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Modern and Off-Modern Time Regimes: Co-Memorating Trauma and Hope in Alida Bremer's *Olivas Garten* (2013)

In this article, I join a growing chorus of those who caution that a predominant focus on 20th century European trauma tends to privilege memories of political violence – such as the Shoa, the gulag, surveillance, and other forms of oppression suffered under various totalitarian and authoritarian regimes across Europe – at the expense of tracing and commemorating other more positive and potentially enabling legacies of the past. In the first part, I point to what is at stake when the socialist past is commemorated with the Shoa in such a way that a focus on historical trauma and victimization potentially bars all other views of this past. I then analyse the tension between Ann Rigney's call for memory studies to go beyond the traumatic paradigm – to look at the futurity of memories of hope and resistance – and Aleida Assmann's critique of the future-oriented modern time regime and her claim that only the commemoration of trauma can lead to a better future. To address this tension, I turn to Svetlana Boym's notion of the off-modern as a way to effectively co-memorate hope and trauma. Taking Alida Bremer's 2013 novel *Olivas Garten* as a case study, I argue that fiction provides a privileged space for allowing both trauma and memories of hope, such as those provided by former Yugoslavia's partisan history, to coexist as equally valid and fruitful legacies of 20th century Europe.

Memories of Socialism and the Limits of Co-Memoration

Since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, commemorations of any positive aspects of political and social life under socialism have often been dismissed as expressions of 'red nostalgia'. While the phenomenon of 'Yugonostalgia' has been popular in many of former Yugoslavia's successor states, there continues to be a striking – and arguably intentional – lack of official forms of commemoration of socialism's legacies that go beyond its traumatic one.¹ Ajla Demiragić thus speaks of a "coerced oblivion of the socialist legacy" (Demiragić 2016: 129). This intentional silencing of the socialist past has been attributed to various complex reasons, including the politically expedient bracketing of the socialist past in order to construct a cleansed collective national memory that evades the existence of the multi-ethnic socialist interlude implemented by Tito (Beronja / Vervaet 2016: 5–6). While the silencing of the socialist past can certainly partly be attributed to decidedly national and nationalistic interests, its larger context can be found at the level of the European Union. Here, distancing oneself from the socialist legacy has functioned as a prerequisite for the successful Europeanization of post-socialist countries (Petrović 2015: 13) because becoming part of the European Union meant submitting to global neoliberal capitalism. It is this economic aspect of Europeanization and its entanglement with memory practices that, intentionally or not, silence other, potentially more emancipatory pasts, which form the backdrop of this paper. In the following, I join those who argue that a predominant focus on 20th century European trauma tends to privilege memories of political violence – such as the Shoa,

¹ I here follow Aleida Assmann's definition of legacy, in which she distinguishes between heritage and legacy and emphasizes the active nature of legacy: "Whereas we are invariably influenced by our heritage—whether we like it or not—a legacy can be accepted, rejected, reinterpreted, and appropriated in one way or another. A legacy, once handed down, is nothing so long as it is not taken up" (Assmann 2020: 169).

the gulag, surveillance, and other forms of oppression suffered under various totalitarian and authoritarian regimes across Europe – at the expense of tracing and commemorating other, potentially more positive and emancipatory legacies of the past. This focus on histories of violence and trauma is closely tied to the various forms of co-memoration practiced in recent decades, which often take the Shoa, arguably the most iconic traumatic event of the 20th century, as a point of comparison. In their introduction to *Ko-Erinnerung: Grenzen, Herausforderungen und Perspektiven des neueren Shoah-Gedenkens*, Daniela Henke and Tom Vanassche, for instance, argue that in the context of co-memorative practices, the Shoa, while no longer a hegemonic standard for memory, certainly still functions as a "Leitbild für andere Kontexte" (Henke / Vanassche 2020: viii). There is no doubt that co-memoration with the Shoa has been very fruitful in order to allow for the articulation of and engagement with other genocidal pasts. In her analysis of *Compelled to Remember* (2012), Willow Anderson, for example, shows that in conversations with Shoa survivors, Canadian residential school survivors found examples of personal and cultural survival and resilience. Shoa survivors functioned as "veterans", as "successful survivors and resilient mnemonic advocates" (Anderson 2017: 193), and thus provide inspiration for the currently ongoing struggles for the full official recognition of Canada's genocidal past.²

However, as Vanassche and Henke note, co-memorative practices also have limits, perhaps particularly so when they are used for political purposes. One such limit lies in the prevailing practice of mentioning the socialist legacy in tandem with fascism or Nazism, which can, for example, be observed in the 2009 European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism. While it is certainly legitimate to point to the shared authoritarian and totalitarian structures of "Nazism, Stalinism and fascist and Communist regimes" (European Parliament 2009), the continued emphasis on the shared histories of violence obscures important categorical differences. As Maria Todorova argues, the result of co-commemorative approaches of this stripe has been a juxtaposition of fascism and communism. However, as she argues, it is in fact more accurate to foreground the modern origins of socialism as the counterpart of capitalism, not fascism. We should juxtapose and co-memorate "capitalism and communism; or liberalism (including neo-liberalism) and communism" (Todorova 2012: 68–69). Gal Kirn also objects to what he observes as a prevailing "equation of communism with fascism", arguing that it has produced "an epistemological obstacle" ensuring that "nothing could be resurrected from the twentieth century" (Kirn 2016: 102). Co-memoration of West and East European pasts with the Shoa and a concomitant focus on political violence and trauma, can thus inadvertently lead to a silencing of other, non-traumatic legacies, and unintentionally lend itself in service of a neoliberal capitalist end-of-history narrative (Fukuyama 1989). As Anne Rigney forcefully argues, however, both society and scholarship urgently need to go beyond the culturally tenacious and pervasive end-of-history paradigm. Drawing

