5. Bringing refugee memories and heritage into public view

Where does the past go?

When someone is forced to flee their home country, they leave behind their home, their friends and oftentimes also members of their family. Memory-soaked places of childhood, the view from the kitchen window in the morning, and the impression of light fading over one's neighbourhood at dusk. All the familiar soundscapes and other 'sensescapes' of everyday life are suddenly silenced and gone. They are lost, never to be recovered again as a lived experience, only as increasingly distant and hazy memories.

Even if the bond between a life and a particular world has been broken, the past does not remain in that world at that location, as if this ambience of time and place had been forgotten and left behind in the violent frenzy of flight. But where does the past go? There is some truth to the idea that we carry our past and our memories with and within us, but there is more to it than that. The stories that make up our memory are like living beings. With time, they transform themselves into other stories; they enter into new constellations with more recent events or are seen later from a different perspective. Sometimes memories perish or almost fade into oblivion. Trauma has this effect, as does the process of forgetting. Importantly, memories can only be relived in the present, and this requires a medium, a carrier. Art, in its many forms, provides fertile soil for such memory work. Visual art is one of the places where the memories of displaced individuals and people go, and where they can be articulated and communicated with nuance, care and an affective appeal to those willing to listen.

Memory studies scholar Alison Landsberg has coined the term 'prosthetic memory' to describe how mediated representations can transform individual and collective memories, usually geographically and historically specific, into symbolic representations that are not the property of a single person or group but can be transmitted across boundaries of time, space and culture. When serving as a prosthesis (i.e. as an external device supplementing a missing or defective part of the body – in this case, memory), mediated representations can open

up 'collective horizons of experience' which may in some cases 'pave the way for unexpected political alliances'; in other words, for solidarity and transversal politics that cut across difference (Landsberg 2018, 149; see also Landsberg 2004, 18–22). Landsberg's research from the 2010s focuses on film and mass culture, but as the American Studies scholar James Berger has noted, her concept of prosthetic memory is equally applicable to other artistic and cultural forms 'and, indeed, to symbol use per se' (Berger 2007, 597). Landsberg's concept addresses the way in which mediated representations enable individuals to relate to memories of events they did not live through, and the potential of such memories to produce empathy and historical understanding that might become the grounds for progressive politics. Her idea of cultural representations as transmitters of a combination of empathy and historical understanding points ahead to Christine Ross's critical discussion of how this transmission can play out in contemporary art using film as medium (Ross 2022; see also the Introduction). Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory is also related to memory studies scholar Astrid Erll's influential theory of 'travelling memory' or 'transcultural memory', which solidifies the argument that memories can be transmitted transnationally and transculturally when mediated by artistic and cultural representations capable of disseminating versions of the past across time, space and mnemonic communities (Erll 2011, 9). Erll's theorization of transcultural memory as travelling memory is a helpful tool. It is solidly founded in memory theory, and is attentive to the ways in which processes of remembering are interwoven with those of forgetting – for instance, the loss of memories or avoidance of remembering, which must sometimes be factored in when dealing with representations of memories of refugeedom suffused with trauma. Furthermore, Erll is very clear about the status of 'transcultural memory' and 'prosthetic memory' as analytical *research perspectives* that direct attention to the ways in which mnemonic processes unfold *across* and *beyond* the boundaries of cultures, rather than serving as labels for specific types or objects of memory (Erll 2011, 6–9 and 14).

Erll's understanding of travelling memory and the exploration of how memories of forced displacement can be represented and transmitted transculturally was at the heart of the exhibition *Forbindelser – danske kunstnere fra det tidligere Jugoslavien* ('Connections – Danish Artists from Former Yugoslavia') curated by Tijana Mišković for SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, where it was shown from December 2022 until March 2023 (Mišković and Østergaard 2022, 2–5; Mišković 2023, 195). This award-winning exhibition showcased a group of recognized Danish artists, most of whom, like the curator herself, had come to Denmark in the early 1990s as refugees from the Yugoslav Wars, and more specifically from Bosnia and Herzegovina: Ismar Čirkinagić, Nermin Duraković, Amel Ibrahimović and Vladimir Tomić. Alen Aligrudić and Ana Pavlović from, respectively, Serbia and Montenegro arrived in the wake of the conflicts in 1999–2000, while Suada Demirović was born to Macedonian parents in Denmark. *Forbindelser* paved the way for a broad public recognition of

these artists as well as for their incorporation into the history of art in Denmark. The exhibition formed part of Mišković's practice-based PhD project, which resulted in the exhibition as well as a pioneering thesis presenting an in-depth analysis of the transcultural connections that Danish artists from the former Yugoslavia articulate in their works. Acknowledging that the diasporic position of the artists and their shared Yugoslav cultural heritage are essential to their artistic practices, Mišković sought to contextualize their works in the exhibition, taking into account both the Yugoslav culture the artists came from and the one they are now a part of. In both the exhibition and her PhD thesis, Mišković argues that works by Danish artists from the former Yugoslavia can shed light on important transcultural connections between different times, places and cultures that were ruptured by the war and disconnected by migration. This chapter is indebted to Mišković, who is to be credited with introducing the concept of transcultural memory as a tool to explore the centrality of memory work to the above-mentioned artists.[1]

Centring on Aligrudić, Čirkinagić, Duraković and Tomić, this chapter explores what can be learnt from their works about worldmaking in the wake of forced displacement. More specifically, I examine how violence and trauma is commemorated, and how memories of war, loss, displacement and origin are storied in the artists' works: How do artists with this specific background of forced displacement – having experienced the Yugoslav Wars as children – represent individual and collective memories of war, refugeedom, and what I term 'waithood' and a budding 'postmigrant subjectivity' in works that speak not only to members of the diaspora to which they belong but also serve as 'prosthetic' memories capable of engaging people with other histories of displacement as well as people who have not experienced forced displacement themselves?

The history of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Wars is too complicated to be discussed here, yet some historical remarks are needed before considering the four artists' works.[2] The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia consisted of six republics (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovenia) and two autonomous regions (Vojvodina and Kosovo Metohija). The Yugoslav federation was established in 1945 as a model Stalinist state with strategies to standardize

1 I had the pleasure of serving as co-supervisor on Tijana Mišković's PhD project and thank her for everything I have learnt about the topic from our conversations and from seeing how the project evolved. In her PhD dissertation, Mišković focuses almost exclusively on the works in the exhibition *Forbindelser*. By contrast, this chapter considers additional works by Čirkinagić and Duraković which were not included.

