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## MEMORY, MIGRATION, AND POSTNATIONALISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KOREAN AND CROATIAN DIASPORIC NARRATIVES<sup>1</sup>

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*This article presents a comparative analysis of the representative works of Croatian author Dubravka Ugrešić and Korean American writer Min Jin Lee, examining how diasporic literature narrates memory, migration, and postnationalism. Situated in contrasting geopolitical contexts – post-Yugoslav Eastern Europe and postcolonial East Asia – these authors deconstruct nation-state-centered identity narratives and explore the literary and ethical possibilities of border-crossing subjectivities. Their texts foreground the dissolution of national boundaries and articulate a literary imagination rooted in postnational ethics and diasporic consciousness.*

*Ugrešić critically dismantles nationalist discourse through linguistic dislocation and fragmented memory, representing the existential condition of the exiled subject and the instability of language as a medium of belonging.*

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*In contrast, Lee reconstructs a diasporic ethics based on familial memory and emotional solidarity, narrating the historical legacy of colonialism and racial marginalization. While employing different narrative strategies, both authors challenge fixed identity models and offer narratives that envision hybrid and plural subjectivities grounded in memory, migration, and linguistic multiplicity.*

*Grounded in theories of diaspora, cultural memory, and postnationalism, this study explores how the works of Ugrešić and Lee construct alternative ethical and aesthetic imaginaries. Through their depictions of border-dwelling identities and transnational conditions, this article argues that diasporic literature constitutes a critical site for rethinking global literary discourse and imagining new modes of subject formation beyond the framework of the nation-state.*

**Keywords:** *Diasporic Literature; Postnational Identity; Memory and Migration; Dubravka Ugrešić; Min Jin Lee; Cultural Hybridity; Intergenerational Narrative*

## 1. Introduction

In the twenty-first century, diasporic literature has evolved beyond the simple representation of national identity to construct a complex narrative terrain centered on migration, memory, and cultural boundaries. This body of literature deconstructs the classical narrative frameworks of “settlement” and “root-seeking” by weaving together personal experiences, collective memory, linguistic hybridity, and the scars of history to envision new forms of identity. In particular, diasporic narratives arising from the distinct cultural and regional contexts of Croatia and Korea are noteworthy for their disruption of traditional identity categories – such as nation, language, and ethnicity – and for their active engagement with postnationalist imagination.

This study builds on this critical framework by conducting a comparative analysis of the representative works of Dubravka Ugrešić, a Croatian exile writer, and Min Jin Lee, a Korean American author residing in the United States. Ugrešić gives literary form to the stateless subjectivity and linguistic alienation that emerged following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, using her work to critique nationalism and explore the potential for post-national modes of writing. In contrast, Min Jin Lee narrates the intergenerational experiences of Korean diasporic families in Japan, focusing on the transmission of memory and the tension between cultural

continuity and disruption. Both authors engage core themes of diasporic literature – memory, migration, and identity – while traversing the borders between homeland and hostland, center and periphery, offering valuable grounds for comparison from a postnationalist perspective.

This research is structured around three central questions. First, how do Croatian and Korean diasporic literatures narrativize the issues of memory and migration? Second, in what ways do these literary works critique the nation-centered model of identity and propose alternative postnational perspectives? Third, what similarities and differences emerge in the diasporic subjectivities represented by these two authors, who write from vastly different cultural and historical positions?

To address these questions, the study draws on key theoretical frameworks from diaspora studies (James Clifford, Robin Cohen), theories of cultural memory (Jan and Aleida Assmann, Marianne Hirsch), and postnationalist discourse (Homi Bhabha, Arjun Appadurai). Through close readings of the authors' major works, the analysis explores their narrative structures, modes of representing memory, dynamics of migration, and models of identity formation. Ultimately, this paper seeks to illuminate the significance of postnationalist diasporic literature within contemporary literary discourse, and to examine the ethical and aesthetic potential of literature to reconfigure the boundaries of identity and belonging.