² Moreover, as this example also shows, co-commemorative approaches have allowed Memory Studies to leave its "methodological nationalism" behind (Levy / Sznajder 2006: 103). Co-memorative practices tend to not only put the objects of memory itself in transnational or transcultural contexts but also trace the transnational or transcultural paths of memory production in the first place, attesting to the fact that, as Astrid Erll puts it, "memory – individual as well as social – is fundamentally a transcultural phenomenon" (Erll 2011: 66).

on Andreas Huyssen's diagnosis of 'present pasts' and Enzo Traverso's diagnosis of left-wing melancholia (see Huyssen 2003; Traverso 2017), she argues for the urgency of thinking about the past's future as we face an uncertain future due to the climate crises and its attendant existential problems (Rigney 2018: 368). She therefore proposes that the present challenge of memory studies as a field is to explore "how the past and present can interact in producing scenarios for the future without falling back into grand narratives, but also without being wedded to the traumatic" (Rigney 2018: 369).

From Trauma *versus* Hope to Trauma *and* Hope

At first glance, Rigney thus seems to argue in direct opposition to another eminent voice in the field of memory studies, that is, Aleida Assmann. In her 2013 monograph *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen: Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes der Moderne*, translated into English in 2020, Assmann argues that since the 1980s we are moving away from the future-oriented modern time regime and accompanying notions of hope towards a past-oriented one.³ Given the havoc that has been wreaked by future- and progress-oriented ideologies and by utopias whose failed realizations too often took on dystopic dimension in service of the political left and right in the course of the 20th century, we are doing so for good reason. Assmann proposes that we have therefore now entered a new time regime, which is reflected in, and premised on, changed conceptualizations of the past, present, and future and their relationship to each other. The previously held modern notion of the future, closely related to the new, to utopia and hope, was cut off from the past, as it was premised on the "prospect of permanent renewal and progress" that drove modernization (Assmann 2020: 230). This notion of the future has now become obsolete as we witness the manifold and unacceptable socio-economic injustices and environmental destruction brought upon by this paradigm and its faith in scientific-technological and economic progress (150). We cannot simply leave the past behind.

Whereas Rigney argues for renewed attention to be paid to the future in a way that is not bound to the traumatic, Assmann in fact sees an increased focus on trauma as the very means by which to engage in the necessary task of thinking the future differently and outside of narratives of linear progress. The "future-directed time regime of modernity" left the past and thus "the victims of history behind" (Assmann 2013: 54) in its march towards an ideologically envisaged future. In contrast, the new past-oriented time regime recovers the significance of the past for the present by working through historical trauma, resulting in human rights discourses and victim claim recognition processes. In doing so, the past and its victims have been "recovered, reconstructed and reconnected to the present by various emotional, moral or legal ties as a response to past grievances and [as] a form of taking responsibility" (Assmann 2013: 53). For Assmann, a focus on commemorating Europe's traumatic past and political violence thus becomes the very means by which to potentially forge its "collective democratic future" (Assmann 2020: 227–228).

³ Assmann defines time regime as "a complex of deeply held cultural presuppositions, values, and decisions that guide human desires, action, emotions, and assessments, without individuals' necessarily being aware of these foundations. François Hartog speaks of a 'régime d'historicité' in this regard, by which he means the different ways in which societies position themselves in time and engage with their past" (Assmann 2020: 9).

While Assmann argues against the modern idea of the future as holding the promise of "a continual improvement in quality of life" or as "permanent renewal" (230), in her conclusion to *Time out of Joint*, she does emphasize that this does in "no way" imply that people can do without imagining the future as a vital source of "desire and motivation [...] for there is nothing more genuinely human than the hope for new life" (Assmann 2020: 231). But rather than conceiving of the future as an "open horizon", Assmann draws attention to another conception of the future altogether, which has emerged in contrast to the idea of the future as utopia or the new. Here, the future is seen as a continuation of the past and present rather than the unknown (Assmann 2020: 231). As she stresses, the future in this way does not rest on a notion of revolution or a radical "temporal break" (162) from the past but rather draws on a carefully curated past tended to with "attention and care" (231). To her, the questions to ponder when looking at the new relationship between the past, present and future thus are not only about what we want from the past and future but "[m]ore and more often, it is also 'What do the past and the future want from us?'" (Assmann 2020: 232). For Assmann, however, it is only the violent past that makes such demands on the present. In response to Konrad Jarausch, who argues in favour of also commemorating positive values, she accordingly finds his distinction of "negative lessons" versus "positive values" problematic because 'positive' future-oriented values such as human rights "were distilled precisely out of Europe's history of violence" (Assmann 2020: 227). While it is undeniable that human rights have been forged out of the wreckage of past atrocities,⁴ there seems to be nothing in Assmann's argument compelling us to say that a better present and better futures cannot also be based on being attentive to, caring for, and curating the non-violent legacies of the past. It is this kind of attention which Enzo Traverso, reading Walter Benjamin, demands for the memories of the hopes of the vanquished. As he summarizes:

