to react to in some manner.

> From the perspective of immigrants, pervasive patterns of prejudice and stereotyping mean that they arrive in a new country not as individuals, but as members of groups about whom beliefs and attitudes have already formed. Thus, their efforts at defining themselves require them to respond to these negative images and expectations. (Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p. 174)

In other words, my pursuit of identity transformation was deeply rooted in the stigma attached to being Serbian. This necessitated strategies to overcome the stigma and the simplest one, recognised by migration studies, is 'to try to “pass” as a member of a nonstigmatized or less stigmatized group' (Goffman, 1963, quoted in Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p. 180). For migrants who can visually fit into their new place of residence, the challenge is how to 'pass' once other differences become apparent, something that Goffman terms 'stigma symbols', and this can include things such as accent (Goffman, 1963, quoted in Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p. 180) or a foreign-sounding name (Marvasti, 2006, cited in Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p. 180). My excessive efforts to fit in, culturally and linguistically, with my new place of residence, were clearly intended to aid my 'passing' as well as to deflect attention from the stigma, another common strategy (Goffman, 1963, quoted in Cabaniss and

Cameron, 2018, p. 180). As we shall see further on, this phenomenon manifested itself through my Creative Writing research too and is evident in many actions taken by my protagonist, such as taking elocution lessons and changing her name.

In the aftermath of war, my mental health also started to show consequences of some kind of subconscious pathological process. In early 2000, less than a year after the NATO bombing of Serbia, I developed clinical depression, anxiety and OCD that were soon severe enough to require inpatient treatment. My recovery was never quite permanent, and I have suffered repeated episodes ever since.

It became clear during the development of the creative work and the unfolding characterisation of my protagonist, a Serbian émigré in many respects similar to me, that she has sustained a particular psychological wound that cannot be completely explained through the existing concepts in war and displacement trauma studies. Or, rather, while many of those concepts may still be helpful, she (like me) does not quite fit the profile of someone who ought to be traumatised by war: her decision to emigrate is, on the surface of things, voluntary and motivated by economic opportunities in London, and she has not lived through any direct fighting. At the same time, while her experiences cannot be compared to that of a war veteran, a refugee who has fled for their life or who has been displaced as a result of military conflict, or a woman who had been a victim of systematic wartime rape, she nevertheless behaves in ways that are suggestive of trauma in some manner caused by the war, which distinguishes it from generic displacement trauma; she has completely cut herself off from her ethnic and cultural roots in ways that indicate shame and alienation, and we know that psychologists have in their work with displaced people found 'links between the experience of displacement, existential doubt and shame, intolerable anxiety, dissociation, alienation and paranoia' (Dowd,

2020, p. 305). In the Methodology section I explain the autoethnographic process, and the relation between my biography and the fictional exploration of these themes.

According to Beronja and Vervaet, 'exile writers work through “the trauma of enforced assimilation”' (2016, p. 8). While this process might have been even more insightful if I had written in my mother tongue, because in that way the writer can '"challenge, dislocate and estrange the language and culture” of their host lands by importing the language and culture of their homeland' (Beronja and Vervaet, 2016, p. 8), the fact that I have decided to conduct this study in my second language, English, is in itself symptomatic of my relationship with my cultural background.[3]

1.2 Media context: representations of Serbs in the UK media during the 1990s

On 29th March 1999, the *Daily Mail,* a right-wing tabloid with the highest daily paid circulation in the UK, ran a headline 'Flight from genocide' illustrated by a photo of Kosovo Albanian children in a lorry (Doughty, 1999).[4] On the other side of the political spectrum, on 1st April 1999 the *Daily Mirror* wrote '1939 or 1999? […] Nazi style terror came to Kosovo yesterday in a horrific echo of the wartime Holocaust' (Dowdney, 1999).[5] On the same day, *The Sun*, another popular right-wing tabloid with high circulation, proclaimed 'Nazis 1999 – Serb cruelty has chilling echoes of the Holocaust' (Hume, 2000, p. 72).[6] On 18th June 1999, the comparisons took an even

[3] For more on writing a thesis in a second language, *see Thesis and Dissertation Writing in a Second Language: A Handbook for Students and their Supervisors* (Paltridge and Starfield, 2020). Of particular importance is the notion that students who undertake academic writing in a second language have to negotiate competing identities in order to be successful (p. 14).

[4] July 2023 average circulation for Daily Mail was 745,629 (Tobitt and Majid, 2023).

[5] July 2023 average circulation for Daily Mirror was 258,043 (ibid.)

[6] *The Sun* has kept its ABC circulation figures private since 2020, so the last available figure, for March 2020, was 1,210,915 (ibid). Although this headline has been widely referenced in media and in edited volumes, I have not been able to find the original article.

more direct shape, with *The Mirror* stating that 'Trepca – the name will live alongside those of Belsen, Auschwitz and Treblinka' (Hume, 2000, p. 74; Mackay, 1999). It was not just the tabloid press that was engaging in demonising the Serbs and the comparisons with the Nazis. The politicians led the way, with Robin Cook, Labour Government's Secretary of Defence, telling a press briefing on 14th April 1999 that 'our common belief that the revival of fascism which we have witnessed in Kosovo must have no place in the modern Europe […] NATO will not allow this century to end with a triumph for fascism and genocide' (Hume, 2000, p. 71; Cook, 1999), and Cabinet minister Claire Short on 20th April 1999 declaring anyone who disagreed with the Kosovo war effort to be 'equivalent to the people who appeased Hitler' (Hume, 2000, p. 78; BBC, 1999). This kind of extreme representation of Serbs in the British media did not start with the Kosovo crisis. It was already entrenched during the conflict with Croatia and Bosnia. Respected broadsheet journalist Ed Vulliamy, in an article for the *New Statesman* published on 25th April 1999, described Bosnian Serbs as 'aliens from "the disturbed universe of evil" (Maas, 1996:37), running "satanic" concentration camps' (Hume, 2000, p. 76).[7] These are just a few of the numerous examples of the same tone and content of reportage.

The issue of hostile and biased reporting in the Western media (most notably the UK and the US), which served to demonise Serbs, is discussed in detail in various secondary sources. Hammond writes about the *'orchestrated* outcry' about the massacre at Racak[8] (2004, p. 176, my italics) and notes how 'most British

[7] While this thesis draws attention to the hostile language used and the demonisation of an entire people, it is not my intention to challenge the established facts of the wars and the atrocities committed. Allegations of direct media deception – most famously by Thomas Deichmann (1997) and *Living Marxism* magazine – have been demonstrated to be false (see Campbell, 2002).

[8] 'The massacre at Racak occurred on 15 January 1999, in the village of Racak in the municipality of Shtimje (Kosovo)' (Gashi, 2008, p. 131). I would add that the events where Serbs were victims (such as those discussed by Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2008, p. 161) by in large didn't feature in Western news cycles, and presenting Serbs only as perpetrators - ignoring those who were victims - is relevant to understanding the type of war trauma I am investigating.

journalists proved incapable of describing the Rambouillet process accurately' until much later, when it no longer mattered, with the BBC reporting that the negotiations had been 'designed to fail' almost a full year later, on 19th March 2000 (Mason, 2000; Hammond, 2004, p. 177).[9] Hammond asserts that journalists were willing to reverse the chronology of events in order to support political narratives (2004, p. 178) and that 'the theme of "genocide in Kosovo" was taken up with enthusiasm by the media' (2004, p. 178). He reports on Audrey Gillan recounting on 27th May 1999 in the *London Review of Books (*1999) how a BBC reporter eagerly repeated the highly exaggerated claims of hundreds of murders and rapes (committed by Serbs in Kosovo), which the UNHCR spokesman Ron Redmond had already corrected himself on, conceding that there was only a rumour of five or six such crimes without any witness reports. Hammond argues that 'The suggestion of exceptional genocidal violence, however, was simply Western propaganda designed to justify the further violence of NATO bombing' (2004, p. 179). He cites many more examples of what he terms 'media hysteria' (2004, p. 179), which portrayed Serbs as barbarians (2004, p. 182).

This is not surprising, when we consider how various American politicians spoke about Serbs and how central the USA was in the Western 'management' of the Yugoslav conflicts. David Binder, a *New York Times* journalist, author and academic, wrote extensively about the highly biased role of Western media in this

[9] The Rambouillet Agreement was a proposed peace deal, drafted by NATO, between Yugoslavia and a delegation representing the Albanian majority in Kosovo. Yugoslavia refused to sign this agreement, which was used as a justification for the NATO bombing of Serbia and Kosovo, which ensued. A great deal has been written about the reasons for Yugoslav government's refusal to sign the agreement, such as the requirement to give NATO military forces the right of unrestricted movement across the whole of Yugoslavia, at the time called Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or FRY (Gowan, 2000, pp. 46-37). 'NATO personnel shall enjoy […] free and unrestricted passage and unimpeded access throughout the FRY including associated air space and territorial waters'. For full details of this contentious clause, described as 'deal-breaker' (Ibid.), see the original document (United Nations Security Council, 1999, Appendix B: Status of Multi-National Military Implementation Force, point 8, p. 81)

war, and cites the following comments from American political leaders and journalists:

> "Serbs are illiterates and degenerates." (Senator Joseph Biden, Democrat of Delaware, on a Aug. 1, 1993 CNN broadcast.)
>
> "These guys (Serbs) aren't ideologues, they're murderous assholes."(Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State,*2 *The New Yorker*, Nov. 6, 1995.)
>
> "There's a total fascism now in Serbia." (Georgie Ann Geyer, *Washington Week in Review*, June 25, 1993.)
>
> "Serbs are bastards." (Morton Kondracke, 1996 on CNN.) (Binder and Roberts, 1998)

This chimes with what Longinovic argues in his influential book *Vampire Nation.* The demonisation of Serbs in the 1990s wars is an extension of the framing of Serbs[10] as 'post-communist vampires after the end of the Cold War' (2011, p.5). In this narrative, the global media identified them as the main culprit for the ethnic violence in the Balkans, their crimes 'spiked with an excess of meaning worthy of the best of the horror genre, creating a collective image of the vampire nation' (2011,p. 7).

Why would this be the case, particularly in the US where Longinovic largely bases his study? His theory is that Serbs have been constructed as 'miniature Russians, a nation that has never departed culturally or politically from the imaginary monolith of Orthodox Christianity' (2011, p. 7). In addition to this, there was the more politically strategic aim of giving NATO a 'raison d'etre since the end of the Cold War' (2011, p. 21). There is no question in Longinovic's mind as to the real reasons for this: the placing of all ethnic crimes on the shoulders of the Serbs 'created a climate in which notions of collective responsibility and punishment have been resurrected to

[10] Longinovic writes 'serbs', i.e. uses the common noun and quotation marks, in order to 'disarm the warring cultures in both their local and their global articulations' (2011, p. 4). For consistency of my own text, however, I will continue to use 'Serbs' even when referring to Longinovic's writing.

justify military intervention that *bypasses existing international law'* (2011, p. 36, my italics). Ananiadis, in *Carl Schmitt on Kosovo,* also acknowledges that ideas around 'collective responsibility' of Serbs served an important political and ideological function: as it is impossible to square the concept of 'humanitarian rights' with 'the waging of a massive air war that […] disregards the 'humanity' of the other side's non-combatants' […] an additional element was required' and that was the 'indiscriminate demonization of the Serbs'. This turns 'the adversary into a disposable total enemy' (2005, p. 151). The most successful 'coup' of the Western media was the conflation of the crimes committed by various Serbian forces in the 1990s with those of the German Nazis in World War Two (Longinovic, 2011, p. 41). Longinovic argues that this is a symptom of the West's 'unwillingness and inability to come to terms with the violent heritage that was responsible for the terrible wars and genocide of the past millennium that shaped the current political configuration of the European continent' (2011, p. 85).

Of course, as I will argue in the next section, this is also deeply intertwined with notions of post-Orientalism and cultural racism towards countries that belonged to Eastern European communism (2011, p. 84). This has a dual purpose: 'the global media gaze that has discovered the cradle of European violence amongst the 'serbs' continues to act as a stake to put other vampire nations out for good' (Longinovic, 2011, p. 187). Goldsworthy agrees with this in her essay *Invention and In(ter)vention,* describing the Western horror at what is going on in the Balkans as tinged with some pleasure, too – 'an opportunity to re-enact the imperialist fantasy of drawing frontiers and "sorting the troublesome natives out" without being accused of racism (because all the people involved are white)' (2005, p. 29).

Others who have noted the black-and-white allocation of the role of the villain to the Serbian side in the conflict include Phillip Jenkins, Professor of History and

Religion at Pennsylvania State University (Jenkins, 1995; Binder and Roberts, 1998) and Nick Gowing, an eminent British journalist who referred to it as a cancer affecting journalism (Gowing, 1997; Binder and Roberts, 1998).

> In Bosnia, above all, there is more evidence than many media personnel care to admit that journalists embarked on crusades and became partial. They empathised with the Bosnian government because of personal outrage at Serb aggression. Prima facie, this partiality distorted the reporting and led either to a refusal to include certain qualifying facts in stories or to distorting the overall impression […] they have taken sides, often unashamedly. (Gowing, 1997, p. 22)

Gowing's report goes into shocking detail about the nature and level of distortions in the reporting of the war in Bosnia.

Hammond and Herman write that almost all Western journalists 'uncritically framed the conflict' as Yugoslav forces committing genocidal acts (2000, p.1). Hume also states that 'a significant part of the responsibility for this Nazification campaign has to lie with those sections of the media that have been guilty of displaying an anti-Serb bias' (2000, p. 71). Another voice adding their condemnation is the American journalist Peter Brock in his book *Media Cleansing: Dirty Reporting: Journalism and Tragedy in Yugoslavia* (2006), with Binder in the Foreword describing the book as the first full scale investigation into 'outright fabrications, widespread use of dubious second-hand sources and blatantly one-sided accounts' which had as a common denominator the 'characterization of Serbs as the principle perpetrators of "ethnic cleansing", mass murder, mass rape and war crimes up to and including genocide' (2006, p. iii). Brock also published on the subject of Western media anti-Serb bias in the award-winning journal *Foreign Policy* (Brock, 1993-1994). Each of the above authors offers further extensive references on this subject.

Even within the media itself, there is an acknowledgement of the unilateral demonisation of Serbs (although this is not portrayed as problematic in any way), with an article from *The Independent* dated 2 April 1999, stating 'Once again Serbs

are being denounced in the British papers as Nazis and murderous "ethnic cleansers"' (Braid, 1999).

While my writing of the shattering of my protagonist's identity was rooted in imagination as well as my own experiences, Munro's research illustrates that this was a common reaction to the prevailing political climate regarding Serbs at the time.

> One writer on the British-Serb website Britic described how the NATO bombardment had 'changed his entire life' in terms of his identity formation. Ivana talked about how she had rejected her Serb ethnicity during her first few years in Britain, hiding her identity for fear of being branded a nationalist or a war criminal [...] (Munro, 2017, p. 51)

Similar anecdotes were relayed to Braid for her article published in *The Independent*, where she quotes one Serbian man describing how 'his daughter is coming home from school in tears after taunts from classmates that "Nato will get you"' and another woman claiming 'that the war, and the British press's likening of Serbs to Nazis, have left her daughter, aged 11 – raised to be proud of her Serbian heritage – "hysterical"' (Braid, 1999).