## 2. Conditions for the Formation of Diasporic Identity

The concept of “diaspora” refers not merely to the technical phenomenon of overseas migration or residence abroad, but to a complex socio-cultural condition operating at the boundaries of identity, memory, belonging, and language. While the term originally described the exile of Jewish communities, its contemporary usage in the humanities has been extended to encompass issues of colonialism, racialization, state violence, and the politics of memory.

For example, James Clifford defines diaspora as an existence marked by both “roots” and “routes,” emphasizing that diasporic identity is not characterized by rupture but rather by complex interconnectivity (Clifford 1994: 304). Khachig Tölölyan further describes diaspora as a “memory-based community not assimilated into state-centered narratives,” locating diasporic identity in a marginal space that resists national storytelling (Tölölyan 1996: 15). Such definitions provide crucial insight into the ways

in which diasporic subjects are represented in literature, and suggest that diasporic literature functions not as a passive outcome of displacement, but as a politically situated and culturally active space of engagement.

In this light, analyzing the works of diasporic writers from two regions where state identity and linguistic hierarchy have played a pivotal role – Korea and Croatia – offers a valuable opportunity to reflect on literary resistance to nationalist paradigms and the articulation of postnationalist consciousness.

This chapter draws upon the theoretical backdrop described above to examine the diasporic conditions reflected in the works of Dubravka Ugrešić and Min Jin Lee, as well as the sociohistorical contexts that inform their writing. These authors are not simply writers who have experienced spatial displacement; rather, they are authors who have constructed new literary identities through experiences of political violence, cultural othering, and linguistic loss. Their narratives subvert established notions of nation, ethnicity, and language through the mediating lenses of memory and migration.

Dubravka Ugrešić, a prominent intellectual witness to the dissolution of Yugoslavia – a pivotal political event in late 20th-century Europe – emerged as a writer of exile, alienation, and statelessness. The collapse of Yugoslavia as a multiethnic state did not merely entail territorial fragmentation, but also the disintegration of identity, language, collective memory, and community bonds. Branded as an “unpatriotic intellectual” in the wake of nationalist fervor, Ugrešić departed her homeland and began exploring themes of identity and memory under siege. Her literature interrogates how nationalist language systems disassemble personal memory and subjectivity. In *The Ministry of Pain*, for instance, she demonstrates that the “home of language” is no longer a safe haven. Her exiled characters cannot find belonging in any language; instead, language becomes a volatile reminder of loss. She deconstructs nationalist language and assembles fragments of memory to create a literary space of resistance. This is not only a critique of Benedict Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community” and its inherent violence (Anderson 1983: 145), but also an embodiment of Homi Bhabha’s theory of cultural hybridity and liminality (Bhabha 1994: 219).

Ugrešić thus constructs the condition of diaspora within the framework of political exile, using the dismantling of language, the fragmentation of memory, and the ambiguity of belonging as strategies to contest state-centered identity. Her writing represents both political resistance and

aesthetic experimentation, providing a compelling example of postnational literature emerging from within Europe itself. This can be read as a cultural realization of Arjun Appadurai's notion of the "postnational condition" (Appadurai 1996: 158).<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, Min Jin Lee, a Korean American writer, foregrounds in her fiction the experiences of colonialism, migration, and racial exclusion that unfold within Asia itself. Her acclaimed novel *Pachinko* narrates the lives of four generations of Zainichi Koreans<sup>3</sup> in Japan, revealing how migration is not a singular act of relocation but a generational accumulation of structural marginalization and resistance.<sup>4</sup> Lee presents diasporic identity as multiple, unstable, and perpetually negotiated, exploring how it is shaped by family, language, religion, and economic conditions. Notably, in *Pachinko*, memory functions not simply as nostalgic recall but as cultural memory transmitted and reconfigured across generations (Assmann 2011: 111). Her narratives interrogate how memory extends beyond the individual and implicates the ethical responsibility of community. Although the

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<sup>2</sup> In *Modernity at Large* (1996), Arjun Appadurai defines the "postnational condition" as a state in which identities and communities are no longer exclusively determined by the nation-state, particularly in a global era marked by the waning of state-centered political and cultural control. This condition arises from the transnational flows of media, migration, and capital, which together generate environments in which individuals and communities inhabit multiple identities and cultural hybridity beyond national boundaries.

