

**Historical Trauma and Multidirectional
Memory in the Vojvodina: László Végel's
Neoplanta, avagy az Igéret Földje and Anna
Friedrich's *Miért? Warum?***

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Introduction

In this paper I offer a comparative reading of two Vojvodina-Hungarian novels, both published in recent years, from the point of view of their thematizing repressed historical trauma that affected the Vojvodina in the 20th century. I analyze how the two narratives propose a more inclusive form of collective memory. László Végel is an internationally known and widely translated Hungarian writer from the Vojvodina; Anna Friedrich is a Vojvodina-based Hungarian journalist with *Miért? Warum* being her first novel. *Neoplanta, avagy az Igéret földje: Városregény* (Neoplanta, or the promised land: Novel about a city, 2013) and *Miért? Warum? Egy jugoszláviai lágert túlélő magyar-német asszony története* (Why? The Story of a Hungarian-German woman who survived a Yugoslav camp, 2016), both published in Budapest, are certainly different regarding their literary style and narrative approach. What both novels have in common, however, is their interest in the question of cultural and historical memory of ethnicity-based and gender violence brought about with World War II to this long-established multiethnic and multilingual region — according to some scholars, “one of the most multiethnic and multilingual regions of Europe” (Bugarski) — that has seen many cultural and border shifts throughout history.¹ Both authors tackle the decade-long silence sur-

rounding interethnic and sexual violence committed against ethnic Hungarians and Germans (Swabians), a topic that has long been omitted from the country's (former Yugoslavia's and now Serbia's) official historiography about World War II. The two narratives, I will argue, propose what Michael Rothberg termed "multidirectional memory," a form of collective memory based on the "interaction of different historical memories," which Rothberg distinguishes from "competitive memory," i.e. a struggle over whose memory and whose pain are more worthy of remembering (3). Végel and Friedrich thus remind us of the fact that, particularly in ethnically diverse communities, and even more so in a region marked by centuries of cultural hybridization, memories (and I would add, identities), to use Gabriele Schwab's words, "are always already composites from dynamically interrelated and conflicted histories" (30). Opening up the space for multidirectional memory in a multicultural and hybrid community like the Vojvodina would constitute a necessary step in coming to terms with the "haunting legacies" (Schwab) of its not so distant past. The two novels, I argue, set an important direction in this regard as they both offer a "working through" of a still unresolved and hence haunting traumatic past.

László Végel was born in 1941 in Szenttamás/Srbobran (southern Bácska), and he studied at the University of Novi Sad (the capital of Vojvodina) and the University of Belgrade. Végel is thus a typical bilingual Vojvodina-Hungarian intellectual. During Tito's rule in Yugoslavia, Végel was one of the most prominent members of the Vojvodina-Hungarian avant-garde literary circle around the magazine *Új Symposion*. A prolific novelist, essay writer and playwright, he worked for many Yugoslav newspapers and magazines both in Hungarian (i.e. *Magyar Szó*) and Serbo-Croat (i.e. *Polja* in Novi Sad and *Politika* in Belgrade). He was awarded numerous prizes, including some of the most prestigious ones, such as the Kossuth Prize and the Gold medal for his overall work (veg.el.org/en/). Like other opposition intellectuals, during the Milošević-years,² he was subjected to political persecution and had to go into hiding. His works have been translated into Serbo-Croat, German, Dutch, English, Slovenian, and Albanian. He is considered a leading Central European intellectual.

Anna Friedrich was born in 1953 in Bezdán (northern Bácska) in the Vojvodina. She is a journalist, a psychologist (a graduate of the

University of Belgrade), and a writer. She lives between Bezdán, Novi Sad, and Budapest. She worked for the Hungarian-language newspapers *Magyar Szó* and *Dunatáj*, and also for Radio Zombor (that was abolished a couple of years ago). In her first book *Ez még nem történelem* (This is not yet history, 2006), she used the diary form under the motto “13 év Belgrádtól Hágáig” (13 years from Belgrade to The Hague) to document the events of the Milošević-reign that had led to the Yugoslav wars and the end of Yugoslavia, and how they affected the Vojvodina Hungarians.

