On the Margins of Memory: World War II Graffiti in the Northern Adriatic Borderland

Eric Ušić
Independent researcher, Vodnjan, Croatia; E-mail: usic.eric@gmail.com

Abstract
The article explores a specific historical graffiti-scape in the Northern Adriatic borderland, composed of antifascist, (pro) communist and pro-Yugoslav political inscriptions and symbols created during World War II and the immediate postwar period by antifascist and communist activists. Produced in a turbulent historical period that radically reshaped the broader region, these graffiti 'survived' and endured almost 80 years, transcending their original political function and historical context of production, as well as the postwar Yugoslav and socialist future that their messages articulated, imagined and projected in the landscape. Today, these historical notes and fragments, scattered across present-day Croatian, Slovenian and Italian territories, represent a singular and significant, but largely unrecognized and overlooked archive that transmits a set of political imaginations, ideological discourses, linguistic nuances and historical experiences that depict a complex and multifaceted picture of the 1940s context in the borderland. The aim of the article is to, first, introduce and (re)contextualize the historical material with an examination of the main features of the documented World War II graffiti corpus and, second, to analyze the graffiti's contents and meanings in order to highlight their historical, archival, cultural and memorial significance as unfiltered and authentic texts that constitute a particular and unexplored layer of the borderland's memory landscape and (auto)biography.

Keywords: graffiti, political graffiti, World War II, Northern Adriatic, Yugoslavia, memory

1. Introduction

In the twentieth century – and especially in its first half – the Northern Adriatic area was affected by intense political turmoils, radical geopolitical challenges and socio-cultural transformations that left their marks on the space, landscape and collective memories in this peculiar borderland (see: Ballinger, 2003). Today, when the area is shared between Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, these marks can be noticed in their material and symbolic manifestations, dispersed across the borderland zone in various forms, practices and discourses – from architecture and urbanism, through monuments and toponymy, to commemorations and diverse, often conflicting, memory narratives and historical interpretations. While these forms, practices and discourses that are related to specific historical contexts, processes and ruptures were and are subject to many academic investigations (eg. Klabjan, 2019), there are certain historical marks in the landscape that pass almost unnoticed: *graffiti* whose longevity and endurance did not attract wider scientific interests in landscape and memory studies[1]. Yet, these marks, i.e. graffiti, represent genuine symbolic expressions and reflections of a period that saw one of the most – if not the most – radical (geo)political and socio-cultural transformation of this border area: the Second World War and its immediate aftermath (Dukovski, 2001; Cattaruzza, 2008).

Namely, during the war and particularly in the immediate postwar period, an enormous quantity of antifascist, pro-Yugoslav and communist graffiti were written all over the area (Ferletic, 2007; Ušić, 2019; Smoljan and Rusac, 2019). Today, large quantities of these graffiti can still be detected and read on older walls and weathered facades – mostly

1 - Here, it is worth to point out several contemporary historical studies that shed light on some aspects of their historical background, as for example: Ferletic, 2007; Konda, 2017; Smoljan and Rusac, 2019; Ušić, 2019.

in rural, peripheral zones – in their integral or fragmented forms. The aim of this article[2] is to examine and highlight the historical, political and cultural significance of World War II graffiti as historically relevant public archival documents that constitute a peculiar layer of the borderland's memory landscape which has been neglected so far. In other words, this article seeks to put forward an understanding of World War II graffiti as legitimate historical records and memory markers, as overlooked 'wall-archives' that record and transmit a multilayered set of historical experiences whose longevity, endurance and presence *in situ* offer valuable insights in the borderland's cultural/memory landscape and their position and meaning in it. Yet, before the analysis of the World War II graffiti corpus, a brief historical introduction is needed.

2. A short historical contextualization

As the Kingdom of Italy annexed most of the Northern Adriatic area after World War I, in the following years the fascist regime gradually initiated an institutionalized practice of writing fascist slogans and painting fascist murals on public surfaces, as was the case in rest of Italy (Segala, 2007; Bosca, 2010). The antifascist groups, with communist activists in the forefront, periodically employed graffiti writing as a tactical form of resistance, inscribing antifascist messages and communist symbolism in public space, while often disrupting and spoiling fascist graffiti and murals (cf. Ferletic, 2007). As World War II erupted and engulfed the region, antifascist graffitism emerged as one of the main symbolic practices and forms of resistance for the People's Liberation Movement led by the activists/members of the Yugoslav Communist Party (see: Ušić, 2019). Graffiti were mainly employed as communicative devices, as ways of spreading antifascist messages, the necessity of resistance and the goals of the movement. Furthermore, antifascist graffiti were employed in order to signalize the presence of the movement in certain locations, and therefore functioned as methods of a symbolic appropriation of space controlled by the fascist regime (ibid.).