2 The primary source of the outline following is Mišković's insightful introduction to the visual arts, culture, history, dissolution and wars of Yugoslavia in her PhD dissertation, which builds on important recent historical studies. A particular asset of Mišković's account is that it focuses on aspects relevant to the artists' work and also considers migration from Yugoslavia to Denmark (Mišković 2023, chapters 4 and 5).

political discourse and develop the country's economy, with a focus on heavy industry guided by an ambitious five-year plan. Socialism and 'Yugoslavianness' became the political building blocks of the new state. As Mišković points out, the government's utilization of the narrative of the Yugoslav partisan movement's victory in the Second World War to unify the different peoples and ethnicities was a necessary strategic move to unite the country around a common reconstruction and generate a Yugoslav patriotism, but it meant that the internal nationalist war crimes were downplayed and relegated to oblivion (Mišković 2023, 43–45).

When the Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito died in 1980 after serving in positions of national leadership since 1943, a new chapter in the country's history began. There are several theories as to what led to the instability that resulted in civil war in the 1990s, with extreme forms of mass murder and the gradual collapse of Yugoslavia as a federal state. Most explanations tend to overemphasize interethnic hostility and ignore both the political and structural impact of a deep economic crisis. The former solidarity of the wealthier republics with those harder hit crumbled, and none of the subsequent presidencies managed to solve Yugoslavia's major problems of debt, oil crises and difficulties in obtaining loans. At the same time, the federal structure opened the door to growing ethnic strife and nationalisms, which prevented a common solution for the whole country (Mišković 2023, 55–56).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 caused further destabilization, compounded by the victory of nationalist leaders over the communists in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the secession of the two prosperous republics of Slovenia and Croatia from the Yugoslav federation in 1991 (Nehrig and Weiss 2015). When Bosnia and Herzegovina attempted to secede in 1992 to avoid being incorporated into a Serb-dominated residual state, the already existing armed conflicts flared up and triggered Yugoslavia's brutal three-and-a-half-year-long civil war, unleashing a brutality that Europe had not seen since the Second World War. The brutality was caused by a campaign of ethnic cleansing, with the Muslim population being the largest victim group. Although ethnic cleansing was also carried out by Muslim and Croatian forces, the assaults by the Serbian forces on the Muslim population was particularly destructive. One of the most vicious atrocities was the massacre of 8000 Bosnian boys and men in the town of Srebrenica in June 1995. After the end of the Yugoslav Wars, it became the first legally recognized genocide in Europe since the end of the Second World War (Mišković 2023, 56–58).

The war and ethnic cleansing also forced 100,000 people to flee the former Yugoslavia, generating the largest and most challenging flow of refugees in Europe since the Second World War. Of these, 20,000, mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, were granted temporary protection in Denmark in accordance with the so-called 'Jugoslav Law', which was passed in 1992 and enabled the Danish authorities to post-

pone the processing of their application for asylum for two years (Mišković 2023, 101–102). Whilst the law ensured immediate protection, it also placed adults and children in the limbo of refugee centres without any possibility of integrating into the Danish labour market and educational system because they were not allowed to work, move into their own separate homes or go to Danish schools.

According to Birte Weiss, Minister of Interior Affairs from 1993 to 1997 and co-editor of and contributor to the 2015 volume *Og Balkan kom til Danmark. Om at være nærområde til krig og folkemord* ('And the Balkans came to Denmark: About being an area close to war and genocide'), the Jugoslav Law was based on a collective international misjudgement of the extent of the war and an optimistic expectation that the war would end sooner than it did, allowing refugees to return to their homeland.[3] By December 1994, the two-year postponement of the asylum procedure for the earliest arrivals expired. About a year later, approximately 16,000 applications had been assessed, allowing the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina to obtain residence permits and integrate into Danish society (B. Weiss 2015b, 108). In January 1995, the so-called 'Bosnian Act' was introduced, which basically meant that refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who had not been granted asylum would instead get a temporary residence permit that would automatically become a permanent residence permit after two years, along with access to integration programmes. In total, about 18,000 displaced Bosnians resettled in Denmark (Hvidtfeldt and Schultz-Nielsen 2017, 47).

Og Balkan kom til Danmark was published 20 years after the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina arrived, coinciding with the arrival of refugees from the Syrian Civil War in 2015. Its retrospective look at the situation and the integration of the Bosnians thus offered an instructive perspectivation of the new refugee situation. The contributors look back not only on the Jugoslav Wars and the reception of the Bosnians but also consider the long-term sequelae and treatment of trauma among refugees, as well as amongst Danish UN soldiers, police officers and emergency aid drivers who were deployed in Bosnia during the war. Birte Weiss also puts the events into historical perspective, with surveys about the situation of Bosnian-born Danes over the age of 18, conducted together with Ankestyrelsens Analyseenhed ('the National Social Appeals Board's Analysis Unit'), Statistics Denmark and the Danish Immigration Service. These surveys showed positive results, especially on the education parameter: a large proportion of young people between the ages of 18 and 24 had entered higher education, surpassing Danes in the same age group (Mišković 2023, 103–104; B. Weiss 2015a, 171).

3 B. Weiss 2015b, 101. Weiss explains that, in 1992, the Danish Parliament, the Folketinget, decided to follow the recommendation by UNHCR to wait and see, initially granting temporary residence permits and freezing asylum applications for two years.

Greetings from a land that no longer exists

The four artists discussed in this chapter belong to the group who entered higher education as they were all educated at Danish Art Academies. Alen Aligrudić, for example, graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 2015. For the exhibition *Forbindelser*, Aligrudić created the installation *Greetings from Yugoslavia*, with postcards displayed on black shelves reminiscent of those found in many museum shops, except that these postcards were not for sale but for free distribution. Aligrudić's photographic memories of the Balkan region were thus not designed for the permanence of museum collections but for *travelling* and *scattering* across the world – like the Yugoslav diaspora itself.

The photos embellishing the postcards derived from two of Aligrudić's photographic series entitled, respectively, *(un)familiar(ities)* and *Strange Bedfellows/ Jugolaboratorija*. The first explores the relation between the familiar and the unfamiliar; the latter is dedicated to the exploration of 'Yugoslavianness', in the light of the country's more recent history of war, migration and forced displacement (Mišković and Østergaard 2022, 10, 41).

What unites the different motifs of the postcard series is that they are all devoid of human presence and filled with an eerie atmosphere of loss and emptiness. Aligrudić deliberately used muted colours and contrasts as an aesthetic means to create a detachment from the motifs so that they are more likely to be read as dreamlike memories than actual places or situations. The postcards depict landscapes, cityscapes, new or converted buildings signalling a society in transition, but also socialist modernist monuments and buildings, and a rowing boat decorated with the Yugoslav flag sporting socialism's red five-pointed star. Aligrudić replaced the details on location and subject traditionally given on the back of postcards with a brief comment or introduction by the artist. The note on the postcard with the boat reads 'In the Same Boat' and is interpreted by Mišković as a reference to the fact that even after breaking away from Yugoslavia, the six independent states continued to struggle with the same kind of financial and political problems (Mišković 2023, 159). Many of the photographs are taken from a roadside or a path through the landscape, suggesting that the artist does not live here but is travelling on a road trip through the region where he grew up: 'Common to the motifs is that they are "coloured" by the feeling of revisiting a place that has changed, but has retained traces of something familiar.' (Mišković 2023, 161)

A postcard depicting a green wooden house at an old Christian churchyard has a note on the back headlined 'Driver's Grave' and explaining that the house is itself a kind of grave. Its roof is crowned with a red five-pointed star and a driving wheel, as emblems of the deceased's political conviction and his profession. Yet, in Aligrudić's symbolically loaded series these remnants of a Yugoslav past dominated by socialism and industrial progress can also be read in a wider political and historical context.

