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On Prosthetic Memories and Phantom Limbs: Borderline Translation in Alen Mešković's *Ukulele Jam*

"Is there or is there not a literature of migration in Denmark?"

The term *travelling memory*, coined by Astrid Erll to reconceptualise transcultural memory as "the incessant wandering" of memory-related expressions and their carriers across linguistic, social and political borders is, as its originator herself pointed out, "a metaphorical shorthand" (2011, 11). This useful metaphor is actually quite unmetaphorical though, because it foregrounds the literal movement of people over territorial boundaries: "[t]ravel, migration and transmigration, flight and expulsion, and various forms of diaspora lead to the diffusion of mnemonic media, contents, forms and practices across the globe" (Erll 2011, 11). In other words, the production of transcultural memory often involves people crossing borders or sometimes being forced to cross borders, and this always means that they carry meaning in the form of words, languages and stories across borders. Where there are migrants, there will be movement of memories through migrant literature.

In Denmark however, the dominant discourse on migrant literature in the country has centred on the lack of it, despite the obvious presence of migrants, continually highlighting both the need for and the absence of migrant writing (Gaettens 2013, 69). In an article contrasting the global significance of migrant literature with the perceived scarcity of migrant writers in Denmark for example, the literary scholar Søren Frank felt compelled to ask, "Is there or is there not a literature of migration in Denmark?". The question, which is also the title of Frank's article, is provocative on purpose and Frank goes on to argue that migrant writers are out there, "that is if one looks hard enough". We must take this question at face value though, because Frank also states that "one could claim, with good reason, that there are no migrant writers in Denmark" (2013, 197). Frank asked the question in 2013, two years before the migrant crisis that brought some 21,000 new arrivals to Denmark at its peak in 2015, but it is still surprising. In that same year of 2013 after all, the Danish-Palestinian poet Yahya Hassan was catapulted into the pages of the *New York Times* for selling over 100,000 copies of his debut Danish-language poetry collection (Smale 2014), prompting another

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scholar of literature, Hans Hauge, to echo Frank's question in one of Denmark's largest-circulation newspapers, *Berlingske:* "Can immigrants write literature?" (Hauge 2014).

What should we make of this repeated questioning of the existence of migrant writers in Denmark? To make sense of it, we must look more closely at the reasons Frank lists for the seeming absence of migrants on the Danish literary scene, and of particular interest is language, because that is the reason that Frank returns to repeatedly in his analysis.

Having established that the Danish language "functions as a hurdle" and poses "overwhelming problems of expression and creativity to immigrant writers in particular", he also cites Danish publishers who reject manuscripts from aspiring migrant writers because of their "poor Danish language" and because "the quality of the language hasn't been good enough" (Frank 2013, 209). Given this supposed dearth of migrant writers who are competent in Danish, Frank ultimately argues that we should rethink the category of migrant literature so that it can accommodate non-migrant Danish writers who address issues of migration in their work because, after all, in Frank's words, "we live in an age of migration in which we are all, to some extent, migratory beings" (2013, 209).

While there is certainly merit in rethinking migrant literature as a more expansive and inclusive category and while an argument can and has been made against using an author's ethnic background and lived experience as a lens through which to understand migrant writing, which is a practice that is both homogenising and marginalising, I would question here whether this should be done from the monolingual assumption that the literature of migration in Denmark must be written in Danish, or more generally, by presupposing that there is a monolingual national literary canon. I do this by focusing on an example of migrant literature that is actually written in the host language and by discussing the novel *Ukulele Jam* (2011) by the Bosnian-Danish author Alen Mešković as a case study in post-Yugoslav translingual writing.[1] I focus on translingual writing because it challenges the yoking together of subject, language, culture and nation that we can trace back to at least Johann Gottfried Herder and the linguistic nationalism of the German Romantics; and unyoking this is, not incidentally, a prerequisite for travelling memory as defined by Erll (2011, 7).

My main point is that translingual migrant writing can usefully be described as an exercise in translation, and that certain concepts from translation studies –

1 According to Steven G. Kellman, who coined the term, translingual authors like Mešković are "authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one" (2000, 9). Mešković publishes primarily in Danish but also translates into and has published essays in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S).

primarily borderline translation practices such as self-translation and pseudotranslation – can be mobilised to analyse it. Furthermore, analysing it in this way provides an insight into how memory travels across and beyond borders and allows us to rethink Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory in a way that both reinforces the possibility of a universal identification with the migrant condition and outlines its limitations at the same time. For Landsberg, prosthetic memory occurs "at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past" when "the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live" (2004, 2). Crucial to this definition is that prosthetic memories are not derived from actual lived experience. Mešković employs self-translation and pseudotranslation in his novel, and these practices not only create a space where prosthetic memories can be formed within his adopted Danish-language community by enabling that community to identify with the migrant condition, but they also register the phantom pain left in the wake of the violent disintegration of his former homeland of Yugoslavia, and the fragmentation of the once common tongue Serbo-Croatian, thus opening up a new understanding of prosthetic memory as a mechanism for the work of mourning that, to some extent, excludes those who do not share the same or at least a similar lived experience.

