

Writing a Home: Idea of Home in the Poetry of the Serbian Female-Authors of the Youngest Generation

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Abstract

Pointing out the tendency of contemporary Serbian female authors of the youngest generations to pay special attention to the phenomenon of space, this paper examines how the poetic perception of space and different relations in it, especially those involved in the creation of the idea of home, influence the establishment and shaping of the lyrical subject's identity.

Keywords: Space, Place, Home, Serbian Contemporary Poetry, Identity

Abstract

Rimarcando la tendenza delle autrici serbe contemporanee della generazione più giovane a prestare particolare attenzione al fenomeno dello spazio, questo articolo esamina come la percezione poetica dello spazio e le diverse relazioni in esso, in particolare quelle coinvolte nella creazione dell'idea di casa, influenzino l'istituzione e la formazione dell'identità del soggetto lirico.

Parole chiave: spazio, luogo, casa, poesia contemporanea serba, identità

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Turning to Space

Starting from Giancarlo Maiorino's thesis that «The first step in literary interpretation is the title, which sets up a critical perspective on the text» (Maiorino 2008, 3), and then putting some titles of contemporary Serbian literature alongside one another, one could ask what story those titles tell and what interpretative possibilities they offer: *povremena poput vikend-naselja* (Maša Seničić, 2019), *Unutrašnje nevreme* (Katarina Pantović, 2019), *Šar-planina* (Milica Špadijer, 2019), *Prostori* (Željana Vukanac, 2019), *Moja mama zna šta se dešava u gradovima* (Radmila Petrović, 2020), *U talasima tela* (Željana Vukanac, 2020), *Ovo telo je hotel* (Martina Kuzmanović, 2020), *Kroz visoku travu* (Maša Živković, 2020), *Govori grad* (Ana Miloš, 2020), *Jagma* (Aleksandra Jovanović, 2020), *Karantin u paklu* (Jelena Marinkov, 2021), *Neuporediva zemlja* (Milica Bešić, 2021), *Temelji čega tačno* (Irena Plaović, 2021).¹ The first thing that those titles bring together is the fact that each of them belongs to a collection of poetry written by a female author and published in the last three years; second, all of the above-mentioned female authors could be situated within the so-called *youngest generation*;² last but not least, one notices that all of the titles, in one way or another, show female authors' preoccupation with the phenomenon of space.

¹ The titles of the collections of poetry translated into English in the order they are mentioned above read: *Occasional Like Weekend Resorts*, *Internal Storm*, *Šar Mountains*, *Spaces*, *My Mom Knows What's Happening in the Cities*, *In the Waves of the Body*, *This Body Is a Hotel*, *Through the Tall Grass*, *The City Speaks*, *Lea*, *Quarantine in Hell*, *Incomparable Land*, *Foundations of What Exactly*. All of the translations of the titles of the collections of poetry, as well as the titles of the poems and cited verses in this paper are mine.

² Although Vladimir Stojnić as an editor of the book *Prostori i figure: Izbor iz nove srpske poezije* (*Spaces and Figures: A Selection from New Serbian poetry*, 2012) distinguishes between the terms “new” and “young” and explains that, in the context of Serbian poetry, the latter usually has a negative connotation and refers to authors who have not long been present on the literary scene, he uses the term “young” strictly as an age determinant (Stojnić 2012: 7). In

Putting space at the centre of one's attention could be easily understood as a sort of a poetical response to the *spatial turn* and to statements about space being the source of «the anxiety of our era», made by Michel Foucault in the 1960s, which lead to a general redirection of attention from the phenomenon of time to that of space at the end of the last century (Foucault 1984, 2). Alternatively, this problem could be observed through the prism of the quest for poetical similarities and points of intersection within one generation of female authors. In that regard, still leaning on Maiorino's premise about titles, it could be said that a certain similarity of approach to this phenomenon among younger Serbian female authors could be found in a shared interest in space. Firstly, in some cases the space will be clearly evoked, either by a toponym (*Šar-planina*),³ by the name of a very specific type of space (*Jagma*,⁴ *Neuporediva zemlja*) or by a reference to space in general (*Prostori*); then, the titles also indicate or question a movement or a stay in a certain space, and thus the experience inscribed in that movement and/or stay (*Kroz visoku travu*, *Karantin u paklu*, *Moja mama zna šta se dešava u gradovima*); the titles can also refer to the constructing one's own space and the re-examination of its boundaries and permeability, on the one hand (*Temelji čega tačno*, *Unutrašnje vreme*), while, on the other hand, some female authors will clearly refer to the self as a sort of space and establish its boundaries (*povremena poput vikend-*

this sense, my use of the term “the youngest” will respond to Stojnić's principle and the syntagm “the youngest generation” will refer to the (female-) authors born from 1989 onwards.

³ Šar-planina or the Šar Mountains form a mountain range that extends from the southern part of Serbia and the north-western part of North Macedonia to north-eastern Albania.

⁴ Uroš Ristanović elaborates on the meaning of A. Jovanović book's title, pointing out that the title *Jagma* could be understood both as a snatching (since the word “jagma” in Serbian originally means exactly *snatching*, *scrambling* or some kind of *frenzy*) and a wasteland, a lea, which belongs to the one who first occupies it (Ristanović 2020, 51).

naselja, U talasima tela, Ovo telo je hotel) by the titles, so that finally the space speaks up for itself through the poetry (*Govori grad*).