Although antifascist graffiti were written intensively during the war, the peak of graffiti production followed immediately after the war, in the second half of 1945 and the first half of 1946, in the context of (geo)political and diplomatic struggles concerning the future of the broader borderland region. Namely, as the Yugoslav Partisans liberated a large part of the region and entered the city of Trieste on May 1, 1945 (see: Tenca Montini, 2021), the territory - that was still in fact part of Italy – became the subject of dispute between Yugoslavia and Italy, along with geopolitical interests of Great Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union, and was divided in two zones – Zone A and Zone B, administered respectively by the Anglo-American and Yugoslav military administrations (see: Nassisi, 1980). In order to reach a potential territorial arrangement, the Allies formed an Inter-Allied Commission made of British, American, French and Soviet members whose task was to inspect the region in the first half of 1946, and propose a new border solution (Smoljan and Rusac, 2019). The pro-Yugoslav organizations and activists, instructed by the Yugoslav Communist Party, organized a wide and comprehensive activity of writing mainly pro-Yugoslav and communist graffiti all over the borderland area – most intensively in those zones administered by the Yugoslav army – with the aim of conveying pro-Yugoslav messages, i.e. the 'will of the people' for the unification with Yugoslavia, to the members of the Commission. According to Basta and Pleše (1980, p. 215), around 850,650 graffiti were written during this period.[3] Pro-Yugoslav graffiti were written literally everywhere. In that sense, reporting on the commission's work *The Guardian* (March 11, 1946) highlighted the ubiquity of graffiti and the „Yugoslav method" of propaganda „which along the main roads in the country districts runs to the blazoning of stenciled slogans on every single house and to the painting of inscriptions on the road every fifty yards".

2 - The article elaborates some of the thesis and problems presented and partially analyzed in my doctoral dissertation (Ušić, 2023), relying on the visual-ethnographic and historical research that was conducted as part of it.

3 - As the authors did not provide concrete sources or the methodology by which they arrived at that figure, it is difficult to accept the number. On the other hand, due to the lack of evidence, it is difficult to reject it. Furthermore, almost 80 years after their production, there are hundreds and hundreds of still present graffiti in the region. Thus, it is plausible to argue that thousands, if not several hundreds of thousands of graffiti were written in that period.

Figure 1. An inscription, written in Italian language, stating “Long live Tito“, located in Momjan, Croatia. Photographed in June 2020. Source: Eric Ušić

Figure 2. An inscription, written in Italian language, stating “Long live Stalin“, along the red star and the hammer and sickle, located in Vodnjan, Croatia. Photographed on April 2021. Source: Eric Ušić

Hundreds of these graffiti, created both during and immediately after the war, are still present *in situ*, on the same walls and facades on which they were written 80 years ago. Numerous writings from the 1940s period – eg. „Long live Tito“ (Figure 1.), „Long live Stalin“ (Figure 2.) and „We want Yugoslavia“, often accompanied by the Partisan red stars and the communist hammers and sickles – are dispersed across the borderland region on each side of the contemporary borders, now 'diluted' by the Schengen regime. The vast majority of them can be detected in Istria, Croatia, as well as in the Slovenian Primorska region, with large portions of graffiti being also present in the city of Rijeka and the islands in the Kvarner Gulf, with a smaller quantity of graffiti detectable across Italian territories.

3. Main characteristics of the World War II graffiti corpus

The existent World War II graffiti that can be found and read in the Northern Adriatic borderland area show very similar formal and political characteristics, as well as repetitive contents and symbolisms. From a broader perspective, it can be deduced that World War II graffiti were, and still are, articulating condensed political agendas, with their messages being structured as short, easily legible and 'catchy' phrases in order to "simplify the message, synthesize thoughts and ideas" (Chaffee, 1993, p. 9), thus following the established pattern of political graffiti in general (see: Velikonja, 2020). To put it more precisely, these political graffiti are shaped predominately as political slogans that "consist of simple phrases or words carrying

Figure 3. A Partisan red star, located in Grožnjan, Croatia. Photographed on February, 2021. Source: Eric Ušić

Figure 4. The abbreviation SFSN (*Smrt fašizmu*, *sloboda narodu*), meaning "Death to fascism, freedom to the people". The inscription is located in Barbići, Croatia. Photographed on May, 2022. Source: Eric Ušić

a political message" (Zaimakis, 2015, p. 376) that can be reproduced and memorized in an easy and accessible way (cf. Miklavcic, 2008).

Observed on a more formalistic level through the methodological lenses of compositional interpretation, that is "concentrated on the image's content, perspectives, form, details, and colors" (Velikonja, 2020, p. 48), it can be concluded that the vast majority of them were written in capital letters, with the application of the dominant red color derived mostly from industrial paint or bauxite (Smoljan and Rusac, 2019, p. 179), on visible and accessible public surfaces, as objects and facades located on main streets or squares. Besides capital letters and red paint, other types of graffiti consist of those written in a more refined minuscule style, and of those texts written with the use of white, black or blue paint. In addition to letters and texts, a large amount of symbols – as the red star, flags and hammers and sickles – can be detected, positioned in the immediate vicinity of other inscriptions or as stand-alone symbols (Figure 3.).