Were the negative media representations of Serbs meant to apply to the army, rather than to be read with reference to the nation and the ethnic group as a whole? That does not seem like an illogical proposition, except that when they were not compared to Nazis, Serbs were qualified as savages in what really seems like broad ethnic terms. 'In the *Telegraph* Patrick Bishop suggested that "'Serb" is a synonym for "barbarian"' (March 26,1999), while Steve Crawnshaw wrote in the *New Statesman* (May 31, 1999) that "millions of Serbs" were "liars on a grand scale"' and 'the *Sun* (April 14, 1999) described the Serbs as "animals", who were "an affront to humanity", and urged that they be "shot like wild dogs."' (Hammond, 2004, p. 185). It is hard to see how these are not meant to be read as being about Serbian people in general. Even if we dismiss such extreme and racialised comments, the concept of

'ethnic war', which is how the Yugoslav wars were typically described[11], implicates the entire ethnic group. As Mueller observes, when we say that in 1941 the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, no one takes that to mean that the entire population of Japan participated in the attack. However, when we talk about Serbs and Croats being engaged in an ethnic war, ' the implication frequently is that those two groups have descended into a sort of Hobbesian war of all against all and neighbor against neighbor' (2000, p. 42). Such a war, Mueller argues, does not really exist, because there are not any real-life situations in which 'everyone in one ethnic group becomes the ardent, dedicated, and murderous enemy of everyone in another group' (Mueller, 2000, p. 42). Unfortunately, this insight was missing from the dominant discourse at the time. Obradovic's view is that whatever the global narrative would end up being, it needed to fit a pre-existing perception of the region as populated by blood-thirsty people – Balkan as 'Other' in historical and cultural representations – and the local was 'only permitted to circulate globally' within a specific narrative that actually illuminates Western political power more than it does the conflict itself (2016, p. 8).

1.3 Socio-cultural context: Representations of Balkan and 'Eastern Europe' in the Western cultural gaze

My protagonist is subject to a number of labels that are perceived in (at least subtly) pejorative terms by her new environment. These labels are layers of identity and

[11] Obradovic also agrees that, while technologies of mass communication were instrumental in turning this local conflict into a global spectacle, those same mediums typically wrongly framed it as a war of ethnic hatreds (2016, p.8).

belonging, focusing on place(s) of origin: Serbia, but also the Balkans, and finally Eastern Europe.[12]

Once the war was over, there was an opportunity for the recovery of Jelena's identity and self-image. However, even if Jelena could shed her 'Serbian-ness' like a skin she no longer needs or wishes to wear, she nevertheless remains engulfed in another, in some ways equally problematic: her Balkan-ness. Serbia is located in the Balkans, an area so steeped in cultural stereotypes in Western imagination and representation that it has given rise to a specific term to describe the discourse around it: Balkanism (Todorova, 2009).

> That the Balkans have been described as the 'other' of Europe does not need special proof. What has been emphasized about the Balkans is that its inhabitants do not care to conform to the standards of behaviour devised as normative by and for the civilized world. (Todorova, 2009, p. 3)

Todorova's book examines the question of Balkanism and whether it can be viewed as a sub-type of Orientalism best explained through existing concepts in post-colonial studies. [13] Her verdict is that Balkanism stands on its own two feet as a damaging and stereotype-driven discourse and that 'Balkan' has become 'saturated with a social and cultural meaning that expanded its signified far beyond its immediate and concrete meaning' (Todorova, 2009, p.21). At the same time, it is important to note that discourse evolves over time and can be influenced by geo-politics. During the Cold War, Yugoslavia was carefully not associated with the Balkans, whereas the 1990s war was often referred to as a 'Balkan war' although most of the Balkan countries – Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Albania –

[12] Of course, Serbia is not in Eastern Europe – this paradox is examined further on.

[13] Orientalism as a concept was introduced by Edward Said in his book of that title, in which he examines Westerns perceptions of the Orient as 'a special place in European Western experience', one of 'romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences' and 'one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other' (Said, 1991, p. 1). At its root, of course, there is the idea of European identity being superior to all non-European cultures and peoples (Said, 1991, p. 7).

were not involved nor in danger of becoming involved. Nowadays, the discourse has again shifted slightly and 'Western Balkans' is the term we might most readily encounter in journalism, even scholarship – this is what remains as the problematic area and other parts of Balkan have now become exempt (Todorova, 2009, p. 192). However, in any of those geo-political permutations, Serbia is and always has been a key part of the Balkans and indivisible from the Balkanist discourse.

Another writer who considers the question of Balkanism is Vesna Goldsworthy. 'Am I Balkan?', she asks in the Preface to *Inventing Ruritania* (1998). Of course, this question is rhetorical: as Kiossev explains in *The Dark Intimacy,* even if we observe the large number of similarities in clothing, cooking or cultural and religious customs of various Balkan nations, we cannot ignore the fact that 'there is always great regional diversity' (2005, p. 172). This is because 'the cognitive "mapping" of a field (in this case, the field of everyday practices in a certain region) is always pluralistic and can be viewed from a variety of perspectives' (ibid). Goldsworthy's question, therefore, is oriented more towards assessing the external perception of 'Balkanness', rather than making any enquiry as to the essentialness of this term. Kiossev argues that 'A perspective, free from all possible ideological premises, cannot describe an "essential" Balkan anthropological type' (2005, p. 172). Goldsworthy concludes with an acknowledgment that 'being referred to as such frequently has negative connotations – it is a toponym which easily becomes an insult. The Balkan peninsula is undoubtedly part of the European mainland, yet the adjective 'Balkan' can imply the opposite of European (1998, p. ix). This has led to the identity debate in the 1990s which was 'largely dominated by the question of whether to be or not be Balkan,' Ditchev tells us in *The Eros of Identity* (2005, p. 235).

Furthermore, Goldsworthy refers to 'narrative' or 'imaginative colonisation' of the Balkans, established since the nineteenth century through (primarily British) non-fiction and fiction written about the peninsula or using the Balkans as a convenient exotic backdrop, often by writers with remarkably little first-hand knowledge (1998, p. 208).[14]The contemporary view of the Balkans tends to be, on the right-hand side of the political spectrum, one of a contagious disease, 'an infectious sore in the soft underbelly of Europe', or, on the left, a departure from 'the ideal of cosmopolitanism' which should be resolved through a paternalistic involvement of the West (Goldsworthy, 1998, p. xi).

Goldsworthy is in no doubt that this results in discrimination of a kind that, nowadays, we rarely see in Western culture, media and academia. She writes about the Balkans as one of the 'marginal and ambiguous areas of the world which have offered refuge to patterns of neo-colonial behaviour no longer acceptable elsewhere', often written about with 'generalised, open condescension' (1998, p. xi).

Other academics, such as Hayden and Bakic-Hayden, also acknowledge that the Balkans are popularly defined by violence (Goldsworthy, 1998, p. 5; Bakic-Hayden, 1995, 917). Goldsworthy describes writing about the Balkans as a 'free for all', giving the example of an editorial comment from *The Evening Standard* (21st April 1997), regarding the news that Albania was to hold a referendum on the restoration of monarchy, which said:

> Lord Archer or Mrs Camilla Parker-Bowles could be persuaded to take on the Albanian job… And if some bearded, wild-eyed, bomb-throwing Balkan anarchist brought their reign to a premature end – well, that is a blow that we, like their subjects, would have to bear with fortitude. (Goldsworthy, 1998, p. 70)

[14] For example Anthony Hope and Cecil Roberts

Such stereotypes help to perpetuate the idea of 'the superiority of Britishness' (Goldsworthy, 1998, p. 160), a kind of European hierarchy from the north-west to the south-east, where 'Britishness' and 'Balkanness' stand at the opposite ends of the diagonal (Goldsworthy, 1998, p.9).

How much does any of this matter outside of the sphere of cultural studies or literature? Goldsworthy's view is that it does, because of the 'impact of preconceived ideas on the processes of decision-making which determine the extent of foreign loans and investment, the level of military and humanitarian aid, and the speed at which individual Balkan countries are allowed to join 'Europe', NATO or any other international organisation or club.' (1998, p. 2).

However, in what way does this affect someone like Jelena, an emigrant to an already economically successful Western country, very much at the top of the imagined hierarchy? Goldsworthy claims that in real life this leads to discrimination, 'a racism which is born not of colour but of nuance, the chauvinist narcissism of minute differences [which] frequently remains undetected' (1998, p. ix). We know from Hron that this is one of the key factors that has an impact on the suffering of migrants:

> Ultimately however, the most important factor in the translation of pain, and the one that most strongly shapes the experience of immigrants and refugees, is the constitution of "target language," or the attitude of the receiving host country. It is the receiving country that largely determines the nature and extent of sufferings that migrants may experience after their arrival – be they forms of discrimination, difficulties finding employment, or therapy for their traumatic sequelae. The host environment, especially its legal, medical, and social institutions, is responsible for doubting or recognizing migrant suffering and effectively treating it. (2018, pp. 297-298)

What further complicates matters for inhabitants of Balkan is that they internalise the process of 'othering', subverting their own identities by 'orientalising one another' through a process termed 'nesting Orientalism'. For example, by using identity

markers such as Latin origins or Catholicism, different nations in their self-imagining align themselves culturally with the West, distancing themselves from their less 'worthy' neighbours and directing their own brand of racism at those who are on the 'next rung down geographically and economically' (Velickovic, 2010, p. 8). Kiossev terms this 'self-colonising' (1999; Velickovic, 2010, p. 8). Goldsworthy recounts this in an anecdotal way: 'In the Balkans, there has always been an unspoken competition as to who was the first to be civilised as well as who was the most civilised' (1998, p. 168).

Velickovic examines this process of self-imagining in order to illuminate 'the various forms of cultural racism Eastern Europeans are faced with in the West' (2010, p. 9), cultural racism being defined as racism without race (Velickovic, 2010, p. 16).

Another key term to note here is colonial mimicry by which the colonizer encourages the colonized to copy or mimic aspects of the colonizing culture' to show it deserves advancement to a higher status (Velickovic, 2010, p. 11).[15] Although the Balkans is not in a literal sense post-colonial space (not of the West, in any case), this process nevertheless exists and is a reflection, in the case of Serbia, of the 'imaginative colonisation' described earlier. Both colonial mimicry and internalisation of Eurocentrism contribute to nesting orientalism and to efforts and aspirations, by various Eastern European peoples, to reclaim belonging to Europe and become part of the West (Velickovic, 2010, p. 23). This is because, without such belonging, people such as my protagonist Jelena suffer from a 'generalised Eastern European otherness' (Velickovic, 2010, p. 183).

[15] The concept of colonial mimicry has been examined by Homi Bhabha in his essay *Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse* (1994, pp. 85-92) and described as 'an ironic compromise', a 'reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.* Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around *an ambivalence* […] a double articulation […] which appropriates the Other as it visualizes power' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86).

Who or what is 'Other'? 'The Other is similar to 'us' but not quite', Velickovic explains. We know that 'to be classifiable as 'Eastern European' makes one Other and not quite European' because even after the end of communist Europe, there still remains 'a "Europe A" and a "Europe B"' (2019, p. 5). Even after the war, Jelena continues to belong to this 'unknown and unknowable place lacking precise political boundaries – the imaginary place called 'Eastern Europe', a cultural rather than geo-political entity that has been 'invented as a result of the Western gaze' (Velickovic, 2019, p. 7). Despite the fact that Bulgarians and Poles, for example, are far apart from each Other on the geographical map, they can all be subsumed under the category "Eastern European"' (Velickovic, 2019, p.10). Indeed, this has often been done in British literature and films with characters loosely designated as 'Eastern European' without any specificity around their country of origin or where their nationality seems under-researched and lacks plausibility, given some material differences regarding immigration conditions. Examples include Rachel Cusk's novel *Transit* (2018) where a supposedly Albanian character runs a successful building business in London, or Rose Tremain's prize-winning novel *The Road Home* (2008) which does not even go as far as to state where exactly its protagonist is from (Velickovic, 2019, pp. 72–73). This homogenising Western gaze has 'consolidated the image of Eastern Europe in such persistently negative terms to the present day' (Velickovic, 2019, p. 7).

Of course, Eastern Europeans are not the only kind of immigrant to be regarded in problematic terms. Like immigrants of colour, the general perception of whom has been described by Nikesh Shukla as 'bad immigrants – job-stealers, benefit-scroungers, girlfriend-thieves, refugees – until we cross over in [society's] consciousness, through popular culture, winning races, baking good cakes, being conscientious doctors, to become good immigrants' (Shukla, Editor's Note), Eastern

Europeans must satisfy certain conditions if they want to be accepted into the mainstream and be redeemed for their origin. This can, to a degree, be achieved through paying taxes and contributing to 'capitalist structures that have brought the economic migrant in the first place' (Velickovic, 2019, p. 14).

About this, Velickovic writes:

> My general argument is that contemporary Eastern Europeans remain knowable only through certain stereotypes and as quite specific economic migrants – builders, plumbers, agricultural and factory workers, nannies. Their own agency exists only in the act of migrating because of economic reasons, but their journey of self-advancement and development is constantly thwarted by not being capitalist (there are rare instances) enough or European enough. (2019, p. 9)

In my own novel, I both acknowledge and subvert this idea. Jelena 'makes it' into British society through marrying into wealth, and her 'arrival into' capitalist abundance is stereotypically viewed as a marker of success for an Eastern European living in Western Europe, or what Velickovic terms 'celebration of individualistic self-fulfilment through the acquisition of material goods' (Velickovic, 2019, p. 40).

However, Jelena is unhappy, damaged, and deeply conflicted. Her psychological and emotional recovery takes place only when she puts aside the Western materialist values and attempts reconciliation with her cultural roots. In this sense, I reject the idea that Eastern European migrants can only find happiness through acceptance of Western capitalist values and instead propose that finding peace with their origins is the route to emotional redemption.

And yet: if, as Velickovic states, the conditions of acceptance are so harsh for Poles, Bulgarians, the Czechs, Romanians and so forth, what hope is there for Serbs, the ethnic group described as 'not yet civilised' (Brdar and Vukovic, 2006, p. 441)? Even Bhabha, who in his ‘Introduction’ to *The Location of Culture* quotes

Renee Green to warn against essentialising blackness (1994, p. 3), in the same essay refers to ‘the hideous extremity of Serbian nationalism’ (1994, p. 5) as if it were something essential that homogenises the Serbian nation.

1.4 Psychological context

The particular trauma which, I will argue, happened to Serbian emigrants in the United Kingdom during the 1990s, may seem like an isolated experience, perhaps only comparable to the aftermath of World War Two for any Germans living in the UK, or the kind of inter–generational shame experienced by their descendants, such as described in Angela Findlay's book *In My Grandfather's Shadow: A Story of War, Trauma and a Legacy of Silence* (2022). And yet, this is a scenario that has reoccurred less than thirty years later: given the nature of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, it is possible that Russian emigrants in the UK are already experiencing a similar set of circumstances and are vulnerable to a very similar kind of trauma while being unlikely to receive any support for it.

Individuals who suffer war-related trauma need what Martz and Lindy term 'trauma membrane' (2010), which I will elaborate on in the Literature Review. Furthermore, the suffering of someone affected by the war does not necessarily end when the war does: it can go on for years and decades, sometimes for the rest of their lives, because of the often-enduring nature of trauma sustained in these circumstances (Hunt, 2010, p. 7).[16] It is particularly important to facilitate collective

[16] Nigel C. Hunt tells us, in *Memory, War and Trauma,* that 'The overwhelming nature of the event is such that it leads to important and *often permanent changes* in the physiology and mental state of the individual' (2010, p. 7, my italics).
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trauma recovery because of ' the capacity for these long-term wounds to re-emerge with terrible destructiveness' (McFarlane, 2002).

