

MYTHISTORY IN A NATIONALIST AGE:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SERBIAN AND GREEK POSTMODERN
FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mythistory in a Nationalist Age: A Comparative Analysis of Serbian and Greek Postmodern Fiction

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The dissertation is a study of postmodern Serbian and Greek novels that reflect the most recent historical trauma in the Balkans. The texts I analyze in specific chapters are Eugenia Fakinou's *The Seventh Garment* (1983), Milorad Pavić's *The Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984), Rhea Galanaki's *The Life of Ismail Ferik-Pasha* (1989), and David Albahari's *Bait* (1996). The appropriation of the term 'mythistory' as a key concept in defining the postmodern narratives analyzed in my dissertation derives from the absence of a clear distinction between mythological and historical national origins. In the Serbian texts analyzed interrogations of history feature as the dominant narrative mode, while even in historically informed Greek texts mythical subtext often figures as the cardinal referent. A possible reason for such a broad appropriation of myth lies in the claim of late 18th-century Greek nationalists to the classical glory of Ancient Greece. This liaison enabled the closure of the gap between the classical period of, predominantly mythically informed, Greek antiquity and post-Ottoman Greek modernity. The pagan content of mythical antiquity became successfully subsumed under the Christian context and thus unified entered the service of national literature.

My contextualization of mythistory, both within Greek women's postmodern fiction and Serbian postmodern narratives uncovers its complex involvement with the national issue. However, as my dissertation clearly shows, it is not only a persuasive rhetoric of nationalism, but also a narrative style that subtly promotes the political without propagandist intentions. Instead, in the texts analyzed emerge very distinct agendas of gender, identity, culture, philosophy, and

aesthetics, all interwoven with the national problematic, but steering away from the definition by which mythistory is relegated to the transparently propagandist. Moreover, my dissertation defends the position that postmodernist Serbian and Greek literature, inclining towards the postcolonial interrogation of history rather than the more playful postmodern style employed in western literatures, engages the mythistorical narrative approach as a critical alternative to classical national allegories and organicist foundation narratives.

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INTRODUCTION

Postmodern Literature and the Problem of History

One of the key questions that arises in connection with the topic of my dissertation is whether we can talk about ‘Balkan postmodernism’ as such, and what are its affinities and differences when compared to one of the most contentious cultural categories in the West. Postmodernism, like Modernism is rarely, if ever discussed out of the context of Western culture. Critics and apologists of postmodernism alike have recognized and described it almost exclusively within the scope of Western cultural, literary, and economic developments. I will concentrate on the acutely sensitive issue of history, which is one of the key questions in most definitions of the Postmodern. From Lyotard¹ onwards, the postmodern has been designated as a final subversion of history, its reduction to a textual residue disconnected with memory (which is likewise rendered obsolete), all the way to the total destruction of history as the knowledge of the past, and its ultimate identification with the fictional narrative.² This rather general idea of the postmodern as a cultural phenomenon alters significantly with Linda Hutcheon³, who radically revises this problematic tenet in the critique of postmodernity and thus brings the historical back into the focus of the postmodern debate. However, even Hutcheon’s project of the *reestablishment* of the long-denied affinity between postmodern fiction and history under the name of “historiographic metafiction” denies postmodern developments

¹ Lyotard stated his proposition in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*.

² Some influential texts dealing with the problem of postmodern perceptions of history useful for reference here would be Hayden White’s *Metahistory*; Michael de Certeau’s *The Writing of History*; Paul Ricoeur’s *Memory, History, Forgetting*; Jean Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulation*. [Complete references in Selected Bibliography].

³ See primarily her *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*. New York and London: Routledge, 1988.

to literatures outside the Anglo- and Latin American contexts. Thus she further narrows a much broader, albeit still only Western scope of postmodernity emphasized by some previous theorists of the postmodern, most notably, Ihab Hassan, and William Spanos.⁴ It is not clear why her otherwise pertinent designation ‘historiographic metafiction’ completely disregards international postmodern developments—postcolonial and East European alike—which are immersed in the historic project and would provide ample support for her thesis.