To remember means to salvage, but rescuing the past does not mean trying to reappropriate or repeat what has occurred and vanished; rather, it means to change the present. The transformation of the present carries a possible "redemption" of what has passed. In other words, in order to rescue the past we have to give birth again to the hopes of the vanquished, we need to give a new life to the unfulfilled hopes of the generations that preceded us. (Traverso 2017: 222)

Several contemporary German-language writers with a background in former Yugoslavia do exactly that: without ever losing sight of the fact that Tito's Yugoslavia was a dictatorship replete with political violence and traumatic legacies, they simultaneously highlight and reactivate positive memories of the socialist past they grew up with. As I have argued elsewhere, authors such as Marina Achenbach and Marica Bodrožić invoke memories of the potentials, the exclusions, the dreams and possibilities of the Yugoslav socialist project in order to critique the capitalist present and to affirm hope in the possibility of radical social, economic, and political change (Mayr 2020). Along similar lines, Alida Bremer, whose work is the focus of this article,

⁴ For a co-memorative example from German-language literature, one can here point to Zafer Şenocak's *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (1998), where he intertwines the Shoa and the Armenian genocide and points to the origins of international human rights discourses in response to the Armenian genocide (see Tusan 2014; Mayr 2015).

co-memorates both trauma and hope, both the victims and the vanquished of Yugoslav history.

Alida Bremer's *Olivas Garten*: Hope despite History

Alida Bremer's 2013 novel *Olivas Garten* focuses on the Croatian-German first-person narrator Alida, who repeatedly visits Croatia in the early 2000s in order to deal with the restitution of family property that had been de-privatized during Tito. Alida has to dig deep into her maternal family's history in order to clarify and prove ownership of the various properties, which provides her with the occasion to research her family's as well as Dalmatia's history. The former is marked by the struggle for social justice as part of the Partisan and the socialist movements, for the sake of which several of her family members lost their lives or endured life in various camps run by the Italians, the Ustaša, or the Germans. The novel reaches back to 1878, the year of the Congress of Berlin, which can be said to have laid the foundation for future political unrest in the Balkans,⁵ and focuses mostly on the Partisan struggle and World War Two. Notably, the novel mostly brackets the 1990s wars and ends in 2011 at the advent of Croatia's joining the European Union in 2013. As the fact that the narrator and author share the same name suggests, *Olivas Garten* presents itself as a fictionalized biography of Alida Bremer's family, containing both autobiographical and historical as well as entirely fictional elements. As Goran Lovrić points out, the novel is part of a body of work which Friederike Eigler calls "metahistorische Generationenromane"⁶ in which family history is reconstructed in its historical context and thus also becomes part of collective memory (Lovrić 2016: 4, Eigler 2005). For the sake of the following analysis, it is also worth noting that the novel's main narrative, told by the first-person narrator Alida over the course of 42 chapters, is punctuated by short, 32 one to two-page chapters following most main chapters and printed in olive green font, which are told from the point of view of Alida's grandmother Oliva in the third person.

Bremer's novel is highly critical of postsocialist Croatia. Despite the fact that the beautifully described Adriatic coast is certainly a place of longing for her, Alida depicts the Croatia of the late 2000s as marred by unbounded capitalism and shady privatization deals. Ready to join the European market, Croatia has sold itself to (often foreign) investors and entrepreneurs, the "neuen Unberührbaren" (Bremer 2013: 62) who followed on the heels of the "kommunistischen Funktionäre" (125).⁷ They profit from corrupt privatization procedures and are politically backed with the justification that neoliberal capitalism is the precondition of belonging to the "großen europäischen Familie" (288).⁸ The social cost of this becomes amply clear in the narrator's own life via her brother, who is struggling financially since he has lost several jobs due to "diverser Privatisierungsprozesse" (134).⁹ Ruthless investors, shady privatization, the neoliberalization of the market, and the tourist boom on Croatia's shores, all sanctioned and driven in the name of Europeanization, thus lead to an atmosphere in which the whole country was "verscherbelt und in Hotels umgewandelt"

⁵ Not to be confused with the Berlin West Africa Conference in 1884–1885.

⁶ 'metahistorical generational novels'.

⁷ 'the new untouchables'; 'communist functionaries'; All translations from German to English for Bremer's novel and blog in this article are mine.

⁸ 'large European family'.

⁹ 'diverse processes of privatization'.

(113).¹⁰ Even though the socialist regime had also disowned Alida's family, the narrator remarks that the socialists – at least ideationally – did so for the common good, for "die Allgemeinheit. Heute schlagen Typen mit Sonnenbrillen und dicken Autos Profit aus dem Land, das die Partisanen einst verteidigt hatten" (152).¹¹

Before detailing the novels' mostly positive assessment of the Partisan past, which can be glimpsed from this quote, it is important to note that Bremer's account of the Yugoslav past is carefully balanced. While the novel highlights many positive sides of the Partisan cause, it is of course also very critical of the crimes committed in the name of the Partisans and their leader, turned socialist dictator Tito. For instance, one of the narrator's aunts recounts how their 15-year-old relative joined the Partisans but was then killed as a traitor because he criticized corruption within their ranks (140). Similarly, her family laments the way in which Alida's grandfather relinquished their family property to the communist regime, with Alida questioning if her heroic partisan grandfather really gave away his land voluntarily or rather was blackmailed by the socialist leadership into doing so because of his extra-marital affairs (152).