While there has been considerable effort to alleviate suffering caused by the ex-Yugoslav wars such as the work Ognjenovic et al. describe in *Social Resources of Life: Rehabilitation in the Former Yugoslavia* (2003) or the approximately three-hundred international NGOs who have worked in areas of former Yugoslavia, providing psycho-social aid for children who were war victims (Baráth, 2003, p. 167), my research did not uncover any initiatives for trauma treatment programs for people who were not directly involved in the war, such as the Serbian emigrants in question. This is because the current thinking around trauma does not recognise this group as potential victims of it. War trauma theory focuses primarily on PTSD and the psychological and emotional consequences of suffering or witnessing 'horrifying acts of violence and aggression' (Baráth, 2003, p. 163), with little to no recognition of non-standard trauma such as those experienced by the Serbian emigrants to the UK in the 1990s. This thesis demonstrates not only that such trauma does exist, but that Creative Writing is uniquely positioned to explore it. It is important to do so because trauma can have long lasting consequences on a person's ability to live well and function healthily in the world.

> […] overwhelming experiences affect our innermost sensations and our relationship to our physical reality – the core of who we are […] trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body. This imprint has ongoing consequences for how the human organism manages to survive in the present. (Kolk, 2015, p. 17)

My thesis is the result of a five-year process of working through and researching this trauma. Processing and reflection can help sufferers of trauma to move on with their life. 'For the individual to recover internally from the past it is first necessary to go through psychological stages of trauma. It is also necessary for the individual to go

through a process of self-reflection and self-discovery' (Gould, 2003, p. 61). One of the three avenues of healing that Kolk identifies is ‘top down, by talking, (re-) connecting with others, and *allowing ourselves to know and understand what is going on with us*, while processing the memories of the trauma’ (Kolk, 2015, p. 8, my italics). A particularly useful tool is language, because it ‘gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know, and finding a common sense of meaning’ (Kolk, 2015, p. 26). Herman, in her writing about the three stages of recovery from psychological trauma, also acknowledges the key role of ‘remembrance and mourning’ (2002).

Furthermore, we know that war may traumatise an entire population and create 'collective trauma'. 'Trauma remains chronic and reproduces itself as long as social causes are not addressed […] The whole society may suffer from an everlasting culture of pain' (Mossallanejad, 2015, p. 131). Therefore, healing trauma is not only beneficial to the individual but also to their wider communities of membership. I expand on this in the Literature Review.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section I review the basic concepts in war trauma and displacement trauma theories, to examine how helpful they are when considering the predicament of Serbian emigrants to the UK in the 1990s (or any analogous group). While I do not aim to give a comprehensive review of authorship in these disciplines due to the constraints of wordcount, scope and focus of this PhD, I examine the main approaches to understanding these subject areas, exploring whether there are gaps in the current knowledge that Creative Writing as a research practice can address.

The word 'trauma' has its origins in an ancient Greek word for 'wound' (Eyerman, 2013; Arora et al., 2015, p. 204) and is generally understood as an emotional response to a significantly disturbing or overwhelming event that is 'outside the range of "normal" experiences' (Briere and Scott, 2006; Arora et al., 2015, p. 195). A similar definition is given by Hunt, explaining trauma as the psychological response to a traumatic event, described by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) III as falling 'outside the range of normal human experience' (2010, p. 52).

War clearly belongs in this category, as do other experiences involving extreme stress and psychological distress (Hunt, 2010, p. 52). While both natural and human-made disasters can result in trauma, a meta-analysis of 160 studies shows that trauma caused by humans induces higher levels of psychological stress than natural disasters (Martz, 2010, p. 2).

What kind of war-time events does the literature I have reviewed evaluate as experiences likely to cause trauma? Kraaij and Garnefski include ‘seeing many people being killed, destruction of house or neighbourhood due to bombing, serious

illness, being in danger of losing one's life, maltreatment and torture by the occupier' (2006, p. 1). My intention in this thesis is to demonstrate how living in a hostile political climate, as an emigrant to a country at war with one's country of origin, can be added to that list.

Although psychiatric approach is one of the six basic ways of viewing traumatic disorders (Paulson, 2003, pp. 114-115), Hunt tells us that 'War trauma is not a recognised psychiatric entity, though there are arguments for making it so.[17] It is a complicated disorder, dependent to some extent on the kinds of experiences people have during war' (2010, p. 59). Herman agrees with this, stating that 'The traumatic syndromes are complex disorders requiring complex treatment' (2002) but Hunt warns that there are difficulties in arriving at a single definition (2010, p. 6).

If a single and unifying definition of war trauma is difficult to arrive at, what concepts are useful for understanding this phenomenon? 'Traumatic stressor' points the researcher in a productive direction. DSM-IV defines a traumatic stressor more through the person's response than through just the event itself. The emphasis is on fear, horror, and helplessness as a response to the event, the central argument being that 'an event is traumatic if it traumatises a person' (Hunt, 2010, p. 9).

Hunt tells us that the main classification used in the diagnosis of war trauma is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD (2010, p. 50). PTSD has existed under different names such as battle fatigue and combat neurosis and was introduced in DSM III, in its current name, in 1980. For a long time, it used to be mainly related to battle experience.[18]

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[17] Alongside the developmental approach, the psychodynamic approach, the family system approach, the learning theory approach, and the cognitive-behavioural approach.

[18] This view is rooted in the psychiatric approach which, according to Paulson, 'in its most basic presentation, views […] traumatization in terms of a post-traumatic stress disorder' (2003, p. 114). Established names in the field include Rachel Yahuda, Charles Figley and Arieh Shalev, although I will be making limited references to them, as in this thesis I consider a wider angle of war trauma.

> […] the scientific study of civilian victims of war is a relatively recent interest in psychology […] most of the early research and clinical work on war trauma until World War II concentrated on combatants, and the studies on civilian population referred to natural disasters or accidents. (Krippner and McIntyre, 2003, p. 3)

DSM-IV can be helpful in understanding the construct of PTSD when we look at some of its diagnostic criteria:

> Criterion A: The person has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following were present: (1) The person experienced, witnessed or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others. (2) The person's response involved intense fear, helplessness or horror. (Hunt, 2010, p. 52)

The diagnosis of PTSD is centred around symptoms that include 'recurrent and intrusive' distressing recollections, hallucinations, dreams and other ways of feeling like one is re-experiencing the traumatic event, accompanied by significant psychological distress and resulting in persistent avoidance of any stimuli associated with the trauma (Hunt, 2010, pp. 52-53).

However, in order to understand how someone like my protagonist can suffer from war trauma, we must go beyond the idea of a single traumatic event that results in a specific, medically identifiable condition such as PTSD.[19] McFarlane tells us that 'While PTSD is a valuable construct in describing the long-term outcomes of trauma, it is important to recognize that there are a range of other psychiatric disorders such as depression, substance abuse and anxiety which can emerge in the aftermath of these experiences' (2002). The characterisation of my protagonist relies on this wider approach with a number of related psychiatric manifestations, which is explored further on in this section.

[19] Although, PTSD itself is nowadays categorised into simple or complex, depending on whether it is caused by a single event such as rape or a more long-term stress such as war. Even so, Hunt tells us that 'War trauma is not the same as PTSD, as the range of symptoms is much broader in the former' (Hunt, 2010, p. 9).

Additionally, the mainstream psychological view of trauma is depoliticised. Kumpfmuller tells us that 'PTSD diagnosis evokes the impression that trauma is a purely individual phenomenon. It ignores its political and social dimension.' In most of the mainstream discourses on trauma, the political and social components are not mentioned (2019, pp. 19-20). But it is important to acknowledge those dimensions, not only because they lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of trauma, but also because 'trauma only has a chance to heal if it is politically and socially acknowledged' (Kumpfmuller, 2019, p. 23).

Moreover, our understanding of war trauma, what it includes and can be caused by, has developed over time. Since the 1990s there has been expansive research about the impact of war stress on civilians and we know that war trauma can be broader and affect the entirety of a person in a more fundamental way. This arises from the nature of psychological trauma per se, for which Herman tells us: 'The essential features of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others' (2002). Shay describes these events in terms of 'moral injury' that develops when there's a 'betrayal of "what's right"', an insight he came to in his work with war veterans (2010, p. 35; 2014, p. 183). In this view, the triggering event is not just something that causes actual or threatened serious injury or death, but something that violates deeply held moral values and, rather than just eliciting fear, horror and helplessness, it also (or instead) elicits guilt, shame and anger, regardless of whether the individual is in the position of the victim, witness or even perpetrator (Shay, 2014, p. 185). My novel explores a scenario where the individual is both a victim (in their own perception) and a perpetrator (in the dominant political narrative).

Additionally, in *Memory, War and Trauma,* Hunt writes that 'War experiences can fundamentally change one's sense of self or identity' because a traumatic event

disrupts social and personal structures and belief systems (2010, p. 10). War can remove this foundation, which according to Janoff-Bulman happens as a result of such beliefs and assumptions about the world becoming shattered, because humans are wired to believe that 'the world is meaningful, that it is benevolent and that the self is worthy' (1992; Hunt, 2010, p. 62). This fits well with Herman's definition of psychological trauma as something that 'destroys the social systems of care, protection, and meaning that support human life' (2002).

At the same time, war trauma does not just happen to the individual in an isolated sense, Hunt tells us, and it is not an individual disorder (2010, p. 114). 'A person traumatised by war is traumatised via the culture in which he lives' (Hunt, 2010, p. 198). The site of trauma – the brain and the mind – is inseparable from the context of trauma – the culture and the society. These four human 'realisations', as Shay refers to them, have evolved simultaneously and are equally important. Shay calls them 'each other's obligatory environments' (2010, p. 32).

> […] there is a constant interaction between individual (narrative) and social forces; the individual draws on the social context in order to make sense of the world, and the social context itself is derived from a range of sources, including the media, academic argument (e.g. in history or sociology), government policy and other sources where individuals interact. The flexibility and fluidity of narrative and individual narrative change is crucial. This relates strongly to the development and treatment of war trauma. (Hunt, 2010, p. 114)

Thus, individual response to traumatic events is not just based on individual memories of them but is a result of an interaction with the wider social world, including political elements (Hunt, 2010, p. 44). War trauma is inextricably linked with the narrative we hold about an experience, but that narrative is not just our individual experience – rather, it has been affected by 'social and cultural influences' (Hunt, 2010, 125). In my view, these influences include the political environment of one's country of residence. In creating the narrative, we rely on memories of the traumatic

event, but they are socially, culturally and politically contextualised. As Hunt describes it, ‘These narratives are developed by an 'internal locus on memories’ and the ways in which they are ‘interacting with social discourses' (2010, p. 198).

Thus, our narratives act as an explanation of the self, the environment, and the wider world and they depend on a social discourse (Hunt, 2010, p. 4). Displacement trauma experts such as Dowd agreed with this, writing about 'our developing sense of both personal and cultural identity (being) in constant and continuous dynamic relation with the environmental surround in which experience happens' (2020, p. 305).

However, being traumatised also means not being able to create a coherent narrative or tell the full story of one's experience (Hunt, 2010, p. 198); therefore, the person cannot make sense of what has happened to them. This is similar to what Dowd explains when she describes the trauma of displacement as arising from 'the loss of the contextualizing background matrix of meanings within which and from which the subject is able to make sense of her or himself' (2020, p. 301).[20] In those circumstances, one might experience' the true impacts and meaning of cultural collapse – the loss of the concepts with which to constitute oneself as a particular subject in a particular place at a particular time because the links of continuity and cohesion – ‘the structure of temporality’ – have been broken' (Dowd, 2020, pp. 302). Arguably, this can happen with any kind of displacement but perhaps especially so when the place one is displaced from ceases to exist (as Yugoslavia did) thus rupturing the deepest cultural and political continuity.

> [Displacement can] sever both actual and spiritual links with the contextualizing background which not only forecloses the felt sense of continuity with both past and future but renders that culture

[20] 'It is, therefore, the rupture of this organising gestalt anywhere along the continuum that constitutes the specific trauma of dis-placement,' writes Dowd. 'Such a loss of contextual continuity (that creates) an existential crisis and spiritual emergency which generates extreme levels of alienating shame, loss, anxiety, confusion and anger. It leaves minds and selves ‘untethered'' (2019, 253).

> ‘invalid’ or not legitimate in the ‘new’ conditions thus shattering both individual and group cohesion. (Dowd, 2020, p. 302)

Displacement trauma rests to a large degree on the assumption of involuntary or forced displacement; however, lines between voluntary and involuntary are not always clear cut. In a large research study of ex-Yugoslav emigrants to the UK, Munro demonstrates this convincingly. She argues that 'a clear demarcation between those migrants who arrived 'voluntarily' and those who were 'forced' was not always possible' (2017, p. 35) and that motivations for migrating are rarely unambiguous, as they are influenced by 'multiple, complex and protracted political and socio-economic factors' (2017, p. 19). We can see this in real life accounts such as Azra from Mostar who, when interviewed by Munro, said 'I came as an au-pair […] I was all for going back but my parents said absolutely no way' (2017, p. 21). While I was not aware of Munro’s research at the time of initially writing the novel, this exact predicament is mirrored in my fictional narrative, as it is based on my own experience. While Jelena is still living with her au-pair family, her mother writes to her '[…] it's not a good idea to come home just yet. Wait till we can live like civilised humans again' (Andrejevic, 2023, p. 143).

An additional factor associated with developing trauma as a response to a traumatic event is lack of control. Herman also focuses on trauma through the lens of disempowerment and loss of control (1992; Hunt, 2010, p. 77), writing that ‘trauma robs the victim of a sense of power and control over her own life’ (2002). This applies to war-time situations too, perhaps especially impacting civilians: unlike soldiers, who can at least in combat maintain some kind of control of their environment – even if that control is mostly illusory – war truly happens *to* civilians. This is an aggravating factor when it comes to the experience potentially developing into a long-term

trauma. I expand on how this loss of control applies to the situation explored in my novel further on in this thesis.

One factor that has been seen as critical for the reconciliation of memories into a coherent narrative and for processing the trauma is social support. Hunt is clear about the importance of perceived social support as a predictor of traumatic stress, with individuals who have experienced a traumatic event and who do not perceive that they have good social support, being more likely to be traumatised (2010, p. 3). Martz and Lindy argue for the existence of 'a multidimensional trauma membrane, which acts as a type of post trauma buffer zone that shields an individual or groups of individuals from further psychological stress' – essentially a 'psychological first aid', an interpersonal protection provided by family, friends or mental health professionals (2010, pp. 3–4). Laugharne et al. also comment on the importance of ' social support [as] important in regulating post-traumatic adjustment' (2010, p. 27). Figley, one of the pioneers in the field of traumatology, also emphasises the key role of social support which, according to the Pursue Social Support Scale, comprises of the following five functions: emotional support, encouragement, advice, companionship and tangible aid (1986, p. 104). Another important point is the role of the family, and I expand on the particular relevance of this in Analysis.