Related to the graffiti's textual and semiotic configuration, there are four dominant types/groups of graffiti that can be derived from a careful examination based on the content analysis methodological approach, which aims at exploring the repetitiveness, frequency and quantity of certain elements of graffiti in order to identify patterns through the reading of their denotative meanings (cf. Rose, 2001; Velikonja, 2020). The first and largest group is constituted by graffiti that consist of pro-Yugoslav and Titoist messages, as "Long live Tito's Yugoslavia", "Long live Tito", "We want to live in Yugoslavia", "Tito", etc., where the communist and antifascist leader Josip Broz Tito is often equated with the antifascist resistance movement or with the postwar Yugoslav state, as for example in those inscriptions stating "With Tito we fought – With Tito we want to live", or "We fought so we can live in Tito's Yugoslavia". The second group consists of pro-communist/revolutionary graffiti, with the leaderships of Tito and Stalin – both on the communist and antifascist levels – being emphasized in graffiti as "Long live Tito" and "Long live Stalin", that are dispersed across the region and are often accompanied by hammers and sickles, or by the Partisan red stars. As for the latter, the

red stars, along with other significant texts, constitute the third group, which I define as antifascist-Partisan graffiti, made of various antifascist slogans, celebrations of specific antifascist fighters or Partisan battalions, that are summed up in the antifascist slogan "Death to fascism, freedom to the people", or in its popular abbreviation *SFSN* (Figure 4.). The fourth groups consists of popular-national graffiti, of those writings that are expressing more explicit Slovenian or Croatian ethno-national messages framed – somewhat contradictory, some might say – in a supranational (pro) Yugoslav context, as "We are Slovenes [or Croats] – We want Yugoslavia", aimed primarily at communicating the 'national self-determination' of certain locales as a response to the Inter-Allied Commission's task to propose a border solution based on an ethno-national criterion.

When observed as a whole, it can be deduced that these graffiti represent condensed, symbolic expressions of a complex and historically contextualized political imaginary, anchored in a historically specific and multilayered pro-Yugoslav, communist/revolutionary and antifascist ideological formation tactically intertwined with a national perspective and 'sentiment' instrumentalized in order to achieve a particular goal – the postwar unification with Yugoslavia (cf. Orlić, 2019). Furthermore, considering their interweaving with the experience of war and resistance, these graffiti – although shaped by nuancedly different but interrelated political-ideological standpoints – emerged as symbolic manifestations of a common antifascist experience and antifascist struggle, shared and led by different political subjects with diverse ideological positions (eg. communists, nationally oriented antifascists, antifascist clerics, etc.) and, especially, by diverse cultural groups, nationally self-identified as Croats, Slovenes and Italians. The latter aspect – that of cultural diversity and interaction – is reflected in the graffiti's languages, a particularly relevant feature when speaking of World War II graffiti's significance as historical documents and memory-markers in the landscape.

4. *"Viva – Živel – Živio"* – Meanings of graffiti's trilingualism

One of the main characteristics that make this corpus of World War II graffiti in the Northern Adriatic borderland very specific, or even unique, is their notable linguistic diversity, derived from the application and interaction between three languages – Croatian, Slovenian and Italian, and whose reading offers new possibilities to broaden the understanding of the wartime and postwar situation. At first sight, this peculiar graffiti trilingualism could imply a reflection of a broad and harmonious cross-cultural cooperation and consent to certain political lines. Yet, when observed historically, the situation is far more complex, considering the differences between wartime and immediate postwar implications and repercussions, and the large number of people who opted for Italian citizenship and left the region in the postwar period (see: Colummi et.al. 1980; Pupo, 2017). Namely, while some subjects, i.e. antifascist activists, could have been aligned with the communist and Yugoslav-led resistance movement during the war, it did not mean that they automatically agreed to the postwar Yugoslav and socialist future of the region (see: Nassisi, 1980). Furthermore, on the eve of the Commission's arrival, the writing of pro-Yugoslav graffiti in Italian language was seen as a way to recognize "the Italian minority" and to communicate its will to live in Yugoslavia (Tenca Montini, 2021, pp. 29-30). Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that this peculiar trilingualism is more a reflection of an organized and synchronized cross-cultural cooperation between those subjects who gave consent to, and identified with, the (pro)Yugoslav and/or the communist and revolutionary political practice, based on a common antifascist experience.

When compared, the contents of graffiti written in different languages are uniform and articulate more or less same messages related to antifascism, communism/ revolution and the pro-Yugoslav perspective. Yet, there are differences related to the ethno-national positions. On one hand, graffiti written in Italian language transmit primarily internationalist, communist/revolutionary, pro-Yugoslav and antifascist messages. On the other hand, graffiti written in Slovenian and Croatian transmit the same messages with an added emphasis on the ethno-national character and (self)identification by their authors, with graffiti as "We are Slovenes [or Croats]" being symptomatic in this case. While graffiti written in Italian are implying that they were written primarily by Italian communists affiliated with the Yugoslav Communist Party and the then imagined postwar socialist state, those graffiti written in Slovenian or Croatian imply that they addressed a broader political and

identity pool, ranging from internationalist and communist positions, through 'local patriots', and even to nationalist stances, mobilized in the context of the postwar ethno-national demarcation criterion. In addition to underlining the multilayered ideological formation, the trilingualism of these 'surviving' graffiti depicts a type of 'graffiti-map' of the postwar context, a peculiar 'linguistic cartography'.

