

COMMODIFICATION OF THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY: YUGONOSTALGIA AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on a specific type of contemporary nostalgia for the Yugoslav past, emerging in recent years across the post-Yugoslav space – Yugonostalgia. This nostalgia creates a new Yugoslavia from the ashes of the old – a depoliticized Yugoslavia, not a state or an ideology, but a life story, a personal and social history that happened to take place within the former state. It is argued in the paper that Yugonostalgia can be understood as a longing for the solidarity, sociability and dignity of the socialist life-style, and even as a critique of the consumerist aesthetics of modern capitalism. However, in no way has it been a call to re-establish a Yugoslav state or to validate its ideological propaganda.

Furthermore, in the intersection of capitalist profit-making and communist heritage, nostalgia has become more than a simple discursive construction, emerging from the idealized collective memory - it turned into a veritable marketing strategy exploiting Yugonostalgic symbols. Media campaigns that instigate warm feelings for Yugo-commodities and positive associations with the former state create new patterns of consumptions seeking to commercialize the nostalgic experiences. This study, therefore, focuses on this highly profitable form of Yugonostalgia by arguing that companies in the region are largely exploiting “nostalgic” capital by stimulating positive emotions from the past associated with certain memories. It tends to explain how nostalgia has been used to brand Yugoslav products and how collective memories impact consumer's decision-making. How, through the identification with certain values and products from the period of communist Yugoslavia, did a whole new market of nostalgia emerge?

The central argument is that, while people have relied on nostalgia as a collective therapy for diverse perturbations of the memory, to preserve values from the socialist period and create a bridge with their ex-compatriots, certain brands (supermarket goods as much as rock bands, politicians, or TV shows) have based their success on Yugoslavia's commodification. In this complex interaction, the collective memory was used as a reconciliation tool as much as a marketing strategy.