Slovene Studies 42.1 (2020): 43–58

Critical Female Voices: Maruša Krese and Slovene Independence

Zala Pavšič

Abstract

This article is dedicated to an analysis of the works by the Slovenian poet, globetrotter, and actvist Maruša Krese (1947–2013).[1] Its purpose is to discuss her poetry and essays in the light of her years of experience living abroad as well and in light of her political stances and engagement.

Keywords: Yugoslavia, nationalism, independence of Slovenia, feminism, migrant literature

Apart from being one of the few contemporary Slovenian female authors who have gained more recognition in the international literary realm, Maruša Krese's works play an important role in depicting a wider, even alternative understanding of the emancipation of Slovenia. While many of

[1] Maruša Krese, Slovenian poet, writer, journalist, world traveller, and humanitarian aid worker was born in 1947 in Ljubljana. "She studied art history, comparative literature and psychotherapy in Slovenia, the USA, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Between 1990 and 2012, she lived and worked in Berlin and Graz as a free-lance journalist and writer. She moved to Ljubljana in 2012" (Hrastelj 2013: 5).

Her poetry collections in Slovene language were published by the Austrian publishing house Drava. She also wrote several radio plays and radio features, most of them were boradcasted by German and Austrian national radios. "Her articles were published in magazines and newspapers, such as *Die Zeit*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *NZZ*, *TAZ*, *Lettre International*, *Manuskripte*, and others. In addition, Maruša Krese received several awards, including the Slovenian literary award Fabula for her collection of short stories *Vsi moji božici / All My Christmases* (2008) and a Milena Jesenská Fellowship for Journalists (2008). Her play *Der Wind weht gegen Mittag und kommt herum zum Mitternacht* was selected the best radio play of the year (1993)" (Hrastelj 2013: 5). Her novel *Da me je strah?/ Me, scared?* (2012), an autobiographical familiy chronical which depicts the partisan youth of her parents during the second world war as well as Krese's impressions of growing up in the socialist Yugoslavia, posthumously received the award for the best novel of the year by the Slovenian literary critics society.

During the war in Yugoslavia, Maruša Krese organized and collaborated in several peace movements and initiatives which supported independent media in the region. Her cultural commitment and humanitarian activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina gained recognition in 1996 when she received the German Federal Cross of Merit. She was also listed among 100 most influental European women by the project Women with a Vision (Hrastelj 2013: 5).

her (male) literary colleagues actively supported political endeavors for independence, Krese was functioning as one of the few critical female voices in the euphoric nationalist times when Slovenia paved the way towards becoming an independent country. Hence, her literary opus should not be interpreted only with reference to her constant travels and nomadic lifestyle but also with view towards her political activism.

I.

Soon after graduating, her globetrotting led Maruša Krese to Great Britain and Australia. She lived in the U.S. for a while, and after that in numerous European cities. For the last twenty years of her life, she lived between Berlin, Graz, and Ljubljana. Her travels were connected to her studies, her humanitarian activities, and journalistic coverage of events in crisis areas. However, the purpose of this article is to argue that the feeling of foreignness that is often found in her literary works is not necessarily just a function of living abroad (in Graz, for example, the writer was very popular, almost to the point of achieving a sort of "city poet" status), but it also has a broader, more existential dimension (Borovnik 2008: 34).

Maruša Krese's dedication to impermanence, motion, and a nomadic way of life is clearly expressed in her early poem "Naš dom" (Our home), published in her first poetry collection, *Danes* (Today 1989), and later in the anthology *Gestern, Heute, Morgen* (Yesterday, today, tomorrow 1992b). In it, she writes that her daughter Ana had, a long time ago, already said that her home was wherever her mother was:

> My home is my mom, / said Ana a long time ago. / We drag ourselves from desert to desert, / linger on a bridge, / we've braved seas, / we're buying rugs. /.../ Foreign languages reveal our roots, / no one in this family dreams in the singular, / a Turkish tea kettle reveals us as nomads, / our heads rest on Chinese pillows, / and our suitcases are filled with fifty cookbooks...[2] (Krese 1989: 72)

That cosmopolitan experience and the everlasting need to travel and move are also expressed by numerous images throughout her other poetry collections; according to Megi Rožič's analysis (2014), they include themes of gypsies, stations (she names her collection from 1992 after them), bags (the central motif of the 2003 poetry collection *Yorskhire torba* (Yorkshire

---

[2] Moj dom je moja mami, / je Ana davno dejala. / Vlečemo se iz puščave v puščavo, / čakamo na mostu, / preizkusili smo morja, / kupujemo preproge. /.../ Tuji jeziki nam pokažejo korenine, / nihče v družini ne sanja v ednini, / turški čajnik nam odkrije nomadstvo, / glave počivajo na kitajskih blazinah, / v kovčku prenašamo petdeset kuharskih knjig... This and following translations are by Manca Gašperšič.

bag), etc., while the theme of travelling is central to the bilingual collection *Nenadoma se je stemnilo / Plötzlich war es dunkel* (Suddenly, it was dark 2011), in which literary fragments from her travels are complemented by photographs by her sister Meta Krese.

