

Title: Exile in the Fiction of post-Yugoslav Emigrant Writers  
Author: Tatjana Aleksić, University of Michigan

The paper analyzes the motive of self-imposed exile in the fiction of two post-Yugoslav writers of the 1990s, the Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić and Serbian-Jewish author, David Albahari. Both authors in their fiction explore the imposition of émigré status through a return to familial and familiar cultural background. The protagonist of Albahari's *Bait* (1996), like David Albahari the writer, leaves his native Serbia for Canada in an act of self-imposed exile in reaction to the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia of the 1990's. It is there that he finds himself involved in the process of negotiating his identity as a foreigner who still mourns the inevitable loss of the old world he left and does not want to return to, but is equally incapable of, and dislikes the idea of fully integrating himself into his new cultural environment. In Canada he writes his "Canadian Trilogy" which, while describing his life in the adopted culture of North America, resonates with the events "at home" — in Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia. The geography of the new world is heavily underscored by historical events in the Balkans, while the memory of his old life is evoked through the audio recordings of his mother's life story.

Dubravka Ugrešić in her novel *Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1996) utilizes the name of the old Soviet museum in Berlin as a metaphor for her narrator's search for the memory of her country that is no more. The past is nostalgically evoked through objects that belonged to her mother, an exile from post-WWII Bulgaria while, the present emerges in a series of disconnected snapshots, each of which is an episode in the greater story of the solitude and destituteness of those who, after the collapse of the grand Yugoslav narrative, could not fit into any recognizable collective identity. Her misfitting narrator(s) roam the streets of Berlin and other global metropolises, desperate to meet "one of their own," yet ashamed of being identified with them and clumsily avoiding every such random encounter. This pain of the mutually exclusive urges of being part of a group yet preserving one's anonymity in new circumstances is present in both novels. Albahari's narrator recognizes Yugoslav immigrants in the streets of Canada, yet shuns eye contact for fear their linguistic intimacy should melt the wall he is trying to erect around himself. Feeling dislike for the emptiness of their adopted cultures, yet consciously rejecting the uneasy intimacy of the old ones, these two authors record the breakdown of both their identities and narratives into visual images and inarticulate sounds.