Namely, the territorial arrangement of Italian, Slovenian and Croatian graffiti in the borderland delineates a very clear 'map' of wartime and postwar graffitism and its relation to the then actual political concerns, ideological positionings and cultural implications. First of all, what can become quite clear during the *in situ* exploration of the material, is the fact that the vast majority of Italian graffiti were created in more urban, industrial centers and cities, while graffiti written in Slovenian or Croatian can be detected mostly on the outskirts of those cities, and mostly across the vast rural territory, on walls of villages and hamlets. Thus, the corpus of World War II graffiti can be understood as a set of linguistic markers that are delineating a particular, historically contextualized constellation of social relations and points of cross-cultural interactions and intersections, as well as a historical linguistic landscape acting "as the most observable and immediate index of relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting a given territory" (Landry and Bourhis, 1997, p. 29). In this sense, this particular 'cartography' manifests the strategical effort of pro-Yugoslav graffitism aimed at demonstrating how a dozen of 'Italian cities' were 'surrounded' by what was conceived as a compact 'Slavic territory', implying their dependance on the hinterland and thus promoting the necessity and obviousness of a (pro)Yugoslav state solution, based on the principle of "brotherhood and unity" between different nationalities, implemented in this region as the "brotherhood between Italians and Slavs".

Furthermore, on a linguistic-historical level of analysis, it can be said that graffiti written in Slovenian or Croatian 'broke' with decades of Italianization of the region's public space (see: Cattaruzza, 2008; Verginella, 2011). Namely, after the implementation of anti-Slavic policies by the fascist regime and the elimination of Slavic languages from public, with prohibitions on its use, Slovenian-Croatian graffiti can be seen as actions that symbolized the first massive influence of written Slavic languages in the borderland's public space, as interventions that transformed the region's linguistic landscape, i.e. the linguistic formation that is displayed and embedded in public space (see: Landry and Bourhis, 1997). Yet, while on one hand the introduction of Slavic languages on such a large scale did imply a significant linguistic reversal, on the other hand the inclusion of Italian language in this linguistic triad implied a cross-cultural interrelation and interaction reflecting the plurilingual historical character of the borderland area that was suppressed by the fascist regime. Hence, it can be said that this plurilingual graffitism, that is still present on the borderland's facades, in a way represents one of the earliest efforts of a public manifestation, interrelation and equalization of the three languages historically present in the region, somehow anticipating the future bilingualism that is institutionally implemented today in Istria, both on the Croatian and Slovenian side of the border.

5. "Long live Stalin" - Suppressed and neglected memories

If graffiti are understood as spatial signs and public inscriptions that record historical memory (cf. Chaffee, 1993), it can be argued that World War II graffiti transmit diverse experiences, events, sets of values and narratives that were suppressed or neglected in the then coming decades, and overlooked in contemporary memory narratives and historical studies. First of all, they emphasize the complexities of the immediate postwar period, being direct articulations of (geo)political repercussions of the war that radically altered the borderland's socio-political and territorial configuration. In this sense, they somehow 'conserve' the memory of the Inter-Allied Commission's visit, an event with a high historical and (geo)political relevance that influenced the demarcation process and postwar negotiations, but that remains an event that is poorly researched and widely unknown to this day. Thus, it can be said that, eight decades after their production, these graffiti represent 'unofficial', unrecognized memory-markers that remind of that historical event, of a historical experience that encompassed a large number of people in the region, many of whom were directly involved in political demonstrations and various pro-Yugoslav activities, including the writing of those same graffiti (see: Smoljan and Rusac, 2019).

Further, related to the war's direct effects, these graffiti recall the period of the borderland's division into Zone A and Zone B, a division that lasted from 1945 to the beginning of 1947 (see: Nassisi, 1980). In other words, these graffiti are symbolic and spatial reminders of a historical period that marked a turbulent, complex and unpredictable transition from one geo-political configuration (Kingdom of Italy) to another one (Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia), from one political system (fascism and capitalism) to a different one (socialism), representing authentic reflexes and voices of this peculiar historical liminality of the region, simultaneously pointing out the historical contingency, mutability and arbitrariness of state borders. In this sense, the graffiti corpus created in this transitional and unstable historical period transmit particular encoded visions of the future (cf. Peteet, 1996, p. 149), a set of political aspirations, affective investments and ideological positionings condensed in graffiti as "We want to live in Yugoslavia", "We want Tito" or "We fought so we can live in [Tito's] Yugoslavia" that envisioned the Yugoslav postwar state led by Tito as the desired future for the broader region, at least for certain social groups and political movements. In a way, it can be said that these graffiti symbolize not only mere aspirations, interests and rigid political projects, but specific localized utopian projections that emerged from the direct wartime antifascist experience and the postwar geopolitical liminal framework, synthesized in these pro-Yugoslav expressions articulated in a *not-yet* Yugoslav context.