Although I start from the titles of the literary work to point out one of the tendencies in the youngest contemporary Serbian poetry – the turn to space as a common identifier – the intention of this paper will not be, as in Maiorino, to offer extensive and exhaustive poetical and contextual interpretation of the relationship between all of the literary texts and their titles; consequently, not all of the listed collections of poetry will be analysed. This paper, being limited in length, will primarily strive to describe the pinpointed phenomenon and to outline and interpret its various poetic forms and shapes in contemporary Serbian literature, illustrating the poetic situation with the most interesting and representative examples found in the collections of poetry *povremena poput vikend-naselja, Moja mama zna šta se dešava u gradovima, Ovo telo je hotel, Jagma*, written by M. Seničić, R. Petrović, M. Kuzmanović and A. Jovanović. In order to do so, my text will provide the answers to the following questions: what spaces appear in the poetry of young female authors and how are they presented?; in what way do the perception of quotidian events and relationships determine binary oppositions connected to the idea of space – *here : there, village : city, homeland : foreign land, familiar : unfamiliar*?; how is the identity established and shaped through perception of the space in which the lyrical subjects resides?; how does the idea of home emerge in relation to space and the people inhabiting it?.

Urban : Rural : Isolated spaces and places

Although the word “city” in plural form appears in only one of the titles of the collections of poetry chosen for the extensive analysis – *Moja mama zna*

šta se dešava u gradovima (underline T.K.) – the city and the city space are frequent objects of interest in all four of them. The notion of the city emerges in a very wide range of different experiences expressed in poetic images and feelings, atmosphere and events that the lyrical subjects face and take part in. Whether the city space is marked only simply as *a city* or is determined by the actual name of the city,⁵ in numerous cases the city appears as the default lyrical stage or scenography of the particular poem.

In many of M. Seničić's poems cityscape is present as a background for intimate meditations and observations («budim se kao poludinamit u srcu grada / i znam da se spolja nikada ništa neće desiti»,⁶ Seničić 2019, 37), but it also figures as one of the ambiances in which the lyrical subject physically, more or less actively participates: «iscrtavam lagodnu dnevnu putanju, ulicom vučem / nepoverenje...»,⁷ (Seničić 2019, 14). Physical participation in the city space, as well as the experience of the city, has a great share in the creation of an image of the city and in the self-perception of the lyrical subject, which can easily be seen in poems *nežnija polovina eksplozije* (*the gentler half of the explosion*), *uteha hodanjem* (*consolation by walking*), *princip minimalnog udaljavanja* (*the principle of minimal distancing*). Every change that occurred over time is noted while observing the city, while actually living in it and through it: «raskopavaju i ponovo grade / i ponovo ruše i opet renoviraju i sve zaboravljam»; «sve

⁵ In the poetry of M. Seničić, R. Petrović, M. Kuzmanović and A. Jovanović, the city is mostly present just as a *city*, but one can find references to existing cities: Belgrade, Vranje, Rovinj, Warsaw, Munich and Paris, while M. Špadijer's poetry, for example, abounds in experiences gathered in both nearby and distant and somewhat exotic places: Zagreb, Cetinje, Crmnica, Bar, Rome, Yerevan, Ani, Jerusalem, Cairo, Kabul, etc.

⁶ «I wake up like a half-dynamite in the heart of the city / and I know that nothing will ever happen outside».

⁷ «I am drawing a comfortable daily path, I draw distrust / along the street...».

zgrade koje poznajem polako nestaju / ili se deformišu: balkon po balkon»⁸ (Seničić 2019, 35, 52). This consequently leads to the perception of the city as a space that is strongly ambivalent. On the one hand, with the recognition of the changes within the city a deeper questioning of the cultural, social, even ethical meaning of the city space and its changes to an individual – that is, to the self – becomes inevitable. Therefore, a dialogue with the prominent thinkers of the space poetically transforms into a means of understanding the self. For instance, Henri Lefebvre's ideas concerning *the right to the city* present throughout the whole of M. Seničić's collection of poetry are explicitly revealed in the poem *niko nema pravo na grad* (*no one has the right to the city*): elaborating on the erasure of differences between *small* and *big* cities based on the city's position, infrastructure and level of urbanisation, and then putting to the fore one's state of mind, subjective perception and the intimate importance of those cities, the lyrical subject subtly advocates for the feeling of urbanity as a state of spirit.⁹ On the other hand, this hard resistance to those aspects that are lacking from urbanity – uncontrolled, mindless and violent occupation and appropriation of the city space (Lefebvre 2008, 24) – makes it impossible to achieve a deeper or complete connection with the narrower space in which the lyrical subject resides. In this way perception of the city space is reflected also on a more personal, intimate level. The lyrical subject, stating that the apartment in which she lives is rented and thus her actual

⁸ «They dig up and build again / and demolish again and renovate again and I forget everything». // «All the buildings I know slowly disappear / or deform: balcony by balcony».

⁹ In his study *The Right to the City*, Henri Lefebvre specifies the fundamental difference between the terms city and urban, stating that although *the city is dead*, what is *urban* continues to live virtually in its blurred and alienated space (Lefebvre 2008, 18). He explains that the right to the city cannot be understood as an ordinary right to visit or return to ancient cities, but that it can be formulated only as a right to urban life – transformed and renewed. (Lefebvre 2008, 28).

property is *nothing but an old dog* (Seničić 2019, 37), thus openly underlines the absence of her home through the ideas of ownership and possession, very often closely bound to the very idea of home (Morley 2000, 26). The feelings of loneliness and not being anchored to any place are then transformed into reconciliation with the circumstances, which leads to the establishing of the idea of homelessness, expressed in verses «[...] kuća je za mene rupa, a / spoljašnjost meteorološka nepoznata [...]»¹⁰ (Seničić 2019 55), and reinforced with the excerpts from Theodor Adorno's *Minima moralia* interpolated in the book: «[...] Kuća je prošlost. [...] One su dobre još samo za to da se odbace, kao stare konzerve» (Seničić 2019, 19).¹¹

Despite this and the occasional traces of connection with the city, leaving the city space is being denied as an option by stating that «selidba je za lakoverne, oportuniste, živahne»¹² (Seničić 2019, 17), showing that the lyrical subject is aware how is shaped by the urban and that the change of space is irrelevant in comparison to an already built urban identity.¹³ As a kind of solution to and a new perspective on this ambiguity there appears a short-term, occasional escape from the city to the topographically unidentified, idealised and somewhat utopic place, namely, to *plac – a lot*. Situated partly in nature,

¹⁰ «the house is a hole for me, and / the outside is meteorologically unknown [...]».