The artist's note invites such a conjectural interpretation by suggesting that the image of the driver's grave 'reflects on the paradigm metamorphosis happening in "the region"'.

Fig. 20: Alen Aligrudić, Untitled / Driver's Grave, *from the series* Greetings from Yugoslavia, *(2006–2021) 2022. Postcard, 10.5 x 21 cm. Courtesy: the artist.*

At this juncture it is worth returning to Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory. She stresses the general semiotic point that meaning-making is not the preserve of the creator. The 'encoding' of the production process is followed by the 'decoding' of the reception process, which means that there are always several possible readings of any 'text' (Landsberg 2018, 150; Hall 1994). This is especially true for artistic representations that often allow for a plurality of interpretations which will always hinge upon the background, knowledge and sensitivity the receiver brings to their encounter with the work. The artist cannot predetermine the outcome as the meaning is ultimately negotiated by the individual receiver. As regards *Greetings from Yugoslavia*, people who grew up in Yugoslavia, or live in 'the region', are more likely to have the prerequisite knowledge to read the signs, identify the actual places and know their history than the general audience, in Denmark and elsewhere. Although these differences seem quite obvious, they should be mentioned here because a distinct feature of the careers of the artists discussed in this chapter is that they exhibit their works both nationally and internationally, with the majority of exhibitions of their work taking place in Denmark, and secondarily in post-Yugoslav countries, especially Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One of the major historical transformations to the Balkan region is the new nation-state borders that split up Yugoslavia. Aligrudić's series reflects this paradigm shift, too. A postcard with the note 'One Step over the Border' entices

the viewer's gaze to take an imaginative step onto a weathered concrete diving board to plunge into the calm water, cross the elementary boundary between earth and sea and head towards the distant shore, which the note suggests might entail crossing a national border. Thus, as Mišković suggests, the key message in Aligrudić's series is perhaps not to be derived from the places depicted but, rather, from the artist's travels and the routes that connect them (Mišković 2023, 162). *Greetings from Yugoslavia* is not so much a representation of the artist's original homeland as an expression of the artist's *diasporic relation* to his country of birth. As many scholars of diaspora studies have underscored, this orientation towards the original homeland and/or its culture is crucial to the formation of the complex transcultural sense of belonging to both the receiving country and the country of origin that characterizes diasporic existence. This also holds true in cases such as Yugoslavia, where the original homeland no longer exists as a nation-state; for a diaspora, the 'homeland' can be an actual place, an idea place, or the memory of one (Mišković 2023, 162; Sheffer 2003, 148–149).

Fig. 21: Alen Aligrudić, Untitled / One Step over the Border, *from the series* Greetings from Yugoslavia, *(2006–2021) 2022. Postcard, 10.5 x 21 cm. Courtesy: the artist.*

Aligrudić's diasporic experience of 'travelling back' to his country of origin on a road trip in pursuit of the past, only to discover that the country and culture have changed, as indeed has Aligrudić himself, is emblematic of how the Danish artists from the former Yugoslavia position themselves. Although Aligrudić's sense of attachment obviously distinguishes him from the tourist, *Greetings from Yugoslavia* suggests that the artist observes 'the region' with the detachment of someone who has repositioned himself by developing attachments to a lifeworld elsewhere.

Mišković introduces the term *the diasporic intermediate position*[4] to capture the artist's dual belonging: 'It is precisely this diasporic intermediate position that prevents the artist from feeling completely at home in one location. Instead, it awakens the need to search for a stable foothold by moving between two locations.' (Mišković 2023, 161)

Because Alen Aligrudić is no longer part of the society he depicts, he notices the signs of transformation in the region and how traces of a waning socialism mix with signs of advancing capitalism. Within the group exhibition framework of *Forbindelser*, the title *Greetings from Yugoslavia* evokes the diasporic narrative of 'where we came from' shared by all the participating artists. Because the title refers to a no longer existing, socialist nation-state as if it still existed as a unified cultural and geopolitical entity, it evokes a twisted sense of nostalgic longing for what has been lost; twisted, because the phrase 'greetings from' suggests the leisure and pleasure of tourism and the joy of sharing travel memories with loved ones back home. A tension is thus created between the postcard as a border-crossing carrier of happy holiday memories and the ghosts of civil war, genocide and the splintering of a federal state, all conjured up by the name of the destination: Yugoslavia.

Diasporic memories of genocidal violence

The sharing of memories of Yugoslavia is as central to Ismar Čirkinagić's artistic practice as it is to Aligrudić's postcards. Whilst Aligrudić focuses on the afterlife of Yugoslav culture in post-Yugoslav countries, Čirkinagić works through the region's genocidal violence in ways that convey an unflinching anti-war and anti-violence commitment.

Čirkinagić's starting point is the nationalist conflict that forced him to flee and the postwar investigations to locate Bosnian mass graves and identify the murdered. A series of photographs from 2005 all titled *Clothing* bears witness to the laborious forensic work following the opening of mass graves to identify the victims based on the human remains. They depict recovered bones and frail bits of clothing sorted with care into small piles of 'individual' evidence. Each photograph shows a pile close-up, thereby enhancing its particularity as a silent tribute to a singular unnamed victim. Two years later, in 2007, the artist travelled around Bosnia and Herzegovina to visit the sites of war crimes, documenting them in large-scale landscape photographs in which branches, thickets, grass and crops cover the soil where bodies were concealed. Only the titles – such as *Execution Place and Mass Grave LJJ1*, *Mass Grave JK1* and *Mass Grave L1* (all 2007) – reveal that these landscapes were once sites of killings committed in the name of ethnic cleansing (D.R. Jørgensen

4 In Danish: 'den diasporiske mellempositionering'.

2008, 22). It is important to note that Čirkinagić's pictures of landscapes and forensic evidence make no direct references to place names or to Yugoslav/Bosnian culture. Rather, they present themselves as documentations of atrocities in the recent past that could have taken place almost anywhere, opening up for transversal reflections on other histories of war and the traumatic memories that displaced people carry with them. Like the stories of the forcibly displaced – the survivors – the lush vegetation in Čirkinagić's landscapes also conveys the message that life goes on even if the memory of the atrocities remains powerful (D.R. Jørgensen 2008, 26).