Both authors tackle the necessity to create a form of collective memory in the Vojvodina rooted in multidirectional memory practices. According to Jan Assmann, communicative memory is the cultural memory kept in families and communities through oral transmission. The official cultural memory is marked by “figures of memory”: “events of the past, whose memory is maintained through cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)” (Assmann 129). In communist Yugoslavia cultural memory was defined along the discourse of “brotherhood and unity” and the constitution of a collective Yugoslav identity. Although the “brotherhood and unity” ideology certainly helped to bring about social cohesion, especially among the younger generation, it also hindered the “working through” of a traumatic past whose truths were undesired by the communist regime, even dangerous to openly talk about, and therefore not revealed until decades later. Végel’s and Friedrich’s novels both address the haunting of this repressed past. Their narratives can be considered an attempt to create a counter-narrative to the narrative of the dominant cultural memory and thus add elements toward the establishment of a multidirectional memory that would incorporate the hybrid cultural mosaic and its history in the Vojvodina.

Cultural hybridity, trauma, and haunting

The title of Végel’s novel implies a historical reference. The promised land refers to the history of Novi Sad when in 1748, the city’s numerous different ethnic groups (Germans, Hungarians, Serbs, Jews etc.) pulled together and collected the necessary money to buy from Empress Maria Theresa the title of “Free Imperial City” for the city she

named Neoplanta: “Let its name be Neoplanta and let all its people call it in their own language. May they live in peace and love, and may this multinational city be an example of the various nations’ peaceful cohabitation” (*Neoplanta*, back cover).³ (“Legyen a neve Neoplanta, és minden nép nevezze saját nyelvén. Éljenek békében, szeressék egymást, ez a soknemzetiségű város legyen példája a különböző nációk békés egymás mellett élésének.”) Végel’s novel demonstrates how this utopia of a peaceful multiethnic coexistence in Neoplanta/Neusatz/Újvidék/Novi Sad was not only destroyed in the 20th century but that its official historical memory has been constructed so as to erase certain chapters, particularly those pertaining to ethnic groups that have been virtually eradicated from the city’s once multicultural fabric. In contemporary Serbia, in the official cultural memory there is space for one gruesome episode of ethnic cleansing perpetuated by the occupying Hungarian forces in the entire Délvidék, in which 3,309 mainly Jewish and Serbian civilian victims were brutally murdered (Braham 211). In Novi Sad alone, 879 people were killed (Végel, *Neoplanta* 293).⁴ The fact that in 1944-1945 Tito’s partisans conducted a mass capturing of tens of thousands of Hungarian and German civilians of all ages who were thrown into concentration camps all over the Vojvodina, where they were brutally tortured, beaten, starved (many to death) and raped, has been glossed over by Yugoslav and Serbian historiography. Végel sums up this selective historical memory in the following words:

European politics considered Tito’s Yugoslavia a showcase example of fair minority politics. The communist elite acknowledged the city’s multinational character, but not its past. The fact that Novi Sad was multiethnic was always proudly emphasized; but its historical past and the reasons behind it were deliberately suppressed. And so was the question about what happened to the Germans who had been deported, thrown into mass graves or perished in work camps. With the city’s impressive development, the leading elite made an attempt to forget the past. Their efforts were eased by the fact that the population increased, and the newcomers didn’t have anything to remember. There was no shared past. (*Újvidéki képeslapok*)
(A titói Jugoszláviát az európai politika a méltányos kisebbségpolitika mintapéldájaként tartotta számon. A kommunista elit tudomásul vette a város többnemzetiségű jellegét, de a múltját már nem. Azt, hogy Újvidék többnemzetiségű, mindig büszkén hangoztatták, ellenben az előzményekről, arról, hogy miért,

miféle történelmi múlttal rendelkezik, azt tudatosan elhallgatták. Meg azt is, hogy hová lettek az időközben kitelepített vagy a tömegsírokba vetett, avagy a munkatáborokban odaveszett németek. A város lenyűgöző fejlődésével a vezető réteg igyekezett feledtetni a múltat. Ügyeskedésüket könnyítette, hogy a város lélekszáma meghatványozódott, az újaknak nem volt mire emlékezniük. Nem létezett közös múlt.)

The novel *Neoplanta* evokes the city's traumatic past. Its virtual hero is Novi Sad, the capital of Vojvodina since 1945. In a 2014 interview, Végel referred to Novi Sad as a traumatized European city (Pejčić). The narrative is told through a double lens: the ironic voice of the first-person Hungarian narrator, and that of Lazo Pavletić, the Serbian fiacre driver (Bence 81) whose fiacre becomes a silent witness to the many historical upheavals the city and its inhabitants have to endure during the long 20th century (Bányai 328). It is through the conversations of these two characters that the reader is introduced to some major events that marked the city's and Vojvodina's history in the 20th century. The conversations between the Hungarian narrator and the Serbian fiacre driver are necessarily multilingual to reflect not only the linguistic and cultural fusion between the city's numerous ethnicities but also their sometimes colliding collective memories. Although Novi Sad was founded in the spirit of peaceful coexistence, geopolitical interests, wars and population shifts have led to various historical traumas.