Furthermore, they remind of an imagined, but never realized, '7th Yugoslav Republic' with the city of Trieste as its capital[4]. Namely, across the region graffiti as "Long live Trieste", "Trieste is ours" or "Long live the 7th Federal Unit" can still be detected, transmitting ideas about the constitution of the imagined republic which would encompass a large part of the borderland area. Additionally, these and similar graffiti that claim "This is Yugoslavia" or "We want to live in Yugoslavia" represent historical spatial projections of the desired postwar state, functioning as territorial markers, i.e. affective and effective practices in the claiming of space (cf. Brighenti, 2010, p. 10). Thus, it can be said that these graffiti are historical and territorial markers that recall never realized (geo)political, territorial projections that emerged from the 1945-1947 liminal historical stage, projections that were later suppressed and discarded, but are still embedded in the region's landscape and are mapping a set of historically framed political and territorial imaginations.

As for the latter, the World War II graffiti corpus is not delineating only 'failed' and discarded territorial projections, but also those which were actually realized and constituted but eventually collapsed due to future political processes and ruptures. Namely, while these graffiti imagined a never constituted '7th Republic' or envisioned broader postwar Yugoslav borders, they also imagined and anticipated the Yugoslav and socialist future for significant parts of the borderland area, outliving the same future they envisioned: written in pre-Yugoslav times, these graffiti are now located in a post-Yugoslav context, positioned as specific "reminders of the absence" (Napolitano, 2015, p. 59), of the non-existence of the socio-political configuration they evoke, project and symbolically 'conserve' in the landscape (Figure 5.). As such, these memory-markers can be also understood as 'subversive' traces in space, with their explicit Yugoslav or communist character somehow contradicting, or even being in symbolic conflict with their post-Yugoslav and post-communist surroundings affected by years of anti-Yugoslav and anti-communist discourses, contested memory narratives and revisionisms of World War II (see: Pavlaković and Pauković 2019; Kirn, 2020), as well as by removal of symbols and texts related to Yugoslavia, Tito, communism or antifascism (see: Rihtman

4 - As the end of World War II was near, the so-called "Race for Trieste" began. Namely, on one hand, the goal of the Yugoslav Army was to liberate and occupy Trieste without help from the Allies, in order to claim the city and incorporate the important port in the postwar Yugoslav state. On the other hand, the goal of the British-American Allies was to liberate and occupy Trieste before the arrival of the Yugoslav Army, in order to secure that the port and the city do not fall in the Yugoslav and communist sphere. As the Yugoslav Army left the city on June 1945 after diplomatic tensions and arrangements, Trieste became the subject of a tense and long international dispute, a city contested between postwar Yugoslavia and Italy. With no immediate solution in sight, the United Nations Security Council constituted the Free Territory of Trieste in 1947, administered by the UNSC Military Government. The "Trieste Crisis" was resolved only in 1954, with the city's integration into postwar Italy. See: Tenca Montini, 2021.

Figure 5. The underlined abbreviation “FLRJ“ in Slovenian language (*Federativna ljudska republika Jugoslavija*), meaning: Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia (FPRY), alongside the inscription “Tito“. Located in Sečovlje, Slovenia. Photographed in July 2020. Source: Eric Ušić

Auguštin, 2000; Radović, 2013)[5]. In this sense, it can be said that these graffiti symbolically subvert and “deconstruct established structures of territoriality and therefore can be understood as counter-monuments” (Harmansah, 2018, p. 50).

Their ‘subversive’ character is even more interesting when considering a large number of graffiti that are celebrating Stalin, or the Soviet Union. Namely, while they were written during the period of closeness and alliance between communist-led Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, these

5 - In addition, it can be argued that these graffiti, with their socialist messages and material endurance, are also in a symbolic – and material – conflict with post-socialist economic practices dominated by neoliberal agendas focused on privatization and especially hyper-touristification, a process that is radically transforming the region’s space and landscape with its emphasis on an unrestrained apartmanization which is drastically altering the aesthetics and material textures of certain places. In other words, the economic subordination to an all-pervading and exhaustive touristification is producing more and more touristic objects which imply thorough ‘renovations’ and material modifications, transforming older objects into ‘modern’, historically sterilized and aesthetically uniform tourist residences. The process is thus representing a threat to the graffiti’s endurance, since the ‘renovations’ and remodeling of places according to (post)modern tourism ‘requirements’ imply a comprehensive spatial adaptation and renovations of older facades. In fact, it seems that the neoliberalist and touristification practices are far more efficient in removing this graffiti corpus than the ideological-spatial purges of the 1990s, which makes their eventual preservation as historical-memory markers very difficult.