As these above few examples suffice to show, Bremer does not celebrate the Partisans uncritically as socialist heroes. During the existence of socialist Yugoslavia, the Partisans were glorified and celebrated in monuments, novels, and particularly Partisan films as heroes and martyrs, as the face of the "communist partisan resistance against the Nazi occupiers" – a "communist master-narrative" aimed at silencing the inter-ethnic tensions and massacres that also marked that time (Beronja / Vervaeet 2016: 4). Such an uncritical celebration of the Partisans is most prominently prevented by the criticism voiced by the title figure Oliva, Alida's grandmother, whose thoughts we gain access to in 32 chapters of 1–2 pages in length, printed in olive green, and which alternate with Alida's narration. While watching the funeral procession for a local partisan and communist functionary, Oliva, for instance, notes that he had suffocated a little baby with his hands during WWII when the baby's screaming threatened to betray the location of the small group of civilian refugees under his protection. This episode raises the recurring issue of whether any life, and be it just one, should ever be sacrificed for the greater good (Bremer 2013: 43). For Oliva, it clearly should not, no matter for what ideology. For her, all the various ideologically inspired movements and occupations that swept over Dalmatia's citizens over the course of the 20th century were part of the same human aberration:

Oliva erinnert sich, wie die italienischen Soldaten mit Paradeschritt durch Vodice marschierten [...]. Sie erinnert sich, dass dieser Ante Pavelić schwarz trug wie die Italiener [...]. Und dann erinnert sie sich an die deutschen Soldaten [...]. Und sie erinnert sich an die Tschetniks [...]. Und dann erinnert sie sich an die Partisanen, wie sie nach der Befreiung tanzten, und die Handgranaten, die an ihren Ledergürteln hingen und gefährlich hüpfen. (282)¹²

¹⁰ 'sold off and converted into hotels'.

¹¹ 'the common good. Today, guys with sun glasses and fat cars reap profit from the land which the partisans once defended'.

¹² 'Oliva remembers how the Italian soldiers marched through Vodice in parade step [...] She remembers, that this Ante Pavelić was wearing black like the Italians [...]. And then she remembers the German soldiers [...]. And then she remembers the Tschetniks [...]. And then she remembers the Partisans, how they danced after liberation, and the hand grenades, which hang from their leather belts and jumped dangerously'.

In light of this history of violence, she finds that all human struggles for progress and a better world are in vain because "die menschliche Hoffnung auf Liebe, das Bedürfnis nach Sicherheit, das Kämpfen für Gerechtigkeit, die Suche nach der Wahrheit" are like the jiggers used to catch squid, who, once hooked, are kept prisoners by their own weight (31).¹³ Oliva therefore concludes that the fight against injustice is hopeless because, humans being humans, it eventually just leads to more fighting and thus to more injustice, and "so gibt es immer mehr Kämpfe, aber nicht weniger Ungerechtigkeit" (127).¹⁴ Rather than merely criticizing particular historical abuses of the socialist idea, Oliva questions what good can come of any ideologically driven political project, be it socialist or otherwise, given our flawed human nature.

While Oliva's voice is prominent by virtue of her 32 chapters and echoes concerns raised elsewhere in the novel, it is also clear that her voice is a traumatized one. Unlike the other prominent women in her family, who are labour and refugee camp survivors like herself, Oliva is not able to resume life after her return and spends most of her remaining decades lying on a divan. Never having been politically interested in the first place, she refuses to resume 'normal life', let alone support the socialist cause, upon her return at the end of the Second World War (127). Rather, she is forever traumatized by the physical violence she endured during her deportation on account of being a member of a Partisan family and during her time in the camp: "Oliva hat schlecht geträumt, und jetzt zittert sie unter ihrer Decke. [...] Sie weiß, dass sie schon wieder vom Ziegelwerk geträumt hat, aber sie will sich nicht dran erinnern" (97).¹⁵ With the suggestion that she was raped by a German soldier, Oliva suffers from physical pains in her stomach until she dies and is visited by nightmares that she never resolves nor wants to face. What remains with her is the fear of being weak, which she tries to counter with food, proposing that if she was able to make her own chocolate, then she would no longer have to be afraid "vor dem Schwachwerden" (97).¹⁶

As one can see from the above quote, Oliva's chapters are consistently written in the present tense, using a third-person stream-of-consciousness technique. While the rest of the novel's chapters are marked with a place and date, her chapters speak from the eternal present of her trauma. While trauma certainly *can* bridge the divide between past and present in the productive ways Assmann indicates, Oliva is as stuck in her trauma as she is stuck on her divan. Tellingly, her application for restitution also went nowhere (138), denying the kind of positive outcome that working through trauma could have. As Lovrić observes, her retreat from life in fact signifies her "endgültige Kapitulation vor den historischen Umständen" (Lovrić 2017: 175).¹⁷ She is unable to overcome her traumatic experience in the way the other women in her family are due to her lack in any faith that history will do anything but repeat itself. As Marijana Erstić also observes, for Oliva time stands still "weil das Ewiggleiche in immer neue Uniformen verkleidet wiederkehrt" (Erstić 2019: 190).¹⁸ Even when the 1990s wars erupt around her, she simply assumes that the shooting she hears comes from those

¹³ 'the human hope for love, the need for security, the fight for justice, the search for truth'.

¹⁴ 'and so there are more and more battles but no less injustice'.

¹⁵ 'Oliva had bad dreams, and now she shivers under her blanket. ... She knows, that she dreamt about the brick factory again, but she does not want to remember'.