Végel's words about an old café in the heart of Novi Sad, where his novel places some major fictional events based on suppressed local history, sums up these shifts in the erasure of undesired historical chapters and the creation of a new cultural memory, always guided by current political interests:

[...] we stop by at Café Athens in the city centre. Originally, this was the Dornstädter café and pastry shop. After WWII, this catering establishment that used to be the property of Jakab Dornstädter was nationalized and renamed Café Moscow. In 1949, its name was changed to Café Zagreb, and since 1994 to date, it has been Café Athens [Atina]. These periodic name changes speak to Novi Sad's rather painful history" (*Újvidéki képeslapok*).

([...] betérünk a központban lévő Athén kávézóba, amely eredetileg a valamikori Dornstädter kávéház, illetve cukrászda volt. A II. világháború után a Dornstädter Jakab tulajdonát képező vendéglátó-ipari létesítményt államosították, ezután Moszkva lett. 1949-ben Zágrábra keresztelték, majd 1994-től egészen napjainkig Athén. Az időközönkénti névcserekből rejtőzik Újvidék története, amely felettébb kínos.)

The continuous name change of the café that carried the name of its Jewish owner (who “disappears” during the war) in the interwar years, reflects the historical changes that have swept through the city and the entire region leaving behind their unresolved traumas: from the Holocaust to the Soviet-influenced first years of communist Yugoslavia (Moscow), to the “brotherhood and unity” motto of Tito’s Yugoslavia following the split with Stalin (hence Zagreb, the capital of Croatia), to the post-Yugoslav developments, which mirrors the 1990s era of the Milošević-rule and its aftermath with a desire for closer ties to the Balkans (Athens) and a breaking away from an Austro-Hungarian past. (See Appendix, Picture 1).

In his novel *Végel* casts a seemingly secondary female character, the waitress of Café Dornstädter who becomes a witness to the dramatic historical changes of which the café is the focal point. She also happens to be the fiacre driver’s mother and embodies the city’s multilingual and hybrid character in a gendered way: not only does she evade all definitions along single national lines (“She may have been a Slovak woman, but perhaps she was Hungarian” — “Szlovák nő lehetett, de lehet, hogy magyar volt”, 63), she also speaks several languages fluently: Hungarian, Serbian, German and Slovak. She sometimes uses the name Horák Katalin, sometimes Katarina Horakova, thus fitting Assmann’s definition of cultural identity as a social construct in response to the expectations of our social environment (qtd. in Rudaš 96-97). Horák Katalin/Katarina Horakova is thus a perfect example of Vojvodina’s cultural hybridity. Her shifting between cultural identities and ethnic allegiances illustrates what Homi Bhabha formulated as a challenge to the illusion of a homogenous national identity: “the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable” (156) — especially in a region like the Vojvodina. The cultural hybridity that Katarina/Katalin embodies makes her the perfect person to work at Café Dornstädter where all ethnic groups meet and where all languages are spoken before WWII. Whereas the fiacre driver’s Serbian