Figure 8. A huge inscription "Stalin" in Croatian, located in Funčići, Croatia. Photographed on September 2021. Source: Eric Ušić

pro-Soviet and Stalinist graffiti 'survived' the harsh split between the two socialist states, communist parties and their two leaders, that occurred in 1948 and was followed by a severe de-Stalinization process in Yugoslavia (see: Jakovina and Previšić, 2020). During the process, political narratives were modified following new principles and (pro) Stalinist and Soviet symbolism was removed. The graffiti did not remain untouched either. Namely, as Andrej Ferletic (2007, p. 138) wrote in his historical study on graffiti in the Slovenian Primorska region, Stalinist and pro-Soviet graffiti were also removed on the Slovenian side of the border, while those who celebrated Tito and Yugoslavia were 'attacked' and spoiled by those communists who aligned themselves with Stalin, as was the case in some parts of the borderland zone, especially in those areas were Italian communists were active. Yet, the fact is that a large quantity of Stalinist graffiti can still be found in areas that were once Yugoslav territories, as suggested in Figure 6, representing a documented pro-Stalin inscription in Croatia, while there are also Titoist and pro-Yugoslav graffiti detectable across today's Italian border zones, as it can be seen in Figure 7, that is depicting a fragmented inscription detected in the proximity of the city of Gorizia in Italy, an inscription written in English with the still legible words "Long live greater Yugoslavia".[6] Here it is difficult, almost impossible, to answer how these inscriptions 'survived' and avoided the

6 - The English language is particularly interesting here: it is plausible to say that this, and similar graffiti, were aimed at the British-American members of the Inter-Allied Commission. Thus, in addition to the region's inherent trilingualism, other languages were also used in order to facilitate a straightforward communication with the Commission.

Figure 7. An inscription in English that reads„Long live greater Yugoslavia“. Located in the proximity of Gorizia, Italy. Photographed in June 2020. Source: Zoran Mršić

consequences of the Tito-Stalin split on one hand, and the post-Yugoslav decommunization processes of the 1990s on the other. However, instead of trying to find a way to answer to these questions, it is more productive to simply recognize their actual presence *in situ*, to understand them as inscriptions which symbolize an authentic and unfiltered memory texture of the borderland's landscape that is transmitting suppressed memories and historical narratives, revealing a vivid, turbulent and multilayered image of the past that avoided institutional and ideological reframing, suppression and oblivion.

6. Conclusions: Graffiti, landscape and memory

World War II graffiti represent a specific type of what could be defined in very simple and broader terms as historical graffiti, i.e. graffiti created in the past that endured and outlived their original socio-political and historical context of production and find themselves entangled with a different, transformed socio-cultural environment. Therefore, it can be said that they are an integral part of what Denis Cosgrove (1989) defined as a residual landscape – a complex of material objects and symbols created in the past and existing in the present, in a different, even conflicting historical environment and socio-political circumstances, as for example the 1940s inscription "This is Yugoslavia" documented in the village of Krapan, located in contemporary, post-Yugoslav Croatia (Figure 8). Thus, if the landscape is understood as „a text that is created, continuously reinscribed, rewritten and interpreted in different ways" (Šakaja, 2015, p. 13), it can be argued that these historical graffiti represent particular layers of the landscape's palimpsest, layers of a text "that is being rewritten while previous text is preserved" (Huyssen, 2003, p. 81).

Figure 8. The (post)World War II inscription stating „Here is Yugoslavia" in Croatian language, situated in contemporary, post-Yugoslav Croatia, in the village of Krapan. Photographed in May 2020. Source: Eric Ušić

Therefore, it can be argued that these World War II graffiti-layers should be understood as constitutive symbolic elements of a landscape that are simultaneously forming a particular scape on their own – a spatialized narrative, a web of texts and symbols, a system of signs that constitute a specific graffiti-scape, or graffscape (Pennycook, 2010). The elements of this graffiti-scape are expressions and reflections of the actual social life of certain subjects and social formations, of a particular and socio-historically contextualized lived experience interrelated with certain socio-political events and/or cultural processes and interactions (cf. Awad, 2017). Hence, to read historical graffiti as parts of the landscape-text means to read and analyze stories and (auto)biographies of certain places, narrations of their heterogeneous and multilayered social life and cultural dynamics, symbolic manifestations of particular collective experiences, historical ruptures, political struggles, etc. As for graffiti that endure and 'survive' for longer periods of time, it is plausible to argue that they also represent visual and spatial fragments that conserve and transmit multiple memories, i.e. diverse images of the past of certain locations, places or even whole regions.

Namely, it can be argued that graffiti bear witness to certain socio-political and historical events (cf. Baird and Taylor, 2011), even more so if they are direct expressions and reflections of these events, their symbolic, public and material-spatial imprints, as is the case with graffiti created during World War II in the Northern Adriatic borderland. Although they were created with a short-term purpose

and function – e.g. communicate antifascist messages during the war, or pro-Yugoslav messages in the immediate postwar period – their endurance *in situ* transcended their original framework, principal function and meaning, and their contingent longevity resymbolized them as records of past experiences (cf. Fleming, 1997), the reading of which offers possibilities to grasp and inspect very vivid symbolic and material impacts of World War II and its aftermath on the region. Moreover, due to their persistence in the same place where they were created 80 years ago, and their more or less intact form and content, these graffiti represent some of the most authentic traces of the tumultuous 1940s period in this borderland area. As such, these scattered notes that remained in the same place where they were created decades ago constitute an authentic layer of the region's memory landscape, that is a scape that consists of material and symbolic traces and remnants of the past, a complex of spatial markers that transmit diverse images of a common, but often contested, past and history of particular locations, towns, regions (see: Ballinger, 2003).