¹⁶ 'of becoming weak'.

¹⁷ 'final recapitulation in front of historical circumstance'.

¹⁸ 'because the ever same returns dressed in new uniforms'.

Italians and Germans who "wirklich keine Ruhe geben [können]" (Bremer 2013: 192).¹⁹ For Oliva, history has always already ended. In her fundamentally traumatized and apolitical attitude, she denies the possibility that history could have turned out otherwise. She does not believe in the possibility for change and thus for any better present or future worth participating in or fighting for.

While the novel certainly evokes empathy for Oliva's plight, her story is marked by memories of a list of grievances, endured both before and after the Second World War, such as being torn from her lover in her youth or later being married to a cheating husband. It seems as if she always has been, and forever remained, a victim. Oliva can thus be read as the personification of the region and her fate as chronicling the region's history of occupations. Yet, as Annette Bühler-Dietrich's astute reading of the motif of food, which is very dominant in the novel, shows, the violent past, victimization, and trauma are actually not the focus of Bremer's novel. As Bühler-Dietrich argues, the region's food, which the various characters describe in very sensuous fashion and great detail, attests to a "fortdauernden Nähe und Verwandtschaft Italiens und Dalmatiens als einer Geschichte der nicht nur gewaltsamen Aneignung" (Bühler-Dietrich 2018: 94).²⁰ In fact, one can read Bremer's choice to not thematize the 1990s wars following the disintegration of former Yugoslavia as an effort to not only focus on the violent past of the region. As Marijna Erstić also points out, this bracketing stands in sharp contrast to several other German-language authors from former Yugoslavia such as Marica Bodrožić, Saša Stanišić and Nicol Lubić, who have, like Bremer, received the Grenzgänger-Stipendium of the Robert-Bosch Stiftung, which has repeatably funded fictional explorations of the 1990s wars (Erstić 2019: 187). Given that the novel is set in 2008, the almost complete absence of any mention of these wars can be read as a conscious effort to avoid reading Yugoslavia merely as part of a history of violence and grievance. Bremer thus uses what Florian Bieber and Armina Galijaš, in a different context, call a "heuristic trick" of bracketing the 1990s wars in order to try and understand "Jugoslawien 'für sich'", in its own right (Galijaš 2015: 197). Rather than co-memorating the Partisan past alongside the 1990s wars and tracing causes for the later wars in the shortcomings of the socialist state, as is so often done, Bremer's work brackets the war in order to see what we can glimpse from the Yugoslavian past if we do not read it as having had the wars as its necessary and inevitable outcome.

Such a reading becomes particularly pressing in light of the fact that in former Yugoslavia and its successor states, the traumatic past often has been put in the service of 'victimhood nationalism' (see Lim 2014), a frequent transitional phenomenon that could be observed in most post-Yugoslav countries in the 1990s and early 2000s. As Armina Galijaš argues in her critique of both nationalist and Yugo-nostalgic discourses in post-Yugoslav countries, collective memories of historical trauma have served as a means for the post-Yugoslav states to stylize themselves as victims of their respective opponents. Croatian or Serbian collective memories formed around a traumatic core were used to both mobilize for war and for post-war nation building efforts since they provided fruitful ground for nationalistic slogans that reactivated repressed feelings (Galijaš 2015: 188). Ljiljana Radonić similarly points to the fact that a focus on trauma

¹⁹ 'simply can't let it be'.

²⁰ 'the continued proximity and affinity of Italy and Dalmatia as a history that goes beyond violent appropriation'.

has led to a nearly exclusive focus on victims, rather than perpetrators, in the Croatian case of nation and collective identity formation post-1989 and has opened the door for undue comparisons. The initial practice of minimizing the victims of the Ustaša during Croatia's Tuđman era, for instance, was replaced by "a new view that recognizes the Holocaust, while presenting Croats as victims of fascism, this time of 'Serbian fascism'" (Radonić 2013: 175). Collective memories of past trauma, particularly if they focus on victimization rather than perpetration, therefore can easily become a resource to justify the past and present in service of a collective national memory. An unbalanced focus on violence and trauma runs the danger of reinforcing the notion that "violence is the primary subject of collective memory and grievance the core of identity" (Rigney 2018: 369), which can inadvertently lead to "aggressive or xenophobic mobilization" (Sindbæk Andersen / Ortner 2019: 7).

Rather than writing a narrative of grievance, Bremer's novel juxtaposes Oliva's chapters with a commemoration of her family's partisan past. Despite sustained criticism of Tito's socialist dictatorship, Alida's tales of her family's partisan and socialist resistance and their courage, sacrifice, and resilience, which form the bulk of the novel, are overall depicted as admirable. In her blog accompanying the research for the novel, Bremer calls the women of her maternal family who inspired this fictionalized family history "Kämpferinnen für Freiheit und Gerechtigkeit" (Bremer 2008: "Die erste große Reise").²¹ As Lovrić also observes, the novel's female characters, with the exception of Oliva, consistently emphasize the revolutionary tradition of the family with pride (Lovrić 2016: 94). Moreover, the revolutionary family members, despite all of their flaws, are shown to be sincere in their pursuit of what they take to be the core values of the socialist project, including ideals such as justice, equality, internationalism, and solidarity (see also Lovrić 2017: 174).²² While Alida somewhat ironically names it her family's "familiäre Gerechtigkeitswahn" (150), she nevertheless upholds it herself.²³ When the lawyer she hired to fight for the restitution of her family's various properties suggests to try to regain the properties currently owned by two small family business owners rather than going after the one owned by a rich foreign investor, she forbids him to do so, noting bemused that he was surprised by "so viel Engagement für die soziale Gerechtigkeit" (86).²⁴

²¹ 'female fighters for freedom and justice'.