An important counterweight to the themes of motion, particularly in her later collections, is the motif of the city—occasionally it appears as an element that repels the author due to its passive nature; she is unwelcome in it, or at the very least, she does not feel at home there: "I do not go to the city any more, / for I remind it of a hundred years of misfortune. // I do not go to the city any more, / for it denounces my misfortune. // It is quite simple. / I do not go to the city any more."[3] (Krese 2001: 37)

Elsewhere, the city appears as a place of disillusionment with the world, which is not the world that the author remembers. She writes: "The sun in this city makes me furious, / because it pretended, because it said, because it lied and said / that it would warm us."[4] (Krese 2001: 9)

Life in the city was boring: "It has become dull. / Life in this confined city. / Life in this heroic city. / Life in a city that, / who knows why, / is long gone."[5] (Krese 2001: 4)

The conflict with people who hold her misfortune against her is exacerbated by the feelings of alienation and isolation that she expressed in one of the last poems from the collection *Postaje* (Stations 1992a):

> They threw me off the stage, / because something went wrong, / because I did something wrong /.../ because I told them, / that it hurts and that it's killing me, / because I wrote poetry while eating spaghetti, / because I did not take them seriously, / because life is too precious to me, / to wrap it up in golden lies.[6] (Krese 1992: 66)

In the same poetry collection, she is drinking coffee in a garden in Berlin (where she was living while writing those poems) and observing her home country from a distance. The view from where she stands is far from beautiful:

---

3 Ne pridem več v mesto, / ker jih spominjam na stoletno nesrečo. // Ne pridem v mesto, / ker se spotikajo v mojo nesrečo. // Stvar je preprosta. / Ne hodim več v mesto.

4 Sonce v tem mestu spravlja v bes, / ker se je igralo, ker je dejalo, ker je lagalo, / da greje.

5 Postalo je dolgočasno. / Življenje v zaprtem mestu. / Življenje v herojskem mestu. / Življenje v mestu, ki ga, / ne vem, zakaj, / že dolgo, dolgo več ni.

6 Odstavili so me z odra, / ker se mi je nekje zataknilo, / ker se mi je nekje zalomilo /.../ ker sem jim rekla, / da me vse to boli in ubija, / ker sem ob špagetih pisala pesmi, / ker jih nisem jemala resno, / ker mi je življenje predragoceno, / da bi ga zavila v zlate laži.

> ...I watch the big windows, / behind which the Slovenes are laughing, / I watch the culture of the Alps, / uncomfortable even for Maria Theresa, / I watch words being twisted, / I watch men control women's wombs, / I watch them rejoicing over pain, / I watch the ruins of my youth /.../ I watch children sing, / they are picking edelweiss, / I watch castles that will never be found.[7] (Krese 1992: 65)

The latest literary historical articles (Žitnik Serafim 2011: 35–45) place Maruša Krese in the context of Slovenian migrant literature without any particular ideological undertones, but they acknowledge the importance of her social engagement. Krese, along with a few other Slovene authors active within German-speaking regions, is described as an author marked by a "quality literary bilingualism" (Žitnik Serafim 2011: 40). This kind of conception is crucial for the shaping of an "intercultural consciousness and a multicultural national identity" (Žitnik Serafim 2011: 42) and for the contextualization of the authors who migrate to or from a culture, but acknowledge both environments as equally important for their creative process.

II.

The feeling of alienation surfaces when, in a situation where Maruša Krese should feel protected and comforted, she is instead faced with insensitivity and disappointment. After she can no longer identify with her own generation, the people she shared her youth with, a youth filled with hippie ideals – those same people are now warmongers and nationalists. Or when she finds herself incapable of identifying with the system of values of the 'new' world, the system of values of the new, independent Slovenia. This excerpt from her 2009 book *Vse moje vojne* (All my wars) illustrates her feelings:

> I live abroad and my own home country often seems foreign to me, in these recent years... There is much I do not recognize anymore. I don't recognize the generation of '68 in Yugoslavia and Germany... I don't recognize the Socialist writers who were re-branded as dissidents overnight... the new German politics who used to admire our self-management in Yugoslavia who now lecture us on Democracy... [...] I don't recognize the uncritical stance of the European left and their

---

7 ... gledam okna velika, / kjer se režijo Slovenci, / gledam alpsko kulturo, / kjer se Marija Terezija še sama spotakne, / gledam besede, ki se jih spreobrača, / gledam moške, ki ukazujejo ženskim trebuhom, / gledam veselje nad bolečino, / gledam ruševine svoje mladosti /.../ gledam pojoče otroke, / ki nabirajo planike, / gledam gradove, ki nikoli ne bodo naši.