<sup>3</sup> The term *Zainichi* refers to ethnic Koreans residing in Japan, including both those who migrated during the period of Japanese colonial rule and their descendants. Unlike general foreign residents, the *Zainichi* community emerged from a complex set of historical conditions – including forced migration, colonial domination, the postwar liberation, and the legal fragmentation of national identity. The designation *Zainichi Korean* encapsulates not a legal nationality but a sociopolitical positionality shaped by a history of structural discrimination, cultural hybridity, and contested belonging within Japanese society. In the fields of literature and cultural studies, the concept of *Zainichi* serves as a critical framework for analyzing the formation of transnational identity, the intergenerational transmission of memory, and the politics of cultural liminality beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.

<sup>4</sup> Min Jin Lee conceptualizes her literary endeavor as a "diaspora trilogy," aiming to narrate the lived experiences of Asian American immigrants in the United States through the intersecting lenses of migration, race, class, and gender. The trilogy consists of *Free Food for Millionaires* (2007), *Pachinko* (2017), and the forthcoming novel *American Hagwon*. Among these, *Pachinko* is widely regarded as the most compelling representation of diasporic ethics and conditions, as it intricately explores the multigenerational memory and survival strategies of *Zainichi* Koreans, situating their history within a transnational diasporic framework.

protagonists become increasingly estranged from the language and history of their homeland, it is precisely this remembered homeland that provokes deeper existential and identity-related anguish.

Min Jin Lee centers her literature on the history of migration shaped by colonial and imperial forces, closely attending to the lived experiences of subjects who have been othered by the state. Her portrayal of Koreans in Japan – permanently excluded from full assimilation – highlights the disjunction between citizenship, identity, and language, and renders visible the “liminal condition” of diasporic existence (Hall 1990: 226).

Despite their divergent backgrounds, Ugrešić and Lee both question the concept of the nation-state. Ugrešić writes from the ruins of a dissolved state, questioning national belonging, while Lee writes from within the legacy of colonialism and postcolonial displacement, exploring the pain of a diasporic subject never fully free of imperial structures. Both authors reject a singular, fixed identity, and instead explore hybridity, duality, and the fluidity of selfhood through literature. Their work challenges the imaginative hold of nationalism and experiments with the construction of postnational subjects. These are not merely stories of immigrants leaving home; rather, they interrogate and unsettle the core notions of language, memory, and belonging, offering an ethical and aesthetic vision for the future direction of diasporic literature. The historical and sociopolitical contexts explored in this chapter serve as the groundwork for subsequent analyses of memory, migration, and postnational narratives in the chapters that follow.

### 3. Narratives of Memory: Loss, Representation, and Family

In diaspora literature, “memory” functions not merely as a device for recalling the past, but as a core narrative strategy that culturally reconstructs and redefines the experience of loss. Such memory often exceeds the realm of personal recollection, entailing political configurations and ethical responsibilities surrounding communal history and identity. Jan Assmann defines *cultural memory* as “socially transmitted and institutionalized memory,” through which communities reorganize past events within the value system of the present (Assmann 2011: 37). This concept plays a crucial role in understanding the politics of memory, particularly within diasporic contexts.

In the works of Dubravka Ugrešić, memory is directly connected to the disintegration of symbolic structures and collective narratives that were ruptured by the collapse of Yugoslavia and the surge of nationalist violence.

Her fiction constructs fragmented spaces of memory that oppose state-sanctioned narratives. *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* exemplifies this formal dismantling of memory by utilizing photographs, fragments, and meta-narratives rather than conventional plots to depict the disintegration of recollection (Ugrešić 1998: 21). Here, memory is not a stable recollection but a fractured, incomplete reconstruction of loss. Ugrešić's literary style exposes how memory is readily ensnared by the politics of language. The "sites of memory" in her work are often unstable linguistic domains subjected to state censorship and manipulation. In this regard, her fiction reflects what Aleida Assmann calls the erasure of *lieux de mémoire* under historical violence (Assmann 2016: 94). Through this process, Ugrešić resists state-enforced amnesia, exploring the potential of exile literature to perform memory as political resistance.