²² Alida's family, most of all her great-grandmother Paulina and her great-uncle Benedikt already fought for these values before the socialist take-over and were active members of the Croatian Republican Peasant Party (HRSS), which mainly fought for peasant's rights and was banned in 1929.

²³ 'a family obsession with justice'.

²⁴ 'so much commitment to social justice'; Bremer's novel is thus representative of findings by scholars analyzing what Koleva tentatively calls a prevailing "ethical nostalgia" for socialism, which is a longing for its ideals, such as justice, equality, and the transcending of national borders (Koleva 2011: 430). Koleva and others, such as anthropologist Chris Hann, point out that positive memories of socialism are tied to a claim of its moral superiority. As Hann argues, there were "plenty who believed in that system to some degree [...] and everyone was] exposed to an ideology that, even when it was patently collapsing, never abandoned its claim to ethical superiority. [...] When all the evils and iniquities of socialism have been recognized [...], it remains important to note this register" (Hann 2003: 11). Both Koleva and Hann conclude that people continue to believe that socialism was ethically superior, even if it may not have been economically or politically so. In a European Union governed by the interests of a global financial market and given the rise of nationalism throughout the Western world, memories of the moral and ethical dimension of the socialist ideal may indeed be worth recalling.

Whereas Bühler-Dietrich therefore asserts that the focus of the novel is not so much "die heroische Partisanengeschichte, sondern die von Durchhaltevermögen und Stärke geprägte Geschichte der sie unterstützenden Frauen" (Bühler-Dietrich 2018: 90),²⁵ and Lovrić similarly emphasizes the novel as being a depiction of "Frauenwelten" (Lovrić 2016: 90),²⁶ I would argue that *Olivas Garten* also forms part of what Gal Kirn calls the Partisan counter-archive.²⁷ As Kirn argues, the Partisan past has been re-evaluated starting in the 1980s. In the service of the increasingly nationalistic political goals of the region, Partisan history was nationalized and the Partisans appropriated as part of a celebrated Slovenian, Croatian, or Serbian national past (Kirn 2016: 103), which was of course in direct opposition to the multiethnic and multinational communist master-narrative of previous decades. In the course of this revisionist nationalization, any aspects of the Yugoslav past that did not fit the national narratives as neatly as the Partisans, including "Yugoslavia, the international solidarity of the anti-fascist struggle, the social(ist) revolution, [and] the Non-Aligned Movement", were silenced (Kirn 2016: 103). Much like Traverso and Rigney, Kirn argues that there is much to be salvaged from this silenced past, no matter what its eventual outcome might have been. He therefore advocates for constructing a "Partisan archive", which "demands not only a critical method of reading" the past "but also a setting in motion of the emancipatory past as a venue that can open up gaps in the dominant discourse by dispersing the fragments of emancipation in our present" (Kirn 2016: 104).

Bremer's novel engages in such a partial and selective activation of a past that goes beyond both tales of victimhood and heroic nationalism and in favour of the dispersal of memories of commitment and resistance. For instance, Alida's otherwise sceptical father, who rolls his eyes when Alida's partisan grandfather sings partisan songs and the praises of brotherhood and unity (Bremer 2013: 264), feels that the sacrifices of the early communists should be honoured:

[I]hr Opfer wird heute nicht mehr gewürdigt, das sage ich dir, der ich wirklich nicht viel für die Kommunisten übrig habe. Aber eines muss man ihnen lassen: Den Faschisten mit ihren rassistischen Ideen konnte man sich nur mit Gewalt widersetzen, und dafür waren hierzulande nur tollkühne Leute in der Lage, die an eine höhere Gerechtigkeit geglaubt haben, wie diese Kommunisten. Deine Urgroßmutter oder dein Großvater oder dein Großonkel mit seiner Frau Laura und seinem Sohn Niko. Die Kräfteverhältnisse bei uns waren kompliziert, deshalb ist diese gottlose und ziemlich naive kommunistische Vision einer anationalen Welt der Arbeiter und Bauern eigentlich eine bewundernswerte Vision gewesen. (280)²⁸

²⁵ 'the heroic Partisan history but rather the story of resilience and strength of the women who supported them [the Partisans]!.

²⁶ 'the worlds of women'.

²⁷ That is not to say that I disagree with their reading of women in the novel. In fact, Bühler-Dietrich's observation regarding the status of women in the novel works well with my reading against the grain of trauma and victimization narratives. As she observes: "Männer erscheinen in dieser Geschichte zwar als tote Helden, aber auch, in großer Zahl, als Täter. Doch der Roman fokussiert nicht die Frauen als Opfer, sondern die Überlebensstrategien der Frauen und ihre Erfahrung von Solidarität oder deren Fehlen" (Bühler-Dietrich 2018: 91). 'Men might appear as dead heroes in this story, but also, in great numbers, as perpetrators. However, the novel does not focus on women as victims but rather on their strategies for survival and their experiences of solidarity or the lack thereof'.