father (who had also been a fiacre driver) struggles with the different languages, it is thanks to the mother's multilingual talents, her malleable hybrid identity, and her astute talent of observation coupled with her survival skills that the family manages to move unharmed through the Hungarian occupation during the war and the subsequent liberation/occupation by the Red Army and Tito's partisans. While the son (later the fiacre driver), following his return from the war as a Hungarian soldier, is forced to demonstrate his Serbian allegiance by shooting into an unmarked mass grave his two best friends, a Hungarian and a German, thus symbolically killing the multiethnic character of his city and his own hybridity, his mother is cast as a witness to and carrier of Novi Sad's and Vojvodina's multidirectional memory, in particular those parts that have been erased from official cultural memory. The most vivid and disturbing episode is her witnessing the orgy organized by local partisan supporters at the "nationalized" Café Dornstädter for the sake of appeasing the drunken misbehaviour of Soviet soldiers toward their Serbian female comrades. Instead, local "traitor" German families are "punished" for their non-Serbian ethnicity and "bourgeois" identity: their female members, in particular their young daughters, like the former ball queen Miss Meinert, are dragged away from their homes in the middle of the night to be thrown into the rape orgy at the mercy of the soldiers while exposed to the vulgar gaze of the grinning crowds gathered on the street in front of the café's windows. The only eye witness to this violent episode — an episode that becomes erased from the city's cultural memory — who comments on its lasting traumatic impact is the waitress: "when did the lace curtains become yellow, why were the plush arm chairs creaky, why is the floor covering so dirty?" (Végel, *Neoplanta* 78) ("[...] mikor sárgultak meg a csipkefüggönyök, miért nyikorognak a plüssfotelek, miért olyan koszos a padlóburkolat?"). It is thus the place itself, the café that continues to carry the haunting memory of this less than heroic episode from the end of the war. Against all effort that has been made to erase this memory and construct a new one, Végel's narrative evokes the former's ghosts. Avery Gordon understands the ghost not as the return of a dead or missing person but rather as a sign that demands "not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present" (183) — hence the necessity to include it as part of a multidirectional memory. The ghosts of the city's repressed traumatic past that the Café Dornstädter exemplifies are not present in a physical way; instead, they exist, in Gordon's words, as a "seething presence" (8). By putting

this violent episode right at the beginning of the regime change following WWII, the author adds an important element to the creation of a multidirectional cultural memory in that he breaks the silence regarding the murder and rapes perpetrated by the “liberating” armies (both the Soviets and the partisans) against the local population, in particular the Germans and Hungarians, and more specifically, the women, a topic that had been taboo for decades.⁵

Gendering multidirectional memory

Friedrich’s novel expands on the gender aspect in the establishing of a multidirectional memory about Vojvodina’s post-WWII history. Even more than Végel, she bases her fictionalized narrative on historical facts. Her heroine, Róza/Rosalía Emling, is based on the real story of a young Hungarian-German girl from Novi Sad who was taken as a teenager to one of the infamous concentration camps that were established under Tito’s regime all over the Vojvodina (Schwartz, “Interview”). To add more veracity to her narrative, Friedrich includes a detailed map with the locations of the camps and numbers of the victims. (See Appendix, Picture 2).⁶

Róza is raped ten times and is saved thanks to the help and intervention of a courageous girlfriend who manages to bring her some food and clothes. Róza’s mother dies in the camp whereas Róza survives and, following her release, lives with her surviving grandmother. Later she moves to (West) Germany where she joins her brother and, gradually working through her trauma, starts a new life and eventually, a family of her own. What helps her in this process is also the fact that she meets a German woman, Lujza, who survived gang rapes by American GIs and remained childless as a consequence. Lujza supports Róza and understands what she went through. By including Lujza’s story in the narrative, Friedrich addresses the universal theme of sexual violence that millions of women experienced at the hand of soldiers of all backgrounds during WWII and following Nazi Germany’s defeat all over Nazi-occupied Europe and the former Soviet Union.⁷

Friedrich’s description of the rapes is reminiscent of other rape narratives, such as Alaine Polcz’s *Asszony a fronton* or Judit Kováts’s

Megtagadva in Hungarian literature but also of rape narratives from German literature by teenage survivors such as Gabi Köpp or Leonie Biallas. The Serbian rapist in *Miért? Warum?* smells of onion and brandy (similar to the Soviet rapists in the other narratives), and the experience of Róza's first rape is described in similar terms: sharp pain, a knife cutting her flesh, her fear that her back will break and her abdomen be torn, disgust, choking:

As he lifted my leg, the thought flashed through my mind that he would break my back.

My god, I will die!

Then I felt a sharp pain.

He stabbed me with a knife, I thought, and the ripping pain made me think that he was cutting the flesh of my lower abdomen. [...] The bastard, panting, held down both my hands while I could feel his breath in my mouth. The smell of onions and brandy made my stomach turn. I felt like throwing up and thought I would choke, but the feeling that he would tear up my lower abdomen was even more frightening. (71)

([...] Ahogy felemelte az egyik lábamat, felvillant bennem, hogy el fogja törni a derekam. Istenem, meghalok!

Aztán éles fájdalmat éreztem.