In contrast, Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* constructs memory through a multigenerational transmission mediated by family. In this work, memory is not confined to the past but is inherited and transformed through experiences of migration and discrimination. Marianne Hirsch's concept of *postmemory* describes how subsequent generations form what feels like lived memory of events they did not experience directly (Hirsch 2008: 107).<sup>5</sup> In *Pachinko*, although the characters inherit memories of Japanese colonial rule and ethnic discrimination, they reconstruct them differently across generations, thereby shaping new forms of diasporic identity.

Through the protagonist Sunja's life, Lee captures both the continuity and rupture of memory. While Sunja remains silent about her traumatic experiences to protect her family's honor and survival, her son Mozasu and grandson Solomon choose to express or sometimes reject these memories in order to endure life in Japanese society. This suggests that memory is not linearly transmitted but constantly recontextualized based on historical, generational, and cultural positions (Halbwachs 1992: 52). Lee further places memory within the female body – through physical suffering, child-

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<sup>5</sup> *Postmemory* is a term coined by cultural theorist Marianne Hirsch to describe the phenomenon in which members of the second or subsequent generations internalize and embody the traumatic experiences of their parents or grandparents – such as suffering, displacement, and forced migration – as if these were their own memories. The concept is particularly effective in explaining how collective traumas like the Holocaust, colonialism, and diaspora are culturally and emotionally transmitted across generations, becoming central to the formation of diasporic identity and memory narratives in literature. See: Hirsch, M. (2008). "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, 29(1), 103–128.



birth, and labor – demonstrating how memory merges with embodied experience. Sunja's experiences illustrate how private recollections of marginalized women can become politicized and historically significant through literature (Chakrabarty 2000: 93).

The differences between Ugrešić and Lee are evident in the spatial and narrative forms through which memory operates. Ugrešić deliberately embraces fragmentation and dissonance, inviting the reader to experience rupture and absurdity. Lee, on the other hand, adheres more to conventional narrative forms to reconstruct the flow of memory and establish a genealogical lineage of identity and community. Nevertheless, both authors refuse to reduce memory to nationalist or ethnocentric discourses. Rather, they illuminate plural and heterogeneous identities through memory, aligning with the aesthetics of postnationalism.

Furthermore, both authors conceptualize memory not as a mere recollection of the past, but as a political act constituted through language. Ugrešić's characters oscillate between their native tongues and the languages of exile, experiencing identity confusion as language becomes a source of instability rather than belonging. Similarly, Lee's characters inhabit multilingual environments – Korean, Japanese, and English – where linguistic boundaries often mirror the boundaries of memory. In this way, memory is not a psychological phenomenon alone, but a discursive practice embedded in linguistic politics and cultural power structures (Hall 1990: 224).

Ultimately, memory functions as both a consequence of migration and a driving force in the reconstruction of identity in the literature of both authors. It calls forth a narrative ethics that reclaims lost worlds and reshapes the self. In diaspora literature, memory does not serve to recover a fixed origin, but rather to generate new subjectivities from scattered fragments. Ugrešić and Lee, despite their differences in style and context, deconstruct state-organized narratives of memory and envision non-national networks of remembrance. Their works embody the ethics of memory while exposing its aesthetic and political roles at the heart of the diasporic condition.

#### 4. Narratives of Migration: Borders, Language, and Culture

Migration in diaspora literature functions as a key narrative device that drives the fundamental transformation of identity and culture. In contemporary humanities discourse, migration is understood not as a simple act of physical relocation but as an event that reorganizes linguistic and



cultural boundaries while producing multilayered identities. Stuart Hall conceptualizes diasporic identity as a “constantly shifting subject constructed in the space of difference and border” (Hall 1990: 235). Migration narratives thus visualize issues of boundary and belonging, center and periphery, and translate migratory experience into an aesthetic of *hybridity* and *heterogeneity* in literature (Bhabha 1994: 38).