Migration, translation, and memory

The term "travelling memory" foregrounds the literal movement of people, but metaphor imposes itself here almost immediately because migration is, metaphorically speaking, translation as the Greek *meta phorein* meaning "to carry across" meets the Latin *translatio*, again "to carry across". Salman Rushdie notes the Latin etymology of the word "translation" in his essay *Imaginary Homelands*, and famously claims that writers in his position, the "exiles, or emigrants or expatriates", are "translated men" (1991, 71). By extension, all migrants are translated people in some sense, having moved or been removed from a source environment to a target culture. Considering migration and translation in conjunction has opened up a new area of scholarly inquiry, as evidenced by the proliferation over the past two decades of academic conferences, university seminars, dissertations, special issues of journals, and academic monographs addressing this intersection.[2] To date, however, translation studies has not grappled with how trans-

2 In marked contrast to the absence of almost any mention of migration in the 1998 edition for example, the 2008 edition of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* contains separate

lation is implicated in reproducing limiting, assimilation-based narratives of migration. Traditional approaches to translation that conceptualise it as the unidirectional movement of a text across a linguistic border with equivalence as the end goal endorse a narrative that also characterises migration as a simple, if sometimes painful, unidirectional process, an interlude between the homeland and the host country as fixed points of departure and arrival, with assimilation as an idealised endpoint.

More recent theoretical approaches to translation that seek to redefine it without recourse to the concept of the border can help us avoid these pitfalls of binary thinking (Pym 2003; Sakai 2012). Edwin Gentzler explains:

> [W]hat if we erase the border completely and rethink translation as an always ongoing process of *every* communication? What if translation becomes viewed less as a speech-act carried out between languages and cultures, and instead as a *condition* underlying the languages and cultures upon which communication is based? [...] If there is no border, then there is no source or target language; distinctions between 'home' and 'foreign' tend to disappear. (2012)

Gentzler's call to reimagine translation as neither a product presented as the translated text, nor the finite process that is the act of carrying a text across a boundary, but rather as a process and a mode of communication that is always ongoing resonates with long-standing efforts within the study of migrant literature to recognise that for many people, migration is not "a mere interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but a mode of being in the world—'migrancy'" (King et al. 1995, xv).[3] Furthermore, reconceptualising translation as more than a one-way transfer across a linguistic border also resonates with research into transcultural memory and Erll's claim that "memory fundamentally means movement [...] across and *beyond* boundaries" [emphasis mine] (2011, 15).

This potential intersection between memory studies, translation studies and migrant literature has not been explored sufficiently. Bella Brodzki and Siobhan Brownlie have offered productive approaches from the perspective of translation studies for conceptualising the interface of memory and translation, but neither

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entries dedicated to "Asylum" and "Mobility", while the 2020 edition also includes an entry on "Migration". Inghilleri's *Translation and Migration* (2017) is a recent academic monograph that focuses on migrants as agents and objects of translation, and a number of other monographs have applied translation studies frameworks to the study of migrant literature, including Cutter 2005, and Karpinski 2012.

3 In an interview with the Bosnian press, for example, Alen Mešković states, "[M]eni koji sam od četrnaeste godine migrant, i još uvijek sam i uvijek ću to biti, to nije na taj način društveno-politička tema" [For me, because I've been a migrant since the age of fourteen, and I am still a migrant and will always be one, migration is not a socio-political topic in that way] (2019b).

fully addresses the context of migration (Brodzki 2007; Brownlie 2017).[4] Furthermore, existing scholarship on the nexus of memory and translation tends to focus on cultural translation. Eneken Laanes's recent article on "born-translated memories", which applies Venuti's notions of domestication and foreignisation strategies to the "cultural translation of Soviet state terror" (2021, 42) in order to theorise the transnational travel of memories and to problematise the notion of prosthetic memory, is a good example of this. In my reading of Mešković's *Ukulele Jam*, I follow Laanes's call to

> explore both the enabling and the problematic domesticating and foreignising effects that result from the use of transcultural memorial forms in the articulation of local memories in different parts of the world as well as the ethical and political questions raised in this process of translation. (2021, 51)

However, I will move away from utilising the concept of cultural translation, which is necessary when addressing migrant writing because, as Boris Buden, Brigit Mennel, and Stefan Nowotny among others have argued, the concept of cultural translation runs the risk of reinforcing the exploitation that migrants are already all too often exposed to. The notion of cultural translation places significant emphasis on the metaphorical link between spatial and linguistic mobility to present a vision of a post-national society where the hybrid individual can freely traverse fluid boundaries without obstacles. But although translation is not just the transfer of linguistic units between languages, it is *also* that, and as such it plays a part in the exclusionary processes of nation-building, where migrants "appear as the human embodiment of untranslatable foreignness today" (Buden et al. 2011). In other words, translation takes place in actual social and political situations and is intricately intertwined with questions of power. Any refugee who has had to navigate state bureaucracies, where translation is a tool in the administration of power, would tell us as much (Blommaert 2009; Maryns 2017).

Instead of cultural translation, which does away with the idea of translation as an activity applied to a text involving at least two languages, I employ the concept of "borderline translation", which retains an emphasis on translation as a textual practice involving multiple languages and can provide an analytical tool for understanding translingual writing. "Borderline translation" is a term first proposed by G.C. Kálaman (1993) in a short but generative article in order to critique Jakobson's

4 In a very recent contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of Translation and Memory*, Brownlie (2022) addresses the role of translation in the mnemonic trajectories of migrant stories.

classic paradigm of intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation.[5] Káláman does this by highlighting marginalised translation practices such as self-translation, where the identity of the author and translator are at stake; those such as pseudotranslation, where the existence of a source text or target text is at stake; and those such as zero translation, where the distinction between the source language and target language is at stake. Káláman's investigation and classification of borderline translation practices that destabilise the binary oppositions like author/translator, source text/target text, or source language/target language that structure the traditional approaches to translation has been taken up by translation studies scholars to reconceptualise translation as fundamentally non-linear, meaning it is more than a one-way transfer from one language into another. I would argue that this is also a useful concept for both memory studies and the study of migrant literature because, as the following case study illustrates, neither the circulation of memories nor the travel of migrants is a simple unidirectional process. I examine here the specific forms of borderline translation that are deployed in Mešković's *Ukulele Jam* as strategies for mediating traumatic memories across linguistic and national borders in order to highlight the crucial role played by borderline translation practices in the travel of memories from the Yugoslav wars across multiple social frameworks of memory.