> attitude towards nationalism... I don't recognize the wall in Berlin, the one in Sarajevo, the one in Israel, the wall between Mexico and the USA. The constant grave digging.
>
> Sixty years. I've been a nomad for almost all my life, but I've always loved returning home. It's easy to be a nomad when you know you've got a home to return to. I kept returning, until they nearly drove me out. It must be because I still love that red star. It's probably because I said that it's pointless to look for a new Slovenian king in this tiny country (Krese 2009: 99–100).[8]

I will try to shed light on the feeling of alienation described above through the relationship between the concepts of home and foreignness. I will be relying on the research by Elizabeta Šeleva (2006). I will also include the analysis of some of the motifs in her poetry, where the theme of foreignness is perhaps secondary to the urge to live a nomadic life. With the help of two hitherto unused sources and interviews I will try to highlight the context of the above paragraph and show where and how Maruša Krese was thinking about the search for a new Slovenian king and why she was nearly driven out of the country. I believe it is much easier to understand Krese's literary opus if we take into account her social engagement and the biographical background outlined in some of her letters and essays. At the end of the segment, I will also be taking a look at how Maruša Krese fits within the context of Slovenian migrant literature.

Numerous world-renowned contemporary migrant authors point out that the concept of identity is far more complex than just religious or national belonging, particularly in these recent times of mass migrations. At the height of the armed conflict in Yugoslavia (after she left the disintegrating country, as I will show later), in an interview for a French TV station, Dubravka Ugrešić said that her nationality was "no one and nothing" (nitko i ništa) (Filip, Kovač 1998: 202). Aleksandar Hemon similarly avoids labels, having received a scholarship from the American

---

[8] Sem v tujini in moja domovina mi je v zadnjih letih večkrat tuja... veliko mi je tujega. Tuja mi je generacija '68 v bivši Jugoslaviji, v Nemčiji... tuji so mi pisatelji v socializmu, ki so se čez noč začeli prodajati kot disidenti... tuji so mi nemški zeleni politiki, ki so včasih občudovali samoupravljanje v naši deželi in nas sedaj učijo demokracije... [...] tuja mi je nekritičnost evropske levice in njihov odnos do nacionalizmov... tuj mi je zid v Berlinu, zid v Sarajevu, zid v Izraelu, zid med Mehiko in ZDA. Tuje mi je neprestano kopanje kosti...

Šestdeset let. Skoraj ves čas sem se šla nomada, ampak vedno sem rada prihajala nazaj domov. Lahko se je igrati nomada, kadar veš, da te nekje čaka dom. Vračala sem se, dokler nisem bila skoraj pregnana. Najbrž, ker mi je rdeča zvezda še zmeraj všeč. Najbrž, ker sem dejala, da res nima smisla, da iščemo novega slovenskega kralja v tej mali deželi.

government before Yugoslavia fell apart and subsequently staying in the U.S. His most famous works were all originally published in English. When asked about his identity, he often replies by saying "I'm complicated" (Hemon 2013: 163).

Amin Maalouf, who emigrated to France from Lebanon (and started writing in French, even though his mother tongue is Arabic), entitled his 2002 essay on the above questions of self-identification "In the Name of Identity." In it, he argues that an individual's perception of themselves is often informed by numerous characteristics at once, and that these characteristics form different connections in different individuals. He also points out that this kind of complex self-definition is still unwelcome in our world:

> And when our contemporaries are asked to "confirm" their identity, as we so often hear these days, they are essentially telling them to find an ostensible basic belonging, often religious, national, ethnic, or racial, and to proudly wave it in front of everyone else. Those who insist that identity is more complex are relegated to the sidelines (Maalouf 2002:10).

Elizabeta Šeleva goes a step further in expressing her writerly experiences of (non)belonging. She claims that the feeling of internal exile is the basis of a writer's identity, that writers are, by definition, strangers, and that "a writer simultaneously occupies more than one homeland" (Šeleva 2006: 110–11). Based on the experiences of some of the writers mentioned in the text (for example Goran Stefanovski), the concepts of "home" and "foreign" are considerably more complex than they might seem at first glance. Stefanovski writes: "The absolute worst is when your home starts becoming foreign. When you become an internal immigrant. When you're not sad because you're away, but because you're there. When you're sitting in your house but you can't recognize your home anymore" (Šeleva 2006: 111).

Šeleva decides that homelessness is "the common denominator and integral element of an authentic creative existence" (Šeleva 2006: 111), and this is crucial for studying the opus of Maruša Krese. That her work often includes the tendency to transcend the concepts of borders, identities, and nationalities, has already been pointed out by Megi Rožič.