Dubravka Ugrešić’s works represent a literary enactment of such border consciousness. She portrays migration not merely as political exile or voluntary relocation, but as an existential rupture that dismantles the very foundation of language and identity. In *The Ministry of Pain*, Yugoslav refugees gather in a language class in Amsterdam, no longer able to use their native tongue and yet not fully assimilated into a new one – thus rendering them “linguistic stateless subjects” (Ugrešić 2005: 56). The protagonist, Tanja, teaches in a fictitious language she calls “Slocroserbian,” a satirical invention that critiques the nationalistic fragmentation of Serbo-Croatian into politically separated languages – Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian – following the collapse of Yugoslavia (Greenberg 2004: 20). This linguistic division signifies more than grammatical change; it marks the enforced dissolution of identity. Ugrešić renders this condition with irony and empathy, highlighting the pain of dislocated individuals caught on the border of language and self.

Moreover, Ugrešić resists romanticizing the destination space. Western Europe, the place of exile, is portrayed not as a haven but as a site of indifference, normative coldness, and cultural exclusion. Her migration narratives are thus not centered on the loss of homeland alone, but also on the alienation and othering in foreign lands. Through her portrayal of non-belonging, language dispossession, and permanent marginality, Ugrešić interrogates the very conditions of postnational identity.

On the other hand, Min Jin Lee’s migration narratives exhibit a multi-generational and culturally layered structure. Writing not as a direct immigrant but as a descendant of immigrants, she frames migration as a historical continuum shaped by family lineage and structural oppression. Her novel *Pachinko* begins with a Korean family’s departure for Japan during the Japanese colonial occupation in the 1910s and traces four generations of their diasporic life. Migration here is not a singular event but an enduring condition that crosses temporal and systemic boundaries (Lee 2017: 13).

Min Jin Lee particularly highlights the intersections of gender, labor, and migration through the protagonist Sunja, who becomes a factory work-

er, raises a biracial son, and sustains her family. Her narrative shows how migration is not only spatial displacement but also an emotional and ethical act that reshapes bodies, relationships, and memory (Chuh 2003: 75). Furthermore, Lee demonstrates that Japan is not a passive host society; her characters are deeply marginalized and excluded from institutions such as schools, employment, and citizenship. She portrays this condition of exclusion as a layered system of legal, cultural, and linguistic violence (Lie 2008: 109).

Language is a critical site in Lee's portrayal of migration. Her characters navigate between Japanese, Korean, and English, often struggling with conflicting linguistic and cultural codes. This multilingual existence does not stabilize identity but rather intensifies self-questioning and a heightened awareness of boundaries (Hall 1996: 18). Language thus becomes a terrain of memory and identity formation, rather than a mere medium of communication.

Both Ugrešić and Min Jin Lee present migration as a structural coercion rather than a voluntary pursuit. For Ugrešić, it is driven by nationalist oppression and intellectual exile; for Lee, it is a consequence of colonial exclusion and racial marginalization. Yet their literature does not stop at depicting victimhood – it experiments with transnational identity formation at the threshold of belonging. Migration in their works is not about “where” one migrates but “how” one survives and evolves through shifting subjectivities (Appadurai 1996: 175). Migration becomes a liminal space of hybridity and transformation, where meaning is perpetually reconstituted.

The narrative strategies of migration examined in this section are directly connected to the postnational perspective explored in the following chapter.

## **5. The Dissolution of the Nation-State and the Reconstruction of Community: Two Modes of Postnational Narrative**

Contemporary diaspora literature has actively dismantled nation-state-centered identity models, instead constructing heterogeneous and fluid subjectivities that reflect a postnational consciousness. Homi Bhabha suggests that modern identity is formed “at the borders, in hybridity, and in incompleteness” (Bhabha 1994: 113), while Arjun Appadurai conceptualizes postnationalism as “a new mode of imagining community beyond the decline of nation-centered order” (Appadurai 1996: 158). These discourses

are powerfully embodied in diaspora literature, which enables the imagination of communities beyond political boundaries through the lives and narratives of non-state-affiliated subjects.