If social support is key to processing trauma, then we must consider what the source of such social support may be. How available is it, for example, to migrants living in a hostile political climate in the host country? Kolk tells us that

> Social support is not the same as merely being in the presence of others. The critical issue is reciprocity: being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else's mind and heart. For our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow we need a visceral feeling of safety. No doctor can write a prescription for friendship and love: These are complex and hard-earned capacities. (2015, p. 48)

One valid source would be the support and solidarity from compatriots; however, as I demonstrate in Analysis, that is the relationship that can suffer the most with this kind of trauma, where an individual – driven by feelings of shame and guilt and responding to the hostile political climate they find themselves in – pulls away from their ethnic community. In that case, the only other viable source of social support would come from the communities inherent to the host country, which, in order to make them accessible, requires either the presence of empathy – this links with the issue of reciprocity mentioned above, but what kind of empathy and reciprocity are likely available to migrants belonging to the demonised side of the 'aggressor? – or it requires assimilation (so that these migrants are no longer perceived as predominantly belonging to that side).

I expand more on the question of empathy afforded to Serbs during the 1990s conflict in Analysis. What does the literature I have reviewed say about assimilation?

Is complete assimilation – one that comprehensively compensates for leaving behind one's cultural and ethnic roots – achievable? The concept of transnationalism in migration studies would suggest that such successful adoption of a new culture is not possible. 'I have, in some way which is still beyond my grasp, remained an alien', Goldsworthy tells us in her memoir (Goldsworthy, 2005, p. 221). This view is echoed in academic literature:

> Consequently, although some scholars may insist that the migrants create transnational communities suspended between 'here' and 'there', the reality is otherwise: the migrants and their descendants find that they are betwixt and between their new and old homes, in the country of immigration but of the country of emigration. Neither one nor the other, they are foreigners (Mexicans, Italians, Senegalese, what have you) in the country where they reside, but immigrants (French, Germans, American, what have you) in the country which they left. (Waldinger, 2017, p. 13)

Instead, what tends to happen with people who emigrate to a new country is that they develop a feeling of 'in-between-ness', of 'not being 'entirely there' or 'entirely here' but somewhere in between' (Munro, 2017, p. 5), or, in Goldsworthy's words, 'Because we both belong here and somewhere else' (2005, p. 222). Dowd refers to this as the displaced person finding 'themselves in an uncanny gap between ‘here’ and ‘there’' (2020, p. 305).

At the same time, the host environment is not static – both the host society and the newcomers will evolve over time (Munro, 2017, p. 32), and the changes they undergo are often noticed and commented on by the family members back home. 'I keep trying to work out how you've changed. You sound the same, you've barely aged, and you dress in a very similar way, and yet somehow you seem so much more English to me even when you speak Serbian,' Goldsworthy is told by her mother (2005, p. 202).

Unfortunately, transnationalism does not protect one from pain. 'I had become English in every possible way, but the fault lines along which the pain reached me were still Serbian, whatever that may imply,' Goldsworthy says (2005, p. 214), and this sense of trauma and pain is present in my own fiction, in the dialogue between Jelena and her friend Natasha who tells her 'I also know you married him so you could pretend to be English [...] Because you don't like being Serbian' (Andrejevic, 2023, p. 273).

It is perhaps this profound and inescapable pain that Dowd implies in her concept of the rupture of the 'implicit psychological organizing gestalt' (2020, p. 304) which prompted her to describe the experience of displacement as something more than just the 'obvious loss and separation from familiar and taken-for-granted ‘ways of being’ – language, places, practises etc – which potentially may be recognized and mourned' (2020, p. 311). It is a state of profound loss and absence that is 'akin

to death' because 'the matrix of relations that holds the world together either is or feels torn, leaving a soul feeling ‘out’ of place, lost, at best temporarily but oftentimes permanently without a place in the ‘scheme of things’' (2020,p. 305), she writes, and although the pain may lessen over time, it may never completely go away (2020, p. 311).

Indeed, Dowd suggests that 'Self “out” of place is being disorganised […] – at least for a while and so the manic defences erected against the pain of the recognition of this can be extreme' (2019, 253). A good illustration of this is Dowd's former patient Jane, about whom she writes: 'I recognised the dissociation and uncanny out-of-place feeling as extreme displacement anxiety and knew therefore that matters of ‘place’ were paramount' (2019, p. 255).

The literature I have reviewed does, in some instances, create an opening to include the experiences such as those of the Serb emigres to the UK in the 1990s, but without going so far as to identify and specify that type of war trauma as being incited by the hostile political environment in the country of reception. The 'opening' I refer to is expressed in the following ways: Mossallanejad, for example, writes about war causing, amongst other consequences, migration, and about affecting people both directly and indirectly, but he does not define what he understands as indirect effect (2015, p. 121). He also acknowledges that, because human force and weapons are necessary elements of war, institutions incite participation by creating and perpetuating a culture of war, which includes demonisation of 'others' (2015, p. 125). However, he does not go as far as to examine the plight of 'others' when they live behind the enemy lines as emigrants, during an active conflict, and the impact that the culture of war has on their mental and social wellbeing.

Additionally, Arora et al. consider the re-victimisation of immigrants through migratory and post-migratory traumas, but their focus is on regressive immigration

policies, 'mechanisms built into the refugee determination system, that keep non-citizens in limbo […] this systemic trauma leaves long-lasting impacts on the lived conditions of refugees' (2015, p. 194).

In the context of ex-Yugoslav immigrants to the UK, it is important to note that, alarmed by increased immigration from former Yugoslavia and the former Eastern Bloc, the UK Conservative government passed the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993, which introduced harsher rules for asylum applications and reduced asylum seekers' benefit entitlements. This legislation marked an important step in the hardening of UK attitudes towards immigration that had begun with the Aliens Act of 1905. These new and harsher conditions provided the background to the lives of many ex-Yugoslavs who were to immigrate to and settle in the UK over the next decade. However, while Serbs in the UK in the 1990s were subject to various immigration constraints, in my view these were not essential to the development of the trauma as these restrictions were not specifically targeted against them as a particular ethnicity amongst ex-Yugoslav nationals.

Furthermore, Gupta considers the issue of economic migrant workers and their susceptibility to trauma created by the conditions under which they live and work in countries of reception, but the focus is on the precariousness of their work, the loss of cultural and symbolic capital and the overall exploitation they are vulnerable to (2015, p. 213). While this is helpful for understanding some of the conditions that frame an individual's immigration experience, it is less relevant to people of my generation who mostly emigrated during or immediately after secondary school, and thus had limited cultural and symbolic capital due to being at an early stage of life. Again, Gupta's considerations do not take into account migrants caught in a political conflict between their two homes and demonised in their new culture.

Similarly to Gupta, Paulson writes about life in exile, stating that 'those who escape to a safe haven in another country generally suffer many hardships […] Life in exile entails psychological and social adjustment issues. […] Probably the greatest trauma at this phase is the uprooting of their physical, psychological, cultural and social past […] difficulties (which) have been characterized as "culture shock"' (2003, p. 113). It is worth noting this notion and expectation of 'safe haven' and considering how different that would be to the reality of the military conflict between the country of reception and the country of origin, and the likely inadequacy of the expression 'culture shock' to describe that kind of experience. Overall, though, Paulson's comment is similar to the ideas discussed in displacement trauma theory, where scholars like Hron recognise the same factors influencing the creation of displacement trauma, while also acknowledging its idiosyncrasies:

> In many ways, the immigrant/refugee experience does not neatly fit with classic definitions of trauma. […] More commonly, the sufferings that immigrants and refugees experience are more quotidian and chronic in nature and may include such experiences as isolation, alienation, discrimination, poverty, or violence. [...] Often, their symptomology exhibited reflects more mundane conditions such as grief, fear, or anxiety, while in other cases, they point to other mental disorders such as depression, eating disorders, or prolonged duress stress disorder (PDSD), a more chronic form of PTSD. [...] (2018, pp. 288–289)

In addition to structural issues and mental health disorders described above, Hron also goes on to acknowledge various factors related to social life and culture which typically become challenged due to migration:

> Immigrants and refugees face numerous stressors when they leave their homelands and acculturate into a new host environment, such as the loss of familiar social networks (Kirmayer et al. 2011), lowered socioeconomic status across the socioeducational spectrum (Tinghog 2007), lack of fluency in the host language (Watkins et al. 2012), or values and behaviors that clash with ethnic traditions (Camino and Krulfeld 2005; Dinnerstein et al. 2015; Ingelby 2005). The loss of one's homeland, familial and social networks, language, and culture are themes that reappear

> throughout both medical and creative literatures about migration. (2018, pp. 288–289)

While these are helpful considerations that can certainly illuminate the origins of displacement trauma, there is no specific discussion of the impact of the political relationship between the host country and the country of origin on the immigrant experience, and the culture of war that develops when this relationship deteriorates into armed conflict.

Theories of war and displacement trauma offer various frameworks which can be to a degree helpful for the recognition and identification of trauma suffered by the Serbs living in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, which I discuss in detail in Analysis; but they do not recognise this or any analogous group as vulnerable to a particular type of war trauma, thus leaving a gap which I believe can be addressed by Creative Writing as research.

Amongst the ex-Yugoslav emigres there have been some notable writers who, after emigrating, wrote and published in English about their experience of the war. Other than Goldsworthy, there are also Aleksandar Hemon and Dubravka Ugresic, just two of the big names of Anglophone ex-Yugoslav literature, as well as Vesna Maric who became well-known in the UK for her memoir as well as for her articles in *The Guardian.*[21] I would also mention David Albahari who resides in Canada and is widely translated into English although he writes in Serbian. How do they, in their own writing, tackle questions of war, trauma and identity?

While a comprehensive analysis of their opus is outside of the scope of this thesis, it is worth pointing out that, except Goldsworthy, none of these authors are ethnically (purely) Serbian. Albahari is Jewish (therefore of a different faith to Serbs

[21] Undoubtedly there are other writers who could be included in this list but due to limitations of scope and wordcount, these are the ones I have considered. My research did not uncover a mainstream Serbian writer who emigrated during the 1990s wars and published fiction or memoirs in English, which in itself is interesting.

who are Orthodox Christians), Hemon comes from Bosnia where he was born ‘to a Bosnian Serb mother and a father of Ukrainian descent’ (Carton, 2018, p. 334) and Ugresic is Croatian (more about her ethnicity later on in this section). Maric is of mixed Serb-Croatian heritage and, in an essay published in *Granta*, refers to herself as Yugoslav (2020). Excluding Goldsworthy, who I have already discussed at length, none of them would have experienced exactly those pressures of belonging to a vilified group that I have explored in my work.

Albahari perhaps comes closest to the kind of internalised shame that my protagonist experiences. In his short story *Lolita, Lolita!*, when the narrator debates whether to interact with a little girl in a supermarket, he says 'I could already see myself in tomorrow's headlines: Immigrant sexually harasses young girl! Country at war with others creates people at war with selves!' (2012, p. 12), thus touching on the existing poor reputation of his wider group of membership. In *Robins,* he writes – somewhat cryptically – that 'Bitterness is a taste you have to sense, it does not matter whether the person is living in Alberta or Serbia. […] Unlike us, they do not know of good and evil and never do evil in the name of good,' where 'us' could possibly be interpreted as being about Serbs and 'doing evil in the name of good' could refer to the war, where the good intention of helping the Serbs caught as an ethnic minority in the newly-independent Croatia and Bosnia, results in bloodshed.

In *Ministry of Pain,* Ugresic (2008) writes about a Croatian lecturer emigrating to Holland and teaching Serbo-Croat language to a class of ex-Yugoslavs who require student visas in order to stay in the country. The author was born in Croatia but has described herself as ‘a-national and ethically inauthentic’ (Velickovic, 2014, p. 13). Pavlovic tells us that ‘In all her writing, Ugresic rejects the nationalistic fiction of a fixed and immobile identity constructed through blood, the secret soil of one’s origin, the distinctiveness of national character, the metaphysical privileging of one’s

ethnic group' (1995, par. 2). She fictionalises her experience of migration with powerful emotion, but the pain explored in the novel originates in the longing for what has been lost or left behind. The characters do share a trauma, but it is the overall trauma of the war and the tragic demise of their former homeland, rather than their specific ethnic belonging. This has been acknowledged by scholars such as Kovacevic who writes that Ugresic's early essays 'explore the forbidden mourning for Yugoslavia' and 'transcending of the trauma of one's immediate national background in favor of a broader contemporary perspective of an "other" in the European Union' (2013, p. 64). Similarly, Young argues that *Ministry of Pain* is required to 'represent a post-war malaise' (2010, p. 90). 'The country we came from was our common trauma' (2008, p. 60), she says, describing the group as convalescents, 'people recovering from an illness or a trauma of some kind, an accident, a flood, a shipwreck' (2008, p. 64). In an explicit recounting of the causes of the trauma, she lists 'the break-up of the country, the war, the repression of memory, the "phantom limb syndrome", the general schizophrenia and then exile' (2008, p. 60). However, even in this comprehensive and difficult list, there is no mention of belonging to the most hated group of people since the Nazis (because she does not, ethnically, belong to it). However, the novel's characters who do – the Bosnian-Serb Uros, whose father becomes indicted as a war criminal, and Boban, who is from Belgrade – reveal a different kind of trauma. Boban has dreams in which he is afraid to speak as people who recognise him as a Serb might spit at him. Uros commits suicide.

My point in this thesis has never been to deny that Serbian forces, particularly paramilitary forces, have committed some unimaginable atrocities; it is only to say that hearing and reading about that, over and over again over the course of many years, is or at least can be powerfully traumatic for members of the same ethnic group who may be living in a place with limited social support, regardless of whether

those allegations are all entirely true – in fact, even more so, if they are, and Uros' suicide illustrates this in the most drastic and tragic way.

Going back to *Ministry of Pain*, it is clear that ex-Yugoslavs, as a group of emigrants in Holland, were not on the whole well regarded. 'People said the Yugomafia was responsible for a third of the criminal activities in Amsterdam. The papers were full of its thefts, prostitute trafficking, black marketeering, murders and vendettas. […] If they mentioned Yugoslavia, which was now the name for Serbia and Montenegro, it was with great agony. […] Yugoslavia […] no longer existed. They did their best to deal with it by steering clear of the name' (2008, p. 19). Can it be argued that Ugresic also explores the trauma of belonging to a vilified group? Only to a degree. It is easier to distance oneself from the actions and reputations of acknowledged criminals than of an ethnic group as a whole. Also, the charges levied at 'ex-Yugoslavs' are something that the narrator can retreat from and into her own ethnicity as a Croatian (although she consciously does not identify as such; despite her many labels, including 'Balkan writer', 'post-Yugoslav writer' or 'world writer', she does not acknowledge the label of 'Croatian writer' even though that is how she is known and referred to in the West (Velickovic, 2014, p. 13)). For a Serb, there is no such option – it is the very ethnicity that is the problem, and there is nowhere to retreat from it.

Ugresic also notes a remarkable phenomenon, which both attests to the complexities of identity and belonging amongst the ex-Yugoslavs, as well as to her own incredible humanity as a writer: her narrator refers to all the ex-Yugoslavs in her environment as 'our people'.