¹¹ «[...] The house is the past. [...] They are still only good for being discarded, like old cans».

¹² «Moving away is for the gullible ones, opportunists, lively ones».

¹³ Compare to Radmila Lazić's explanation of the poetic background of her *Anthology of Serbian Urban Poetry – Stars Are Beautiful, but I Don't Have Time to Look at Them* (2009) and her understanding of the ideas of urban and urbanity; for this author, urban poetry is not only poetry that treats the theme of the city and city life, but that urbanity should be understood as a paradigm of modernity that entered poetry with Baudelaire, and represents a critique of traditional values and a changed attitude towards beauty; urbanity is an emancipatory state of mind, it is a matter of sensibility, openness to the other and to what is different, it implies modernity (Lazić 2009, 19).

partly in the decentralised and yet urban space of a *weekend resort*, presented like an *oasis*, a lot is a place between two worlds, a place where the lyrical subject gets in touch with itself, where it experiences peace and tranquillity. But the lot also appears to be a place where the lyrical subject practices and enjoys her *right to nature* (Lefebvre 2008, 28), as in the poem *Slušam*: «vetar među listovima hrasta, treperav, poželjnog intenziteta»¹⁴ (Seničić 2019, 54). Another destination that the lyrical subject chooses for its getaway strategy is a seashore, more precisely, *secondary recreational housing facilities* (Seničić 2019, 81) built on the shore, through which (both poetically and theoretically) the cultural background of the practice of tourist relocation and the significance of tourist places for individual and collective identities are being re-examined.

Having in mind the distinction between the city and the urban and also the process of (de)centralisation that is immanent to what is urban (Lefebvre 2008, 28), a special experience of the city space and life in it is expressed when the city is presented and perceived as a place of immigration. Whether it is about moving to a bigger city from a smaller city or from a rural area, the new space is perceived as a centre in relation to the previous place of residence. The very process of relocation is what disturbs the outlines of an individual's identity, and the re-establishment of identity is made more difficult by the establishment of a new life. For example, in A. Jovanović's poetry this perspective is considered intuitively rather than theoretically, as it is in M. Seničić's poetry. A. Jovanović's poems present sometimes playful – *Setno jutro na osmom spratu* (*Blue Morning on the Eighth Floor*) –, sometimes grotesque – *Smrt moljcima* (*Death to Moths*), *Bubašvabe ratnice* (*Cockroaches Warriors*) –, sometimes sad – *Tapete* (*Wallpapers*) –, sometimes even depressive – *Fotelja* (*The Chair*), *Smrad* (*Stink*) – poetic pictures of everyday in the city skyscrapers. What is

¹⁴ «Wind between oak leaves, trembling, of desirable intensity».

mutual for all these various pictures is the feeling of not being «svoj na svome»¹⁵ (Jovanović 2020, 43), that is, not being able *to appropriate the imposed space* (Jovanović 2020, 43), starting with the apartment in which the lyrical subject resides, feeling trapped and unsafe at the same time, and then widening to the outer city space. The strong urge to adapt to the new life situation comes as an endeavour to change one's immanent characteristics: language – that is, dialect. The way of speaking inherited from the place of origin is understood as something natural and innate to the individual: «grlo mi i dalje brani / da produžim prvi slog»¹⁶ (Jovanović 2020, 29). The urge is also expressed within the collective of those who have come into a city and are determined to stay there and succeed:

ovde su mnogi pustili korenje
da bi pozvali nekog telefonom
dobro mi je
ne brini
uspeću
ako ne
ne vraćam se nikako
u svakom slučaju ne (Jovanović 2020, 40).¹⁷

Although coming from the marginalised space, the only resemblance with the home that the A. Jovanović's lyrical subject finds in the new space is the feeling of unity with those who fight against social and urban injustice, with those who are defending the right to the city. Therefore, the verse «Svi

¹⁵ «lord of its own place».

¹⁶ «My throat is still forbidding me / to lengthen the first syllable».

¹⁷ «Many have put down roots here / just to be able to call someone over a phone / I'm fine / don't worry / I will succeed / if not / I won't come back / in any case I won't».

su se ujedini oko smrada»¹⁸ (Jovanović 2020, 40), at the same time ironically points out towards the common interest that unites the lyrical subject with the others (the stink) and makes it feel accepted in new, urban surroundings. This verse also implies that one's urban identity does not depend on one's birthplace and origin, but on one's state of spirit.

As a counterpart to the idea of moving to the big city lies the idea of coming back home, also present in A. Jovanović's poetry. Although returning home is an action *that excites* and the house of birth is perceived as a place *where one belongs* (Jovanović 2020, 29, 34), the home is still ambiguously defined as a space to which, once abandoned, one no longer belongs and which no longer feels like one's own. The physical journey home is presented as a road trip with obstacles («put do kuće krivuda i lako zapnem o krivine»,¹⁹ Jovanović 2020, 5), the biggest of them being the doorstep.²⁰ Crossing it in both directions – in and out – leaves consequences: struggling in the big city after the home is left corresponds to the resistance the home space emanates towards the lyrical subject once back home. This resistance can be understood as a sort of punishment for the lyrical subject who had left it and a reminder of who the lyrical subject previously was. In that sense, by coming back home, the aforementioned dialect, which in the city environment primarily felt like a kind of a link to home, but also like a distinctive and isolating factor in new surroundings, is now changed again under the influence of the environment in which the lyrical subject resided: «a krupna žena na stolici me ne razume /

¹⁸ «All united around the stink».

¹⁹ «The road to the home winds and I easily get stuck on the curves».