Dubravka Ugrešić's work engages in a radical deconstruction of the nation-state. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, she resisted the exclusive identity regimes and linguistic violence instituted by emergent nationalist states. Branded as an "unpatriotic intellectual" in Croatia, she declared herself a "stateless writer" and "exile," literary identities through which she explored the alienation and linguistic displacement of individuals removed from the nation.

In *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, Ugrešić portrays the "nation" as a mechanism of linguistic and mnemonic oppression. Her characters relinquish or evade national affiliation, finding instead a higher degree of ethical autonomy in the life of the outsider. The novel imagines an alternative community grounded not in state-centered identity but in shared loss and memory (Ugrešić 1998: 88). Her fiction subverts Benedict Anderson's notion of the "imagined community" by envisioning communities constructed through language and memory rather than through national institutions (Anderson 1983: 145). Moreover, Ugrešić depicts migrant existence not as a path to cultural integration but as a permanent condition of liminality. Having been alienated from the nation, her characters are paradoxically liberated from the violence of nationalism, revealing the potential for border subjectivity to form an alternative identity. This aligns closely with Bhabha's theory of the "Third Space," in which hybridity and liminality become generative sites for identity formation (Bhabha 1994: 56).

In contrast, Min Jin Lee maintains a more traditional narrative structure while internalizing a postnational perspective. Her characters in *Pachinko* either fail to acquire or actively reject Japanese citizenship, yet they establish unofficial identity communities through familial and communal ethics. Lee portrays the lives of Zainichi Koreans – Koreans residing in Japan without formal citizenship – and how they maintain dignity and ethical integrity outside the formal nation-state structure (Lee 2017: 287). In *Pachinko*, community is constructed not through state mechanisms but through networks of care. Though Sunja and her family remain marginalized within Japanese society, they build solidarity through mutual care, silent resistance, shared meals, and religious rituals. In this way, Lee envisions a postnational ethic grounded in the imagination of community at the borderlands of the state (Chuh 2003: 94).

Lee's notion of postnationalism is not overtly oppositional but is instead an ethical practice reconstructed through the conditions of everyday life. Her literature exemplifies what Appadurai calls the "postnational condition" realized in the intimate spaces of family, neighbors, and daily survival (Appadurai 1996: 176).

While both authors articulate narratives that transcend national borders, their literary strategies and critical emphases diverge. Ugrešić exposes the ideological violence of national language through textual deconstruction, while Lee quietly reveals the dignity and resilience of minority subjects living outside the state's purview. Ugrešić's is a writing of deconstruction, whereas Lee's is a narrative of reconstruction. Both, however, work toward deterritorializing identity and envision new cultural topographies formed by border-dwelling subjects. Their literature interrogates not only political communities but also the possibility of emotional and mnemonic communities, redefining identity as a narrative structure to be constructed rather than a fixed attribute. This suggests that diaspora literature is not merely a peripheral discourse but a viable alternative narrative to the dominant nation-centered literary canon (Hall 1996: 21).

Ultimately, Ugrešić and Lee represent two dominant tendencies in postnational literature: one that dismantles the signifiers of the nation-state through radical critique of language and state structures, and another that builds non-state identities grounded in ethical memory and relational belonging. Both transcend the modern literary tradition centered on the nation-state, offering new directions for contemporary literature that embrace border subjectivity, polyvocal aesthetics, and ethical community beyond national allegiance.

## 6. Comparative Discussion and Literary Implications

In the preceding chapters, this study has analyzed the narratives of memory, migration, and postnationalism in the works of two diaspora writers – Dubravka Ugrešić and Min Jin Lee – who hail from distinct regional, cultural, and historical backgrounds. This chapter synthesizes those findings from a comparative perspective to evaluate the literary strategies and discursive positions adopted by each writer.

Foremost among their commonalities is their shared critique of nation-centered identity narratives through diaspora literature, and their efforts to propose new modes of subjectivity and community. Ugrešić, having directly

experienced the dissolution of a nation-state, exposes the violence embedded in the signifiers of language, memory, and nationhood. In contrast, Min Jin Lee, writing as a second-generation diasporic subject shaped by the legacies of colonialism and racism, articulates an alternative ethics and community outside the framework of the state. Both authors deconstruct nationalist discourses of language and memory while exploring new ethical foundations for belonging (Appadurai 1996: 163; Hall 1996: 21).