At about the same time as Linda Hutcheon’s propositions somewhat changed the stereotyped ideas of the ahistoricity of postmodern fiction, there were voices that questioned the very possibility of postmodern literature in the Balkans. The problem was not nearly the belief in the redundancy of history but, on the contrary the awareness of its ubiquity. One of the first Yugoslav writers who carried the label of a postmodernist, Danilo Kiš, was dubious about the probability of Yugoslav literature ever freeing itself from political dictates and service to petty national resentments in the former multinational state, which he saw as the first step in the production of disengaged literature.⁵ Likewise, as late as 1987, Gregory Jusdanis, defining postmodernism almost exclusively in terms of reaction against literature’s institutionalized function, voiced his own skepticism about the prospects for Greek postmodernism.⁶ The precariousness of Greek literature, according to Jusdanis, lies in the fact that at each step in its development

⁴ Ihab Hasan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971; William Spanos, “The Detective and the Boundary: Some Notes on the Postmodern Literary Imagination,” *Boundary 2*, 1:147-168.

⁵ Following the controversy and orchestrated attack on his postmodern text *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich* (1976) Kiš polemicalizes the issue with his critics in a series of essays published in the collection, *Anatomy Lesson* [Čas anatomije]. In the United States a selection of essays translated by Susan Sontag is available under the title *Homo Poeticus*, New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995.

⁶ Gregory Jusdanis, “Is Postmodernism Possible Outside the ‘West’? The Case of Greece.” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 11 (1987): 69-92.

it was called upon to play the key role in the creation of institutions of national culture. Writers were never free of the sacred duty to the nation, and thus those who were supposed to subvert institutionalized literature were, in fact, those who participated in its creation. Both statements raised a modernist aesthetic issue which was at that time no longer debated in the context of western European literature. The fact that the problematic of apolitical and engaged literature should be interrogated this late in the 20th century is indicative of certain political dynamics which have thoroughly dictated the development of postmodernism in the region. Jusdanis ascribes it to what he problematically calls the 'belatedness' and very limited scope of the influence of European modernity. Yet another problem is the constant reshaping of political ethnoscares of the Balkans which demanded from literature unwavering loyalty to national interests. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why in the rich postmodern fictional production coming from the Balkans there is a profound involvement with the historical and the national. Probing the historiographic record and at the same time elucidating the national problematic has been the constant topic of such eminent writers as the Albanian Ismail Kadare, Greek Maro Douka, Bulgarian Anton Donchev (or, even the latest novelistic venture of Julia Kristeva), and the latest Nobel Prize Winner, Orhan Pamuk.

Postmodern in the Yugoslav context implied a literal transposition of the literary and cultural model. Multifaceted interventions of history's darkest incarnations—totalitarianism, dictatorships, excesses of nationalist and religious zealotry and, ultimately, civil wars—have generated an ambivalent liaison between the literary idiom and the historical narrative. The historical question inevitably seemed to be transformed into the national, while the Federation was torn apart by internal frictions among

constitutive national narratives each of which carried a potential for overwriting the grand multinational narrative. Far from believing in the possibility of ahistorical literature, Yugoslav postmodernism (the designation which I use only in the absence of a better one to cover all the national, linguistic, and historical multiplicities) problematizes official and dominant national narratives. The metafictional narrative, in fact, becomes a kind of a substitute for the historical, a sort of alternative history. Postmodern mythistorical fiction from the Yugoslav geographic space betrays a peculiar anxiety which arises from the impossibility of establishing certain identities or the shock at their abrupt and violent disruption. Reminiscent of the Modernist melancholia for the lost central authority, this stance produces a parody of history which is both merciless and painful. The irony towards and passionate denunciation of history represent not the gesture of discarding a concept which is no longer relevant, but instead reveal complex gestures of revenge and frustration. While Western historiographic metafiction subverts and interrogates the very notions of stable absolutes, and through this gesture sharpens our awareness of the illusion of their very existence, Yugoslav metafiction delves into the past with a conspicuous anxiety about the loss of recognizable and delineated culture-specific identities. The reader thus often senses that the intention of this gesture is not purely deconstructive. Instead, the remnants of the modernist melancholy for the lost absolute tend to drive the narrative in the opposite and mutually exclusive directions of fragmentation and unification.

Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984) articulates this split between these two equally powerful forces in two ways. The more obvious is the existence of the text in two non-identical editions—the female and male—that differ in only one

paragraph which, however, significantly changes the reader's perception of the totality of the text. The other manifestation of this struggle permeates the text by powerful metaphors which at times suggest the unification of the corpus of history and the book itself, and at times pessimistically announce the impossibility of their sustainance. His own explanation for this unusual textual trick is that the narrative division replicates "a picture of the dissolution of the time, which has been divided into the collective, male and individual, female time."⁷ [this is the subject to which he dedicates his *Landscape Painted with Tea*]. The impossibility of sustaining a narrative, therefore, stems from the attempt of shattering and fragmentation on the one side and legitimization and reconstruction on the other. The reason for this dispassionate archaeological digging into the past with a special design to disprove it is further emphasized by yet another problem of recent historiography: revisionism. The Post-Communist era of revisionist history takes the distrust of official history and information outlets of the previous era to its other extreme by indiscriminately discrediting all information about that time as a product of censorship and deliberate distortion.⁸ In the atmosphere in which previous tenets are *a priori* taken as false and replaced by propositions of equally dubious facticity, the fictional writer asks the only logical question: whom do we trust now?

Postmodern fiction and the Yugoslav national question clash for the first time in the infamous case of Danilo Kiš, accused by the Yugoslav literary establishment in the late 1970s of plagiarism in his mythistorical take on totalitarianism, *A Tomb for Boris*

⁷ "to je slika raspada vremena, koje se podelilo na kolektivno muško i individualno žensko vreme." Milorad Pavić, *Roman kao država i drugi ogledi* [The novel as a state and other experiments], Belgrade: ПЛAТΩ, 2005, p. 18. [In Cyrillic, translations mine].

⁸ Cf. Jessie Labov, "Leksikon Yu Mitologije: Reading Yugoslavia from Abramović to žmurke," *Mythistory and Narratives of the Nation in the Balkans*, ed. Tatjana Aleksić, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Ltd., 2007, 22-48.

Davidovich (1976). The case was widely publicized as Kiš and his accusers published their exchanges in the weekly papers. Although Kiš emerged as the moral and legal winner of the debate and court battle he left the country and spent the remaining years of his life in Paris. *A Tomb* is a critique of the Stalinist totalitarianism which follows the thwarting of genuine revolutionary idealism in several, loosely-connected characters through the geo-political space of pre- and post-WWII Europe. Soon after its publication, the novel was strongly condemned by powerful literary figures close to the political apparatus of the former country. Recognizing that the critique of Stalinism carries an allegory of contemporary Yugoslav Party politics, some leading writers in the former Federation joined in what became the most notorious case of public lynching of a literary work and its author. What prevented a frontal attack on Kiš along *political* faultlines was the fact that the novel never referred to any person or event that could be vaguely linked to the actual Yugoslav reality. The characters were mostly Jewish revolutionaries, mercilessly tortured and murdered, but given the time to contemplate the incomprehensible nature of their alleged transgression against the myth they themselves helped to construct.⁹ The only excursus that the text makes out of the sphere of Stalinism is in a story which takes place in 14th century France. However, it only serves as a confirmation of the unifying subject of the novel—the persecution of the Jews through history, and makes of it an example of the universality of totalitarian repression regardless of its temporal and geographical location. As a response to Borges’s *Universal History of Infamy* (1935), which he considered childish and ridiculous, Kiš wrote his own

⁹ Cf. Tomislav Longinović, “Danilo Kiš: History, Performance, and Horror in *The Tomb for Boris Davidovich*,” *Borderline Culture*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995, 109-192.