Čirkinagić's insistence that the genocide should remain in public view – to ensure that it remains a part of collective memory and to circumvent the inclination that traumatized nations and families often have to silence the horrors in order to protect one another and 'move on' – is perhaps most evident in *Herbarium*, a series of about 250 herbariums dating from the period 2004 to 2022, when the artist collected plants from the mass graves around his hometown of Prijedor in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina.[5] Whilst these herbariums are based on the traditional way of collecting and preserving plant specimens, they do not serve the purpose of classifying the flora and forming a botanical collection suggesting order and overview. They are, rather, commemorative markers of the mass graves where they were found. *Herbarium* can thus best be described with the German term *Mahnmal*, which denotes a memorial intended to keep something in memory that should be prevented from ever happening again.

Čirkinagić would dry and press the plants before mounting them on sheets of acid-free paper on which he also labels the specific plant, including its Latin name, the place and date of collection, as well as the number of bodies found in that particular grave. The plant label that marks Tomašica, the largest mass grave in Europe since the Second World War, is typical and reads: 'Plant name: Lotus corniculatus/Family: Fabaceae/Place: Bosnovi; Identity of the habitat: Dump on the hill 'Depo' at mine Complex Tomasica. Primary mass grave with about 800 bodies./Date: 1.9.2013.'

One of Denmark's major art museums, the ARoS museum in Arhus, has a large collection of Čirkinagić's herbariums. When on display, they take up a whole wall, even if they are densely hung. The intimate format of each framed plant specimen requires the viewer to come close to be able to read the labels – uncomfortably close to uncomfortable truths. Yet, the visitor must also take a few steps back to gain an overview of *Herbarium*'s systematic mapping of the mass graves, which brings out the systemic nature of the horrific genocide itself. However, conceptually, the herbariums with the delicate dried plants also allude to the circular processes of

5 See Ismar Čirkinagić, *Herbarium*, https://www.ismarc.com/portfolio-item/herbarium/ (accessed May 20, 2025).

nature where the bodies of the deceased nurture the plants, thereby assuming a new form of life.

Fig. 22: Ismar Čirkinagić, from the series Herbarium, *comprising about 250 herbariums, 2004–2022. Dried plants, variable sizes. Photo: Ziyah Gafic. Courtesy: the artist.*

Landscape and garments come together in Čirkinagić's installation *Cleaning Times* (2006). Originally featuring as the artist's contribution to *EXIT 2006*, the annual graduation show of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, it entered the collection of SMK, the National Gallery of Denmark, in 2020. Here, it was displayed together with a commentary by the artist explaining the significance of the title and the materials, which could not easily be deduced visually.

A tall plinth of ten bales of hay mown from one of the largest mass graves in northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina supports a simple drying rack with used clothes belonging to victims who ended up in the graves. The title *Cleaning Times* is similarly loaded with dark political and historical references, sarcastically echoing the euphemism 'ethnic cleansing' used during the wars as a generic term for violent actions such as genocide, torture, rape, deportation, etc. Through use, the garments

have taken the shape of their former owners' bodies. These material 'memory imprints' serve as synecdoches for the victims, enabling the dead to be remembered as a defence against oblivion. In his commentary, Čirkinagić encourages the viewer to look beyond the specific political context and see the work as 'a universal struggle against oblivion. The hay comes from plants that spring from the soil at a site where they were nourished by minerals, salt and acid from the bodies of the victims of the ethnic cleansing. It is as if the past life has taken on new form, continuing the cycle of life.'

Using a concept coined by the art historian Verónica Tello, Čirkinagić's artistic idiom could be described as adhering to a 'counter-memorial aesthetics' that uses montage techniques to interconnect the otherwise vanishing images, voices, memories and histories of refugees that museums and archives often fail to document and preserve. Tello suggests that this aesthetics has been brought forth by 'an impulse that desires to memorialize or, more precisely, counter-memorialize experiences of refugeedom' in a way that appears heterogeneous and casts connections, dialectics and disjunctions between divergent bodies, objects and signifiers (Tello 2016, 2, see also 4).

Ismar Čirkinagić's *The House in the Forest by the Sea* (2021), shown in the SMK exhibition *Forbindelser,* scaled up the usage of clothing as synecdoches of victims of violence to a global statement. This monumental installation consisted of two elements: a horizontal representation of the stony remains of the foundation of a house reduced to rubble, and a vertical representation of the soaring sails of a ship patchworked from clothing belonging to victims of armed conflicts, terror attacks and political violence. While the garments and rubble were sourced from fifteen conflict-stricken countries in different parts of the world, the title was drawn from the artist's research on war veterans who seek to cope with post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSD) by withdrawing from society and moving to the forest (Mišković 2023, 142–144). Thus, the objects on the floor were placed in a meticulous order as a kind of 're-enactment' of an obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) often caused by trauma. Here, ordering helps the subject remain calm and ward off fear in a situation experienced as unbearable. A specific source of inspiration for Čirkinagić was a picture taken by the photographer Don McCullin in 1982 shortly after the bombing of a hospital in Sabra and Shatila, the refugee camps in Beirut populated by Palestinian refugees. McCullin's photograph depicts a boy sitting alone on the floor arranging small pieces of rubble on a straight line as if he were playing undisturbed by the chaos around him (Mišković 2023, 143).

Fig. 23: Ismar Čirkinagić, The House in the Forest by the Sea, *2006. Installation. Clothes sewn together, debris and other materials. Variable sizes (minimum height 625 cm). Shown at the exhibition* Forbindelser – danske kunstnere fra det tidligere Jugoslavien *('Connections – Danish Artists from Former Yugoslavia') at SMK (the National Gallery of Denmark). Photo: Thomas Andersen. Courtesy: the artist.*

The inclusion of clothing belonging to victims links this work to *Cleaning Times*, but it also goes beyond it to state Čirkinagić's universal message more compellingly. In a video interview for the exhibition, the artist explained:

> During my time at the academy, I was very interested in the war in the former Yugoslavia. When you talk about a particular war, you talk about all the wars we've

> seen before. Today, just take the war in Ukraine, or the war in Iraq. The shock, the stress, the fear you have … It's easier to understand or compare and come up with a work that talks about what you've experienced in a universal way.[6]

Tijana Mišković, who assisted the artist in obtaining clothes from the families of victims, has clarified how this installation uses the common symbols of the ship and sailing, well known from religious myths and rituals across the world, to articulate an almost universal or transcultural non-violence statement about human lives destroyed by violence and the passage from life to death:

> Through this universal and transcultural symbolism, Čirkinagić's aesthetic language takes on an almost universal tone, that is, as a language that can be understood in many different cultures. The work thus rises above Čirkinagić's own experiences and testimonies from the war in the former Yugoslavia and links it to other similar atrocities, as he uses clothes that belonged to victims who lost their lives in wars, terrorist attacks and other acts of political violence to make the sail. The connection between the local and the universal is an important shift in perspective that places a specific situation in a larger context that concerns humanity. (Mišković 2023, 147).