Rožič studies the poet's opus by employing a number of newer, contemporary concepts. The first is the concept of the nomadic subject, which she borrows from Rosi Braidotti (1994). It is closely connected to Susan Stanford Friedman's concept of locational feminism. The nomadic subject is emblematic of a life lived in a world marked by globalization and transition (Rožič 2014: 55). It is a form of resistance against the imperatives of ethnicity and nationality. This form of self-definition demands a critical

re-evaluation of the self and should, in its essence, be uncertain, unstable or fluid. For the concept of locational feminism, it is typical to regard identities as a way to map territories and borders (Rožič 2014: 55). Both concepts emphasize the importance of the migrant experience for the evolution of identity complexity, which is crucial for the concept of transnationalism and transculturalism in cultural studies. According to Steven Vertovec (Rožič 2014: 55–56), this is the case with identities that are shaped under the influence of many cultures and many national components, which is why they include elements of the global as well as the particular. The role of a migrant is crucial because of their experience in transcending borders or experiences from both sides of a border, since they are defined in equal measure by both (Rožič 2014: 56).

III.

However, we also need to take a look at the context of Maruša Krese's migrant experience from another point of view: my aim is to place the author within a broader cultural framework based on the friendships[9] that she cultivated with writers and intellectuals from former Yugoslavia. They are connected by their views on the war in Yugoslavia and by the disillusionment with the state of affairs in the region after the war, and consequently they all tackle these themes. Because of their critical stances and their opposition to nationalist policies, some of them did end up literally leaving their home(land)s, while others became internally dislocated, strangers in their own countries.

The correspondence between Maruša Krese, the Croatian philosopher Rada Iveković, the Serbian poet Radmila Lazić, and playwright Biljana Jovanović took place from June 1991 to the end of November 1992 by means of fax messages sent from Ljubljana, Berlin, Belgrade, Paris, etc. The authors were also active in numerous anti-war initiatives: they were among the founding members of the Civil Resistance Movement, a movement established in 1992 that identified as Yugoslavian and fought for the concept of multicitizenship, which would have stopped the war in

[9] The article is linked to my doctoral dissertation in which I explored the discourse of friendship in relation to the breakup of Yugoslavia (Pavšič 2017). The research included both an analysis of the discourse of brotherhood and a part of state politics, as well as an examination of media narratives and personal testimonies. In doing so, I wanted to emphasize that the time of war is not only a time when friendships are lost, but also a time when new friendships form. An important part of my research was the analysis of contacts between antiwar activists who understood their (international) contacts and collaborations as part of resisting the nationalist politics. A correspondence similar to the one discussed in this article was written by Filip David and Mirko Kovač (1998).

Bosnia. The founding charter of the initiative was also included in the correspondence.

The book *Vjetar ide na jug i obrće se na sjever* was published in Germany in 1993 with the title *Briefe von Frauen über Krieg und Nationalismus* (Letters by women on war and nationalism), and its authors even wrote a radio play in Germany based on that text. A year later, the letters were published in Belgrade with the title *Vjetar ide na jug i obrće se na sjever.*[10] Certain fragments of the correspondence were also published in Maruša Krese's prose collection *Vse moje vojne*.

Maruša Krese expresses the horror that she felt as the wars for Slovenia and Croatia broke out in her very first letter, sent to Biljana Jovanović.

> Oh, it's wonderful here. Finally, the Slovenes are the news of the day on German TV, along with the Croatians. Jakob is crying because we keep jumping from channel to channel, waiting for new information on what's going on in Yugoslavia and he can't watch his cartoons. David is pale as a ghost. He said: "Mom, they're going to bomb Ljubljana." Vesna [Kesić] turned green, and she told me that: "Maruša, this will get bloody..." We all know that, but we're pushing on... Is there really no one that can stop this, no one who could say: "Alright now, people, get your heads on straight!" Have they all been driven out?[11] (Krese 1994: 20)

While watching the news coverage of Slovenia's war of independence, Maruša Krese wonders what to do with all the fear and anger welling up inside her, and when faced with the opinions of some of her friends from Slovenia (whose rhetoric was drifting further away from hers every day), the feeling of loneliness within her grew ever stronger. But what hurt the most was the disintegration of the world as she knew it. These feelings started mixing with a nostalgia for her youth. Her unease often caused insomnia and even a feeling of guilt because of her move to Germany.

> I don't sleep at night anymore. My whole life keeps flashing in front of my eyes. Sometimes I think it's because I went to

---

10 The wind blows south and turns to the north; excerpt from Ecclesiastes 1: 6.

11 Pri nas je krasno. Končno smo Slovenci prišli na prvo mesto na nemškem televizijskem dnevniku, Hrvati tudi. Jakob joka, ker neprestano obračamo gumbe na televiziji in iščemo novosti iz Jugoslavije, on pa ne more gledati risanke. David je bled in pravi: "Mama, Ljubljano bodo bombardirali", Vesna [Kesić] je zelena in pravi: "Maruša, to bo sama kri..." Vsi to vemo, ampak vseeno norimo dalje... Kaj res ni nikogar, ki bi to zaustavil, kaj res ni nikogar, ki bi dejal: "Hej, ljudje, pamet v roke!" Ali so že vse pregnali?