“universal history of infamy.”¹⁰ The orchestrated attack against Kiš concentrated on the literary values of the piece and insisted on the accusations of plagiarism, with blind and deliberate disregard for metafictional documentary techniques employed in the text.

It is not often that we have the opportunity to gaze into the transparency of self-censorship of the literary establishment in its attempt to pre-empt the possible punitive reaction of the political establishment. Nor is it often that censorship speaks in the language (however inapt) of literary criticism. The accusations which were seemingly concerned with the alleged unauthorized use by Kiš of parts of texts or references to well-known literary pieces (to which he himself gives credit in the text of the novel) soon broke the limits of the literary and turned into a full-fledged condemnation on the grounds of nationalism. Kiš dedicates several essays of his *Anatomy Lesson* (1978) to the debate, naming a few well-known literary and critical (and at the same time political) figures on the Belgrade scene.¹¹

Generally considered to have been the last ‘Yugoslav’ writer, and moreover half-Jewish, which puts him outside the usual nationalist tensions, it is interesting to point out what would make him susceptible to nationalist rhetoric and what it had to do with postmodernist fiction. Considering himself a Yugoslav writer first, of Jewish origin second, he is aware that neither designation is favored in the atmosphere of petty nationalist tensions between ‘brother and brother’—which is, in his opinion, the most fearsome competition of all—and that his double otherness places him in the neither-nor category which, at the time in which the adhesives that held the weakening central state together were losing their grip, was not the most desirable one: “[...] if you tell them that

¹⁰ See Branko Gorjup’s “Textualizing the Past: The Function of Memory and History in Kiš’s Fiction.”

¹¹ Cf. *Homo Poeticus*, trans. Susan Sontag, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1995.

seen in [...] (the light of tradition) you are a Yugoslav writer they consider that a kind of lie, or rootlessness, which arouses pity or anger; they assume that by choice you wanted to hide, to mask your true allegiance” (*Homo Poeticus* 56). The only position, that of being outside, that allows one a greater picture of the whole is viewed with suspicion. He sensed that his writing about Jews was not interpreted solely as a non-belonging, but a belonging to the Other, to the non-us, and therefore none-of-us.

Literary Ethnopoiesis

In dealing with the subject of nationalism it is never easy to avoid the obvious pitfalls from the one side, or stereotypes from the other, especially if national poetics is from the start labeled as *mythistorical*. Due to the great sensitivity of the subject of nationalism the very act of writing about it is equal to walking on thin ice and becoming an easy target for accusations of different kinds. Most of all, to focus on the national poetics in the Balkan context runs the risk of being *a priori* assigned the attribute of *destructive*, rather than *creative* poetics.

Literature, whose role in the definition of modern nationhood has been analyzed at length and breadth appropriate to such an important subject, is one of the pivotal channels for national invention. Developing the connection between nationalism and the literary genre of the novel, Timothy Brennan in “The National Longing for Form” says: “Nations [...] are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role” (49). Brennan, as many before and after him, recognizes literature to be one of the principal elements in the construction of national identity both in 18th century Europe as well as in the 20th century

postcolonial liberation movements.¹² However, it is his spatio-temporal situation of these developments that is problematic, being reminiscent of Fredric Jameson's controversial "national allegory" theory whose validity has since been brought into question, although it remains a powerful metaphor for non-Western developments, literary and otherwise.¹³

The question arises of how this dissertation relates to such claims since Balkan literatures would most likely fall under the 'Third-World' category in Jameson's division and since its main concern is the national question and its narrative representations. It may be enough to state that it is the particular interest of this dissertation to uncover exactly the kind of discourse that Jameson tends to find in virtually all non-Western texts. This does not mean that I intend to condone Jameson's indiscriminate inclusiveness and myself treat the entire Balkan literary production as a nauseating repetition of one and the same narrative. However, in this dissertation I am interested in analyzing exactly the kind of texts that perform this function. Therefore, all of them *are* heavily invested in national issues, regardless of whether their narrative stance is individual (e.g. Albahari, Fakinou), semi-personal (Galanaki), or fully collective (Pavić). Whichever storytelling dynamics

¹² Perhaps the best-known among the texts that clearly define the nation as an imaginary idea, and literature as a pivotal element in its creation are *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), edited by Terrence Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm and *Imagined Communities* (1983) by Bernard Anderson. Also very useful may be articles collected in Homi Bhabha's *Nation and Narration*, especially Simon During's "Literature—Nationalism's other? The case for revision," 138-153.