The House in the Forest by the Sea can be seen as calling for responsible action to end and prevent wars. As the previously mentioned works, this monumental installation also offers itself up as a counter-memorial to victims of war and violence. Drawing on Michael Rothberg's influential concept of multidirectional memory, Mišković suggests that *The House in the Forest by the Sea* evokes a sense of multidirectional memory since Čirkinagić's ambition is to bind together diverse spatial, temporal and cultural sites of political violence in order to spotlight the shared experience of deadly violence, loss and grief (Mišković 2023, 145). Multidirectional memory is an accurate term here because it refers to the coexistence of multiple cultural memories being possible without the rivalry that is often produced when comparing 'major' and 'minor' historical atrocities (e.g. the Bosnian genocide and the Holocaust). The concept thus draws attention to how specific traumatic memories can serve as an analogy for other events and histories and to the dynamic transfers taking place between diverse times and places during the act of remembrance (Rothberg 2009, 11). To recall Landsberg's point on transcultural memory transfer, Čirkinagić's work serves as a mediating prosthetic representation that enables viewers to relate to traumatic events they did not live through (Landsberg 2018). From the acknowledgement that such experiences are shared beyond the specificities of local histories might spring a transnational and transcultural sense of solidarity. *The*

6 Quoted from the transcription of the interview included in Mišković 2023, vol. 2, appendix 2, p. 11.

House in the Forest by the Sea offers an alternative understanding of counter-memory beyond the usual dialectics of understanding counter-memory as based on binaries like victor and vanquished, victim and perpetrator, us and them, self and other. It thus conveys a profound understanding of the *coexistence* defined so accurately by Christine Ross as 'the nondiscreteness of beings; the state, awareness and practice of existing interdependently' (Ross 2022, 8).

Camp structures for a life between permanence and temporariness

Shifting focus from Čirkinagić's commitment to anti-violence to Nermin Duraković's persistent critique of the Danish asylum system, it is crucial to emphasize a fact that situates Duraković's critique of this national system in a broader global political context. For many of the world's refugees, mobility is followed by *im*mobility. At the beginning of the 21st century, UNHCR estimated that around four in ten registered refugees lived in camp-like facilities, often for years or even decades (Gatrell et al. 2021; Gatrell 2013). In the camp's parallel society, the lives of refugees are put on hold. An example is the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya – one of the world's largest camps, which has endured for more than 30 years. Gerawork Teferra has shown how today this camp is still geared to handling people with refugee status for a supposedly short-term period before repatriation or resettlement elsewhere – which seldom happens. As a result, the Kakuma Refugee Camp has developed 'pseudo-permanent' structures, such as education, administration and elections for informal leadership positions, to accommodate people who must build what Teferra describes as 'increasingly permanent lives in the camp'. Here they develop a 'unique lifestyle between permanence and transience' (Teferra 2022, 164). Teferra uses the term 'waithood' to refer to the ways in which the forcibly displaced handle 'a prolonged encampment that could, in theory though not in reality, end at any time' (Teferra 2022, 171). Waithood, argues Teferra, is 'not social limbo but legal and bureaucratic limbo … for an indefinite period'. Oftentimes, the uncertainty of waithood determines the nature of refugees' social life and is detrimental to their physical and mental health (Teferra 2022, 175).

Since the arrival of large numbers of refugees from the Syrian civil war in 2015, it has also become frequent practice across Europe to leave refugees waiting for years in the semi-permanence of refugee centres while their asylum application is being processed. In the case of Denmark, such policies date back to the early 1990s when the country received about 20,000 Bosnian refugees (Hammer 2019, 86, 102) who were housed in temporary camps or 'centres' where they often ended up spending several years.

Although this kind of long-term encampment is often politically designed to separate asylum claimants from civil society (Kreichauf 2018), provisional infra-

structures are established, and informal encounters between refugees and residents unfold from early on. I propose, therefore, that the protracted wait for a – nowadays temporary – residence permit in a European country, could be described as a postmigrant condition. It is postmigrant in the obvious temporal sense that it is a phase 'after' the *act* of forced migration, but also in the sociopolitical sense, as refugees enter postmigrant societies embroiled in struggles over migration and integration that impact their situation – for example, when right-leaning parties and their constituencies perceive the increasing social and cultural 'diversity' as a threat to national monoculture and asylum seekers are perceived as enemies (Foroutan 2019b, 2019a). Refugeedom, camp life and waithood have rarely been analysed as a postmigrant condition. The remainder of this chapter examines works by Nermin Duraković and Vladimir Tomić and develops from these analyses some methodological considerations of what a postmigrant frame of reading can contribute on life in European refugee camps, which generates, I argue, a kind of postmigrant subjectivity rarely singled out in postmigration studies.

Whilst the Prologue highlighted Duraković's video work *Our Border* for the way he used the heavily surveyed border between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina to reflect critically on the interlocking Danish and European border regimes, this chapter foregrounds the refugee camp as a recurrent motif in his drawings and installations. Duraković's commitment to interrogating the long-term encampment of asylum seekers links his work thematically and politically to the transnational community of Trampoline House and its embedded gallery CAMP (examined in Chapter 2), where one of his major early works, *(Re)arranging* (2009/2015), was shown at CAMP's inaugural exhibition *Camp Life* in 2015.

As a student at the Funen Art Academy, Duraković had already developed an interest in migration politics, especially the spaces and systems society creates for asylum seekers. The artist had ample experience with them from the early 1990s when he spent four years in the Danish asylum system as a young teenager. What triggered his critical interest was 'the discrepancy' between the lived reality he had experienced and witnessed and the public narrative. This discrepancy came to inform several art projects centring on the physical structures of asylum centres and deportation centres (Duraković 2020, 1). In his 2020 essay 'Addressing Migration Politics through Art', Duraković describes these centres as 'zones in which human life is reduced to an uncertain wait for either a residency permit or deportation [… and] where the experience of time is different from wider society'. He also notes that most asylum centres in Denmark are placed outside of urban areas, ensuring the absence of asylum seekers in the public places of Danish towns and cities – 'and by extension preventing public interest in their existence' (Duraković 2020, 2).

One of the first projects to spring from Duraković's political indignation was the booklet project *Danish Asylum Guidebook* (2002), which offered an overview of all asylum centres in the country as of 2002, as suggested by the title on the booklet's

cover: *Alle Danske asylcentre på ét sted 2002* ('All Danish Asylum Centres in One Place 2002'). Its intended readership was ordinary people who had never visited one of these isolated zones of waithood. The booklet was designed to look like promotional material, appropriating the layout of the *Danish Camping Guide* from the same year and offering descriptions in Danish of each centre through categories such as local area, transport, and the activities and education offered to the centre's inhabitants. Like *Our Border*, this project thus pushed back against the invisibilization of displaced people by making what was supposed to remain hidden publicly visible and accessible.