Alen Mešković's *Ukulele jam* (2011)

Alen Mešković is arguably the best-known Scandinavian representative of post-Yugoslav migrant writing and he has also achieved a degree of literary fame across the former Yugoslavia.[6] While the majority of post-Yugoslav migrant writers in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway continue to write and publish exclusively in

5 Jakobson famously classifies all translation into three categories: intralingual translation or rewording is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language"; interlingual translation or translation proper is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language"; and intersemiotic translation or transmutation is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (1959, 233).

6 It could be argued that Slavenka Drakulić, who left Croatia for Sweden in the early 1990s and now lives in Stockholm and Zagreb, is better known both internationally and in the former Yugoslavia. Drakulić, however, was already a well-established journalist and non-fiction writer on the Yugoslav literary scene before the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia and became famous, or infamous, in the early 1990s when she was denounced in the nationalist Croatian press for her anti-war activism.

their first language of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, or B/C/S,[7] Mešković belongs to a generation of writers who learned Danish, Swedish, or Norwegian at a younger age and have either switched completely into one of these languages or, like Mešković, write in multiple languages.[8] In this sense, his work is an interesting case study in the movement of memories across and beyond borders through the medium of migrant literature because it is possible to trace its reception both within Scandinavia and in the former Yugoslavia, and also to trace the role that translation plays at each site of reception.

Mešković's published work to date consists of a collection of prose poems, *First Return* (*Første gang tilbage*, 2009), and two novels, *Ukulele Jam* (2011) and *One-Man Tent* (*Enmandstelt*, 2016), and it all straddles the space between autobiography and fiction and can best be described as autofiction, or fiction that is heavily indebted to autobiography, which blurs the distinctions between the author, the narrator or speaker, and the character. *Ukulele Jam*, his first novel and the case study for this article, features a first-person narrator who is identifiable in many ways with Mešković himself, and so a short biographical sketch of the author may be helpful.

Mešković was born in 1977 in Derventa in what was then the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and he and his family were forced to flee from the newly independent Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, across a newly established national border and into neighbouring Croatia. In a recent interview, Mešković reminisced that as a fourteen-year-old boy living in Derventa, he dreamt of two things – playing for Sarajevo Football Club and being in a rock'n'roll band. Instead though, he became a refugee at fourteen, and fourteen years later, having made his way to Copenhagen and into the Danish language after two years in a Croatian refugee camp, he became a published author in Danish in 2006: "I became a writer in another country and another language, in Denmark and in Danish" (Mešković 2022, 0:40)[9] he comments. Mešković debuted on the Danish literary scene with a selec-

7 The language formerly known internationally as Serbo-Croatian was given its present name, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, or "the virally echoing BCS acronym" by translators at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (Longinović 2011, 283). In this article, I use "Serbo-Croatian" to refer to the official language used across the former Yugoslavia before its dissolution and "Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian" or "B/C/S" to refer to the standard language after the dissolution.

8 In his comprehensive study of Bosnian migrant writing in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, Muratspahić (2019) documents the work of 87 writers, with 60 residing in Sweden, 17 in Denmark, and 10 in Norway. Of these, only 17 have published in Swedish, Danish or Norwegian. Muratspahić's study does not cover authors who have switched into a third language, like Elvis Bego and Adnan Mahmutović, who both write in English.

9 "Postao sam pisac u jednoj drugoj zemlji i na jednom drugom jeziku, u Danskoj i na danskom". Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

tion of poems in the *New Voices* (*Nye stemmer*) anthology that was the result of a competition for "ethnic literature" initiated by Denmark's leading publishing house Gyldendal, and this coincided with what critics have described as "the beginning of a real breakthrough for immigrant writers into Danish literature" (Gaettens 2013, 63). Although Mešković never fully embraced the description of him in the Danish literary scene as an "immigrant writer" (Krasnik 2009), he maintains that: "I don't think that it's a coincidence that so many refugees become artists. Being a foreigner, if you ask me, is stimulating to art" (Mešković 2019a).[10]

Mešković's refugee experience certainly informed his debut novel, *Ukulele Jam*, which chronicles two and a half years in the life of a teenage Bosnian refugee, Emir Pozder or Miki for short, who lives with his parents in a Croatian refugee camp on the Adriatic coast. With his brother missing in a Serbian detention camp, Miki experiences flashbacks to his childhood in Bosnia and the beginning of the war there, and he yearns to escape to the Promised Land, which in his case is Sweden. The novel ends on a cliffhanger, where Miki has run away from the refugee camp but only made it as far as the next town along, with vague plans to travel on to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, and from there to Sweden. It is only in the novel's sequel, *One-Man Tent*, that we meet up again with Miki, who is now a refugee in a Danish asylum centre, having been detained there on his way to Sweden. It might seem counterintuitive to focus on *Ukulele Jam*, a novel that largely takes place in a Croatian refugee camp, when looking at post-Yugoslav migrant writing in Scandinavia, given that it is the sequel that takes place in Denmark, but the very role of Scandinavia as nothing more than a far-off fantasy in this novel makes the author's decision to write it in Danish and its reception in Denmark all the more interesting.