²⁸ 'their sacrifice is no longer honoured today, I tell you, even though I don't care much for the communists. But you have to give it to them: One could only resist the fascists with their racist notions with violence, and that required the kind of daring only people that believe in a higher justice are capable

A similar validation of the Partisan's ability to act on their convictions occurs in the novel's depiction of the two-year existence of El Shatt. El Shatt was a camp set up for Dalmatian refugees in the Egyptian desert. While it was administered by the British, it was mostly run by the Partisans. Alida describes El Shatt as a "Wunder", that "aus einer veritablen sozialistischen Kleinstrepublik in britischen Militärzelten mitten in der Wüste [bestand]" (273).²⁹ Over half a page, the narrator lists the achievements of the camp, including unsalaried full employment for all people able to work, who manufactured everything from bread and toys to carpets, and maintained theatre groups, mandatory schools, and a newspaper in self-organization (273). For the narrator, this prototypically designed "perfekte Organisation des Lebens von 30 000 Menschen [...] in einer Wüste" was only possible due to the "Idealismus der Partisanen" (274–275).³⁰ In line with the novel's status as a fictional family biography, both Marijana Erstić and Ulrich Wagner highlight that this depiction of El Shatt is not aimed at documentary veracity (Erstić 2016: 48). The narrator herself points out that the project and its realization was politically motivated to prove to the world the stability and viability of the socialist system (Wagner 2018: 132). Moreover, the novel does not shy away from describing the difficulties endured in the desert and the doubts some had about why they were put in a desert, out of all places (Bremer 2013: 275). In view of Bremer's concerted efforts to highlight the novel's fictionalization of El Shatt, Erstić astutely observes that: "So wird literarisch und nicht dokumentarisch inmitten der Wüste eine (nicht dauerhafte) Utopie des Zusammenlebens und des Friedens unter den widrigsten Umständen entworfen" (Erstić 2016: 48).³¹ Rather than attempting to reappropriate or recuperate a historical event or use it as proof of the possibility of socialism as a political order, Bremer here merely 'gives birth again to the hopes of the vanquished', as Traverso puts it (Traverso 2017: 222). She highlights that what was miraculous in a desert, could certainly be a real possibility in more favourable circumstances where solidarity and cooperation are embraced as the basic principles upon which to build the social and economic fabric.

That the novel's salvaging of such positive memories of historical moments is redemptive and aimed at a better present and future, becomes apparent throughout Bremer's text. Here, it is important to emphasize that this is not a celebration of the kind of ideologies Oliva rightly condemns. Rather, it is about celebrating what it takes to move people to stand up against injustice and to build just communities, which

of, like those communists. Your great grandmother and your grandfather or your great uncle and his wife Laura and his son Niko. The balance of power was complicated, and because of that, this godless and pretty naive communist vision of an a-national world of workers and farmers was actually an admirable vision'.

²⁹ 'the miracle of El Shatt, which consisted of a veritable socialist republic in miniature in British army tents in the middle of the desert'.

³⁰ 'this perfect organization of the lives of 30.000 people in the desert' was only due to 'the idealism of the partisans'.

³¹ 'In this way, the novel creates a literary rather than documentary (impermanent) utopia of community and peace in the middle of a desert against all odds.'; Other values that are mentioned include the ideal of universal brotherhood, when Benedikt recounts an overheard conversation from 1928, where a young woman prefers Tito to Ante Pavelić, since he holds that "alle Menschen Brüder sind" rather than dividing them by nationality (103). This experienced and lived notion of a-national and multidimensional identities is also emphasized as a positive legacy of Yugoslav socialism in other German-language novels written by authors with a background in former Yugoslavia.

comes close to what Bloch classifies as hope. For him, hope is the kind of 'dreaming' that is not "just stale, even enervating escapism" (Bloch 1995: 3) but rather an active practice, "a directing act of a cognitive kind" which aims at "overtaking the natural course of events" (12). Inspired by the family's memories of acts that were based on such forward dreaming, which the family's women have re-collected and recounted over the course of the novel, it is only consequent that Alida's mother and aunts decide, in the final pages of the book, to not sell the reacquired family vineyard on the coast. Despite all their disagreements about the past and present, they find it "ungeheuerlich", outrageous, that everything, particularly their country's natural resources, are being privatized. Instead, they believe that the coast should belong "dem ganzen Volk und nicht Privatbesitzern" (Bremer 2013: 315).³² Hoping, in a Blochean sense, that there will eventually be a just law in the future, a "gerechte Regelung" (315) to protect the coast, they keep the vineyard in family hands. Their hope for a better future therefore translates into action that makes that very hope come partly true; based on their hope for a more just world, they take steps towards making that better world happen by refusing to sell to a capitalist lawyer who wanted the island all to himself. Acting on their conviction that it is wrong to privatize the coast and resources such as spring water (314) does not entail that the family's women agree on or embrace an ideology. As the narrator's brother points out, their decision actually is not very consistent:

Die vier Frauen, die es wirklich besser wissen sollten, führten einen Prozess wegen dieser Enteignung und zugleich hätten sie plötzlich nichts dagegen, dass man alle kleinen Inseln nationalisiert – wo sei da bitteschön die Logik? Aber Logik werde in dieser Familie sowieso nicht großgeschrieben, hat er gestöhnt und dann doch gelacht, was bleibt ihm anderes übrig. (315)³³

Having witnessed the ills of both expropriation and privatization, socialism and capitalism, the women's decision is not based on any socialist conviction and notion of progress for which everything else is sacrificed in the name of a future that leaves its victims behind. Rather, in the end the women opt for gradual and slow change that is attentive to the individual cost of their principles.³⁴ They opt for action in the here and now, for patience and cultural evolution rather than grand visions of a new world order and revolution. As Bremer writes in her blog, when writing the novel she had "ein vages Gefühl" that "alle Ideen von einer Weltordnung blind sind, ob groß und klein, ob hell und düster, ob optimistisch oder zerstörerisch, ob von kleinen Leuten formuliert oder von Philosophen beschrieben" (Bremer 2008: "Die Gefallenen").³⁵

³² 'to the people and not to private owners'.