²⁰ In Serbian, i.e. Slavic, folk culture and customs, the doorstep is a place of ritual significance and symbolises the border between the house and the outside world, at the same time representing an insurmountable obstacle to unclean forces (Tolstoj and Radenković 2001, 441).

jer sam rekla nešto sasvim polako»²¹ (Jovanović 2020, 32). Language and the newly discovered way of speaking are therefore transformed into one more sign of difference between the home and the lyrical subject that only manifests itself upon arrival back home, which inevitably widens the already existing gap between the two created after the home was left in the first place.

The clear delineation between the city and the village is strongly accentuated in almost every poem by R. Petrović. This demarcation, however, is not inscribed in physical space itself. Instead, it can be recognised in the habits, customs, behaviour and the way of thinking, both of the city and village people, and thus in their incongruous representations of the world. In the eyes of village people in R. Petrović's poetry, the city space is unfamiliar, unsecure and promiscuous, offering undefined relationships and many temptations, and therefore dangerous to anyone who would dare to go there. Additionally, it represents the socio-economic counterpart of a village, for the village people *retain social peace in the city of Belgrade and they feed all those people* (Petrović 2020, 41). For the lyrical subject in R. Petrović's poems, however, it is both a place of many opportunities (Petrović 2020, 10), about which the lyrical subject learned by *watching TV* (Petrović 2020, 24), and a space without any *comfort* and without the *benefits of private property* (Petrović 2020, 26). Simultaneously, representation of life in a village begins with notions of typically rural activities, such as agricultural and farm work: «znam kako se sade luk i grašak / i da točkovi traktora idu samo pravo»²² (Petrović 2020, 8); «tamo se u zoru ustajalo / da se muzu krave»²³ (Petrović 2020, 28); it then touches upon specific cycles that determine those activities: «ovde su se krmače /

²¹ «And the big woman on the chair can't understand me / because I said something very slowly».

²² «I know how to plant onions and peas / and that the tractor wheels only go straight».

²³ «There they got up at dawn / to milk the cows».

prasil s prvim snegom»²⁴ (Petrović 2020, 11). Finally, it sketches the mentality of the village as a community, as in these verses:

nismo ni tamo pričali s
komšijama
ali znali smo ih bolje nego sebe
znali smo koliko rakije
imaju u kom buretu (Petrović 2020, 26).²⁵

and points out its unique logic based on folk tradition and beliefs, leaning also on different magic and occult practices – «ovde se trguje krilima slepog miša»²⁶ (Petrović 2020, 17) – R. Petrović creates a somewhat mythologised representation of a rural space. Scenes of hard and exhausting work, both for men and women, on the one hand, testify to constant dealing with the uncertainty of its outcome – that is, of a repetitive struggle against nature and its moods, but also of a struggle against unfavourable socio-economic conditions:

I ja se
Setim
kako je vrućina bila velika
tog leta u malinama, a cena
niska
pa smo blokirali prugu
prevrnuli maricu (Petrović 2020, 9).²⁷

²⁴ «Here the sows / farrowed with the first snow».

²⁵ «We didn't talk to the neighbors / there either / but we knew them better than we knew ourselves / we knew how much rakija / they had in which barrel».

²⁶ «Bat wings are traded here».

²⁷ «And I / remember / how hot it was / that summer when we picked raspberries, and how the price / was low, / so we blocked the railway line / and knocked over the police van».

On the other hand, analogies that show the essential connectedness of the lyrical subject with nature, as in the poem *Odjeci šume (Echoes of the Wood)*, suggests that living in a village also implies living *within nature*, not only conquering it. The lyrical subject's awareness of this very position is exactly why it reaches for the motifs from and scenes witnessed in nature when expressing the deepest and most complicated emotions.

Homeland : Foreign Land

Knowing that the understanding of travel or travelling as an anthropological determinant marks European cultural self-awareness from the beginning (Farago 2006, 33-34), it should still be emphasised that the paradigm of modern experience as rapid mobility over long distances is sometimes substituted with the idea that the model of contemporary life is characterised centrally by voluntary forms of mobility and as such «strictly applicable only to a relatively small number of highly privileged people» (Morley 2000, 13, 54).

Differences in degrees and styles of mobility (Morley 2000, 153) can be noted in Serbian contemporary poetry too. For example, the experience of residing abroad is given in M. Seničić's poetry through the outlines of the suburbs of the German city, namely the suburbs of Munich, in the poem *tuda predgrađa (someone else's suburbs)*. The whole poetic image of the suburbs is built on the juxtaposition of its contrasting characteristics. The lyrical subject gives a very detailed insight into the scenes and cultural patterns she encounters. Multinationalism, multiethnicity, multiculturalism, multilingualism, multiconfessionality, and then, grandiosity and the sense of prestige that result from a systematically ordered society are critically observed and re-examined, so that the reverse of Western European progressive society can be presented. Despite all the advantages of such a society, the lyrical subject concludes that

«stražnje ulice su svuda iste / puste i ovlaš prebrisane»²⁸ (Seničić 2019, 40), stressing the injustices and insecurities that she encounters *in the back streets*. In that sense, the idea that the reverse of the well-organised system does not differ from any other system becomes a metaphorical representation of society in general. Therefore, the feeling of not being a part of the Munich suburbs is where the lyrical subject finds its comfort. The crucial opposition within the suburban spaces emerges when the lyrical subject confesses her *confusion* by the sound of the birds singing: «čuje se mnogo više ptica nego što staje u sva ta dvorišta»²⁹ (Seničić 2019, 43). The orderliness of the system, which at the same time means strict rules and restraint, is now directly confronted with the idea of freedom that the birds symbolise.