Ukulele Jam as a self-translation into Danish

Mešković composed *Ukulele Jam* in Danish, and so the novel is not a self-translation in the more restricted sense of the term of an author translating their own text from one language into another, resulting in two written texts. In a broader sense, however, self-translation can be viewed as "the translation process occurring when a bilingual writer chooses to write in a second or acquired language", whereby self-translation becomes "an integral part of the 'original' creative writing process" of multilingual authors (Evangelista 2013, 178). Strictly speaking,

10 "Jeg tror heller ikke, at det er et tilfælde, at flere tidligere flygtninge bliver kunstnere. For det at være udlænding, tror jeg, er kunstnerisk set stimulerende".

Ukulele Jam is an instance of the narrow self-translation embedded within broader self-translation, because after initially composing the first twenty to thirty pages of the novel in B/C/S in 1998, Mešković returned to the project some years later, heavily editing this initial manuscript before rendering it into Danish and completing it in that language (Mešković 2011, 04:53). In this sense, *Ukulele Jam* is an original work written in the target language or, in Rebecca Walkowitz's formulation, an example of a literary work written in "languages that are translated from the start and owe their present shape to prior words and prior users of words". In such cases Walkowitz argues, where multilingual authors push against the primacy of the original language, "[w]e are confronted with dynamic processes of production and circulation featuring multiple beginnings and revisions" (2022, 325).

One of the reasons that Mešković gives for choosing to write *Ukulele Jam* in Danish after the failed attempt to write it several years earlier in B/C/S, is that he needed additional distance in both time and language to narrate the main character's traumatic experiences during the Bosnian War, and the subsequent trauma of becoming a refugee. In an interview in B/C/S, Mešković reflects on this need for another language, which he was able to satisfy with Danish: "When therapists work with traumatised patients who cannot narrate their experience, they say, 'Give it a go in English!'. Similarly, that linguistic distance allowed me to address things that perhaps I couldn't have in Bosnian" (2011, 04:53).[11]

The risk of being unable to address a traumatic event and the role of literature in countering that risk is discussed in a similar vein by the Bosnian poet Senadin Musabegović in the introductory note to his collection of war poetry, *The Shovel from Heaven* (*Rajska lopata*, 2004):

> In the peace that follows war, we are confronted with a spine-chilling silence where all the fractures, stress and echoes of war are congealed. The chaos of war [...] emerges from that silence, breaking through as a stifled moan or repressed scream, muted by the post-war silence. [...] The drama of war is ensnared in that scream, but never fully articulated. In other words: it has not been shaped into a Munch-like scream that would externalise all the terrors of war and post-war reality. In such circumstances, peace begins to resemble war [...] and in this peacetime, war begins to dictate our inner existence, stretching our skin from within, pressing us down with silence. [...] This poetry is just one attempt to voice the scream that will break through the silence that represses and oppresses us. (Musabegović 2004, 3–4)[12]

11 "Psiholozi kada rade sa pacijentom koji ima traumatični događaj i nije u stanju da ga prepriča kažu, 'Probaj na engleskom!' Isto tako, ta jezička distanca, ili otklon, mi je omogućila da se dotaknem stvari koje na bosanskom možda ne bih".

12 "U miru, što dolazi poslije rata, sudaramo se sa jezivom tišinom u kojoj su zgusnuti svi ratni lomovi, stresovi, odjeci. Iz te tišine izviruju ratna rasula [...] probijaju se kroz prigušeni jauk, ili

Musabegović says that the chaos of war, a word derived from the Germanic *werra* [confusion or strife] is manifested in peacetime in the traumatised silence of the survivors. For healing to happen, the trauma must be articulated "into a Munch-like scream that would externalise all the terrors of war and post-war reality". The purest representation of war, therefore, takes the shape of "an unquotable scream of pain" (McLoughlin 2009, 17), the verbal equivalent of Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream.* As Elaine Scarry has argued, however, pain "has no voice" and it "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language" (1985, 3–4). The scream of pain, therefore, is not only inarticulate but is in a very real sense silent; it takes the form of "the voiceless cry, which breaks with all utterances, […] exceed[s] all language" (Blanchot 1986, 51). Literature faced with war finds itself in a perilous position then, since silence may be the only possible response to war and yet a response must be articulated if war is not to be allowed to continue.

Mešković deftly sidesteps the paradoxical constraint that war cannot be, and yet must be, represented through the very language that it "actively destroys" by translating his representation into another language. At the same time, the inadequacy of any language to convey trauma fully is made apparent in the final pages of *Ukulele Jam* where Miki, having run away from the refugee camp, fantasises about an asylum interview at the Swedish Embassy in Zagreb. He imagines a friendly consul, Mr. Nilsson, who greets him at the Embassy, but in response to the consul's polite question of "Mr Pozder, tell me what you would like, sir?" (Mešković 2018, 366),[13] Miki can only manage an incoherent torrent of words:

> The shells fell. The space around us closed in … But … had I lived a little further away … or many, many kilometres away … like some … yes … But I lived there, and so did my friend Adi! Adi was a nice guy for the most part … I don't know what he's like now … We were crammed into buses one day, the army's buses, and you see Mr Nilsson: I have never liked riding in buses! Nor has my father. He is … (366)[14]

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potisnuti krik, što ga je poslijeratna tišina ušutkala. […] Ratne drame su zapravo u tom kriku kao u kulpku umotane, ali se do kraja ne artikuliraju. Drugčije rečeno: one se nisu uobičile u jedan munkovski krik koji bi svu jezu ratne i poslijeratne stvarnosti ospoljio. U tim i takvim okolnostima mir sve više počinje bivati rat […] tek u miru rat počinje da kreira našu unutrašnjost, da nam iznutra kožu steže i da nas kroz tišinu pritišće. […] Ova poezija je samo jedan napor da se ispusti krik koji će probiti opnu tišine što nas pritišće i štišće".