In terms of memory, the two authors pursue divergent strategies. Ugrešić undermines nationalist historiography through fragmentation, anti-narrativity, and repetition. In her fiction, memory is dispersed and irretrievable, a space of oblivion and loss (Assmann 2011: 38; Ugrešić 1998: 45). Min Jin Lee, on the other hand, portrays the intergenerational transmission of memory through family narratives, attempting to restore community lineages. Though fractured, her representation of memory remains anchored in familial continuity (Hirsch 2008: 117; Lee 2017: 211).

Migration, too, is configured differently. Ugrešić's narratives emerge from the context of political exile and linguistic disintegration, portraying her characters as border subjects who belong nowhere (Bhabha 1994: 112). Migration for her becomes an experience of perpetual instability and dislocation. Conversely, Min Jin Lee contextualizes migration within structural discrimination and strategic survival, portraying the affective and historical labor of Zainichi Koreans living in Japan (Lie 2008: 109; Chuh 2003: 88).

From the perspective of postnationalism, both authors interrogate the legitimacy of the nation-state while seeking possibilities for alternative community formation. Ugrešić experiments with the idea of a "community of memory" beyond political affiliation, while Min Jin Lee suggests the dignity of diasporic life through an invisible communal ethic, not dependent on legal citizenship. Ugrešić neutralizes the national language through deconstructive writing, and Lee ethically reclaims marginalized lives through affective and communal practices (Anderson 1983: 144; Bhabha 1994: 57).

A key comparative insight lies in their shared narrative focus on "subjects at the border." This border position is not merely one of marginalization, but rather a space of emergent perception and identity. Being outside the center enables a heightened awareness of multiplicity, multilingualism, and hybridity (Hall 1990: 236; Bhabha 1994: 120). In literary form, Ugrešić adopts experimental narrative techniques to deconstruct the very form of literature, employing fragments, photographs, recollections, and polyvocal

storytelling to emphasize the fractured nature of memory and elicit imagined solidarities. Min Jin Lee, while preserving conventional narrative frameworks, intricately weaves diasporic histories and ethics through multi-generational characters and complex plot structures. Their divergent styles demonstrate that diaspora literature resists reduction to a single mode and instead embraces layered forms of aesthetic practice (Ugrešić 2005: 78; Lee 2017: 304).

Both writers reject fixed identity frameworks and conceptualize identity as a process of *becoming*. This aligns with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophy of "becoming," which emphasizes openness and the ethical enactment of identity formation (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 291).<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, Dubravka Ugrešić and Min Jin Lee embody two distinct yet interrelated trajectories within diaspora literature. They span the dialectic between critique and ethics, deconstruction and recovery, fragmentation and continuity. Their works transcend nationalist literary paradigms to articulate the ethical transformation of literature in a globalized world marked by decentered, plural identities and liminal boundaries. In an era when the order of the nation-state is increasingly destabilized, their literature offers both a diagnosis and a proposal for imagining multiplicity and belonging beyond national borders.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has comparatively examined the multilayered characteristics of diaspora literature through the representative works of Croatian writer Dubravka Ugrešić and Korean American author Min Jin Lee, focusing on the themes of memory, migration, and postnational narratives. Despite writing under vastly different cultural and political conditions, both authors engage in a literary critique of national boundaries and iden-

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of *becoming*, introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), challenges the essentialist notion of identity by proposing that subjectivity is constituted through continuous processes of transformation and differentiation. Rather than being fixed or coherent, identity emerges through encounters with alterity and is shaped in peripheral, liminal, and relational spaces. This philosophical framework reconceptualizes identity as dynamic and non-totalizing – always in a state of becoming rather than being. In the context of diaspora literature, *becoming* serves as a critical lens through which to examine how diasporic subjects negotiate hybrid, multiple, and fluid identities beyond the boundaries of nation, ethnicity, or language.

tity discourses, while imagining alternative forms of community that transcend the framework of the nation-state.