Furthermore, unlike other memory-markers as monuments, plaques and street names that are embedded in public space as parts of broader institutional memory projects and spatial representations of a dominant ideological/historical discourse (cf. Radović, 2013; Horvatinčić, 2014), World War II graffiti represent texts that were not produced with the intention of spatializing a coherent memory narrative in public, but today they can be understood as spatial historical documents, symbolic transmitters of a historical experience that represent genuine reflections and expressions of that particular context. In this sense, they can be understood as forms of an unfiltered memory texture: unfiltered by state institutions and cultural memory agents, as types of non-institutional and extra-institutional 'open-air' wall-archives and fragmented (auto) biographical notes of the borderland area which avoided processes of institutional (re)framing, rigorous removal and selective ideological memorialization and amnesia. While official, institutional and state-sponsored memorials transmit more or less standardized narratives of World War II and its aftermath on each side of the borders in relation to dominant historical and ideological narratives, and despite the post-1990s tendencies of historical revisionism and the removal of certain monuments, plaques and other symbolic markers such as street names in post-Yugoslav areas (see: Hrženjak, 2001; Kirn, 2012; Radović, 2013), this peculiar graffiti-scape conserves and articulates a multifaceted, more 'rough' and more complex picture of the 1940s historical experience of the borderland region. Further, it represents an unfiltered set of spatial markers that remind of certain episodes and experiences that are not present and articulated, or are marginalized, neglected or suppressed in other elements and narratives embedded in the region's memory landscape, as the Inter-Allied Commission's visit, or the (pro)Stalinist historical episode.

In other words and on a more general scale, it can be said that graffiti document popular history (Olberg, 2013), whether 'intentionally' in the form of organized commemorative graffiti that mark/celebrate particular events or memorialize 'martyrdom' and sacrifices of certain socio-political movements (cf. Peteet, 1996), or 'unintentionally', as is the case with World War II and postwar graffiti, whose authors employed them as effective communicative devices or resistance tools in response to current issues, but whose material imprint outlived their primary 'here and now' function and original context of action transmitting experiences from the past in a different context. And it is exactly this 'memorial unintentionality' that makes the latter form of graffiti interesting and relevant from a historical and memory-perspective. Namely, they were created in the first place as texts and symbols with a clear, straightforward purpose and function – e.g. articulation and dissemination of antifascism during World War II – and as messages whose purpose is communication, reaction and interaction with current events – e.g. conveying pro-Yugoslav messages to the Inter-Allied Commission. In short, their principal function was to 'act' and make an impact on a short-term, rather than to record experiences and function as memorial texts. Yet, their *in situ* material endurance that transcended their original framework transformed them – theoretically speaking – into traces, i.e. "condensations of histories onto material forms" (Napolitano, 2015, p. 58). As such, they symbolically maintain and spatialize a vivid image of the past that is far more complex than standardized historical narratives, marking and transmitting well-known historical episodes as well as certain neglected or suppressed stories that, although they may be 'forgotten' or 'unwanted' by certain socio-cultural groups or ideological

formations, represent constitutive elements of the (auto) biography of the Northern Adriatic borderland. As such, these graffiti could be recognized as “sites of communal or cultural memory” (Baird and Taylor, 2011, p. 8), at least until the passage of time, or the renovation of walls and facades, erases these undervalued and overlooked historical and memory-markers, dispersing both the past and the memories into oblivion.

Conflict of Interests and ethics

The author declares no conflict of interests.

References

Awad, S. H., 2017. Documenting a contested memory: Symbols in the changing city space of Cairo. Culture & Psychology, 23(2), 234–254.

Baird, J. A., Taylor, C. 2011. Ancient Graffiti in Context: Introduction, in: Baird, J.A., Taylor, C. (Eds.), Ancient Graffiti in Context. Routledge, pp. 1-19

Ballinger, P., 2003. History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans, Princeton University Press

Basta, V., and Pleše, Z., 1980. Organizacioni i politički razvoj KPJ (SKJ) u Istri, Hrvatskom primorju i Gorskom kotaru 1945-1978, in: Sobolevski, M. (Ed.), SKJ – Istra, Hrvatsko primorje i Gorski Kotar, 1919-1979, Centar za historiju radničkog pokreta i NOR

Bosca, G. 2010. La propaganda murale del regime fascista: una memoria storica del XX secolo, Araba Fenice

Brighenti, A. M., 2010. At the Wall: Graffiti Writers, Urban Territoriality, and the Public Domain. Space and Culture, 20(10), 1–18

Cattaruzza, M., 2008. L’Italia e il confine orientale 1866-2006, Il Mulino

Chaffee, L. G., 1993. Political Protest and Street Art – Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries, Greenwood Press

Colummi, C., Ferrari, L., Nassisi, G., Trani, G. (Eds.), 1980. Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956, IRSMLFVG

Cosgrove, D., 1989. Geography is Everywhere: Culture and Symbolism in Human Landscapes, in: Gregory, D., Walford, R. (Eds.), Horizons in Human Geography, Macmillan Press Ltd, pp. 118- 135

Dukovski, D., 2001. Rat i mir istarski: model povijesne prijelomnice (1943.-1955.), C.A.S.H.