> The first time I entered the classroom I could tell what made them 'our people'. 'Our people' had an invisible slap on their faces. They had that sideways, rabbit-like look, that special tension in the body, that animal instinct of sniffing the air to tell which direction danger is coming from. The ourness came through in a certain strained melancholy in their features, a slight cloud on their brows, a barely

> visible, almost internal stoop. 'Our people prowl the city as if it were a jungle, terror-stricken,' Selim would say. And we were all 'ours'. (2008, p. 21)

This is significant: instead of retreating into her own identity as a Croatian, a country that has been readily recognised by Europe and the perception of which tends to be as much more democratic and Westernised due to its Germanic connections, the narrator chooses to embrace all the pain and the shared heritage and misfortune of being an ex-Yugoslav or, as she referred to herself, as post-Yugoslav (Velickovic, 2014, p.13).

Hemon is not so generous. In *Nowhere Man* (2004), there is little doubt as to who the culprit is for the war and the crimes in Bosnia and Croatia. Almost as soon as the narrative begins, the reader is faced with a newspaper headline '*DEFENSES COLLAPSE IN GORAZDE'* (2004, p. 8), a reference to a Bosnian town which suffered heavy losses in the attacks by the Serbian army. Soon, we find out about the 'trouble in Croatia' and the news of the 'roaming murder-units coming from Serbia, conveyed with images of corpses with gouged-out eyes and cut-off noses' (2004, p. 69). There is also the mention of the news headline about thousands of people killed in Srebrenica,[22] and a letter which talks about Chetniks throwing grenades 'and you see brains and stomach and spine, children, women, all dead, small pieces of meat' (2004, p. 132).[23] When we meet the novel's first and only Serbian character, it becomes easy to understand how such atrocious crimes can be committed: Branko Brdjanin, whose very name suggests primitivity, is a thoroughly horrible man who has abandoned his American wife and child, who is on the run from the courts for child support payments, and who drives a car with a bumper

[22] Bartley tells us that 'In Srebrenica, Dutch UN peacekeepers stood by helplessly as thousands of Bosnian Muslims were massacred by Serb forces in 1995' (2008, p. 67).

[23] An informal name for Serbian paramilitaries and also used in the Second World War to denote those whose political loyalties lay with the overturned royal regime

sticker that says 'IF YOU DON'T LIKE MY DRIVING CALL 1-800-EATSHIT' (2004, p. 148).[24] Even his physical appearance is revolting: he has an overgrown beard and a thumb that's a 'grotesque stump' (2004, p. 154). His living quarters are disgusting, reeking of 'coffee and smoke, stale sweat and Vegeta' (2004, p. 154), and his own body exudes 'an exhausted yeasty smell' (2004, p. 157).[25] It is interesting that scholars such as Markovic et al. have interpreted this same sentence purely in the light of ‘a sense of home [being] constructed through sounds and smells’ which makes up ‘the familiar domestic setting for the post-Yugoslav reader’ (Markovic et al., 2019, p. 166). I am inclined to give more weight to the specific choice of language. The room ‘reeks’ and, while the mention of the smell of Vegeta may indeed be nostalgic for a post-Yugoslav reader, it is hard to interpret the mixed smells of coffee, cigarette smoke and stale sweat as anything but unpleasant – unpleasant enough as concrete detail to be useful in the characterisation of Brdjanin who is deeply unpleasant himself. As if his repulsive physicality and living conditions were not enough, he also carries a gun in the back of his trousers and beats the Serbian woman he now lives with. When she appears in the scene with a 'swollen face and a faint bruise on her cheek', the book's protagonist fantasises how he might save her from this 'lair' until she recovers and regains her beauty, and how he would 'not ask for anything in return' (2004, pp. 153-155), despite the fact that up to that point he has fantasised about sex or inappropriate bodily contact with every other female character he came across, even in passing. Faced with the Serbian character's senseless hatred, the protagonist (who, like the author, is Ukrainian) wants to tell him that 'Croats are just like everyone else: good people and bad people' (2004, p. 154), but the novel omits any suggestion that this might apply to

[24] Brdjanin can be translated as Mountain Man
[25] Vegeta is a Serbian all-purpose seasoning

Serbs, too. At the end of their encounter, the protagonist leaves Mountain Man sobbing, and imagines him shooting himself with his gun, presumably because simply being Serbian is so awful that one must prefer to die.

The protagonist himself does not need to worry about telling anyone where *he* is from, however. Whenever he says 'Bosnia', invariably this is met with sympathy by foreign characters who, evidently, assume that Bosnian does not ever mean Serbian (as Serbs are the aggressors) (2004, pp. 15, 141, 178). In other words, the novel does not in any way acknowledge Serbian refugees from Bosnia, although according to 1996 data, there were '419,879 displaced persons on the territory of Republic of Srpska' (Marjanac, 1998). They were predominantly individuals of Serbian nationality, as in Serbia itself, where Serbian refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina make up more than 85 per cent of the total number of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNHCR, Serbian Commisariat for Refugees, and ECHO, 2002)'. In Serbia itself, 451,980 refugees from other ex-Yugoslav republics were registered in 2001 (Lukic and Nikitovic, 2004, pp. 89-90).

Hemon's memoir *The Book of My Lives* (2014) follows a similar structure, with the first mention of Serbian mass-murders on page 11 and shortly after a denouncing of the Belgrade daily paper *Politika* as the 'hysterical nationalist voice of the Slobodan Milosevic regime' (2014, p. 50). The author tells us that in the nineties Belgrade was 'fertile ground for the most virulent fascism' and writes about 'the rich tradition of Serbian fascism' (2014, p. 55). This is followed by the talk of Serbian death camps and genocide (2014, p.75), and the author concludes, reflecting on an infamous speech by Radovan Karadzic, the leader of Bosnian Serbs, that the speech was a performance aimed at 'the patriotic Serbs watching the broadcast, for those ready to embark upon an epic project that would require sacrifice, murder and ethnic cleansing to be completed.' This is understandable, however, as Serbs were

brought up on the likes of *The Mountain Wreath,* an epic poem that the author declares to be a painfully boring 'foundational text of Serbian cultural nationalism' which advocates for total extermination of the Muslims (2014, p. 76) (ignoring the fact that this is, actually, a piece of Montenegrin poetry, dating back to the 19th century and that the Muslims in questions were the Ottoman Turks who occupied and ruled most of the Balkans for over five centuries). Despite all the virulent Serbian nationalism and genocidal tendencies, the author's parents take shelter from the war in Serbia, living there as refugees until eventually emigrating to Canada. The narrative mentions a number of friends who, to an ex-Yugoslav reader, sound likely to be Serbian (Duska, Velimir Vebovic, cika Vlado), but it is interesting that the author, writing in English for a foreign audience, does not acknowledge them as such. The only Serbs explicitly mentioned are in the context of the atrocities of war, mostly simply referred to as 'the Serbs' (2014, pp. 104, 105, 106 etc). In this narrative, another Serb commits suicide: Professor Koljevic, a close ally of Karadzic, shoots himself after falling out of favour (2014, p. 129).

Does Hemon's writing, like mine, ultimately explore trauma of a particular group of migrants? Scholars such as Shin (2019) have focused on analysing his work as part of a new type of immigration narrative, which is prominent in its adoption of 'transnational aesthetics' (Mukherjee quoted in Shin, 2019, p. 571). This theory focuses on the fact that Hemon's novel does not have a conventional plot; instead, the text uses 'network aesthetics' (Shin, 2019, p. 570) approach to narrative structure, which, as a form, mirrors the real-life experience of migration and transnational networks which define it. If we accept this claim, we could argue that this innovative structure also mirrors Dowd's concept of the broken links of continuity and cohesion – 'the structure of temporality' (Dowd, 2020, pp. 302) which may be indicative of displacement trauma.

If there is one of these authors who can absolutely lay claim to war trauma, however, that is Maric, who comes from Mostar and who, before emigrating to the UK as a refugee, lived through considerable fighting in her hometown: ‘Some days before, on my way home from school, a tremendous explosion shook the city. Windows shattered around me, people screamed, the ground trembled and everyone ran in random directions’ (Maric, 2009, p. 5).

Western media typically reported on the events in Bosnia as purely committed by Serbs against the other parties. However, right at the start of her book and her story, Maric reliably reports that her Serbian friend, the daughter of Mr Dusan, advises her that they are leaving Sarajevo. 'She was one of the many Serbs who left the city that week and never came back. My Serb relatives also left town that week.' (2009, p. 7). Later that same day, there is another explosion. 'There were dead bodies in the street, wounded, screams, the wailing of ambulances and police cars' (2009, p. 8). These are the kinds of experiences that, as we have seen in Literature Review, are most likely to lead to a traumatic response. Yudit describes the emotional impact of the events which Maric lived through as ‘dramatic changes [which] unsettled the very basis of their existence, inducing a profound feeling of loss and, at the same time, incredulity’ (2023, p. 264).

Maric's story illustrates how even in the midst of war, the decision to emigrate can appear on the surface to be voluntary. '[…] my mother mentioned there was an opportunity to go to Britain', Maric recalls, as if she were talking about a weekend trip to the seaside, something one can easily choose to do or not. Decades later, Maric considers the decision she had made to emigrate, and what the outcome of the opposite decision might have been. 'I often wonder what would have happened if I had decided to stay in Bosnia,' she writes. 'Where would I be now? I could have been anything: a mother sitting in front of the TV with two kids at her side; a

secretary filing her nails and huffing while she looks at the clock; a successful businesswoman.' However, this ordinary, nostalgic hypothetical list then moves on to the darker realities of what could have happened, had she stayed in Bosnia. '[…] a corpse, lying beneath a black marble stone bearing my name and dates of birth and death' (2009, p. 19). The last point brings into question the degree to which her decision could ever have been considered 'voluntary' in the first place. It is impossible to read Maric's memoir and not be deeply moved by her experiences. At the same time, in her book I did not detect any of the open disdain or bitterness that permeates Hemon's work so palpably.

3. METHODOLOGY

'Good research practice dictates that you start by framing your research question(s), then identify the method(s) that seem most likely to lead to a useful answer (Tenenbaum et al., 2009, quoted in Kara, 2020, p. 8). For this PhD, the most appropriate methods have been Creative Writing as research and autoethnography, and in the following section I explain the rationale behind choosing those methods, how they have been applied and what benefits they have yielded.

3.1 Creative Writing as Research

The central vehicle for my research through Creative Writing has been the protagonist of my novel. As noted in the Introduction, while she does not have direct experience of war, her behaviour is nevertheless suggestive of war trauma. Given that she is a fictional character, what do I mean by her 'behaviour'?

We know that Creative Writing is 'a synthesizing process that brings about both knowledge and emotional awareness through imaginative interpretation and representation of experience.' (NAWE, 2018, p. 5). Thus, her 'behaviour' is the outcome of my own experiences combined with my imagination: a thought experiment where I use the method of modelling reality through the process of Creative Writing.

This Creative Writing PhD is an example of practice-led research (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 2). It centres around a novel, which 'is not written solely for commercial, cultural, literary, personal, political, professional or social reasons [… but also] for an *educational* reason – indeed, *a research into new knowledge* reason' (Krauth, 2008, p. 14). Thus, 'the terminologies are a means to characterise the way

in which practice can result in research insights, such as those that arise out of making a creative work' (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 2).[26] On the other hand, how do we define 'creative'? Creativity 'designates the ability to create; to produce something new and original' (Dawson, 2005, p. 22). Ever since the humanism of the Italian Renaissance, the notion of humans as creative beings has been firmly established (Dawson, 2005, p. 25), with the word 'creative' becoming part of the general language by mid–eighteenth century (Dawson, 2005, p. 27). 'Creativity is now most commonly defined as the mental capacity to produce something new and valuable' (Dawson, 2005, p. 45).

The idea that creative practice can be a form of research is relatively new, as historically Humanities prioritised other kinds of enquiry, such as criticism, theory and historical investigation.[27] Creative practitioners developed terms such as practice–led research in order to argue that their activities are as important for the generation of knowledge as the more traditional and conventional academic research methods (Smith and Dean, 2009, p.3), and that 'creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs' and can lead to specialised research insights (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 5). The latter happens particularly when the creative practitioner reflects on their own work, seeking to theorise, conceptualise and document it, which for Sullivan is crucial to fulfilling all the functions of research. Crewe agrees with this, saying that 'Although Creative Writing provides the researcher and reader with unique insights, it cannot fully realise its research potential without a framework for theoretical and contextual analysis and reflection' (Crewe, 2021, p. 2). The artist–researcher must 'take up the challenge of theorising

[26] Practice–led research, practice–based research, creative research or practice as research (Smith and Dean, 2009, p.2)

[27] There are exceptions. For example, Ralph Waldo Emerson thought that a true scholar 'engages directly and personally with nature and experience before committing his perception to the page' (Dawson, 2005, p. 33)

their practice' if they are to fully utilise practice–led research as creating knowledge that is 'individually and culturally transformative' (Sullivan, 2009, p. 63).

Multiple organisations define practice–based research in very similar terms, with the Arts and Humanities Research Council's definition of it as a 'distinctive feature of the research activity in the creative and performing arts', which 'involves the identification of research questions and problems, but the research methods, contexts and outputs then involve a significant focus on creative practice' (Sullivan, 2009, p. 47), and the National Association of Writers in Education stating that 'Creative practice research can include a range of methods, approaches and styles […] The process of artistic practice and its resulting output are perceived as contributions to knowledge' (NAWE, 2018, p. 3).

However, this knowledge needs to be transferrable to other contexts (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 7). This emphasis on transferability is in line with the OECD's view of research as being 'creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humankind, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications (OECD 2002 : 30)' (Sullivan, 2009, p. 44), a definition which, although originating in the 1960s, has been widely accepted in academia.[28]

How does this notion of generating new knowledge that can be transferred to other contexts relate to my novel? As I demonstrate in Analysis, the process of writing my novel and developing the characterisation of my protagonist has led to insights regarding war trauma as something that can arise in economic migrants who have not experienced war first-hand. These insights can be transferred to other fields such as psychology – in particular, regarding interventions and treatments for war

[28] Although, Smith and Dean consider this definition to be somewhat undervaluing the particular contribution art can make to cultural economies, as it is rooted in ideas of basic and applied research and its contribution to industrial economies (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 44).

trauma which currently do not recognise economic migrants as a group vulnerable to it. Furthermore, arriving at such insights through the practice of Creative Writing can impact other writers, enabling them to understand their position and write in similar ways. These insights can have an impact that goes beyond academic theory or clinical practice, because they can also impact the reader. As the UK Research Excellence Framework states, 'A novel can create a change in the behaviour and attitudes of its readers, as well as bringing potential benefits to a community, such as, for example, a particular marginalised group'. Crewe particularly acknowledges the potential benefit of providing insight into the minds of' individuals from groups often portrayed with homogenised negative stereotypes in mainstream media' (Crewe, 2021, p. 3); given that Serbs are one such group, as was demonstrated in the *Media Representations of Serbs* section, my novel can have a profound impact on Serbs living in the UK and how they are perceived by their wider British communities, because fiction as a research practice has the ability to promote empathy and build 'bridges of understanding across differences' (Crewe, 2021, p. 2). This is likely to extend to groups beyond just Serbs: for example, the Russians living in the UK during Russia's current aggression on Ukraine.