The poem *uvod u studiju nestrpjenja* (*an introduction to the study of impatience*), in which M. Seničić's lyrical subject expresses its awareness of the present moment and its political implications can be understood in a similar sense. Transferring the topicality of the actual political situation to the universal plan reveals the hypocrisy of intercultural political strategies, contrasting them to unacceptable interpersonal and social behaviour learned already in childhood. Moreover, when asked if she feels European, the lyrical subject declares herself as a non-European, stating: «a kakva je to emocija: / mokra po granicama, teška od prašine»³⁰ (Seničić 2019, 44). Pointing out its limitation and obsolescence, the lyrical subject gives a critique of European society in the broadest sense; still the lyrical subject continues to re-examine its own positions within that same society and tradition as well: excluding itself from the narrative of the Europe as cultural cradle, the lyrical subject reveals a paradox and admits

²⁸ «Back streets are the same everywhere / empty and lightly wiped».

²⁹ «You hear many more birds / than can fit in these yards».

³⁰ «And what a feeling it is: / damp around the edges, heavy with dust».

its own hypocrisy, discovering that its *travel to an island that denies affiliation* (alluding probably to Great Britain) is funded by none other than the community whose affiliation it also denies (Seničić 2019, 44).

In the contemporary poetry of the youngest female-authors traveling or going abroad appears also as a result of the decision to start a new life. Moving to another country undeniably produces a feeling of alienation from family and friends, but also from language (Farago 2006, 40), on the one hand, as well as the urge to establish a new life, on the other hand. Thus, in the poetry of M. Kuzmanović, the reasons for going abroad, as well as everything that led to that decision, will be found in the verses of the poem *Priča o ženi* (*The story of a woman*):

ovo je priča o ženi
kojoj su govorili da je
nedovoljna
kriva za sve
čak i za način na koji hoda
preselila se na ostvo
posmatrala je palme i
talase (Kuzmanović 2020, 12).³¹

The question of survival, primarily emotional and mental rather than material, is raised in almost every poem. The bureaucratic procedures and practical organization of relocation described, for example, in the poems *Preselila sam se* (*I Moved away*) and *Čekala sam osam meseci* (*I Was Waiting for Eight Months*), as well as the outcomes of these endeavors themselves, despite their undeniable importance in fulfilling the *right to life* abroad (Morley 2000, 26),

³¹ «This is the story of a woman / who was told to be / insufficient / guilty for everything / even for the way she walked / she moved to the island / watched palm trees and / waves».

contradict what the lyrical subject considers as *real life* and a sense of life. Betrayed expectations and coldness in relationships with loved ones appear to be more hurtful and exhausting than providing the documents that would guarantee dignity in living in a foreign land. The inability of documents to create a meaning in life is, therefore, substituted with *writing lists* and *poetry* as a simulation of life (Kuzmanović 2020, 24). In addition to this feeling of meaningless life there stands the fact that abroad is not a place that could be called *home* or even a *house*; the places are all most often referred to with the nouns *building*, *apartment*, *your house*, *his house*, etc., stressing that they belong to someone else and that the superficial or inconsistent relationships with the people living in them mean that the space cannot be perceived as familiar, or as pleasant to and appropriated by the lyrical subject. The experience of residing in a foreign land is also accompanied by the idea of returning home (Morley 2000, 46). However, this idea in M. Kuzmanović's poetry is not interwoven with nostalgic nor utopian reflections, but rather emphasises the uncertainty and insecurity of the space of the previously left home. Recognition of the road that leads home is reflected through the memory of the front door's code (Kuzmanović 2020, 45), so the only key that lets the lyrical subject inside the home space and that guarantees the home's existence is the lyrical subject's memory.³²

³² Since «The mobility of choice [...] is [...] “quite different from the mobility of the international refugee or the unemployed migrant as a social experience”» (Morley 2000, 153), it comes as a no surprise that the unique vision of the relocation and home will appear when the change of residence is caused by force and violence. This theme is one of the dominant ones in Željana Vukanac's poetry. Many poems implicitly or explicitly allude to the historical circumstances that followed the disintegration of SFR Yugoslavia and that resulted in the suffering and loss of the homes of many. Vukanac's poetical attitude towards this situation and regarding the idea of home can be best seen in the poem *dugo telo jablanovo* (*long body of a black poplar*). Literal demolition of a house by the fall of a black

Family : Home

Bearing in mind the claim that «society has grown more ‘family oriented’, the family itself has identified more and more squarely with its physical location, the home» and «‘Home’ and ‘family’ are now virtually interchangeable terms» (Oakley 1976, 65 as cited in: Morley 2000, 25), it is important to examine how the idea of family and then the representation of family relationships figure in the constitution of a home space in the poetry of Serbian female authors of the youngest generation. Predominantly, the family those female-authors are presenting is the one where family members are usually alienated – that is, incomplete or dysfunctional, if the term family is understood as a community made up of parents and children. Thus, for example, in Seničić’s poem *nasilje forme koju naseljavam* (*the violence of the form I inhabit*), a family will be named as a building block of society (Seničić 2019, 20), so that in the poem *pséće srce, van književnosti* (*heart of a dog, out of literature*) it will be shown that the family lunch is just a *formality* and a simulation of togetherness and closeness, feelings that both remained trapped in the past and actually belong to it. «Sad memories» and shared experiences that can only bring family members closer – «četvoro odraslih ljudi koji tvrde / da se poznaju»³³ (Seničić 2019, 15) – in this case are contrasted with what is expressed by the poem *tradicija* (*tradition*) and what obviously transcends individual destinies. Apart from denying resemblance to one’s parents, forgetting them turns out to be the only legacy

poplar tree during *the storm* is accentuated by portraying the grandfather who built the house so it lasts forever and resists any kind of mishap, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by alluding to the events that lead to the wrecking of the house i.e. to the ruining the idea of home even before the house itself was materially destroyed – by alluding to the military operation *Storm* (1995).

³³ «four adults who claim / to know each other».

that is passed from generation to generation, and *to have children* (Seničić 2019, 30) means securing one's own path to oblivion.