Ferletic, A., 2007. Propagandni in politično-propagandni napisi ter grafiti na Primorskem v letih pred, med in po drugi svetovni vojni. Zgodovinski časopis, 61(1-2 (135), 113-140

Fleming, J., 1997. Wounded Walls: Graffiti, Grammatology, and the Age of Shakespeare, Criticism, 39(1), 1-30

Guardian, The. 1946, March 11. Trieste Out to Impress. Boundary Commission Starts Its Work, p. 6

Harmansah, O., 2018. Graffiti or Monument? Inscription of Place at Anatolian Rock Reliefs, in: Ragazzoli, C.,

Harmansah, O., Salvador, C., Frood, E. (Eds.), Scribbling through History: Graffiti, places and people from antiquity to modernity, Bloomsbury Academic, pp. 49-64
Horvatinčić, S., 2014. Spomenici posvećeni radu i radničkom pokretu u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji. Etnološka tribina, 44(37), 153-168.
Hrženjak, J. (Ed.), 2001. Rušenje antifašističkih spomenika u Hrvatskoj: 1990-2000. Savez antifašističkih boraca Hrvatske
Huyssen, A., 2003. Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory, Stanford University Press
Jakovina, T., Previšić, M. (Eds), 2020. The Tito-Stalin Split 70 Years After, University of Ljubljana-University of Zagreb
Kirn, G., 2012. Transformation of Memorial Sites in the Post-Yugoslav Context, in: Šuber, D., Karamanić, S. (Eds.), Retracing Images: Visual Culture after Yugoslavia, Brill, pp. 251–281
Kirn, G., 2020. The Partisan Counter-Archive. Retracing the Ruptures of Art and Memory in the Yugoslav People's Liberation Struggle, De Gruyter
Klabjan, B. (Ed.), 2019. Borderlands of Memory: Adriatic and Central European Perspectives, Peter Lang.
Konda, H., 2017. Grafiti v Ljubljani: zgodovina, grafitarji, mesto, Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete.
Landry, R., Bourhis, R. Y., 1997. Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study, Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 16(1), 23-49
Miklavcic, A., 2008. Slogans and Graffiti: Postmemory among Youth in the Italo-Slovenian Borderland, American Ethnologist, 35(3), 440-453
Napolitano, V., 2015. Anthropology and traces. Anthropological Theory, 15(1), 47–67
Nassisi, G., 1980. Istria: 1945-1947, in: Colummi, C., Ferrari, L., Nassisi, G., Trani, G. (Eds.), Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956, IRSMLFVG, pp. 87-144
Olberg, S. T., 2013. Political Graffiti on the West Bank Wall in Israel/Palestine, The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd
Orlić, M., 2019. Né italiani né slavi. State- e Nation-building jugoslavo nel secondo dopoguerra in Istria, Contemporanea, 22(4), 563-588
Pavlaković, V., Pauković, D. (Eds.), 2019. Framing the Nation and Collective Identities. Political Rituals and Cultural Memory of the Twentieth-Century Traumas in Croatia, Routledge
Pennycook, A., 2010. Spatial Narrations: Graffscapes and City Souls, in: A. Jaworski, Thurlow, C. (Eds), Semiotic Landscapes. Language, Image, Space, Continuum, pp. 137-150
Peteet, J., 1996. The Writing on the Walls: The Graffiti of the Intifada. Cultural Anthropology, 11(2), pp. 139-159
Pupo, R., 2017. Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio, Rizzoli
Radović, S., 2013. Grad kao tekst, Biblioteka XX vek
Rihtman-Auguštin, D., 2000. Ulice moga grada: antropologija domaćeg terena, Biblioteka XX vek
Rose, G., 2001. Visual Methodologies – An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials. SAGE Publications
Segala, A., 2007. I muri del duce, Arca
Smoljan, I., Rusac, N., 2019. "Živio Tito!" Parole povodom dolaska Međusavezničke komisije za razgraničenje u Istru 1946. Godine, in: Duda, I. (ed.), Komunisti i komunističke partije: politike, akcije, debate, Srednja Europa, Sveučilište Jurja Dobrile u Puli, pp. 163-190
Šakaja, L., 2015. Uvod u kulturnu geografiju, Leykam International
Tenca Montini, F., 2021. ...Trst ne damo! Jugoslavija i Tršćansko pitanje 1945-1954, Srednja Europa
Ušić, E., 2019. Istrian graffiti in World War II – Meanings and experiences, Časopis za povijest Zapadne Hrvatske, 13. (-), 37-62
Ušić, E., 2023. Visual ethnography of (post)World War II political graffiti in Istria (Doctoral dissertation), Fakulteta za družbene vede, Univerza v Ljubljani
Velikonja, M., 2020. Post-Socialist Political Graffiti in the Balkans and Central Europe, Routledge
Verginella, M., 2011. Granica drugih: Pitanje Julijske krajine i slovensko pamćenje, Srednja Europa
Zaimakis, Y., 2015. 'Welcome to the civilization of fear': on political graffiti heterotopias in Greece in times of crisis, Visual Communication, 14(4), 373–396