Furthermore, fiction has the potential to do more than just elicit empathy: it can also induce readers to re-evaluate their own perspectives and assumptions, especially through the creative technique of focalisation, which enables the reader to 'see' from a character's perspective. Thus, when the character reframes their own understanding of an issue, this can result in a shift in the perspective of the reader, too. (Crewe, 2021, p. 4). In the case of my novel, my protagonist Jelena's initial attitude about Serbia is negative, but in the course of the narrative, she moves to a more positive and accepting viewpoint. My hope is that this shift would be reflected in the readers as well. This is one of the key strengths of Creative Writing as

research (Crewe, 2021, p. 5). This process of moving from the unknown to the known directly echoes what Sullivan sees as unique to creative practice as research:

> What is of interest to practice–led researchers, however, is the possibility of new knowledge that may be generated by moving from a stance more accurately seen to move from the ‘unknown to the known’ whereby imaginative leaps are made into what we don’t know as this can lead to critical insights that can change what we do know. (Sullivan, 2009, p. 48)

For Sullivan, creative practice generates new knowledge in two steps, the first being the creative impulse which must include going beyond the known, and the second being accepting that traditional systems for knowledge cannot adequately respond to this challenge. Thus, 'This is where artist–researchers take us – to where we’ve never been, to see what we’ve never seen. And then they bring us back and help us look again at what we thought we knew' (Sullivan, 2009, p. 62).

In this case, 'what we thought we knew' is the existing system of knowledge regarding war and displacement trauma; the potential benefit of my novel is in identifying the gap between those two concepts, neither of which recognises the case of the economic migrants living in a hostile adoptive country. This can enable the expression of this complex predicament for writers who have found themselves in that situation as well as any reader who relates to it, with a ripple impact on other communities.

Miall and Kuiken (1999) also talk about the adaptive value of literature in reshaping our perspectives and reconsidering our system of values. This exposes a significant similarity between Creative Writing research and the more traditional scientific methodologies, because both work to illuminate 'aspects of the human condition'. This process of 'decontextualisation and recontextualisation' can 'produce original insights that may remain overlooked or undiscovered by more conventional research methodologies' (Miall and Kuiken, 1999, quoted in Crewe, 2021, p.5). In

section 4, I demonstrate that this is the case with my novel, which produces original insights regarding war trauma that have not been fully recognised by the existing research in the field of psychology.

3.2 Autoethnography

I wanted to approach the experiences explored in the novel through the lens of autoethnography, which ‘asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do’ (Ellis, 2015, p. 10).

My research particularly focuses on the latter: central to my research objectives is the examination of why, over the last thirty years, I have acted and felt the way I do regarding Serbia, as explored through the character of Jelena in my novel. An additional question is whether I am alone in acting and feeling this way or whether I am symptomatic of a bigger problem, one which affects other people of my ethnic background and culture. Therefore, I am engaging in 'a cultural, or ethnographic, study of oneself' (Choi, 2017, p. 28) where I write about the personal and its relationship to culture (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). This is because ‘One characteristic that binds all autoethnographies is the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience’ (Holman Jones et al., 2015, p. 23). In other words, autoethnography as a method enabled me to start from my own experiences but not end there – it enabled me to go beyond just my life and examine those experiences in ways that seek to make meaning at a broader level. The full meaning of what I was writing about came to unfold as I was progressing through my novel. This is referred to as the 'emerging quality' of autoethnographic texts, whereby the researcher 'learns by going' (Anderson and Glass–Coffin, 2015, p. 57).

Telling our own stories, when coupled with deep examination of what those stories mean to us as members of our ethnic or national groups, positions the writing as not just reflective but also critical and that carries certain 'personal, relational, and ethical risks' (Holman Jones et al., 2015, p. 19). For me, a way of managing those risks was to utilise both autoethnography and Creative Writing as research, as opposed to focusing just on Creative Writing which is my core discipline. Integrating the two meant that I could use imagination to supplement direct experience, particularly in those areas where the emotional examination might be painful. Exploring the idea of war trauma through my protagonist Jelena as opposed to purely discussing what it meant to me personally, enabled me to go deeper while at the same time maintaining some emotional safety; it also meant that rather than just writing about *me* I could explore something potentially valuable to others who are *like* me, broadening the reach and potential impact of my work.

Holeman Jones et al. acknowledge that assigning a definitive label to a piece of personal writing, whereby it is designated as either autobiographical or autoethnographical, can be complex and without certainties (Holman Jones et al., 2015, p. 23). Nevertheless, broadly speaking, autoethnographic work typically feels more socially conscious and tends to meet the following criteria:

(1) It purposefully comments on/critiques culture and cultural practices
(2) It makes contributions to existing research
(3) It embraces vulnerability with purpose
(4) It creates a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response

(Holman Jones et al, 2015, p. 22)

To purposefully comment means to highlight the relationship of one's story to a culture or a cultural practice (Holman Jones et al., 2015, p. 23)'. In this thesis, there is a dual aspect to the 'culture' part of this equation: I am examining the effects of certain circumstances and experiences on people who belong to my own, Serbian, culture, as well as the relationship with the adoptive culture I find myself in as an émigré to the United Kingdom. Autoethnography will enable me to connect lived experience to scholarship (Anderson and Glass–Coffin, 2015, p. 58).

In terms of making a new contribution, 'autoethnographic texts demonstrate knowledge of past research on a topic and seek to contribute to this research' (Holman Jones et al, 2015, p. 23). This helps to characterise autoethnography as scholarship, and autoethnographers as entering into an existing academic conversation around a particular subject matter. This thesis delves into the existing knowledge around war and displacement trauma; however, as I am not a psychologist, my contribution is primarily in examining the ways in which Creative Writing can contribute to these disciplines by helping to represent an experience of war not currently encompassed in the existing studies. Autoethnographic texts can incorporate scholarly conventions, such as citations and scholarly commentary, in order to be recognisable to scholars, but this is not a requirement (Holman Jones et al., 2015, p. 24). My own work combines both approaches, with the exegesis relying on those conventions in a formal academic manner and the novel being a straightforward prose text.

The third expected trait of autoethnographic texts is of particular interest to me as it concerns intentional vulnerability on the part of the subject (i.e., the researcher). The vulnerability comes from the authenticity of the stories that autoethnographic research is based on, even when those stories are then fictionalised. 'As such, authoethnographic texts open the door to criticisms that other ways of knowing do

not; as Carolyn Ellis notes, “We open ourselves up for criticism about how we’ve lived” (p. 34)' (Ellis, 2004, quoted in Holman Jones et al., 2015, p. 24). In order to mitigate this potential criticism, autoethnographers have to make choices about what they are prepared to share, and I also had to make those choices when writing my novel. Sometimes the choice meant inventing a fictionalised experience that did not happen to me in real life, in order to analyse what could have happened and was often likely to happen to people like me, thus creating a broader cultural link. Two examples from the novel are my protagonist's work in the sex industry and the sexual assault she suffers as an au–pair. The key point I was trying to make was about the economic vulnerability of migrants who do not have work permits, and the potential abuses this enables. Those experiences did not have to happen to me directly but are very real for many people and are part of the broader cultural experience of being a migrant from a country whose nationals are subject to severe immigration restrictions in the UK. Writing about those experiences created enormous vulnerability for me because I did not want to provoke concern in any reader who knows me personally, while also wanting to avoid any potential stigma or social judgement. Additionally, I was aware that I was 'borrowing' the voice of two marginalised minorities, that is of sex workers and of survivors of sexual assault. Thus writing about those experiences had to be done with both honesty and sensitivity, with an awareness that I had little control over how they would be received by the reader.

With regards to writing about the work of strip/lap dancers, I consulted a wide range of sources from academic writing through to council-commissioned reports and mainstream media. The research I have undertaken has given me reassurance that my portrayal of work in a strip/lap dancing bar in London in the 1990s has been accurate and fair.

For example, Goldsmith (2018) refers to a key report titled *Profitable exploits: Lap dancing in the UK* (Bindel, 2004) which had been commissioned by the Glasgow City Council and has been, as a key piece of primary research, used in policy decisions and considerations around the role of this kind of commercial establishment. Goldsmith gives a clear summary of the main conclusions of the report. The ones most relevant to the representation of strip clubs in my novel are:

- Lap dancing clubs, contrary to the opinion of club owners interviewed for the purposes of this study, are part of the sex industry
- Activities within the clubs can be seen as detrimental to gender equality
- The buying and selling of sexual services does occur in some lap dance clubs
- Working conditions and terms of employment of lap dancers are inadequate and problematic
- There is strong evidence that dancers can suffer humiliation and sexual harassment on a regular basis, from customers and staff/management
- Many dancers begin working in lap dance clubs through lack of real choice (Goldsmith, 2018, p. 4)

Another important piece of primary research into this subject has been a University of Leeds study titled *Regulatory Dance: Investigating the Structural Integration of Sexual Consumption into the Night-Time Economy, 2010-2011*, which conducted the largest English survey so far of dancers/strippers (196 responses) and came to the similar conclusions, such as that ‘here were regular reports of harassment from customers, […] issues raised regarding some clubs' lack of consideration for the welfare of their workers. Most notably, there was evidence of financial exploitation from managers as women would pay high 'house fees' and commission, often earning very little money after a shift […] The project found that lap dancing is a precarious form of work’ (Hardy and Sanders, 2011).

Nowadays the narrative of sex work has shifted towards female empowerment and an overall sex-positive discourse, which can be seen in writing such as *Attempts at a Feminist and Interdisciplinary Conversation About Strip Clubs* (Egan and Frank, 2005) and which I entirely support as it helps to reduce the stigmatisation of women who work in this type of sex industry. At the same time, it is clear that, at least in the 1990s, it was often economic necessity and lack of other choices that drove women to this type of work. This, in turn, made them vulnerable to exploitation, especially given the imbalance of power that would typically exist between dancers and patrons, or even dancers and management, and this was the point made in my novel, especially with regards to immigrants whose other work options were extremely limited.

> Power lies with who has the economic capital to buy (not those selling from a basis of financial need); who defines the parameters and content of sexualised dance (not those who can set the boundaries for each transaction within an overall template); and who has the ability to walk out of the door without being labelled as sexually loose and stigmatised. To ignore the context of gendered power relations in which sexualised dance clubs are such 'profitable exploits' (Bindel 2004) is to miss the meanings of unequal distribution of wealth and social and cultural capital between men and women. It also makes invisible the harm that women in the sex industry experience from the fragmentation and commodification of their bodies: a sense of intrusion, dissociation and (dis)embodiment (Wesley 2002; Coy 2009). (Coy, 2010, pp. 546-547)

The acknowledgement of the problems of working in strip/lap dancing clubs does not detract in any way from the bravery and strength of individual women who work in such establishments; on the contrary, it is only intended as a reminder that an individual dancer's emotional strength and resilience should not be her only protection from abuse, but that sex workers deserve and have a right to expect better protections from the law and the society as a whole. However, the normalisation of this aspect of sex industry does not stem from nor result in such

protections. In fact, it is a ripple effect of an overall increased sexualisation of popular culture in Western societies, which research has found to be profoundly detrimental to girls and young women (Coy, 2010, p. 547).

> The rapid growth in, and expansion of, sexualised dance clubs is rooted in this backdrop of wider sexualisation and through its framing as 'leisure', has increasingly normalised and mainstreamed the sex industry. (Coy, 2010, p. 547)

Iceland, for example, introduced an outright ban of strip clubs in 2010. 'The rationale for this, as with the criminalisation of paying for sex in Iceland, Sweden, and Norway, is that the commodification of women's bodies is not compatible with gender equality (Coy, 2010, p. 544-545).

At other times my choice (and task) was to write with integrity and a certain amount of courage about opinions and beliefs I hold in real life but which may be unpopular. It was challenging for me to admit to what could be perceived as a troubling lack of even basic patriotism, and the degree of alienation from my own culture that I have suffered. At the same time, my responsibilities as an autoethnographic researcher outweigh my concerns as a private individual. In putting my authentic self under the microscope, I am able to examine whether these particular traits are a personal anomaly or whether there are cultural patterns that can be detected, and if there are any epiphanies that can not only help me to come to terms with my experiences but which can extend to a wider group of people experiencing similar cultural patterns.

Finally, autoethnographic texts seek to create a reciprocal relationship with their readers, inviting a response. While I do not explicitly ask for this response in my text, it is implicit in the choices I made to make myself vulnerable, which have the potential to deeply engage the reader and entice them into considerations about their

own experiences, whether they belong to a similar ethnic and cultural group as me or not.

It is clear from the above that autoethnography functions as a highly subjective research method and its subjectivity, rather than being a weakness or a contradiction with the concept of research, is in fact its strength. It is the dimension that provides meaning to the otherwise technical inquiry of 'what happened' because it delves into 'how', including the key questions of 'how it felt then and how it feels now'. As Bochner says, 'facts don't tell you what they mean or how they may make you feel' (Bochner, 2015, p. 54). However, the meaning of our stories is not fixed in time and interpretations can change depending on our vantage point. This was very much my experience in writing this thesis, because the meaning I ascribe to my experiences now, as an adult and an academic, is different – deeper, more nuanced, more aware – than the meaning I ascribed at the time. In many ways it is only now, having completed this thesis, that I can truly appreciate how traumatising my experiences have been for me, as well as for my fictional alter-ego Jelena. This insight means that autoethnography has served a deep purpose in recognising something vital about my own life as well as helping me on the journey of healing.

4. ANALYSIS

The unfolding characterisation of my protagonist provided invaluable insights regarding my own life and personal history, and what made these insights possible and available was the process of Creative Writing as research. The starting point for the writing of my novel was very autobiographical, and in the early drafts the plot was based on many real–life events from my past; however, there was little emotional engagement, and the character of my protagonist was observed by several readers to be flat.

As I developed the narrative, I moved away from autobiographical retelling and towards a more fictionalised account, at the same time starting to develop deeper observations about my protagonist's feelings, problems and behaviour. As I allowed myself more space to explore, by moving away from the things that had directly happened to me towards things that could have easily happened to someone in my position (and which often did happen in real life), this process seemed to open an emotional safe space in which to examine how I had felt during that period of my life. Many memories came back to me vividly and resulted in the emotional side of my protagonist becoming more vivid too.

As a semi-autobiographical character, Jelena is also born in Serbia, to Serbian parents; she emigrates to the UK as a teenager, in the middle of the war that Serbia is fighting with Croatia and Bosnia in the early 1990s. In London, she initially works as an au-pair, then leaves the host family after a sexual assault by her employer and finds illegal but lucrative work in the sex industry. Her romantic relationship with Mladen, a Bosnian Serb refugee, exposes her to the dark side of the Serbian diaspora in London – it is a world of strip clubs, shady business dealings, and frequent but concealed violence. When, after the NATO bombing of

Serbia in 1999, Mladen recruits her to help him on a humanitarian trip to Kosovo, Jelena is forced to confront her own fears and doubts: she begins to believe that their work is not, in fact, humanitarian but that they are about to become human traffickers, intent on smuggling a group of young Albanian women into the UK with the plan to 'sell' them to brothels and into sex slavery. She runs away from the group and escapes back to London and spends the next few years trying to avoid being found by Mladen, before learning that he has returned to Serbia and moving on with her life. However, seventeen years later Mladen does find her and blackmails her to launder money for him, which is to fund his defence against war crimes charges at The Hague.