Unlike Aligrudić, Čirkinagić and Tomić, Duraković rarely makes any reference to his country of birth, the specific history of Bosnian refugees, or any personal experience of refugeedom (Mišković 2023, 180–181). His perspective is transcultural and political, as his primary matter of concern is the racializing and dehumanizing effects and the ethico-political implications of Danish and EU asylum policies. Duraković is acutely aware that an artist with a refugee background speaks from a position quite different from that of the refugee:

> One of the reasons why, for me, dealing with people in need is one of the most difficult artistic subjects to work with is connected to the fact that as an artist I am placed in a privileged position that is not shared by the subject of my work. If there is one thing that I can draw from my own experience of having been in the position of asylum seeker, it is that being locked in the imprisoned limbo of the asylum system without significant legal rights, is absolutely a political issue. (Duraković 2020, 8)

As a vocal critic of the emotionally charged imagery of suffering refugees and migrants – overused by media and humanitarian organizations, as well as some artists, to evoke compassion and empathy – Duraković takes a different, conceptually oriented approach that focuses on spaces, structures and objects rather than human bodies. Accordingly, his project *Asylum Residency* (2005) offers viewers visual entry to the interior of centres but not access to the inhabitants or their stories. This series of graphic illustrations drawn with fine accurate lines depicts prototypical rooms in Danish refugee centres furnished with the standard equipment used in the 1990s, ready for occupants to take up residence. They can be seen as a kind of chart of the furniture and objects considered essential for establishing a home in Denmark. Duraković thus uses his personal history as a critical instrument with which to explore cultural notions of what basic needs must be met for people to be able to (re)create a home, and the importance of a home for developing a sense of belonging to a place. The series was originally designed to be displayed on overhead projectors where these 'blueprints' of refugee accommodation were transilluminated by a clinical white 'analytical' light exposing the inhumane character of these containers for

unwanted people and suggesting that these environments were not designed for worldmaking. *Asylum Residency* thus reflects the ambiguous character of these environments of care and control to which displaced people are (not) welcomed – the ambiguity that Derrida's neologism *hostipitality* captures so eminently with its dual reference to a sociocultural and political conduct or climate that is both hospitable and inhospitable at the same time (Derrida 2000).

Fig. 24: Nermin Duraković, Asylum Residency, *2005. Drawing, 30 x 40 cm print on transparent paper. Courtesy: the artist.*

This project is key to Duraković's understanding of the Danish asylum system, as evidenced by his adaptation of the series to other formats suited to different exhibition contexts. In 2007, he used some of the illustrations for the poster series *My Temporary Asylum Residency* created for the group exhibition *How Do You Belong?*, organized by the curatorial collective Publik and displayed in Copenhagen's public spaces.[7] In 2015, the series was displayed in light boxes at his solo exhibition in Croatia at the MMSU (Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Rijeka) and ICA

7 *How do you belong?* by publik, see http://publik.dk/howdoyoubelong.html and http://publik.dk/nermin.html (accessed January 9, 2025).

(Institute for Contemporary Art, Zagreb). The exhibition concept centred on Duraković's projects about the Danish immigration system from 2002 to 2015,[8] and it should be mentioned here also as an event that exemplifies how the artists discussed in this chapter exhibit and make their mark on the Danish and the Croatian and Bosnian art scenes concurrently.

Fig. 25: Nermin Duraković, (Re)arranging, *2005/2015. Year of production: 2009. Exhibited: 2009/2015/2016/2022. Installation. Metal, plastic, wooden furniture, mattresses and restriction tape, size approximately 16 m². Courtesy: the artist.*

Whilst *Asylum Residency* includes two-dimensional renderings of the basic equipment of rooms in 1990s asylum centres, the installation *(Re)arranging* includes the real objects: two red metal bunk beds with grey mattresses, two metal lockers, a red table and two red plastic chairs furnish a confined space of 14 m² whose walls are marked with white lines on the floor. The furniture evokes the aesthetics of the 1990s asylum centres, so anonymous and industrially standardized that it seems to be devoid of specific cultural connotations. The title *(Re)arranging*

8 Duraković 2020, 3–4; Wedel-Brandt 2015; see also the artist's website: https://nermindurakovic.art/ (accessed January 9, 2025).

underscores this as it refers to the paradox that no matter how the occupants might rearrange the furniture, the aesthetics will remain almost the same (Duraković 2020, 5). The spatial aesthetics spotlights how inhospitable such accommodation is to worldmaking and points to the impossibility of turning it into your own (temporary) home. The fact that asylum seekers must live in the centres, as no other options for accommodation are available, emphasizes the unequal power relations of the camp. The furniture thus speaks volumes about the dehumanizing effects of a prison-like system which turns people into case numbers – asylum claimants sentenced to indefinite waithood.

(Re)arranging was also included in the SMK exhibition, *Forbindelser*. Mišković gives an account of the conversations it spurred when some of the exhibited works were used as reference points in a conversation on 'home' in an ethnographic workshop with participants of refugee backgrounds. Mišković recounts that the work had a powerful but differentiated impact on those who had 'more or less traumatic memories of asylum centres in Denmark' (Mišković 2023, 154):

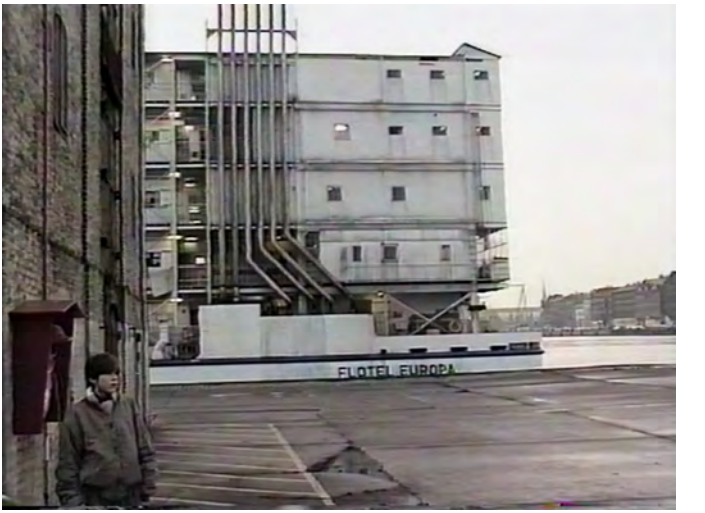
> The workshop showed that for some the stay was a traumatic restriction, while for others it was a rescue that provided freedom and security. On the one hand, we hear an Indian woman talk about how the room in *(Re)arranging* reminds her of the fear and confusion she felt when she came to Denmark as a young woman with her younger brother, while on the other hand, we hear a young man from Eritrea talk about how it was in an asylum centre room in Denmark that he could sleep safely for the first time in his life after being on the run for three years. These clear identifications with the room illustrate how the work *(Re)arranging* channels the memories of different people almost like a portal, and at the same time reflects different political contexts and aspects of Denmark's asylum and refugee policy. (Mišković 2023, 151–152)

Refugeedom and the limbo of waithood

How differently the long wait can impact people's state of mind and everyday lives is reflected vividly in Vladimir Tomić's video work (2015) and novel (2022), *Flotel Europa*. Flotel Europa was an old hotel-ship docked in Copenhagen Harbour to serve as a refugee centre for Bosnians. Run by the Red Cross, approximately 1000 people were housed on it, with each family allocated a cabin of 8m^2, with only a few that had windows but with a toilet and bath. On each of the crowded decks, the 200 residents shared a communal kitchen where there were approximately twelve hobs (Mišković 2023, 108). Both Tomić's video work and his novel, identically named yet different, are compelling testimonies to how the early postmigrant transition phase was experienced by the residents in this floating refugee camp.