Ugrešić, in her representation of memory, deconstructs nationalist narratives through a non-linear and fragmented portrayal of language and remembrance, revealing memory itself as a site of violence and resistance. In contrast, Min Jin Lee expands memory into an ethical practice by depicting its intergenerational transmission through familial relationships, thereby transforming wounds and identities into sites of continuity. Both authors propose memory as a critical and ethical conduit between the past and present of the diasporic subject.

Regarding the narratives of migration, Ugrešić portrays the existential void created by linguistic collapse and ontological exile, whereas Lee focuses on the affective labor and survival strategies of marginalized subjects under colonial and racial oppression. Their works demonstrate that migration is not merely a spatial movement but a complex condition involving sociopolitical boundaries, linguistic alienation, and institutional exclusion.

Most notably, both authors offer postnational perspectives as a means of critiquing and reimagining the dominant national order. Ugrešić performs a radical dismantling of the violent linguistic systems of the nation-state, while Lee narrates the possibility of ethics and dignity outside the state through invisible networks of emotional and communal solidarity. Their literary worlds explore new forms of subjectivity – unbound by state affiliation, shaped by linguistic hybridity, and situated on the peripheries.

Such literary practices reposition diaspora literature beyond “immigrant stories” to a central discursive arena within contemporary world literature – where issues of center and margin, nation and postnation, memory and power are actively contested. In particular, the works of Ugrešić and Lee demonstrate both the ethical sensibility and the political radicalism of diaspora literature, affirming its potential to envision identities beyond the nation.

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## SAŽETAK

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PAMĆENJE, MIGRACIJA I POST-NACIONALIZAM:

KOMPARATIVNO ISTRAŽIVANJE KOREJSKIH I HRVATSKIH  
NARATIVA IZ DIJASPORE

U radu se donosi komparativna analiza reprezentativnih djela hrvatske spisateljice Dubravke Ugrešić i američke spisateljice korejskoga podrijetla Min Jin Lee te se ispituje kako književnost nastala u dijaspori pripovijeda o pamćenju, migraciji i post-nacionalizmu. Smještene u kontrastne geopolitičke kontekste – post-jugoslavensku istočnu Europu i postkolonijalnu istočnu Aziju – ove spisateljice dekonstruiraju narative o identitetu usmjerene na naciju-državu i istražuju književne i etičke mogućnosti subjektivnosti koje prelaze granice. Njihovi tekstovi u prvi plan stavljaju rastapanje nacionalnih granica i artikuliraju književnu imaginaciju ukorijenjenu u postkolonijalnoj etici i svijesti dijaspore. Ugrešić kritički rastavlja nacionalistički diskurs kroz jezičnu dislociranost i fragmentirano pamćenje koji predstavljaju egzistencijalno stanje prognanoga subjekta i nestabilnost jezika kao medija pripadanja. Nasuprot tomu, Lee rekonstruira etiku dijaspore utemeljenu na obiteljskome pamćenju i emocionalnoj solidarnosti pripovijedajući o povijesnome nasljeđu kolonijalizma i rasne marginalizacije. Premda koriste različite narativne strategije, obje spisateljice propituju fiksne modele identiteta i nude narative koji predviđaju hibridne i višestruke subjektivnosti utemeljene u pamćenju, migraciji i jezičnoj višestrukosti.

U ovome se radu utemeljenome na teorijama dijaspore, kulturnoga pamćenja i post-nacionalizma propituje kako se u djelima Ugrešić i Lee konstruiraju alternativne etičke i estetske predodžbe. Na temelju njihovih opisa identiteta koji obitavaju na granici i trans-nacionalnih uvjeta u radu se iznosi mišljenje da književnost u dijaspori čini ključno mjesto za promišljanje globalnoga književnoga diskursa i osmišljavanje novih načina formiranja tema izvan okvira nacije-države.

**Ključne riječi:** *književnost u dijaspori; postnacionalni identitet; pamćenje i migracija; Dubravka Ugrešić; Min Jin Lee; kulturna hibridnost; međugeneracijski narativ*