> Germany. Soon after, my father died. [...] But whenever I wanted to return home, friends of mine (who now run the whole thing) advised me against it. They told me I should wait a bit, that it would all turn for the better. Is this what they meant? Perhaps it is, perhaps this is what they were waiting for. But I don't think it's better. I grappled with the cramped cultural space in Slovenia, which started shrinking even more during the eighties [...] and they all said that their time would come, their hour of power, no matter the cost.[12] (Krese 1994: 27)

During her stay in Germany, Maruša Krese often wrote journalistic articles for the Slovenian media, but she found it increasingly harder to identify with the points of view that the expectations of others were forcing upon her. In the beginning of July 1991, her superior expected her to write an article about how German media reported on the "difficult war in Slovenia" (Krese 1994: 35). But the German press covered the war in a euphoric tone, completely enamored of the tiny nation that stood up to the Bolshevist tanks; this made her feel even more alienated.

Soon after, the German paper *Die Zeit* proposed Krese write an article on Slovenia or Slovenian literature. At first, she didn't know whether to take it or not: apparently, she was afraid of her own anger. But eventually, she decided to write the article, and informed her correspondents that, even though she was aware of the potential repercussions of her words, she would express her genuine feelings on the matter.

The essay "Abschied von Slowenien" (Farewell to Slovenia) was published in *Die Zeit* on 6 September 1991. In Serbia, it was published in the magazine *Književne novine* under the title "Slovenijo, kuda ideš?" (Slovenija, where are you going?), and, in November 1991, in *Nova revija* as "Slovo od Slovenije" (Farewell to Slovenia).

IV.

With the German title (*Women on nationalism*), the authors clearly expressed what their correspondence was about: their experience of nationalism during the disintegration of Yugoslavia. That these were not

---

[12] Ponoči več ne spim. Pred očmi se mi odvija celo življenje. Včasih razmišljam, da je to zato, ker sem odšla v Nemčijo. Takoj nato mi je umrl oče. [...] Ampak vsakič, ko sem hotela nazaj, so mi prijatelji, ki zdaj vodijo celo zadevo, odsvetovali. Počakaj malo, saj bo bolje. Ali je to tisto bolje? Verjetno je to tisto, kar so čakali. Jaz ne. Jaz sem opletala z ožino slovenskega prostora, ki se je začel v začetku osemdesetih še bolj grozljivo ožiti [...] in oni so govorili o trenutku, ko bo napočila njihova ura oblasti, vseeno, kakšna bo cena tega početja.

personal letters, but documents that would ultimately be published, is clear from their writing style: the letters collect their impressions (emotional, physical or theoretical elucidations on the imaginarium of war) and information about current events in their vicinity. The documentary function of the text is emphasized by the alphabetical list of personal names mentioned in the letters that appeared as an appendix to the correspondence.

The authors included certain petitions and statements by other notable intellectuals or artists (e.g., an open letter by the actress Mira Furlan, who was forced to emigrate to New York because of her anti-war statements and lynching in the Croatian media). The book also included the above-mentioned essay by Maruša Krese.

Krese began the essay with an account of her visit to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Her Yugoslav passport had been stolen, and she was stranded at four o'clock A.M. in the middle of Berlin, where she lived at the time, waiting for a visa. She adds in a bitter tone that she should have applied for a German passport instead, obviously referring to her deep feeling of disappointment at the disintegration of the former country and the beginning of Slovenia's independent journey. She had lost her footing, or, as she puts it, her roots:

> Where is my home? Here, in Berlin, where I barely know anyone, or down there, in a country that doesn't exist anymore, as my fellow Slovenians keep telling me? I have a brand new passport in my purse, issued by a country that has ceased to exist. This is one of the ways in which you can become an immigrant.[13] (Krese 1991: XI)

She continues her thoughts by noting how quickly people, particularly artists (her essay primarily criticizes poets and writers), "changed their tune"[14] in regards to Yugoslavia: how quickly they accepted the rhetoric that the former country was a "prison of nations," that so many built their careers entirely on the awards that they received in Belgrade and other Yugoslavian republics, and how their brothers, who only months ago

---

13 Kje sem doma? Tu v Berlinu, kjer ne poznam skoraj nikogar, ali tam spodaj, v državi, ki je ni več, kot me poučijo moji slovenski rojaki? V svoji torbici nosim popolnoma nov potni list neke države, ki je izginila. Tudi tako lahko postaneš emigrant.

14 The turn of politicians and intellectuals into nationalism and their demonization of a failed political system was also described extremely well by Dubravka Ugrešić, especially in the book *The Culture of Lies* (1998) and partly in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel (2016).

had been part of the same country, suddenly turned into "those people down there,"[15] while Slovenes were now "Europeans."