The video work and the novel are about the collective experience of refugeedom, as well as an autobiographical coming-of-age story about a boy named Vladimir. It thus integrates a situation of exception with one of normality. The video work places equal emphasis on the collective and the autobiographical story; it is a collective, multi-authored work in the sense that it is a digital montage of amateur footage recorded by different residents at the Flotel Europa. In the 1990s, it was expensive to make international phone calls, so someone at the Flotel bought two used VHS cameras, which were used to record messages to send to relatives back home, as well as for documenting everyday life and festive events on board. *Flotel Europa* thus also includes footage from a 'video letter' in which Vladimir's mother and her two sons describe their situation and send loving greetings to relatives back home. VHS tapes are fragile and degrade over time and with use. Signs of wear are apparent in Tomić's montage, suggesting distance in time as well as enhancing the fragmentary nature of memory. As the scholar of photography Mette Sandbye notes, these amateur recordings provide important insight into refugee life and serve as 'a kind of archival memorialization of the untold and seemingly unremembered between the personal and collective history' (Sandbye 2024, 43).

Fig. 26: Vladimir Tomić, Flotel Europa, *2015. Single-channel video, 70 min. Still image from the video. Courtesy: the artist.*



In the video work, Tomić's personal story is foregrounded in some clips from a video letter from his mother to his father in which the two somewhat unwilling sons are also asked to tell their father about their lives in Copenhagen, but it is mostly

the collective experiences that come to the fore. In contrast to the video, the novel foregrounds the autobiographical story about Vladimir and his extended family. Accordingly, it includes more details on their life in Sarajevo before the war and their flight, arrival and resettlement as refugees in different Western countries – i.e. the production of a transnational diaspora.

Reading *Flotel Europa* through the lens of Teferra's concept of refugees' waithood, I propose that a distinct form of postmigrant subjectivity emerges from the lived experience of refugeedom after the flight and then the arrival in a host country. I use the term *postmigrant refugeedom* to designate the specific forms of worldmaking between transience and permanence that the forcibly displaced develop as a mechanism for handling prolonged encampment and for developing a subjectivity and lifestyle tuned to the uncertain existence as a denizen without the foothold of a residency permit.

In the 1990s, Denmark was only on the verge of becoming a 'postmigrant society', as opposed to the Danish society of 2015–2022 in and for which Tomić created his works. This prompts the questions: What is gained by adopting an analytical lens that repositions 'refugees' as 'postmigrants'? How might artistic representations of 'postmigrant refugeedom' influence the hostile and polarizing discourse on migration in postmigrant societies? And can the analyst avoid the migrationist trap of 'migrantizing' the artist? I would argue that migrantization cannot be completely avoided. Because the novel and the video work are semi-biographical, and Tomić uses a first-person narrator, one cannot bypass Tomić's background, voice and body. His biography is integral to the works.

The last question can be formulated in more general terms: How do researchers who examine artistic and literary works that draw on their creator's refugee background navigate between Scylla and Charybdis? Between, on the one hand, a biographism that reads the works only in biographical terms and, in doing so, risks narrowing down the scope for interpretation to the artist's/writer's *exceptional* personal story of flight and victimhood; and, on the other, new forms of integrationist colour-blindness that silence stories of displacement and voices carrying different relations to languages, peoples and place-based knowledge? How can scholars reconcile the need to acknowledge that postmigrant refugeedom is distinctly different from the subjectivity of the descendants of immigrants with the need to undo the binary distinction between the newly arrived and the host population which is often used to label newcomers as outsiders? How can research into art and literature contribute to the recognition of forcibly displaced people as part of society, even when they are confined to the socially abject zones of camps and have not yet been granted asylum, a temporary residence permit, or the citizenship that has become increasingly difficult to get?

In Tomić's novel, Vladimir's story unfolds chronologically, starting with his arrival at Flotel Europa, with his mother and elder brother Goran, in December 1992,

and ending with their move to their own apartment in April 1996. It is interspersed with flashbacks to his family history and the increasingly violent enmity between ethnic groups back home, along with the fearful time they had experienced before fleeing. Readers learn that Tomić's family is composed of a complex mix of Serbs, Croats and Bosnians. Consequently, after the outbreak of war, they were constantly suspected of being enemies as others questioned which side they were on, and what blood ran through their veins. Yet, fleeing Yugoslavia did not mean that Vladimir and his family left this mistrust behind; his account of several incidents at the Flotel Europa indicates that the deeply ingrained ethnic conflicts travelled along with the displaced.

In the teenager's slightly naïve narrative, the anxiety, and the occasional shocks that the terror of the war and the fear of what has happened to Vladimir's father back home bring, blend into what gradually becomes everyday life. We hear about Vladimir falling in love with Selma, a girl on the ship who takes folk dancing classes, and about his friendship with other boys in the floating camp.[9] There are stories about the Flotel's football team, teenage desire and group masturbation, and encounters with Danish people – from the teenagers' adoration of the pretty women at the Flotel reception desk, to the psychologist who inspects the Flotel and finds it unsuitable for long-term habitation, to Vladimir's discovery of rock music and concerts in the city. Near the end, Tomić turns to the difficult transition from a Bosnian to a Danish school with the bullying and linguistic hurdles this entails.

Fig. 27: Vladimir Tomić, Flotel Europa, *2015. Single-channel video, 70 min. Still image from the video. Courtesy: the artist.*

9 The girl is named Selma in the novel and Melisa in the video work, but the stories match up.

Woven into Vladimir's story are tales about the tensions and solidarity between the Flotel's residents, about the black economy and recycling bottles to supplement their meagre allowance. There are also stories of anxious waiting: for news from back home and moving to a better place, for asylum, for a new life. One of the most piercing observations of waithood in both the novel and the video work is found in the scene in the TV room where many of the adults spend days and nights watching the news on Danish, American, French, and other channels, for a glimpse of someone they know. They looked, the narrator notes, as if the shape of their bodies slowly took the shape of the sofas they sat on: 'It was as if Flotel Europa and our refugee situation was a kind of vacuum in time and space, and the TV room at Flotel Europa's deck A was an additional vacuum within the vacuum' (Tomić 2015, 28:30–32:30 min.; 2022, 136–137).