Kést döfött belém, gondoltam, és a hasító fájdalomról azt hittem, hogy az alsótestemben a húsomat vagdossa. [...] A dög lihegve szorította mindkét kezemet, miközben a számba lehelt, és a hagymás pálinkaszagtól felgyülemlett a nyál a számban. Hányni akartam volna, és úgy éreztem, megfulladok, de a fuldoklásnál remisztőbb volt az érzés, hogy széttépi az alsótestem.)⁸

What distinguishes Friedrich's narrative from the narratives mentioned above is that Róza starts to count while being raped, a strategy of keeping her spirit at distance from the terrible violence her body has to endure. Róza counts in three languages, beginning with Hungarian, switching to German and finally to Serbian while her rapist murmurs insults and swear words into her ear in Serbian. What the author describes here can thus be interpreted as the metaphorical rape of Vo-

jvodina's multilingual identity by a monolingual, brutal force. Moreover, this multilingual identity is gendered as female as the brutal force "taking" Róza's body is the metaphorical conquest of Vojvodina by a colonizing, armed patriarchal power. With the rape of Róza, multilingualism and cultural hybridity are superseded by monolingualism and the imposition of a single ethnic identity, which stands for the ensuing loss of a multiethnic community.

The author weaves in her expertise as a psychologist into Róza's story which is told back and forth between the present and the past, a narrative strategy that allows for the demonstration of how traumatic experiences and memories survive in the body and the mind, even decades later, in flashbacks, nightmares, and uncontrollable movements. One example of this traumatic re-enactment is Róza feeling nausea and clenching her fist while flashbacks shoot through her mind in situations in which her body is reminded of the past wound, such as when she smells brandy from a nearby co-worker's breath:

My stomach was lifted, my back sank, and squeezing my thumb between my four fingers, I clenched my right fist and pressed it firmly against my stomach. My right knee collapsed as if instinctively trying to make myself look smaller than I really was. These movements returned periodically when the images I had buried appeared in front of me in a flash, like now under the influence of the smell of brandy. (39)

(A gyomrom megemelkedett, a hátam megroggyant és a hüvelykujjamat a négy ujjam közé fogva ökölbe szorult a jobb kezem és erősen a hasamra szorítottam. A jobb lábam térdben meghajlott, mintha ösztönösen kisebbnek akarnék látszani, mint amekkora vagyok. Ezek a mozdulatok vissza-visszatértek olyankor, amikor egy villanásra megjelentek előttem az elhantolt képek, most éppen a pálinkaszag hatására.)

Róza obviously suffers from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Cathy Caruth speaks of the temporal aspect of PTSD as a belated response to a traumatic event, an event that at the time when it hits a person, he/she is unable to process given that the consciousness shuts down as a protective reaction while numbness ensues (4). Hence the uncontrollable repetitive behaviour as a belated "acting out" of the traumatic impact. According to Dominick LaCapra, in the acting out of the compulsive repetition the past occurrences intrude in the present (142). Essentially, acting out means reliving the past, i.e. the unsettled

ghosts of the past event continue their haunting in the present. As we are reminded by LaCapra, in order to come to terms with the traumatic past, a “working through” has to happen. Working through does not mean that a traumatized person is completely “cured”; it does, however, bring a temporal structure into a traumatized person’s life and allows him/her to distinguish between past, present, and the future. In other words, working through allows the victim to move beyond victimhood and gain agency, an agency that still allows to keep the memory of the past, which Róza succeeds in doing. She honours the memory of her own past and that of the lost loved ones while she gradually comes to terms with her wound and is able to become successful in her new environment in Germany, a loving friend and eventually a wife and mother.

Nevertheless, Róza/Rosalia never really feels at home in Germany; despite her partly German background and her new life, she feels like a foreigner in her new country. With her cultural hybridity, she no longer belongs anywhere as her once multiethnic and multilingual village in the Vojvodina has been populated by a new monolingual population that replaced the expelled one. Thus despite her successfully moving forward and beyond her traumatic past, Róza never forgets how absurd all what happened to her and her family was. Hence the title of the novel and the sentence in the concluding paragraph: “Why did all what happened happen, Róza?” (Friedrich 184) (“Miért volt mindez, Róza?”). Although partly fictional, Róza’s story is an important element in the creation of a multidirectional memory for the forgotten (or rather edited out) war crimes committed against the Vojvodina Hungarians and Germans, in particular the women, whose story of sexual violation at the end of WWII is covered by an additional layer of silence. How much of a taboo Friedrich is breaking with her book is reflected in the fact that even two years after its publication, the central library of the Vojvodina, the Matica Srpska Library in Novi Sad, still does not own a copy.⁹