I have already mentioned Krese's outrage at the writers that were suddenly full of words against the terrors of communism, even though during its heyday they were prospering, according to her—they could publish books, received fair royalties, and jobs at various publishing houses. But what bothered her the most was their chauvinistic rhetoric and inflated sense of ego:

> What the hell do you think you are doing, I asked a poet, a warrior for the great Slovene ideal, while we were taking a walk in the park where Rilke wrote his Duino Elegies: "You know, we Slovenes, we won't be a healthy nation until we've found our own Slovenian king." [...] At the time, I thought I shouldn't take him seriously. [...] A few months later, I found that these people should be taken very, very seriously. They speak in the name of the people. A people who I can't bear to belong to any longer.[16] (Krese 1991: xi–xii)

---

[15] In the decade after the death of Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia was faced with a political as well as an economic crisis resulting in a growing gap between Yugoslav republics. In addition, in the late 1980s, the image of the harmonious Yugoslav brotherhood was slowly replaced by narratives of overwhelming closeness. Moreover, the notion of brotherhood becomes associated with exploitation, mistrust, and threats. The relationship between brothers was no longer marked by their unity but by their differences, a state where one of the brothers is more equal than the other. It is a form of Orientalism which Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995) describes as "nesting of Orientalisms" (Bakić-Hayden 1995: 917) and which implies that the states of former Yugoslavia have developed their own respective variants of Orientalist conceptions of one another. Apart from distinguishing the presumably civilized nature of the Yugoslav northern republics and the inferior, i.e., familial community anchored in nationalism, the excerpts above also develop a distinction based on the Christian morality of abstinence, which is juxtaposed to Orthodox Christianity, characterized by authoritarian Fascism. So, in order to justify the cultural differentiation, some Slovenian intellectuals (e.g., Taras Kermauner and Dimitrij Rupel) attached the Christian note in their discourse to Protestant ethics, even though only few Slovenes are Protestants (Bakić-Hayden 2007: 452–53). Slovenian and Croatian intellectuals thus resorted to a rhetoric that created an impression of Croatia and Slovenia belonging to Europe, while the southern republics remained part of the Oriental Balkans. That was how nationalist politicians reinforced the need for the two states to secede from Yugoslavia (Bakić-Hayden 2007: 452–53) and at the same time intensified the use of national stereotypes, such as the one on lazy Montenegrins.

[16] Le kaj počnete, sem rekla nekemu pesniku, borcu za véliko slovenstvo, med sprehodom po parku, kjer je Rilke napisal svoje devinske elegije. "Veš, mi Slovenci ne bomo zdravi, dokler ne bomo imeli lastnega slovenskega kralja."

Maruša Krese also pointed out that, in this new country, women had to fight to secure a number of rights that they already enjoyed in the Socialist era,[17] and that this independence belonged to the men (according to her, Slovenia had become the land of "evil dwarves"). In the parliament of the new country, there were less women than at any point in Yugoslavia. The search for a new suitable king for the Slovene nation was an effort primarily reserved for the men. "I hope at the very least they find a handsome one," she adds bitingly towards the end of the essay (Krese 1991: XIV).

Twenty years after the essay was first published, with a number of notable works under her belt (she received the Fabula award for her 2008 prose collection *Vsi moji božiči* (All of my Christmases), and she was in the process of writing her novel *Da me je strah?* (Am I afraid? 2013), she decided to talk about her reasons for writing the essay in an interview for *Sodobnost* magazine:

> On the first day of the war, I received a call from the redaction of *Die Zeit*. They asked me to write an article on Slovene literature. I didn't want to write it at first, I couldn't do it at that moment. When they insisted that they wanted "something" on Slovenia, I gave in and told them I could give them an article about my own thoughts on the situation in Yugoslavia, but obviously it could have turned out to be less than politically correct. We finally settled on an article, and the basis of it would be the story of how my passport had recently been stolen. [...] During a stroll through the beautiful gardens of the Castle of Duino with Niko Grafenauer, he said, half in jest, half in earnest, that we Slovenes can't become a healthy nation until we have our own king. The only thing I could say to that was that I hoped he would be handsome. This was before the disintegration of Yugoslavia. But these days, when I watch some of the presidential candidates as they

---

[...] Takrat v Devinu sem mislila, da tega ne morem jemati resno. [...] Nekaj mesecev kasneje sem ugotovila, da je treba te ljudi jemati grozno resno. Ti ljudje so govorili v imenu ljudstva. Temu ljudstvu ne morem pripadati].