In Radmila Petrović's poetry, the family is presented as a *family system with axes, pitchforks and rakes* (Petrović 2020, 8), in which there is no place for open expression of any kind of tenderness and affection:

tamo gde sam odrasla
nežnost se ne iskazuje prema
ljudima
ona se čuva
za mačiče što se okote u štali (Petrović 2020, 8).³⁴

The strict framework of patriarchal culture in which the lyrical subject grows up and/or lives, on the one hand influences the lyrical subject making it refer to its rural experience most often with different grammatical forms that mark unity expressed in the pronoun "we": «nalazili smo viljuške / zakopane u kukuruzištu»;³⁵ «neko je dolazio na naše / pašnjake»³⁶ (underline T.K.). Thus, the lyrical subject confirms her awareness of belonging to the community acquired by birth, but also its rootedness in that community by the possibility of reflecting the character of family members, as in the poem *Moja loza ima dar da ti skрати liniju života* (*My Lineage Has the Gift to Shorten Your Life Line*). On the other hand, the very same patriarchal framework and the order realised within it create the need for the lyrical subject to distance itself not only from its wider environment by leaving the village and going to the

³⁴ «Where I grew up / tenderness is not shown to / people / it is kept / for kittens that are born in the barn».

³⁵ «We have been founding forks / buried in the cornfield».

³⁶ «Someone has been coming to our / pastures».

city, but also to distance itself from its family: «pripadam poljani / [...] / ali ne i ljudima koji su je naselili»³⁷ (Petrović 2020, 14).

A very important place in R. Petrović's poetry is occupied by the relationship with the parents. The complexity of this phenomenon can already be seen in the prologue words of her poetry collection, where the birth of the third daughter – that is, the lyrical subject – is announced. The awareness of the family members' (especially the father's) disappointment due to the birth of another female child instead of the desired and predicted son is found in many of R. Petrović's poems, such as *Devojka koja ne veruje u mitove* (*The Girl Who Doesn't Believe in Myths*), *Pre nego što sam pošla u školu znala sam šta je oduzimanje* (*Before I Started Going to School I Knew What the Substraction Was*), *Planina u plamenu* (*Mountain in Flames*), etc. This rupture in the family between *desired* and *given* regarding the child's sex is what permanently and irreversibly marks the destiny and identity of the lyrical subject. Since it is not a male, the lyrical subject is now facing the expectations that are set out for daughters and women, being forced to respond to girl-like desirable patterns of behaviour and to abandon those patterns that are more pleasant but also more manly and therefore condemned:

volela sam pištolje, bagere
i čekić

šta će ti to? ti si žensko
žensko si! govorili su (Petrović 2020, 18).³⁸

³⁷ «I belong to the meadow / [...] /but not to the people who settled on it».

³⁸ «I was fond of guns, excavators / and a hammer // what do you need that for? you are a girl / you are a girl! they were saying».

As a reaction to such demands of the environment, after trying to obey them by being a *sensual, sophisticated, girly-girl* (Petrović 2020, 45), the lyrical subject decides to give up its imposed and any other gender identity, deciding *to stay the one who collects snails in red clogs after the rain* (Petrović 2020, 25), once again choosing a side of nature as the referential one rather than choosing society. Like everything else that led to the feeling of not being accepted, welcomed or tolerated at home (Morley 2000, 17), the decision to leave the village is also misunderstood, making the lyrical subject repeatedly justify itself for making it. Most of the justifications are addressed to the father figure, pointing out unstable and tense father-daughter relationship, as in the poem *Pismo tati* (*Letter to Dad*), where the lyrical subject explains that there are no crucial differences between life in the village and life in the city – since the feeling of loneliness is what prevails in both places (Petrović 2020, 26). Contrasting movie scenes of idealised and romanticised family relations (Petrović 2020, 19) with the actual family experience, the path for the culmination and ironic turn in relationship with the father is set, letting the lyrical subject – the daughter *who has also always been a little bit of a son* (Petrović 2020, 55) – implicitly reveal its love for another girl: «da, tata, imaćeš snaju iako / nemaš sina»³⁹ (Petrović 2020, 61). Describing this situation as a kind of *ingenuity of God*, which enables the father's desire for a son to be more or less satisfied by having a daughter-in-law, Petrović destabilises and undermines the image of the rural world and destroys the framework of the traditionally understood patriarchal family.

As a counterpart to the father's strict and harsh figure, the importance of the mother's figure is reflected already in the title of Petrović collection of poetry and more deeply in the poem of the same name – *Moja mama zna šta*

³⁹ «Yes, Dad, you will have a daughter-in-law, even though / you don't have a son».

se dešava u gradovima, where the mother is presented as a source of understanding, despite her own sad and difficult life:

ona zna da su tatine ruke
armirani beton
reči crni luk blizu očiju (Petrović 2020, 40).⁴⁰

The lyrical subject establishes communication with the mother on a special level – on the one that does not require spoken words and explanations, not even the awakened state (Petrović 2020, 56-57). *The secret language of herbs* used in a sleep between the mother and the daughter exceeds both spatial and communication distance, offering some idea of consolation. However, the figure of the mother is not represented in a totally unambiguous way, since the mother also participates to some extent in creating the feeling of alienation and rejection about which the lyrical subject moans: «samo nikad nisam osetila da sam/majčina ili tvoja dušica»⁴¹ (Petrović 2020, 65).

In Kuzmanović's poetry, there is a clear distinction between what an imaginary idea of the family is and what the family looks like in reality. The idyllic imaginary presentation of parents on vacation hugging and laughing – *Ruine me progone* (*Ruins Haunt Me*) – is contrasted with the description of the literal and metaphorical decay of home described in the poem *Trinaest* (*Thirteen*). Verses describing life in a space filled with the sound of a TV that is always on – «jer tišina nije bila česta u mom / domu»⁴² (Kuzmanović 2020, 56) – allow the background of discordant family relations to be sensed,

⁴⁰ «She knows that Dad's hands are/ reinforced concrete / his words onion close to eyes».