I agree with the literary scholar Fedja Wierød Borćak that the novel is probably largely based on Tomić's own biographical details and reflects the vulnerability that the boy Vladimir feels while being emotionally split between fading Yugoslav ideals, new brutal militaristic nationalisms and 'the Danish population, welcoming with one hand and pushing away with the other'. Notwithstanding the centrality of the first-person narrator, *Flotel Europa* has a wealth of characters and is 'first and foremost a collective novel' that serves as 'an important testimony to a shared experience of disintegration, war and flight' (Borćak 2022, 21).

It is precisely the interweaving of the collective story of Bosnian displacement and camp life with ordinary and familiar coming-of-age experiences that enables readers and viewers to grasp how the processes of displacement and resettlement are interlinked. The Bosnians at Flotel Europa were both 'refugees' and 'postmigrants', albeit postmigrants in a different and much more precarious and marginalized situation than the 'postmigrant generations' of descendants born in the country. It is such features that make Tomić's depiction of youth life a narrative about postmigrant refugeedom: the transition phase between flight and resettlement in the diaspora.

An intriguing aspect of both the novel and video work is Tomić's complex temporal and spatial positionality. In these works, he is embodied by the teenage refugee narrator Vladimir growing up at the Flotel in 1990s Copenhagen; yet as a writer, he speaks from a position as a Danish citizen and a highly esteemed visual artist educated at art academies in Copenhagen and Vienna in the 2010s, narrating the story of his youth and the sociopolitical circumstances that shaped it. Borrowing a term from Tijana Mišković mentioned above, the positionality that the novel constructs for Vladimir/Tomić could be described as a 'diasporic intermediate position' (Mišković 2023): a positionality straddling past and present, 'refugee' and 'citizen', Denmark and what is today known as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia.

But there is an additional layer that transcends the historical specificity of Tomić's story and has to do with art and literature as instruments of empathy

and transversal solidarity. Tomić's works about the post-Yugoslav refugees speak to the way the history of war and displacement repeats itself. The video work was released in 2015 when displaced Syrians arrived in Europe, coinciding with the 'paradigm shift' in Danish migration and asylum policies that worsened the conditions for asylum seekers and refugees on temporary residency permits (see the Introduction and Rytter et al. 2023). The novel was published some years later, in September 2022, only months after millions of Ukrainians had fled to Europe following Russia's military invasion. Tomić's works make no mention of transversal solidarity between different diasporic groups who share the experience of war, displacement and resettlement. Yet, in the historical contexts of their making, it would certainly have been possible to read them as expressions of solidarity across differences. The literary critic Thomas Thurah's observation that it is impossible not to read this novel with empathy for the refugees' situation captures this implicit solidarity: 'In this way, the novel also becomes an ever-relevant depiction of the camp, of people crowded together in very little space, deprived of most things and subject to the rules of others. This can be done out of humaneness and yet feel like a loss of humanity.' (Thurah 2022)

What can be learnt from Vladimir Tomić's *Flotel Europa* about the place of refugees and asylum seekers in Europe's postmigrant societies? As newly arrived, they do not belong to the postmigrant generations of descendants whose cultural productions and lifestyles have been thoroughly analysed by postmigration scholars such as Mark Hill and Erol Yildiz (Yildiz and Hill 2017). They are, arguably, positioned differently. In Tomić's novel, it is the narrator's experience with particularly language barriers, when entering a Danish school, that suggests that refugee youth are positioned as social and cultural 'outsiders' rather than as 'outsiders within' who are familiar with their country's social codes, norms, language and mainstream culture.

My analysis suggests that critical postmigration studies needs more fine-grained distinctions between different postmigrant positionalities and subjectivities to more accurately describe the 'place' of refugees and asylum seekers *in* society. I have used the term *postmigrant refugeedom* to name this transitional stage between flight and diasporic resettlement. My analysis also suggests that literary and artistic narratives are key instruments in helping 'us' – the motley crowd of citizens and denizens that make up postmigrant populations and readerships – understand better the condition of waithood. *Flotel Europa* offers some insight into refugees' worldmaking, into how they are suspended between a country recently lost and a country they cannot yet claim as theirs, between normality and a state of exception – and the creative agency and resilience it takes to make a world for oneself and develop a postmigrant subjectivity in waithood's zone of indeterminacy.

Waithood, trauma and prosthetic memory

This chapter has explored worldmaking in the wake of forced displacement. It has analysed how violence and trauma is commemorated, and how memories of war, loss, displacement and origin are storied in works by Alen Aligrudić, Ismar Čirkinagić, Nermin Duraković and Vladimir Tomić. The chapter has also demonstrated how Duraković and Tomić have represented 'waithood' and the formation of a germinating 'postmigrant subjectivity' in artworks that are capable of engaging people with similar or other histories of refugeedom as well as those who have not experienced forced displacement themselves.

The introduction to this chapter stressed that processes of remembering are interwoven with those of forgetting, including the loss of memories and the avoidance of remembering – an issue quite common in representations of memories of refugeedom that are riddled with trauma. Trauma is unrepresentable, and yet it must be dealt with. This is one of the reasons for the tensions involved in representing refugees, argues Mieke Bal in her 2023 essay 'Refugees and Representation: An Impossible Necessity' (Bal 2024, 9–11, 21–23). Trauma cannot be represented 'for reasons of psychic foreclosure, which is the defining aspect of trauma; it must not because trying to do so would entail being trapped in voyeurism, the lack of modesty, but neither can it be ignored' (Bal 2024, 11). Bal emphasizes specifically the difficulty of incorporating trauma into narrative memory because trauma disrupts or 'splits off' experiences from the main narrative, thereby disrupting its coherence (Bal 2024, 23). The predilection for juxtaposing or combining divergent objects, motifs and fragments that are somehow interrelated, yet do not 'cohere' to form an organic unity, is a representational mode favoured by all four artists and could be seen as a way of acknowledging the need to work around that which cannot and should not be ignored. As with, for example, Aligrudić's fragmentary greetings from unnamed places in 'Yugoslavia'; Čirkinagić's use of clothes, flowers and stones as synecdoches for traumatizing conflicts and genocide; Duraković's spatial montage of refugee camp furniture as tokens of debilitating waithood; and Tomić's recollection of scattered episodes in teenage and community life under the conditions in a floating camp.

For audiences without a background of forced displacement, many of these works can serve as prosthetic memory that can potentially call forth empathy. Empathy is not a purely emotional response like sympathy, but has a crucial cognitive component and takes work and thought to achieve (Landsberg 2018, 147). To draw the strands of this chapter together and link it to the next, I would like to recapitulate Landsberg's proposition that prosthetic memory transmitted by mediated representations (including artworks) enables individuals to relate to memories of events they did not experience, potentially leading to empathy and a historical understanding which might pave the way for progressive politics. The

book's concluding chapter on the predicament of the Palestinians will explore this proposition further by turning to Christine Ross, whose analysis of contemporary art's prosthetic transmission of memories of forced displacement will add critical nuance to Landsberg's hopeful proposition.