When the reader first meets Jelena at the opening of the novel, she is in her mid-thirties, married with two children, and living a very typical English middle-class life. Her 'Englishness' has largely been achieved through marriage, as can be the case with emigrants in real life. The Serbian writer and academic Vesna Goldsworthy tells us in her memoir that 'it was strange and quite unexpected, for many different reasons, that I finally shared my life with an English man and by sharing it became, almost, English' (2005, p. 150).[29] Jelena's situation is very privileged: the family is wealthy, due to her husband's inheritance and trust fund. They live in a large house in an expensive area of North London and Jelena is able to indulge her ideas of independence by running a small online business. Her daughter goes to an expensive school and her autistic son benefits from private specialist support. Her husband, while physically disabled, nevertheless lives a productive life as an

[29] The emphasis being on 'almost'. As Velickovic tells us about Goldsworthy, 'her claiming of Englishness represents an empowering position that disrupts the dominant perceptions of Englishness with its clearly defined set of boundaries, according to which she would always remain foreign, or at best British but never English' (2010, p. 182). It is interesting to consider whether the reverse would work: if Goldsworthy and her husband (or Jelena and William) had settled in Serbia instead of the UK, would the husband have become (almost) Serbian? Is it the locality that determines the direction of the change or is it the more dominant national identity (and how would that be defined)?

economist working in academia. All the circumstances of her life, on the surface of it, seem fine, especially by the main metric by which migrants are judged – economic success (Velickovic, 2019). However, something strange is bubbling just under the surface, because Jelena seems to have forgotten that she is Serbian.

She never speaks the language, never cooks any Serbian food, does not observe any Serbian customs, and is no longer friends with anyone from home, all symptomatic of avoidance which is 'a common defensive strategy for coping with shame and trauma' (Van Vliet, 2010). She takes elocution lessons for a year to hide what Velickovic refers to as 'audible difference' (2010, p. 183). Like Goldsworthy in real life, Jelena does not read the daily papers and never tells people she meets where she is from (Andrejevic, 2023).[30] In her memoir, Goldsworthy discusses similar efforts to conceal her ethnic identity: '"Where are you from?" the man continued. "Russia", I said, suddenly taken aback by the realisation that I pretended to be Russian in order not to have to talk about the war in Yugoslavia' (2005, p. 209).

All of Jelena's cultural choices are entirely English and she has even changed her name to Helen by deed poll. In displacement trauma literature, the phenomenon of Anglicisation of one's name has been described as an act that

> …betrays the fear and shame of being recognizably 'other' and signifies […] a defensive position of counter–phobic assimilation. This manifests as disavowal of the loss of the move and split from a former self, 'fusion' with the idealized new culture/place and loss of recognition of oneself as 'other', in order to feel as if one belongs 'here'. (Dowd, 2020, p. 316)

All of the above can be interpreted as indicators of trauma, viewed through the lens of 'avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event'. Criterion C from DSM IV is particularly helpful here (elements 1, 2, 5, and 6):

[30] Although Goldsworthy has caveats that help her to manage this: 'So long as the article did not contain the words Balkan, or war, or dead, it was fine,' she writes (2005, p. 211)

> There is persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness (not present before the trauma), as indicated by at least three of the following: (1) Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma (2) Efforts to avoid activities, places or people that arouse recollections of the trauma […] 5) Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others 6) Restricted range of affect (e.g. unable to have loving feelings). (Hunt, 2010, p. 53)

This seems to describe quite accurately Jelena's extraordinary efforts to avoid anything from her own culture and language, including giving her children names that, while they do exist in Serbia in some cases, are nevertheless of ambiguous linguistic origin and very Western-sounding (Oliver and Ana-Maria).

Jelena has intermittent depression and 'takes pills to get to sleep and different pills to get out of bed in the morning' (Andrejevic, 2023, p. 102); she also suffers from OCD tendencies and her life is immersed in rituals and checks that help to keep her anxiety under control. We know that exposure to traumatic events puts a person at an increased risk of 'major depressive disorder (MDD), panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and substance abuse as well as somatic symptoms and physical illnesses' (Laugharne et al., 2010, p. 25). Indeed, her body does show signs of psychosomatic illness, with frequent back spasms which do not seem to originate in anything physical and which no doctor has been able to resolve, and we know that 'Somatic symptoms for which no clear physical basis can be found are ubiquitous in traumatized […] adults. They can include chronic back and neck pain […]' (Kolk, 2015, p. 59). Hron also recognises that 'In the late twentieth century, doctors recognized that many immigrants and refugees suffer a wide variety of psychological and physical disorders resulting from the migration' (2018, p. 288). Jelena is often numb and feels nothing except a sense of confusion and detachment (DSM IV criterion C, point 5). When she looks at herself in the mirror, on the night of Mladen's arrival, she sees a stranger. 'It's not just the twisted outline of her body that seems

foreign. It's all of her' (Andrejevic, 2023, p. 15). This sense of alienation and detachment is not dissimilar to what Goldsworthy observes when she writes 'When I do make them, the movements feel as though they belong to someone else' (2005, p. 197).

The writing of the novel enabled me to explore the psychological consequences of the war and the stigma of being Serbian on Jelena, and by extension on me, while the literature review I undertook in my efforts to create autoethnographical extrapolations made it clear that those consequences could be best understood through the framework of war and displacement trauma, although Jelena had neither directly lived through a war nor been forcibly displaced.

What follows below is a mapping of specific aspects of Jelena's experience (as a fictionalised exploration of my own real-life experiences) to attributes of war trauma as discussed in the Literature Review:

1. A person is exposed to a traumatic event (actual or threatened injury or death, or something that injures their sense of 'what is right'), and they experience intense fear, helplessness and horror or guilt, shame and anger.

The first criterion directly applies to Jelena's experience of the NATO bombing of Serbia during 78 days in the spring of 1999. She is confronted with events that involve threatened death or serious injury to her friends and family, which unavoidably result in feelings of 'intense fear, helplessness and horror'. Although she is not physically in the territory which is being bombed, her experience of this event cannot be easily categorised as second–hand or indirect. She watches the bombing of her country, including her hometown, live on British television, just like Goldsworthy who writes in her memoir, 'I often returned home from work just

in time to watch the landscapes of my childhood burn on the early–evening television news' (2005, p. 238).

I also vividly recall the first night of the NATO bombing of Serbia, which I watched on the BBC, sitting on a friend's sofa, seeing footage of my hometown bombed while having no communication from my parents and not knowing whether they were still alive. The emotions I experienced that night, and in the following three months of the NATO bombing, included both profound shame that my formerly highly regarded home country had found itself in this political predicament, as well as overwhelming anger towards the West due to what I perceived as an injustice of how the conflict was portrayed. There was also a tremendous sense of disbelief, a feeling that some basic way of the world had been betrayed, which I believe fits well with the idea of the moral injury as described in the Literature Review. However, most fundamentally, there was fear as to whether my family would survive or die in the bombing.

Figley confirms the traumatic potential of this kind of situation, by observing that 'catastrophic events' which can develop into trauma usually involve a sense of danger, and that can be for oneself or loved ones. 'Indeed, we may be perfectly safe ourselves, yet still be traumatized when a loved one is in danger' (1986, p. 102). Furthermore, this is expanded on in Figley's writing about social support, with the recognition that 'the families of catastrophe are also victims of catastrophe – whether they experienced the catastrophe first hand or through a family member – and require the same considerations for treatment that the other victims receive' (1986, p. 113). It is interesting to consider that my family, despite having been in direct danger, did not seem to develop any long-term traumatic response to the NATO bombing. My research leads me to believe that perhaps the main factor which has influenced the trauma developing in my psyche but not

in theirs is the issue of social support, which is addressed further down in this section.

It is interesting that my watching of the bombing on British television never made it, as a scene, into my novel – the experience of the first night of NATO raids is only given through the point of view of Jelena's parents, as a story told to Jelena after the war. There are other significant real-life events from that time which are excluded from the novel and whose omission is, on reflection, interesting. During the NATO bombing, Serbs in London participated in protests outside of Whitehall and I attended many days of these street demonstrations. From a Creative Writing perspective, this is an interesting situation to describe as a scene, with potential for conflict, drama, and enormous thematic relevance. From a political perspective, it is a very poignant development in the characterisation of the protagonist. However, in my novel, the three months of bombing – arguably the biggest thing that has hitherto happened in Jelena's life – are glossed over. The reader learns about the first night, and then the story fast forwards to Mladen's invitation on the Kosovo trip, after the war is already finished.

I am not a psychologist and cannot claim with certainty that these omissions happened subconsciously, due to how triggering these memories are for me. I can however confirm that, to this day, when I read primary sources from that time or secondary sources written about the war, I feel strong physical discomfort and anxiety, and even though it has been over thirty years, I still feel reluctant to post anything pro-Serbian on social media, unless it is about neutral topics such as our celebrated tennis player Djokovic.

2. Traumatic events can change our view of the world as they disrupt social and personal structures and belief systems. War trauma often fundamentally changes our sense of self and identity. Traumatic response develops as an interaction between individual narrative and social forces.

Brought up with Yugoslav values, which included the idealistic notions of 'brotherhood and unity' with all Yugoslav ethnicities and nationalities (which, at the level of the nation as a whole, became negated in the years leading up to the war and then completely shattered during the conflict), Jelena holds a fundamental belief that she comes from a good, internationally respected country and belongs to a morally positive group. The view that Serbs believed themselves to be well-regarded by the West is supported by academics such as Dimitrijevic who writes about 'the belief that Serbs and Serbia were beloved in the whole world, and that they had friends in all states except in those which were their traditional enemies, whom they had defeated in World War II (Germany, Austria)' (2000, pp. 634-635).[31] This is more than just a subjective patriotic feeling. The Centre for European Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill states that Tito was a highly respected leader and that Yugoslavia enjoyed international prestige (The University of North Carolina, 2023). During the Cold War, Yugoslavia held a strategically important geopolitical position as a 'buffer' country situated between the Soviet Union and the Mediterranean Sea. It also provided a political balance between the US and the USSR, being a socialist country that refused to join the Warsaw Pact and maintained its independence. Tito was politically astute and understood how to capitalise on his country's unique position.

[31] Dimitrijevic offers a fascinating insight into the role of socialist ideology in the decisions Serbian leadership was making in the 1980s, just as the Soviet Union was about to fall apart and as the tensions in former Yugoslavia started to develop more visibly (2000, p. 636-637).

While Jelena, at the time of the war breaking out and her subsequent departure for England, is too young to understand this political context, nevertheless her worldview is one of patriotic pride. This worldview is also entrenched in the Yugoslav educational system, with its highly ideological approach to teaching World War Two history and the victory of the Partisan army in the fight against the German occupiers. Much of the post-war art and culture in Yugoslavia is based in what could be thought of as World War Two *mythology,* steeped in a stark good-versus-evil narrative of the conflict between the Yugoslav people and the Nazi invader, and this has a profound identity effect in a pro-Yugoslav family such as Jelena's. However, this worldview becomes impossible for Jelena to maintain when faced with the media onslaught in England which, as I demonstrate above, characterises Serbs as not just the aggressors but as an epitome of Nazi-like evil. From a psychological and emotional perspective, this is devastating.

Social identity theory assumes that 'people have a basic need to perceive themselves positively and that an essential part of one's self-concept derives from membership in groups' (Tajfel, 1981, and Tajfel and Turner, 1986, quoted in Cabaniss and Cameron, 2018, p. 178). Because of this our national identity and self-identity are 'deeply entwined' (Waldinger, 2017, p. 7. Tajfel and Turner (1979) also explain that group memberships provide us with a sense of self-esteem and that 'A positive view of our own group depends in part on comparisons to other groups' (Tajfel and Turner, 1979, cited in McKeown, Haji and Ferguson, 2016, p. xv). In Jelena's case, and by extension my own, the self-esteem originating in group membership is replaced by shame, further exacerbated by the comparison to other ex-Yugoslav republics which are enjoying international sympathy and support, while Serbia is indiscriminately vilified. Attachment to our group memberships has implications for our wellbeing and behaviour (McKeown, Haji and Ferguson, 2016, p.

xv), so the detrimental impact on Jelena's psychology and inner wellbeing is underpinned by theory and should be predictable; but it is not commonly recognised for the group she belongs to, both with regards to Serbs being viewed as aggressors – which forfeits their right to considerations given to their counterparts in the conflict – and with regards to her status as an economic migrant rather than a war refugee.

As an extension of the above, Hunt and Janoff–Bulman both emphasise the impact of trauma on a person's identity and sense of self. When the war breaks out, overnight the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the country Jelena is born into and considers home, no longer exists and neither does the Yugoslav identity, bringing into focus as a successor identity Jelena's ethnicity as a Serb. Even on its own, this fact entails 'a question of coming to terms with the loss of belonging to a more inclusive Yugoslav identity, and a negotiation of a newly acquired burdensome Serbian identity' (Velickovic, 2010, p. 181). Therefore, being Yugoslav is superseded by the fact of being Serbian, but Jelena learns through the British media that the Serbs are compared to the Nazis, and the Holocaust is widely accepted as 'the most terrible, evil series of events known to mankind' (Hunt, 2010, p. 3).

What conclusions can Jelena come to emotionally (if not intellectually) about the national and ethnic group she belongs to (and by extension, the self)? Velickovic tells us that there was a tension between the place one belonged to, with that belonging being rooted in family ties, and the 'burden of belonging' to the Balkans and what they have become during the war (2010, p. 180). In fact, it is more than just a tension – given how central our national identity is to our personal identity, it is a monumental shattering of that foundation. Furthermore, if identity is tied up with memory and history (Hunt, 2010, p. 106), then even after the immediate war ends there is a lasting consequence. Hunt recognises the transition from memory to history, from personal to collective – the necessity of both is there for the creation of

personal identities. In the case of emigrants who find themselves relegated to a pariah group, these critical continuities are disrupted. 'In order to create our identities we draw on cultural memories and historical understanding of our cultures' (Hunt, 2010, p. 106).

The shift from Yugoslav cultural memories – which become decoupled from any geopolitical entity once Yugoslavia stops existing – to Serbian, which are to a large degree culturally and politically new, is in itself sufficient to significantly disrupt the process of creation of own identity through the cultural 'whole'. Added to the invalidation of all things Serbian in the hostile political culture in the UK, the foundation for establishing new identity is shattered. When this happens to young people – my generation of Serbian emigrants were typically only seventeen or eighteen at time of departure – it can significantly interfere with that ongoing thread needed for 'socialisation into our culture' (Hunt, 2010, p. 106) so instead the culture of the host country ends up being adopted as the only available alternative, despite its hostility. This creates a deep internal conflict, given the sense of injustice that many, if not all, Serbian people felt about the war, how it was portrayed in the West and the role the international community had played in the conflict.[32]

We tend to think about migration as geared towards an improvement of circumstances – a refugee in fear for their life is going to be and feel safer in a lawfully regulated, democratically run host country; an economic migrant is going to at least to some degree, despite the challenges of living and working in a different culture, enjoy the increased opportunities and financial benefits of their decision to emigrate. Those assumptions posit as an outcome an improvement of some of the circumstances of the person who emigrated, and even taking into account the issues

[32] It is outside of the scope of this thesis to explore the alternative viewpoints of the causes and nature of the Yugoslav wars and the role of the Serbs. For a critical examination of the Western policy towards Yugoslavia, see authors such as Hammond and Herman (2000).

around the context of reception, discussed in Literature Review, they include an assumption of a relatively benign 'receiving' environment. However, in the case of a pariah emigrant group, demonised during an active conflict between the host country and the country of origin, the openly hostile environment means that any attempted integration comes at a great cost to the sense of personal integrity.