⁴¹ «I just never felt like I was / your or mother's sweetheart».

⁴² «For silence was not common in my / home».

which drives the lyrical subject to think of leaving the family – *thoughts of independent travels and secret escapes* (Kuzmanović 2020, 57). The representation and experience of the family in M. Kuzmanović's poetry can be best understood when the figure of the father and the relationship that the lyrical subject establishes with it are taken into account. Already in the first poems of the collection – *Izвини (Sorry)*, *Godišnjica (Anniversary)*, *Priča o ženi (Story of a Woman)* – the father figure is gradually shaped through the depiction of the father's presence in the lyrical subject's life. By pointing out the constant betrayal of the child's expectations, the separation of the parents and the destabilization of the primary family, the presence of the father figure is transformed into its absence. The figure of the absent father acquires its final form when the lyrical subject confronts its death:

preminuo je na stepenicama
između prvog i drugog sprata
držeci se za srce
a možda u bolnici
ili na putu do nje, rekli su (Kuzmanović 2020, 12).⁴³

Recognition of similarities with the father, «moje lice je tvoje lice»⁴⁴ (Kuzmanović 2020, 9) – that is, the experience of the self as a constant reminder of what (home) and who (father) no longer exist, as well as questioning paternal feelings and intentions (Kuzmanović 2020, 10) –, is what makes the relationship with the father figure deeply ambivalent and difficult to solve. This relationship is further mirrored not only in all the other relationships that the lyrical subject tends to establish with other people and especially men,

⁴³ «He passed away on the stairs / between the first and the second floor / holding onto his chests / but maybe in the hospital / or on the way to it, they said».

⁴⁴ «My face is your face».

but it also strongly influences the lyrical subject's self-perception and its urge to find the meaning of its own existence in an idealised projection of its parents' relationship, as in the poem *31.08.1990*.

Similar to this is the relationship of the lyrical subject with her father that A. Jovanović conveys in her poetry. For example, in the poem *Jedan krivi nos (One Crooked Nose)*, by imagining a situation that would lead to greater physical resemblance to her father or, more precisely, to her father's appearance in the photograph, namely, by *breaking the nose* – an extremely subtle nuance of the anxiety of facing the loss of a father appears. A feeling generated through this poetical situation corresponds to the revelation of the father's absence in a more explicit way, as in the poem *Ocu (To Father)*. Based on the child's memory of its father's statement «ona je moja»⁴⁵ (Jovanović 2020, 30), due to the feelings of guilt and betrayal that create division between the father and the mother in the lyrical subject's perception (Ristanović 2020, 51), the feeling of belonging eventually changes into a voluntary, even compromising alienation – from both the father and the mother: «pričala sam svima da sam ničija/ako kažem mamina sam, znao bi za izdaju»⁴⁶ (Jovanović 2020, 30).

Another type of representation of the family in the poetry of the youngest Serbian female-authors occurs in the case of those figures that belong to a community that could be called an extended family, such as grandparents. Their great importance lies in the fact they are mostly positively connoted and represent exceptional personalities for those who are speaking of them. They are presented in many different ways, so one can find precise and detailed descriptions of the person, but also lyrical sketches and sporadic highlights and anecdotes.

⁴⁵ «She's mine».

⁴⁶ «I was telling everyone I was no one's / if I said I was Mom's, you would know for the betrayal».

The figures of grandparents are most often associated with the period of childhood, i.e. with the feelings associated with it, like carefreeness, security and playfulness. If the figures are neither directly physically present nor participate in the lyrical situation, then they are called to the memory of the lyrical subject, most often by looking at the photographs in which they are presented. Apart from evoking memories and happy moments that are connected with them and which represent the only happy period for the lyrical subject and thus convey a somewhat Bachelardian idea of home (Bachelard 1994), these figures often evoke lessons about the past – *Prase na Vol Stritu* (*A Pig on the Wall Street*, R. Petrović); *Tikve* (*Pumpkins*, A. Jovanović) –; distant in time, the lyrical subjects re-examine their grandparents' experiences and decisions, trying to understand them. In addition to learning about the past, the figures of grandparents are the ones who pass on wisdom and advice to their grandchildren from another life. For example, in R. Petrović's poetry the grandfather, although a patriarchal man, appears as the one with whom the lyrical subject not only has the most similarities – specific arrangement of lines on the palm that predict a similar fate), and who therefore understands her, but is also the one who possesses secret knowledge and skills, almost like a sage or a wizard (Petrović 2020, 54–55).

In opposition to the idyllic period associated with the figure of grandparents, there stands a motive of transience that is also associated with them. It is thus a question of observing and facing the death of older family members and the feeling of loss that remains after their death, as is the case in the poem *težina jula* (the wight of July) and *usamljenost prosečnog kapetana plovidbe* (*the loneliness of the average navigating captain*) by Seničić or *Do mog srca potrebno je deset minuta kolima* (*It Takes Ten Minutes by Car to Reach My Heart*) Petrović.

The feeling of closeness and trust towards grandparents is continued by the idea of awareness of one's roots and origin, which develops further as the

idea of inheritance and transmission from generation to generation. The degree of connection with ancestors that is manifested in the poems varies from author to author, while in Jovanović and Petrović's poems it is explicitly spoken of as *the curse of the ancestors* and the influence of that curse on the life and destiny of the heirs.

Writing a Home

After all the confrontations with various forms and ways of collapsing, with the decaying and disappearing idea of home – the feeling of not belonging to any space (either because that space no longer exists, or because no space feels like one's own) or the value systems they represent, physically distancing oneself from these spaces as a reaction to the oppression they normalise and non-acceptance they generate, emotional distancing oneself from the individuals who inhabit or reside in that space, ambivalent feelings of alienation, non-rootedness and abandonment in contrast to the desire to be accepted, supported and loved – in spite of everything, the youngest Serbian female-authors have not completely given up on the idea of home. Simultaneously with the collapse of this idea, there is the slightly idealistic need for its revival and revitalisation, the urge to make up for the lost connections and the lack of intimacy.