³³ 'The four women, who really should know better, were involved in legal proceedings because of having been disowned by the state and at the same time, they suddenly would support it if all the small islands would become nationalized – where, he demanded, is the logic in this? But logic was never written large in this family, he sighted and then laughed, since there was nothing else left to do'.

³⁴ Wagner, who assesses the novel's exploration of the dilemma between a future-oriented fight for higher ideals and the care of empathetic human relations in the here and now also concludes that Alida strikes a balance between the need for idealism and the care for individuals (Wagner 2018: 142).

³⁵ 'a vague feeling that all ideas about a new world order are blind, whether they are big or small, bright or dark, optimistic or destructive, whether they are formulated by the common man or described by philosophers'.

Conclusion: The Past is Green and Black

However, as my reading of the novel indicates, relinquishing grand narratives of progress does not necessitate losing sight of a future inspired by past instances of resistance. Leaving the tenants of modernization behind does not necessarily entail having to give up on the modern project altogether in the way Assmann seems to suggest. Rather, the novel resonates with what Svetlana Boym calls the off-modern. Instead of leaving modernity³⁶ in its entirety behind by going 'post-' or 'out' of modernity, as she puts it, she advocates to look at its 'off':

[O]ff – as in off-stage, off-key, off-beat, and occasionally, off-color. Off-modern does not suggest a continuous history from antiquity to modernity to postmodernity, and so on. Instead, it confronts the radical breaks in tradition, the gaps of forgetting, losses of common yardsticks, and disorientations that occur in almost every generation. [...] It involves exploration of the side alleys and lateral potentialities of the project of critical modernity. In other words, it opens into the "modernity of what if" rather than simply modernization as it is. (Boym 2010: 7–8)

An off-modern perspective does not condemn the projects of modernity in its entirety – modernity includes, but is not reducible to, modernization. The history of modernity cannot be entirely captured by the trajectory of modernization and its histories of violence, inequity, and destruction. Such a view would indeed leave us only with an engagement with trauma to forge a better future. Rather, the off-modern also leaves room for the moments when history took a different turn, offered glimpses of the possibility for a different kind of future, albeit just temporarily. Celebrating the Partisan spirit, remembering Traverso's hope of the vanquished, allows us to disperse Kirn's fragments of emancipation as reminders that a better present and better futures are always possible as long as there are those willing to make them so.

As Bremer's novel shows, this does not entail denying the history of violence and trauma that threads itself through the 20th century. In fact, a fictional work such as Bremer's novel may be the ideal space for allowing both trauma and memories of hope to coexist as equally valid rather than mutually exclusive responses to the experience of the twentieth century. Not only do both require commemoration, but they also must be co-memorated to keep each other in check, so that we leave neither the victims nor the vanquished hopes of the past behind. In the novel, Oliva's unredeemed trauma thus stands next to her other relatives' stories of resilience and committed action, but it does so in green and black, not black and white. Trauma and memories of hope coexist just like the pictures on aunt Mirta's wall, where Tito hangs next to Mirta's daughters at their first communion even if they "ideologisch nicht zusammen[passten]" (27).³⁷ Only together do they provide the complete picture, a balanced composition, in which the white flower wreaths in the girls' hair provide "einen Kontrast" to the partisan cap of Nico, who died as an eighteen-year-old fighting the Germans (28). Fiction, and art more generally speaking, are privileged spaces for the co-memoration of seemingly contradictory approaches to the legacies of the 20th century. As such, fiction is perhaps

³⁶ Boym distinguishes between *modernization* as industrialization and technological progress endowed with a "single narrative of progress" on the one hand, and *modernity* on the other, which entails a "critical reflection on the new forms of perception and experience" that lends itself to a critique of modernization and its attendant notion of progress, but does so without turning "antimodern, postmodern, or postcritical" (Boym 2010: 7).

³⁷ 'did not fit together ideologically'.

more reflective of reality than some history. Armina Galijaš, for example, observes that if our narratives about the past give too much weight to events, to "Ereignisgeschichte" (Galijaš 2015: 199), we end up paying too little attention to the multitude of "[p]ersönliche Erfahrungen" (190) that also constitute historical reality. If we condemn all memories of the socialist past wholesale to the dustbin of a violent 20th century, then we belie other historical realities that existed under socialist rule, such as the experiences of resilience, commitment, collaboration, and pride the women of Alida's family recount and which can inspire us to imagine alternative futures³⁸ while keeping in mind the ambivalent and often contradictory nature of all human striving.

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³⁸ As See Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Jessica Ortner argue in their introduction to a special issue of *Memory Studies* entitled "Memories of Joy", memory studies as a field needs to be attentive to the role of such "positive types of memory" since "societies also need positive or hopeful memories in order to create alternative imaginaries of the future" (Sindbæk Andersen / Ortner 2019: 5).

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