3. Traumatic events often involve a loss of control.

While the above statement is particularly true in cases of highly personal trauma, where there might be some kind of direct violation of individual integrity (through violence, sexual violence etc), I believe that the issue of loss of control is also applicable to broader scenarios. Jelena, for example, has no control over politics or the progression of the war in Serbia. A crucial factor in this sense of helplessness is that the war is not really being fought in her name. Like many Serbs, she does not harbour strong nationalist sentiments. Her characterisation in that respect is supported by research. Mueller, who is Hayes Chair of National Security Studies at Mershon Center and Professor of Political Science at The Ohio State University, is solid in his insistence that there was a great deal of resistance to the media's attempts to whip up nationalist frenzy in Yugoslavia (particularly Serbia) and that militant nationalism was not particularly deep (2000, p. 44). One of the facts that illustrate this is a poll conducted throughout Yugoslavia in 1990, roughly a year before the war with Croatia started, which asked the question 'Do you agree that every (Yugoslav) nation should have a national state of its own?' Mueller reports that, 'after centuries of supposed ethnic hatreds and after years of nationalist propaganda [responses were:] completely agree, 16 percent; agree to some extent, 7 percent; undecided, 10 percent; do not agree in part, 6 percent; and do not agree

at all, 61 percent' (2000, p. 44). This reluctance, Mueller suggests, extended to the army.

> But when ordinary Serb soldiers were given an opportunity to express these presumed proclivities or to act in response to the ingenious televised imprecations in government-sanctioned violence, they professed they did not know why they were fighting and often mutinied or deserted en masse. Meanwhile, back in Serbia young men reacted mainly by determined draft-dodging. Some 150,000 or more quickly emigrated or went underground. In one city, only two of the 2,000–3,000 “volunteers” expected in a call-up showed up, and in several towns there were virtual mutinies against conscription. Overall, only 50 percent of Serbian reservists and only 15 percent in Belgrade obeyed orders to report for duty. (2000, p. 48)

Who fought the war, in the absence of willing soldiers? Anecdotally, in Serbia at the time, the widespread belief was that various paramilitary formations were behind the wrongdoings identified in the conflict. Again, research supports this view. Mueller argues that the main military force were small groups of combatants, 'groups that purport to fight and kill in the name of some larger entity,' in the process often taking 'vicious control' of mild, ordinary and bewildered civilians (Mueller, 2000, p. 42). Furthermore, he claims that the war in Yugoslavia was predominantly fought by such small groups, consisting of thugs and ' opportunistic marauders', often released from gangs and prisons for this purpose.

Years before I read about this in an academic article, I ascribed to my antagonist Mladen the following dialogue lines:

> I'm innocent.' […] It's just another lie, Jelena. And you know how many lies there've been. You know who committed those crimes. Hooligans, drug lords, criminals let out of jail. Because normal men like me didn't want to. […] 'It wasn't people like me […] or your dad, or your high school teacher, or your neighbour. (Andrejevic, 2023, p. 86)

This is relevant to the formation of Jelena's trauma because the dominant discourse in the UK did not recognise the wrongdoings of these criminal groups as crimes that

should be attributed to society's outlaws instead of being portrayed as representative of the national character. The helplessness to do anything about such a fundamental misrepresentation would have added immensely to the sense of powerlessness and loss of control, for my fictional protagonist as it did for me in real life.

Furthermore, in a practical sense, during the NATO bombing this loss of control extends to her family's actions, some of which are unsafe (remaining in the 4th floor flat in order to be contactable by telephone) but which she has no power to influence or prevent, however much they increase the risk of them being harmed in the bombing.

4. Traumatic response is strongly associated with lack of social support to process the traumatic event.

As evidenced in Literature Review, social support is seen as 'the single most effective means of helping people to cope with war trauma […] protecting them from the emotions associated with (trauma) and relying on the home as a safe haven from the memories of war' (Hunt, 2010, pp. 78/79). What happens in the case of an emigrant like Jelena or myself is that the broad environment not only does not offer any such support, but often contains triggers for those memories (in the media, for example, which is why not only Goldsworthy and myself, but also my fictional character do not read the papers) and where the very concept of home as a safe haven becomes compromised, because if England is home then how does one reconcile that with the hostility one perceives and experiences there? Hunt also argues that 'People develop effective narratives through social support' (2010, p. 128). Does that mean that without such social support, in a country like the UK

where there was such universal condemnation of Serbia at the time, it was not possible to develop effective narratives to aid in trauma healing process? I believe so. Not only was there the condemnation of Serbian politics and their military actions, but the media discourse extended this to an overall lack of empathy even to the group of people who are normally never vilified in this way, the refugees. If this seems like an exaggeration, it is helpful to remember that, for example, Phillip Sherwell of *The Sunday Telegraph* on 13th June 1999 called Serbs 'probably the world's least pitiable refugees' and on 7 August 1995 *The Independent's* leader-writer wrote that it was 'tempting to feel euphoric' about the 1995 attack on Krajina in which 2,500 Serbian refugees were killed (Hammond, 2000, pp. 130, 125).

Braid's article (1999), written and published in the midst of NATO bombing, is also marked by any lack of empathy for the Serbian side even though its civilians were being bombed on a daily basis. At one point, the author asks, 'Have British Serbs, rallied around the one issue of the bombardment, any sympathy for Kosovo's suffering and dispossessed?' but it is only an unnamed Serbian man who acknowledges Serbian suffering, stating that 'Sometimes media coverage would make you think Serbs did not have women and children'.

While the movements of any other ethnic group caused by this war were declared to be ethnic cleansing by the Serbs, when Serbs themselves were displaced, this was described as 'voluntary ethnic cleansing', and a BBC correspondent described looting by ethnic Albanians as 'rough justice […] to be expected'. Hammond also tells us that, ‘The hundreds of thousands of Serbs who fled bombing were therefore determinedly ignored by British journalists, just as most of the killings, kidnappings, beatings and torture of Kosovo Serbs after the war were not deemed newsworthy’ (2000, p. 130).

Goldsworthy was also aware of this, when she wrote about her ‘distress that Serb suffering didn’t seem to register anywhere’ (2005, p. 213). The negative perception and stigma surrounding Serbs as aggressors has very practical consequences for Serbian people as a whole. For example, Hammond observes a big disparity in international aid initiatives when he writes that 'The Director General of the British Red Cross noted that even before the Kosovo crisis Yugoslavia had the largest number of refugees in Europe (over 500,000), but while over 300 humanitarian organisations operated in Bosnia, just 27 had a presence in Yugoslavia' (2000, p. 131).

This is the state which Pilger describes as, 'Today, the Serbs are the unpeople. They have no civilisation, no society, no poetry, no history. The savagery they suffered at the hands of the Nazis in the Second World War, exceeded only by the mass extermination of the Polish Jews, has been forgotten […] they are the unworthy victims' (2000, p. 132). Belonging to a group that was so publicly declared as not worthy of any compassion would certainly explain some of the emotional consequences that Jelena suffers.

The irony of this is that Jelena, compelled by feelings of anger and shame (which, Hunt tells us, are often reported by people as being experienced at the time of the trauma (2010, p. 62)), withdraws from her root culture and immerses herself in the host culture where she may be able to forge a new and more positive identity, as well as acting on the impulse of avoidance as one of the two fundamental coping mechanisms for coping with traumatic recollections (Hunt, 2010, pp. 78–79). However, the host culture prevents recovery from trauma because there is not the social support to create a new and effective narrative to deal with what has happened. She is unable to integrate the traumatic events into her overall life story and increase 'autobiographical coherence'. This is not just Hunt's view. Karen

Burnell's work also examined the role of social support in healing from trauma (Hunt, 2010, p. 127). A further question, I believe, is whether in addition to making trauma recovery more challenging or impossible, the lack of social support can be one of the factors creating that trauma in the first place? While this does not seem to be articulated in war trauma studies in an explicit way, there is an implied possibility of this when Hunt discusses how refugees 'are often damaged more by their arrival and reception in the new country than they are by the events they witnessed or experienced in their homeland (Hunt and Gekenyi, 2003, quoted in Hunt, 2010, p. 59). The relevance of the 'context of reception' for migrants, in general, has been explored by other authors, too (Stepick and Stepick, 2009 and Jarowsky et al. 2012).

> The principles of the context of reception are predicated on the assumption that certain aspects of the host country's socio–political environment will influence a migrant's 'incorporation' and identity formation as a member of the host society. (Munro, 2017, p. 31)

In other words, the conditions that the migrants experience in the host country – the reception they are met with – have an influence on the effectiveness of their efforts to create a new identity for themselves oriented around the host culture. We saw evidence of Hron agreeing with the significance of this in her writing about 'target language', discussed in the Literature Review (2018, pp. 297–298).

5. CONCLUSION

Hemingway said that every war is a crime.[33] Although indisputably bloody, the war which broke up former Yugoslavia was just one: in the four decades after the end of World War Two there were one hundred and fifty wars and only twenty–six days of world peace (Fink, 2010).

In the Literature Review, I introduced the concept of 'trauma membrane'. Martz expands this concept to include rehabilitation interventions; i.e., the activities of international agencies such as the United Nations, non–governmental organisations or Organization for Security and Co–operation in Europe [OSCE], as another way of creating this trauma membrane, a post-conflict rehabilitation which is seen as critical for facilitating healing, encouraging stability and thus helping to prevent future conflict – in other words, addressing the human factor which is key to post-conflict rebuilding (Martz, 2010, p. 4). The World Bank estimates that 40% of post-conflict countries will relapse into fighting within 10 years of the war ending. McFarlane argues that unprocessed trauma may have already played a part in the 1990s Balkan wars:

> [After WWII] a great deal of individual suffering remained private and the need for society at large to learn from these adverse consequences was given little thought. Particularly, in those Western countries that had fought in two World Wars, this meant an enormous residuum of suffering that went unrecognized in social rituals. The danger, however, was that the sense of victimization and injustice that was carried by these traumatized individuals meant that there was a capacity for this trauma to re–emerge with a terrible vengeance into further national conflict. It is interesting to note that Serbia, not Germany, Russia, France or England was one of the nations that suffered the greatest per capita losses in the First World War. The bitterness of the ethnic conflicts that surrounded the breakdown of the Western boundary of the Ottoman

[33] 'An aggressive war is a great crime against everything good in the world. A defensive war, which must necessarily turn to aggressive at the earliest moment, is the necessary great counter-crime. Never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime.' (Hemingway, ND; Mossallanejad, 2015, p. 126)

> Empire in recent years is one indication of the capacity for these long–term wounds to re–emerge with terrible destructiveness. (2002)

Similarly, Martz et al. assert that 'resolving psychological trauma may help to reduce the reoccurrence of war' (2010, p. 5). However, if an entire group is not even recognised as suffering from war trauma, how can they receive the necessary help and support to embark on the pathway of healing? This is similar to what Kumpfmuller explores in his writing about trauma certificates for refugees: there is a sense in which a trauma is credible when acknowledged by a representative of the state or society, and it can only heal if it has been politically and socially acknowledged to exist in the first place (Kumpfmuller, 2019, p.23).

One way politically and socially to acknowledge this trauma is through the practice of Creative Writing. This is especially helpful where the pariah status creates an ongoing obstacle to any other kind of social acknowledgement. While the war finished decades ago and has been examined in a huge body of academic and journalistic writing, the prevailing narrative about it remains fixed and only a dedicated researcher can uncover any alternative points of view. Without an opportunity to discuss, examine or bring to light a different perspective, it can be difficult to achieve closure or healing. Fortunately, literature can explore challenging subject matters with nuance and empathy. Good fiction does not have a blunt separation between heroes and villains, archetypes of good and evil. Literature can afford even the most negative character their full humanity and help us to understand and empathise even with the worst antagonist. If there is one safe space for exploring a taboo trauma – taboo in the sense that official narrative does not allow perceived aggressors also to be capable of suffering – it is inside a book, where even the members of a vilified group can tell their story.

The research work I have undertaken for this thesis took me back to a part of my life that lies (almost) forgotten most of the time, with a resulting mix of strong emotions: sadness, anger, shame. Often, even after all these years and all the work that has gone into writing this thesis, I still do not know how to make sense of these events from the past. I am unable to give any definitive answers about the war in Yugoslavia, and perhaps the furious disagreements about it between various nations, ethnic groups, academics and journalists, are destined to remain in place forever. Perhaps it is impossible to reconcile those opposing views exactly because we cannot go back in time to try to see those events in a new light, from another's point of view. Fiction can help us to do that, by telling stories that illuminate how those days were experienced by us and by those who are not 'us', and all those stories are equally valid. I am struck by a realisation that Goldsworthy, Ugresic, Maric, Hemon and Albahari all wrote their own stories much closer to the time when they experienced those events. It has taken me almost 25 years to tell mine.[34] It is possible that I would have been able to confront the past much sooner had some kind of therapeutic intervention been available which recognised and gave validity to the specific sense of trauma I have lived with for best part of three decades.

While 'considerable work has been generated regarding […] the former Yugoslavia' (Krippner and McIntyre, 2003, p. 4), with Bloch (1993) and Smith and Surgan (1996) being influential in the field of trauma rehabilitation in former Yugoslavia, those researchers wrote largely about initiatives for trauma support and recovery in non-Serbian localities (Croatia and Bosnia, respectively). My research did not uncover any work addressing the question of Serbian economic emigrants, although living on the 'margins of society' and being part of a group 'likely to be overlooked' – both categories which, I would argue, living as an emigrant in a hostile

[34] Since 1999, the NATO bombing and the last of the ex-Yugoslav conflicts

climate in a host country relegates one into – is a recognisable risk for developing PTSD (Hobfall and de Vries, 1995, cited in Martz, 2010, p. 7).

It is exactly this which makes the recognition and acknowledgment of this type of trauma of key importance. This thesis demonstrates how Creative Writing can be a uniquely helpful tool: precisely because this trauma lacks the clearly defined shape of the traumas of those who have witnessed, suffered or committed acts of horrific violence, Creative Writing as a research practice can shine a light on it as a problem that needs addressing. It is a trauma that reveals itself over a long period of time, both in real life and in literature where it becomes evident in the organic development of ideas, characters and character behaviour. When this is coupled with personal experience examined through an autoethnographic framework, Creative Writing as research can provide unique and valuable insights into how deeply war can impact humans even when they haven't lived through direct fighting. This is because 'The actions of Creative Writing research inherently include investigations and explorations both in and of creative practice, whereby experience is transmuted into language.' (NAWE, 2018, p. 5) and 'the self is gradually revealed, to become known not only to oneself but also to the reader' (Velickovic, 2010, p. 179).

In the 1990s war and since, the Serbian people have been portrayed in a one–dimensional way, similar to what Adichie terms 'the single story'. In her essay *The Danger of a Single Story*, she writes

> The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. I've always felt that it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. (Adichie, no date, p. 87)

There is no doubt in my mind that Serbian people, on the whole, have suffered due to the single story told about them on the stage of international politics. However, that single story is only one story – to paraphrase Hemon's protagonist from *Nowhere Man*, Serbs are just like everyone else: good people and bad people. Creative Writing can be an important tool in portraying the experiences of a group that has been characterised as singularly bad, and perhaps with more stories being told that portray our humanity, and the pain that has been inflicted on us by the war, Serbs, as an ethnic group, and as a nation, can begin a process of healing.

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