One of the possibilities for realising this aspiration emerges in an attempt to establish a close, intimate, loving relationship with the Other, in which expectations, hopes, dreams and fantasies related to founding a new home are inscribed. Thus the lyrical subject in Kuzmanović's poetry explicitly expresses its desires, describing its vision of an ideal life, which includes a *cottage on a seashore* and *its own man* (Kuzmanović 2020, 60). Confronted with

the repetition of the unwanted behaviour patterns witnessed in its own (primary) family, whose recognition leads to the *breaking of threads of communion* (Kuzmanović 2020, 26), Kuzmanović's lyrical subject is, however, once again left on her own, facing the loneliness and alienation known and experienced from the very beginning of its life (Kuzmanović 2020, 61).

A similar conclusion is expressed by Jovanović in her poem *B*, where one rare moment of intimacy with the loved one is depicted, the moment that produces the feeling of home: «mirišeš na so i dom/mirišeš na kuću koju sam oduvek htela»⁴⁷ (Jovanović 2020, 10). Confronting the question how one can determine what the home really is – is it *the cement or the people?* (Jovanović 2020, 14) – the lyrical subject concludes with the traces of hope that one day there will be a place to call home.

In Petrović's poetry the difficulty of establishing a relationship with the Other stems precisely from the tension between city and village as opposing poles in her poetry. Even though promising, city space does not offer true love and compassion, at least not in a relationship with any of the male inhabitants of the city, since their vision and perception of the world do not correspond to those of the lyrical subject. As a village is intolerant to anything that disrupts its strictly established system, order and habits, the same-sex love that the lyrical subject experiences as the only true one is not acceptable, and therefore has to remain a secret, rendering the lyrical subject unable to present itself for what it really is.

As the search for the alternative home in Other has failed, loneliness in space makes the lyrical subjects turn to themselves. This attempt is pointed out already in some of the «literary nutshells» constituted by titles, raising textual expectations (Maiorino 2008, 2) – in Seničić's *povremena poput vikend-*

⁴⁷ «You smell like salt and home / you smell like the house I've always wanted».

naselja and Kuzmanović's *Ovo telo je hotel*. Fulfilment of those expectations is shaped in various ways. The realisation that one is one's own home, that one's body represents home itself comes ambiguously; on the one hand, it comes as a final confirmation of the alienation, loneliness, and impossibility of achieving intimacy with the Other, the betrayal and abandonment of the traditional concepts of home and family; self-confidence, self-awareness, readiness to accept oneself and fight for oneself, on the other hand, mean defence and actually preservation of home.

Therefore Kuzmanović's initial metaphor of a *body as a hotel* develops, explaining itself firstly in the verses «ne znam šta je dom/moje telo jedina domovina»⁴⁸ (Kuzmanović 2020, 59), and secondly in the poem *Ovo telo je hotel* (*This Body is a Hotel*), which mirrors one's urge to master one's own body and thus one's own space, by letting visitors in and out, i.e. by defining relationships with other individuals. In another way, it expresses the universal idea of the shortness of human life versus time, where the body occurs only as a temporary abode. The moment of coming to this realisation is the fruitful moment of true contact with oneself. Fruitful, because being in touch with oneself, no matter how strange, uncanny or scary it may seem, is, as in the title of another poem by Kuzmanović, *how collections of poetry are created* (Kuzmanović 2020, 35).

In Seničić's book conceptualisation of the self as a space is even more strongly foregrounded: the title together with the introductory fragment in which the lyrical subject refers to itself through a sort of advertisement form – as a space of *small square footage*, the one that is *equipped only with the necessary* (Seničić 2019, 5) – represents only the beginning of the later developed image of the lyrical subject's identity. This image is being built on two contrasting

⁴⁸ «I don't know what home is / my body only homeland».

poetic pictures that represent the lyrical subject's experience of a self as *an object under video surveillance* and *a landscape of exceptional features* (Seničić 2019, 66). Later on, this image is being transformed into inner landscape of a self – a place the lyrical subject never visited before (Seničić 2019, 71-76). This landscape turns out to be the only one the lyrical subject is *responsible for* and the only one that does not demand any action (Seničić 2019, 68). But once this place is reached, the creation of the poems is enabled, so this inner landscape becomes the home of writing.

Although in Petrović's and in Jovanović's poetry the idea of self as a concrete space is not so strongly pointed out, some awareness of this sort of conceptualisation is present. For instance, asking itself: *Does the sadness come from the village?*, Petrović's lyrical subject answers by presenting a soul as a *piece of land* that should be overtaken, controlled, nurtured and cultivated, *weeded from the need of understanding*, before surrendering it to someone else (Petrović 2020, 60), showing that, even in the attempt to overcome the rigid framework imposed by birth, some of its traces remain in a form of thinking and writing. In Jovanović's poetry, however, the awareness of the lyrical subject that its own *self will have to serve as an insecure foundation prone to collapse, until it creates a poem about the housebuilders* (Jovanović 2020, 14) proves that writing or expressing oneself in general are close to the understanding of the idea of home, i.e. that only through writing and singing can one be built.

Apart from turning to space in their titles, the four poetry collections presented in this text, appear to have another common characteristic indicated through the thematisation and conceptualisation of different spatial relations – the absence or destruction of the idea of home. Writing about destroyed homes and the change of their meaning, selected female authors preserve those destroyed homes and allow them to last and live separately from the space itself and the individuals that inhabited it. At the same time, writing

poetry is a road that leads the youngest generation of Serbian female authors to find and build their new home.

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