13 "Hr. Pozder, sig frem, hvad vil De?" (Mešković 2018, 391). All translations into the English are from Mešković 2018, all quotations from the original in Danish are from Mešković 2018. In the following only page numbers will be given for English translation in the main text and for the original in the footnotes.

14 "Granaterne faldt. Rummet omkring os snævrede ind… Men… havde jeg boet lidt længere væk… eller rigtig mange kilometer væk… som nogen… Ja… Men nu boede jeg altså dér, og det

Although Miki tries to heed the consul's instructions to calm down, stop waving his arms about, and be more specific, each subsequent attempt to tell his war story, which takes up the entire penultimate page of the novel, degenerates into a similar muddled mess. Eventually, he abandons all attempts to recount his story, as the otherwise confident, even cocky, voice of the teenage narrator breaks down into a series of ellipses, nonsensical statements, and non-sequiturs.

The asylum interview is, of course, almost always a fraught exchange. In his novel *From Nowhere to Nowhere* (2021, *Nigdje, niotkuda*, 2008), the Bosnian-Norwegian writer Bekim Sejranović presents the interview from the perspective of a Bosnian interpreter, who is unable to convey the sufferings of his fellow countrymen to the uninterested Norwegian bureaucrats: "They would strip naked, and with their muddled thoughts try to give shape to their pain and explain the injustice they had suffered to public officials who, with a few exceptions, generally couldn't care less" (2015, 118).[15] In Sejranović's telling, the asylum interview becomes an illustration of the lack of empathy in a system that can neither acknowledge nor accommodate a refugee's past, and it also becomes an indictment of the inadequacies of translation. Sejranović's narrator is painfully aware of the inability of translation to help traumatised testimony negotiate the gap between languages and cultures, and his sense of helplessness eventually leads to him quitting his job as an interpreter.

In *Ukulele Jam* however, Miki's asylum interview takes place in his imagination, where his interviewer is a representative of a utopian "civilised Sweden, the country where [...] even neo-Nazis liked Bosnians" (136)[16] and where he, as the interviewee, has no need for an ineffective interpreter. But although Miki may be able to do away with the language barrier in his imagination, even he understands at some level that he cannot translate his trauma into a coherent narrative. As the legal scholar Ilene Durst states, asylum applications are often rejected because of "the inability of the asylum applicant, [...] to translate the persecution suffered into a narrative graspable by the adjudicator, and/or the adjudicator's inability to transcend the barriers created by the inherent otherness of trauma" (2000, 128). Perhaps that is why Miki decides before his fantasy asylum interview that he will show the Embassy staff the marks on his body from a recent attack at the refugee camp: "I'll go to Zagreb, find the Swedish embassy, and show them all

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samme gjorde min ven Adi! Adi var en fin fyr... for det meste... Jeg ved ikke, hvordan han er nu... Vi blev proppet ind i busser en dag, i hærens busser, og ser De, hr. Nilsson: Jeg har aldrig rigtig kunnet lide at køre i bus! Det har min far i øvrigt heller ikke. Han er..." (392).

15 "Skidali su se goli, pokušavali svojim zbrkanim mislima dati oblik i objasniti svoju patnju i nanesenu im nepravdu službenicima koje, čast iznimkama, uglavnom nije bilo briga za sve to".

16 "Civilisered Sverige, landet, gvor selv nynazister [...] godt kunne lide bosniere" (143–144).

this swelling and bruises" (365).[17] Miki seems to realise intuitively what Liisa Malkki notes in her article on the significance of medical examinations in Hutu refugee camps: "Their bodies were made to speak to doctors and other professionals, for the bodies could give a more reliable and relevant accounting than the refugees' 'stories'" (1996, 381). Wounds are accepted as objective reality at the asylum interview, where words are always suspect.

Miki has already told his story to the Danish-reading public, however, and told it well, and in Danish no less. His incoherent attempts to tell his story at the asylum interview are a garbled version of the novel's plot, and by placing the imaginary asylum interview at the very end of *Ukulele Jam*, Mešković ensures that his readers will be able to decode Miki's incoherent testimony. The attentive reader can for example connect Miki's random interjection, "you see Mr Nilsson: I have never liked riding in buses!" (366),[18] to an earlier scene in the novel when Miki and his family are packed into "old, stinking buses and driven deep into Serbian territory" (48),[19] where Miki's older brother is taken away by the Serb forces in an episode that marks the rupture between Miki's idyllic pre-war childhood and his war-time exile as a refugee, and forms the traumatic core of the novel. By making such connections possible, Mešković creates the conditions where his readers in Danish can understand Miki's asylum interview testimony and empathise with his position, thus paving the way for prosthetic memories to form.

It is interesting to note that while Landsberg claims that "prosthetic memories can produce empathy and thereby enable a person to establish a political connection with someone from a different class, race, or ethnic position" (2004, 48), prosthetic memory functions somewhat differently in relation to migrant stories. Landsberg focuses on the second great wave of immigration into the United States that brought some thirty-five million immigrants from Europe, and to a much lesser extent from South America, Asia and Africa, to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and examines how early twentieth-century immigrant authors in the US mobilised prosthetic memory in their texts to counter rampant nativism and xenophobic prejudice by demonstrating to the American public that the "huddled masses" could assimilate successfully into American society. She looks at accounts of migration like Mary Antin's autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912) and Henry Roth's novel *Call It Sleep* (1934) and argues that migrants write themselves out of the margins and into the nation in these texts by conflating their stories with grand national narratives, thus taking on the prosthet-

17 "Jeg tager til Zagreb, finder den svenske ambassade og viser dem alle disse hævelser og blå mærker" (391).