17 The changes brought about by the war in Yugoslavia or by the transition to nationalist regimes from the perspective of women's rights, were analyzed by feminist authors from the former Yugoslavia in a volume edited by Sabrina Ramet (1999). In addition to increasing public attacks on women (e.g., the affair known as the Witches from Rio), most authors also highlighted the rise in anti-abortion propaganda and the reducing of women to a reproductive function by certain Serbian and Croatian academics. Feminists from the former Yugoslavia have also compiled a volume of discussions on the relationship between women's discourse and the discourse of war, with an extremely relevant theoretical introduction by Svetlana Slapšak (2000).

> make appearances with their families, I really feel like I'm watching a royal dynasty. [...] But otherwise, the text clearly draws attention to the simple fact that, in search of a scapegoat for the situation that had occurred, we are too eager to point our fingers at our "brothers from the south," and refuse to take a good, long look at ourselves instead. It's not a black-and-white thing. Well, after the article was published, I stopped receiving invitations from Slovenia, but I did get a fair number of threats and weird telephone calls, so we had to change our phone number eventually. The kids were very confused. So much about freedom of speech. They were difficult times. If you were critical towards "your side" that could only mean you were pro-Serbian or a Yugonostalgic or what have you.[18] (Krese 2011: 556–57)

The loss of one's homeland and the feeling of alienation in one's own country is certainly a very good reason for becoming frustrated, prompting one to question one's identity and allowing them to describe the world from the perspective of a stranger. With many authors, this kind of loss is also fuel for creativity. After all, the role of literature is not just to sing praises to the beauty of your homeland, but primarily to constantly ask new, sometimes difficult questions.

Maruša Krese offers a more detailed account of the circumstances under which the correspondence and her essay *Slovo od Slovenije* were published, in an interview with Cvetka Bevc (2011). Considering how there

---

[18] Na prvi dan vojne v Sloveniji so me poklicali iz redakcije Die Zeita in me prosili, da bi napisala članek o slovenski literaturi. O tem nisem hotela pisati, v tistem trenutku res ne bi mogla. Na njihovo vztrajanje, da vendarle želijo "nekaj" o Sloveniji, sem jim ponudila, da napišem svoje osebno razmišljanje o nastali situaciji v Jugoslaviji, vprašanje pa je seveda, če bo politično korektno. Dogovorili smo se za prispevek, izhodišče pa je bila moja prigoda, saj so mi v tistem času ravno ukradli potni list. [...] Na nekem sprehodu po prelepem vrtu devinskega gradu z Nikom Grafenauerjem mi je ta na pol za šalo, na pol zares razložil, da Slovenci ne bomo zdravi, dokler ne bomo imeli svojega kralja. Lahko sem samo pripomnila, da upam, da bo ta kralj lep. To je bilo še pred razpadom Jugoslavije. A ko si zdaj ogledujem nekatere kandidate za predsednike vlade, ki se pojavljajo s svojimi družinami, imam občutek, da je na pohodu kraljevska dinastija. [...] Ampak drugače sem v tekstu opozorila na preprosto dejstvo, kako v iskanju krivde za nastalo situacijo ogromno krivde zvračamo na "brate z juga", sebe pa ne vzamemo pod drobnogled. Stvar najbrž ne more biti popolnoma črno-bela. No, po objavi članka me Slovenci niso več vabili, zato pa sem dobila kar nekaj groženj in čudnih telefonskih klicev, da smo nazadnje morali zamenjati telefonsko številko. Otroci so bili precej zbegani. Toliko o svobodi pisane besede. Takrat je bilo težko. Če si bil kritičen do "svojih", je to takoj pomenilo, da si prosrbski ali Jugonostalgičar ali sam bog ve kaj.

have not yet been any detailed studies of the above-mentioned texts, it seems that more time is necessary to come to terms with the more alternative views on key historical events.

V.

The migrant experience of Maruša Krese operates with motifs that are quite different from those of other Slovene women poets abroad. While the poems of Milena Šoukal, Pavla Gruden and Milena Merkal Detela deal mostly with longing for their homeland and the fear that it might be forever lost, (Avsenik Nabergoj 2005) Maruša Krese is more concerned with travelling, "longing to feel the wind in my hair, never knowing where the road will take me, and what to expect from the journey, if anyhting at all" (Rožič 2014: 60). And even though Krese was never fully uprooted from her home country and her eventual return always seemed plausible, there is another truth that we can infer from her writings: over the years, her homeland had gradually turned into a foreign land.

The years when Maruša Krese did not appear in Slovenian public life also left some gaps in the research of her works. The biggest one certainly refers to the correspondence *Vjetar ide na jug I obrće se na sjever*, which is not freely available in Slovenia and is known more or less only in the circle of activists who knew Maruša Krese personally. Hence, critical analysis will be needed not only to confront events from our half-past history, but also to identify and evaluate (semi)literary works from this period that question the seemingly sacred truths of our nation-states.

Faculty of Media, Ljubljana

Works Cited

Avsenik Nabergoj, Irena. 2005. Hrepenenje po domovini v poeziji slovenskih avtoric v zdomstvu. *Dve domovini / Two Homelands* 21: 125–42.