Végel’s novel ends in the narrator’s failed attempt to have his Serbian fiacre driver friend buried, according to the latter’s own wishes, in the same unmarked mass grave into which his two friends he was forced to shoot, the Hungarian and the German, were thrown. The fiacre, that bridge that survived through wars and generations, is taken by a schlemihl¹⁰-kind of character who suddenly appears on the

last two pages, repeating a few sentences in a language the narrator does not understand but that contains words from Hungarian, Serbian, and German mixed with incomprehensible words. The narrator answers him in English, the *lingua franca* of the 21st century, but to no avail. Upon several failed communication attempts, the schlemihl grabs the fiacre by the beam and drags it away, disappearing in the twilight, taking with him his hybrid language, perhaps a linguistic utopia for the 21st century that nobody can understand, not even a multilingual citizen of Novi Sad, that once utopian city of peaceful multilingual cohabitation.

Conclusion

Jutka Rudaš notes with respect to Végel's novel that it "celebrates the heterogeneity of cultural experience" (92) ("éltetve a kulturális tapasztalat heterogenitását"). Végel's and Friedrich's narratives are important attempts, both with their own focus and in their own genre, to diversify the still dominant cultural memory about Vojvodina's history — a memory reinforced by the Serbian nationalist government and its essentially anti-constitutional cultural policies (see Bugarski) — toward a multidirectional memory, a memory that would take into account the region's hybrid cultural past and its legacies in the present. In order to come to terms with the haunting effects of these memories that until recently were covered under a veil of silence, these violent episodes have to be given their appropriate place within cultural memory, i.e. offered what Jacques Derrida calls "a hospitable memory [...] out of concern for justice" (qtd. in Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* 58), "so as to overcome their pulsating and lingering effects" (134) on individuals and communities.¹¹ Rothberg's emphasis on multidirectional memory takes us in the same direction when it comes to settling the ghosts of memory competition:

If memory is as susceptible as any other human faculty to abuse — [...] this study seeks to emphasize how memory is at least as often a spur to unexpected acts of empathy and solidarity; indeed multidirectional memory is often the very grounds on which people construct and act upon visions of justice. (19)

It is therefore urgent to listen to the ghosts of past traumas and injustices; they remind us that what happened in the past may happen again, and that it may very well happen to any of us: “it could be you. I could be you” (Gordon, “Some Thoughts” 13). According to Gordon, we need to engage with the ghosts of the past so as to arrive at a “transformative recognition” (*Ghostly Matters* 8) which, beyond the memory of a painful and violent past, also carries the hope for future reconciliation and the need to find ways to prevent such traumas from reoccurring.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The research carried out on this paper was in part supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) under Grant # 430-2016-00232, titled “*Children of the Enemy*”: *Narrative Constructions of Identity Following Wartime Rape and Transgenerational Trauma in Post-WWII Germany and Post-Conflict Bosnia* with Schwartz as principal investigator and Mythili Rajiva, Christabelle Sethna, and Tatjana Takševa as co-investigators.

NOTES

¹ According to Gábrity-Molnár et al., the multiethnic character of the Vojvodina was largely established following the Battle of Zenta in 1697 fought against the Ottoman Empire. The nearly depopulated lowlands — a consequence of migratory processes induced by the Ottoman conquest in the previous centuries — now became an attraction point for many migration waves that were largely determined by policies from Habsburg Vienna. A resettlement of Southern Hungary (Délvidék; later named Vojvodina by the Serbian population) began in the 18th century. Ethnic Germans from southern parts of Germany (so-called Danube Swabians) were one of the largest groups, but ethnic Hungarians also moved in along with many other smaller ethnic groups from all over the Habsburg territories (Slovaks, Czechs, Jews, Croats, Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Romanians etc.). Two big waves of Serbian refugees referred to as the “Great migration of the Serbs” fleeing Ottoman-controlled Serbia brought large numbers of Serbs into the area as well. Following the Treaty of Trianon, the newly established Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom, later renamed Yugoslavia, was given the territory of the Vojvodina. However, well into the 20th century, no ethnic group could claim an absolute majority. Despite aggressive attempts by the Serbian king to “serbianize” the area by creating new Serbian settlements and thus breaking up the linguistic territory of the other ethnic groups, 1931 census figures still indicate that only one third of the area’s population were ethnic Serbs. The expulsion and/or murder of nearly 350,000 ethnic Germans and the settlement of over 200,000 ethnic Serbs after World War II initiated the process of the erosion of Vojvodina’s ethnic and linguistic diversity. Although what remained of the diversity was guaranteed by the constitution and cultural policies in Tito’s Yugoslavia, the balance continued to shift in favour of a Serbian majority that was firmly established by the 1960s. Since the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s that brought about further ethnically determined migrations, this shift has become further pronounced. The shrinking of the Hungarian but also other non-Serb ethnic groups continues at an alarming rate. On current trends, according to Branislav Djurdjev, a demographer at the University of Novi Sad, Vojvodina will be 90% Serb by the end of the 21st century. The remaining 10% will consist largely of Hungarians and Roma. Of the 350,000 ethnic Germans only 4,000 remain today in Serbia.