18 "Ser De, hr. Nilsson: Jeg har aldrig rigtig kunnet lide at køre i bus!" (392).

19 "gamle, stinkende busser og kørt dybt ind i det serbiske territorium" (49).

ic memories of an Anglo-American past. While they were ultimately successful in serving their political purpose of countering a rising tide of nativism and anti-immigrant prejudice, these stories fail at producing empathy across social borders because they reinforce dominant national narratives by rejecting linguistic and cultural differences (Landsberg 2004, 78–79).

Mešković, however, does the exact opposite in *Ukulele Jam.* The setting that is removed from the Danish context together with the self-translation mean that Miki's refugee story is not domesticated into the recognisable narratives of the target culture, but rather this foreign story is brought into a language that is familiar to the Danish readers, and in the process the text becomes foreignised. Lawrence Venuti, who introduced the terms "domestication" and "foreignisation" into translation studies, says that domesticating translations constitute "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values" (1998, 242); they render the presence of translation and cultural differences invisible, resulting in "acculturation, in which a cultural other is domesticated, made intelligible, but also familiar, even the same, encoded as it is with ideological cultural discourses circulating in the target language" (Venuti 2010, 27). Conversely, a foreignising translation foregrounds the fact of translation in order to "register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text" (Venuti 1995, 68). Mešković maintains his text's foreign status by not covering up the presence of translation in his novel. The very first chapter of the novel ends, for example, with Miki drifting off to sleep while pondering the linguistic connections between the name of the Japanese electronics company Sanyo, the maker of his beloved cassette player, and the Serbo-Croatian word "*sanjati*", meaning "to dream"; in the text, the foreign verb is visually marked by the use of italics, serving as an explicit reminder to the readers in Danish that they are being made privy to Miki's inner thoughts through the medium of translation. Another example of where translation is made explicit in the novel occurs when Miki is tasked by the local Casanova, Igor, to act as an interpreter between him and an attractive English-speaking female tourist. In the ensuing three-way dialogue, the names of Croatian pop bands, which have already been translated into Danish in the exchange between Igor and Miki, become even more ridiculous when rendered into English through Miki's amateurish interpreting efforts. Here, Mešković not only exploits the introduction of a third language, English, for comedic effect, but also uses it as another reminder that for the readers in Danish, Miki's story, like his friend's taste in music, is in any case already mediated through translation.

By refusing to domesticate Miki's story throughout the novel, Mešković effectively activates not only prosthetic remembering in his readers in Danish but also what Elisabeth Oxfeldt has termed "Scandinavian guilt" [*skandinaviske skyldfølels-*

er],[20] an affect that can also be a productive political emotion. This kind of prosthetic remembering that enables empathy while recognising the alterity of the Other has been termed "subtitled memories" or "memories that cross borders while retaining their alterity" by Ann Rigney, and their production is made possible by "the translation of narratives from one European zone to another" (2014, 353). While Rigney focuses on instances of actual interlingual translation, such as the translation of novels by the Yugoslav Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić from the Serbo-Croatian into Western European languages, *Ukulele Jam* illustrates how translingual works of literature can also become contact zones and vehicles for prosthetic memory, in this case, allowing the Danish public to understand and share in Miki's trauma.

Ukulele Jam as a pseudotranslation from the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian

In foreignising his novel, in Venuti's term, Mešković also uses pseudotranslation. Pseudotranslation is a term with a complicated history in translation studies and it has been used to refer to a range of disparate practices and phenomena (O'Sullivan 2011, 123). Anton Popovič, who was the first to define pseudotranslation, puts it under the rubric of "fictitious translation", as "not only a text pretending, or purporting, or frequently taken to be a translation, but also [...] a translation that is frequently taken to be an original work" (Robinson 1998, 183). While pseudotranslation is most often defined in this vein as texts that claim falsely to be a translation, I take it here in the broader sense of a mode of reading. In her essay *When is a Translation Not a Translation?*, Susan Bassnett radically expands the term pseudotranslation beyond the inauthentic source to encompass practices ranging from self-translation to invented dialogue in travel writing. The crux of her argument is that pseudotranslation is not necessarily a property of the text, but it can also be a mode of reading. This mode of reading is premised on what Bassnett terms a "collusion" between the writer and the reader: "[w]hen we collude with something, we go along with it, we agree with it, but only to a certain point", she explains (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 25). Pseudotranslation thus becomes a means of redefining translation as a "set of textual practices with which the writer and reader collude" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 25). This thread is taken up by Brigitte Rath in a paper presented at the 2014 annual meeting of the American

20 "Scandinavian Guilt" or "Scan Guilt" is a feeling of discomfort among Scandinavians when confronted with a global, underprivileged Other (Oxfeldt 2016, 9).

Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) and later included in the ACLA State of the Discipline Report, in which she argues for pseudotranslation as a mode of reading "that oscillates between seeing the text as an original and as a translation pointing towards an imagined original, produced in a different language" (Rath 2014). In *Ukulele Jam*, the Danish-language reader colludes with the author in imagining *in Danish* events that had to have taken place in a different language.