Bakić, Hayden-Milica. 1995. Nesting orientalisms: The case of former Yugoslavia. *Slavic Review* 54.4: 917–31.

——— and Robert M. Hayden. 2007. Orientalistične različice na temo „Balkana": simbolna geografija v nedavni jugoslovanski politiki kulture. In *Zbornik postkolonialnih študij*, ed. Nikolaj Jeffs, 441–59. Ljubljana: Krtina.

Borovnik, Silvija. 2010. Podobe tujosti v prozi nekaterih sodobnih slovenskih prozaistk. *Simpozij Obdobja 29*, ed. Alojzija Zupan Sosič, 33–40. Ljubljana: Center za slovenščino kot drugi in tuji jezik.

Braidotti, Rosi. 1994. *Nomadic Subjects*: *Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

David, Filip and Mirko Kovač. 1998. *Knjiga pisama 1992.–1995*. Split: Feral Tribune.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. 1998. *Mappings*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press

Hladnik Milharčič, Ervin. 2013. In Jaz sem kompliciran. *Knjiga mojih življenj*, by Aleksandar Hemon, transl. Irena Duša, 161–67. Ljubljana: Modrijan.

Hrastelj, Stanka, ed. 2013. *Maruša Krese: Author's catalogue*. Novo mesto: Založba Goga.

Krese, Maruša. 1989. *Danes*. Drava: Celovec.

———. 1991. *Slovo od Slovenije*. *Nova Revija* 10: 115, XI–XIV.

———. 1992a. *Postaje*. Celovec: Drava.

———. 1992b. *Gestern, Heute, Morgen*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag.

———. 2001. *Selbst das Testament ging verloren: Še testament se je izgubil*. Dunaj: Edition Korrespondenzen.

———. 2009. *Vse moje vojne*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga.

———, Rada Iveković, Biljana Jovanović, and Radmila Lazić. 1993. *Briefe über Frauen und Nationalismus*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

———, Rada Iveković, Biljana Jovanović, and Radmila Lazić. 1994. *Vjetar ide na jug i obrće se na sjever*. Beograd: Radio B92.

——— and Cvetka Bevc. 2011. Cvetka Bevc z Marušo Krese. *Sodobnost* 75: 1551–63.

Maalouf, Amin. 2002. *U ime identiteta: Nasilje i potreba za pripadnošću*. Zagreb: Prometej.

Pavšič, Zala. 2017. Izgubljeno prijateljstvo kot metafora za razpad Jugoslavije. Ph.D. diss., Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU.

Ramet, Sabrina P., ed. 1999. *Gender politics in the Western Balkans*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Rožič, Megi. 2014. Transnacionalne in transkulturne prvine v literarnem opusu Maruše Krese, 53–61. *Philoslovenica: Mednarodno znanstveno srečanje doktorskih študentov slovenistike in slavistike*. Maribor: Philoslovenica.

Slapšak, Svetlana. 2000. Yugoslav war: A case of/for gendered history. In *War discourse, women's discourse: Essays and case studies from Yugoslavia and Russia*, ed. Svetlana Slapšak, 17–68. Ljubljana: TOPOS and Študentska založba.

Šeleva, Elizabeta. 2006. Domovina – rodna gruda – tujina. *Apokalipsa* 106: 109–15.

Ugrešić, Dubravka. 1998. *The culture of lies*: *Antipolitical essays*, trans. Celia Hawkesworth. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press.

Wachtel, Eleanor and Dubravka Ugrešić. Dubravka Ugrešić and Borka Pavićević, interview. CBC Radio. 19 May 2015. Available at: http://www.cbc.ca/radio/writersandcompany/dubravka-ugresic-and-borka-pavicevic-interviews-1.3031975

Žitnik Serafin, Janja. 2011. Literarna zapuščina slovenskih izseljencev v drugih deželah Evrope. *Dve domovini / Two Homelands* 34: 35–45.

POVZETEK

KRITIČNI ŽENSKI GLASOVI: MARUŠA KRESE IN OSAMOSVOJITEV SLOVENIJE

Maruša Krese je ena izmed mednarodno najbolj prepoznavnih sodobnih slovenkih avtoric. Medtem ko so bile predhodne analize osredotočene na razumevanje njene poezije in esejističnh zapisov skozi prizmo njenega popotništva in nestalnega življenjskega sloga, skuša prispevek pokazati, da se za njenimi nadnacionalnimi idejami skriva tudi konkretna aktivistična in politična drža, kakršno je avtorica izpričala ob razpadu Jugoslavije. Poleg tega prispevek Marušo Krese umešča v širši okvir aktivnosti in razmišljanj jugoslovanskih feministk, ki so s svojim angažmajem in kritičnimi zapisi v času nacionalističnih čustev pogosto razburjale javnost in oblastnike.