² Slobodan Milošević was a Serbian politician, President of Serbia between 1989 and 1997, and President of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from 1997-2000. Given his rise to power in the 1980s, he was chiefly responsible for the ignition of Serbian nationalistic politics that, along with simi-

lar politics by his Croatian counterpart, Franjo Tuđman, led to the catastrophic and bloody break-up of multinational, multiethnic, and multilingual Yugoslavia along single national ideologies. It is also thanks to Milošević that Vojvodina (along with Kosovo) lost its previous autonomy which had been granted to both provinces in the 1970s under Tito.

³ All translations from the Hungarian by Agatha Schwartz.

⁴ Randolph L. Braham gives the following ethnic breakdown of the Újvidék massacre: 550 Jews, 292 Serbs, 13 Russians, and 11 Hungarians (211).

⁵ In the Hungarian context, this taboo topic has been recently researched more extensively. See Schwartz on the representation of the rapes in Hungarian literature; Márta Mészáros' 2017 feature film *Aurora borealis: Északi fény*; and Andrea Pető's 2018 monograph *Elmondani az elmond-atlant*.

In the context of the Vojvodina and former Yugoslavia, the rapes committed during World War II have not been researched. In Serbian scholarship, there are only sporadic references to the rapes perpetuated against local women. Milovan Djilas in his internationally known *Conversations with Stalin* addresses this less than heroic behaviour of the Soviet soldiers, a comment jovially glossed over by his interlocutor. The rape of German women who survived Tito's camps has so far only been addressed in the groundbreaking publication *Dunavske Švabice* where the editors mention the rapes in their introduction, a fact that their interviewees, elderly ethnic German women, did not wish to have included in their respective narratives collected in the volume. One of the editors, Nadežda Radović, told me in an interview that in one case, it was the son of one of the interviewed women who did not wish to see his mother's name "tainted" by publishing this particular detail about her camp experience. Thus it is still the victim who has to feel ashamed, even decades later, while the perpetrators evade justice.

⁶ Friedrich's source for the map is <http://www.keskenyut.hu/>.

⁷ The number of women raped in World War II and its aftermath will likely remain an estimate given the complex issue of memorializing wartime rape and the mechanisms of silence that surround rape as a social phenomenon (in war as in peace time), but historians talk about millions of women affected both in Nazi-occupied territories — which includes Germany both before and following Allied occupation, especially taking into account female concentration camp inmates and forced labourers — and in territories liberated by the Allies.

⁸ On Hungarian women writers' narratives of wartime rapes see Schwartz.

⁹ It ought to be mentioned that at times, Friedrich inserts into her narrative ethnocentric comments that go against the conciliatory passages in other parts of the novel.

¹⁰ In American slang, schlemiel usually means an awkward or unlucky person. The origin of the word is Hebrew and Yiddish and was made famous by German late Romantic writer Adalbert von Chamisso and his novella "The Wonderful History of Peter Schlemihl" (*Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte*, 1813).

¹¹ In 2017, with the support and encouragement of German chancellor Angela Merkel, a monument to the murdered and expelled Danube Swabians was erected by the Serbian government on the site of the notorious camp in Jarek (north of Novi Sad) where about 6,500 ethnic Germans had been killed between 1944 and 1946. Vojvodina Hungarians have unofficially erected some small memory sites (which have repeatedly been vandalized) in various places where civilians had been murdered at the end of World War II. The erection of a multilingual monument in Novi Sad to all civilian victims at the end of World War II has been debated since 2016.

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“Végel László.” <http://vegel.org/en/>

Appendix

Picture 1



Current front façade of the café Atina © Agatha Schwartz