Although she does not use the term "pseudotranslation", Rebecca Walkowitz identifies a similar practice as one of the features of born-translated texts.[21] *Ukulele Jam* is "born translated" because Mešković composed the novel in Danish but, as he has stated in multiple interviews, always with an eye towards its eventual translation into B/C/S. Like the Danish original however, the B/C/S translation functions as a pseudotranslation in asking of its readers to collude in imagining events that had to have taken place in a different language, in that case Serbo-Croatian, which is a language that in some ways can no longer exist. The fragmentation of the common tongue in the wake of the violent dismemberment of Yugoslavia need not be retraced here,[22] but how this fragmentation affected the translation and reception of *Ukulele Jam* in B/C/S should be considered.

Tomislav Longinović has written persuasively about how translation has been used in the post-Yugoslav context as a political tool for constructing differences.[23] He discusses malicious attempts by nationalists knowingly to cause political division by the use of translation, but sometimes this outcome is both inadvertent and inescapable, as with the translation of *Ukulele Jam* into B/C/S. On the very first page of the B/C/S version of *Ukulele Jam* for example, Miki refers to his uncle as "*amidža*" (Mešković 2016, 9), and the post-Yugoslav reader cannot help but hear an ethnic valance in this term. B/C/S does not contain a term for this particular familial relation of the father's brother that is not ethnically marked, and so the translator had no choice but to choose a term that would draw the attention of the reader in B/C/S to the narrator's ethnicity. The way that the new idiom makes

21 "These works [born-translated texts] are *written for translation*, in the hope of being translated, but they are also often written *as translations*, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed. Sometimes they present themselves as fake or fictional editions: subsequent versions (in English) of an original text (in some other language), which doesn't really exist" (Walkowitz 2015, 4).

22 After the initial conjoining of the language and the people in the nineteenth century, Serbo-Croatian became an official language as its speakers were united into the various iterations of Yugoslavia after the First World War, and then it followed its speakers again through the 1990s, when they went their separate ways and deprived it of its official status.

23 "The conclusions drawn from the post-Yugoslav case prove that translation can be effectively used as a political tool for the construction of differences and the tearing down of cultural bridges that promote understanding" (Longinović 2011, 283).

no room for the ethnically neutral, or at least the ethnically ambiguous, is best seen when Miki tries to make sense of the coverage of the war on the evening news. Both the Danish and English versions of *Ukulele Jam* contain references to "Bosnians" – "Serberne og os bosniere, nu kaldet bosniakker, som præsidenten stadig kaldte for muslimer" (20) / "The Serbs and us Bosnians, now referred to as Bosniaks though the president still called us Muslims" (Mešković 2018, 20)] – but the B/C/S version only references Muslims and Bosniaks: "*O Srbima i nama Muslimanima, sada zvanim Bošnjacima*" [About the Serbs and us Muslims, now called Bosniaks] (Mešković 2016, 9). In short, the language itself need not have changed significantly from Serbo-Croatian to the new idiom, and while Mešković worked closely with his translator to recreate a mixture of Bosnian and Croatian that was reminiscent of the pre-war language of his narrator, the changed context in which the language is being received means that the B/C/S reader approaching *Ukulele Jam* inevitably reads it also as a pseudotranslation pointing towards "an imagined original, produced in a different language". This different language is the Serbo-Croatian that, in the early days of the war at least, would have been Miki's mother tongue, something Mešković hints at in the B/C/S version with terms like "hrvatski dinari" [Croatian dinars] (Mešković 2016, 21) for example, using the once-common Yugoslav *dinar* currency to refer to what in the new Croatian language would be the new Croatian *kuna.*

The significance of *Ukulele Jam* functioning as a pseudotranslation even in B/C/S, and the way that this can be useful in reframing prosthetic remembering, is best illustrated through Mešković's use of epistolary conventions in the novel. Miki receives two important letters in the course of the novel, and the contrast between them is telling. One is from his childhood friend Adi, whose letter makes it clear that he has fallen prey to a nationalist ideology that is now encoded in the very language of his letter: "Are there Chetniks over with you?", Adi asks before urging his friend to "Punish those you can, man, and those you can't – Allah will take care of!" (311–312).[24] Even Adi's attempts at nostalgic reminiscence, "Do you remember the good old days? … We played Germans and partisans…" (312),[25] ultimately serve only as a bittersweet reminder that times have changed, and instead of playing Nazis against Tito's Partisans, the teenage boys are living in a world divided between Serb Chetniks and the followers of Allah.

The other letter arrives from Miki's brother Neno, who has been a significant absence at the heart of the novel and who is presumed before the letter arrives to

24 "Er der četnikker ovre hos jer?"; "Straf dem, du kan, mand, og dem, du ikke kan – vil Allah tage sig af!" (332).

25 "Kan du ikke huske de gode gamle dage?… Vi legede tyskere og partisaner…" (332).

be missing in a Serb detention camp. Although this letter is the subject of an entire chapter, which gives detailed descriptions of the postage stamp, the return address with its unfamiliar Swedish orthography, and even the quality of the Swedish paper it is written on, the readers hear the contents of what they are told is a sixteen-page letter only through a few fragments and some paraphrasing. The reader is largely asked to imagine the contents of the letter, and B/C/S readers at least are free to imagine it in whatever version of the common tongue is theirs. This opens up a space in the reader's own language for empathising with Miki, for whom the arrival of this letter signals the end of *his* war, more than any peace talks in some far-off American city could.

I emphasise *his* here, because Mešković does so as well: "*Min krig var forbi*" (278) / "My war was over" (Mešković 2018, 262) / "*Moj rat je bio završen*" (2016, 257). In commenting on the sense of isolation that permeates both *Ukulele Jam* and its sequel, Mešković draws a distinction between Miki's sense of isolation that is produced by being an outsider in Denmark, and the isolation in *Ukulele Jam* that arises because collective trauma is never *really* collective. As Aleksandar Hemon has written eloquently, "once war starts, all the individual lives commence their own, ruthlessly unique trajectories" (2015). War, in other words, besieges. Allowing B/C/S readers to imagine Neno's letter through pseudotranslation however, means that Miki's war becomes our own, and for a moment at least, the letter breaks through the siege, undoing some of the isolation caused by the loss of the shared Yugoslav cultural space and the fact that every refugee's experience is "ruthlessly unique". The resulting prosthetic memory for B/C/S readers is a reminder of the impossibility of a shared Yugoslav cultural space, since the absence of that space is the reason why prosthetic remembering is needed in the first place, and it is also an opportunity to mourn collectively this space for those who share at least a common loss, if no longer the same lived experiences.

Conclusion: Prosthetic memory and phantom pain

In a poem in Mešković's first publication in Danish, the speaker finds an old letter nestled between the pages of an atlas and he comments that, "Even though the road from Me to You is not the same as the road from You to Me, they both wind through the same atlas" (Mešković 2009, 24).[26] This travel of memories across

26 "Selv om vejen fra Mig til Dig ikke er den samme som vejen fra Dig til Mig, snor de sig begge i det samme atlas".

atlases and through letters leads us to another mode of travel, air travel. At 13:01:15 on 15 December 2011, the Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilal uploaded a photograph of an aeroplane to his website. The image is unremarkable, showing a large window, slightly out of focus and haphazardly framed, that looks out at the nose cone of a Delta aeroplane parked on the tarmac. The next image in the series, captured exactly one minute later at 13:02:15, is of the same scene with the camera angle adjusted slightly to show the tail end of the aeroplane. More images with more variations follow at one-minute intervals, as a Gate Gourmet catering truck appears next to the aeroplane in one shot, while someone's shoulder enters the frame in another. The sixth image in the series is a non sequitur, as the camera's perspective swings down to capture a dark passageway. The photographer has presumably stepped onto a passenger boarding bridge.[27]

None of these photographs are particularly accomplished in their execution. We should not blame the photographer for the aesthetic shortcomings of the images though, as his hand and eye had nothing to do with the photographic process. The *3rdi* photographs were taken by a prosthetic in the form of a digital camera implanted into the back of Bilal's head that was rigged to capture automatically one image per minute. The result, says the artist, is a "platform" for producing and disseminating "technological-biological images" (Bilal). These new media buzzwords should not obscure the picture though, because *3rdi*'s technological apparatus may be novel and apparently futuristic, but the artist's purpose is not future-oriented. Bilal's art is shaped by his past. As a refugee from Iraq, he comments in his statement about the work that the *3rdi* project arose "from a need to capture my past as it slips behind me" and goes on to explain that during his journey from Iraq to the US, he left many people and places behind. He wishes he could have recorded them to serve as a reminder of all the places he was forced to leave behind and may never see again. *3rdi*, then, arises from the artist's need to counter the predicament of the refugee, which is the inability to look back and remember because sometimes memories do *not* travel but are petrified. *3rdi*, then, is Bilal's answer to Lot's wife, who having nowhere to turn, turns and is turned into a pillar of salt.

The function of prosthetic memory, as defined by Landsberg, of enabling others to empathise with a traumatic past they have *not* experienced has been discussed at length, and has rightly also been criticised at length, but less has been said about the effects of prosthetic remembering on those who supposedly share

27 These photographs are a small part of Bilal's *3rdi* project, commissioned by the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha for its inaugural exhibition. The entire *3rdi* archive numbering tens of thousands of images is available online at http://3rdi.me.

a collective trauma. Landsberg likens prosthetic memories to artificial limbs with her focus on the "inauthenticity" of the artificial limb (2004, 20). I would argue though that prosthetic memory has another significant function within communities that have experienced trauma; like an artificial limb, or indeed like Bilal's prosthetic eye, it can serve to heal phantom pain. Phantom pain, caused by the amputation of a limb, is more likely to result after a traumatic injury. There is no cure, but one of the most successful treatments is to use a lifelike prosthetic. The neurologist V.S. Ramachandran notes that this treatment is successful because it restores to the body a sense of wholeness, as it literally re-members the body, while the mind is given time to process the absence of the actual limb (Hicks 2013, 18–19). Similarly, Neno's letter in *Ukulele Jam* acts through pseudotranslation as an artificial limb that temporarily creates a shared linguistic and cultural space so that the work of remembering and the work of mourning that space can begin.

And so, finally, what does this post-Yugoslav, translingual, migrant text have to say about the question, "Is there or is there not a literature of migration in Denmark?". What insights can it offer about migrant literature more generally and the role of prosthetic memory within it? I believe we can read *Ukulele Jam* simply as a text composed in Danish, and one that is thus worthy of being included in the canon of Danish migrant writing. But if we recognise translingual literature as an exercise in translation, we may also recognise the value of translation for this canon, precisely because, like Neno's letter, translated texts are not necessarily addressed to us. By recognising this, we can understand that prosthetic memory, in the context of migrant literature, does not always aim to highlight that we are all in a way like migrants. Instead it sometimes allows migrants to reclaim a past that is uniquely theirs by enabling their memories to travel across and beyond linguistic, cultural, national and temporal borders.

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