¹³ The reference is to Fredric Jameson's "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1985): 65-87. His controversial argument of virtually *all* non-Western fiction reading as a 'national allegory' denies any development to non-Western fiction which he sees at the end of the 20th century struggling with the same issues that Western fiction treated in 18-19th centuries, the time of the emergence of modern nations in Europe. This act of confining literature to forever reproducing the same kind of *collective* identities by extension denies subjectivity to non-Westerners, as they are never seen evolving beyond impersonal members of a nation into individual citizens, which is still the prerogative of Western readers. *Nation and Narration* also treats the subject of national definition from the point of comparison of much older Western texts and current postcolonial production, although the accent is on the parallel between the actual political-historical moment of the nation and the role that literature plays in it, rather than on stereotypes that are found to be so problematic in Jameson's argument.

the texts in this dissertation employ, they unmistakably point to and, ultimately, lead to a convergence with the national.

With respect to the theoretical and critical methods utilized in textual analysis, the dissertation brings together two prominent approaches to the problematic of the nation. Perhaps the most established in the current theoretical environment is the one that tends to interpret the nation as a myth, an artificial creation, an invention, even a “dream.”¹⁴ Such treatment of the subject is championed by some of the leading poststructuralist thinkers. It examines the nation as a modern phenomenon (or a modern myth) that emerges at the time of the Industrial Revolution and has no real continuity with preceding forms of social organization, although it is all too busy seeking its imagined origins in antiquity.¹⁵ The other, much less common argument nowadays, is a historical mapping of the nation that considers its historically progressive role, but also searches to establish its origins in much older ethnoscaples.

Not explicitly against the theories of national mythopoiesis but insistent that modes of historical representation be given equal importance, Gregory Jusdanis in *The Necessary Nation* (2001) seeks “to restore history to the study of nationalism,” by which gesture the nation would stop being interpreted purely “as an invention, a fantasy, or a narration,” a mythical and mimetic narrative of a “search for origins” (4-5). He rejects the poststructuralist project of the “writing of the nation” because its ultimate goal is to “unwrite” it. Not catering to either pro- or counter-nationalist factions, and fully aware of nationalism’s latent murderous power, Jusdanis urges the reader to reconsider the

¹⁴ Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

¹⁵ See Antony D. Smith’s *The Antiquity of Nations*, which offers a cross-section of various interpretations of the origins of the nation, both those insisting on its modern derivation and those that tend to see it as evolving from a much older *ethnie*.

historically creative role that the nation played in its time as a progressive and positively homogenizing force (in the European bourgeois, just as in postcolonial liberation movements), rather than uncritically reject it on the grounds of its adverse energies.

Mythistory

Neither of the two methods of describing the nation, however, can prove satisfactory by itself. If the nation is merely a figment of our certainty-starved imagination brought about by the collapse of religious systems, then we ourselves and our universe are probably parts of somebody else's dream. The purely historical elucidation of the problem, on the other hand, gets complicated by the impossibility of proving many postulates of ethnogenesis because they belong to the times that precede any solid forms of historical documentation. This dissertation proposes an approach to the national question that lies distinctly in the liminal space best designated as *mythistory*. The choice of the term *mythistory* in defining nationalist narratives in general, as well as those discussed in this dissertation, is based on the impossibility of delineating a clear-cut distinction between the historical as opposed to the mythological origins of nations. Its application, although not determined by the exact term, can be traced as far back as Herodotus, whose *History* was a compendium not only of historical events, accompanied by dates and related facts, but also of foundational myths of the then known nations, of the sacred stories of their national beginnings that define the spatio-temporal continuity, interpret the future, and have been integrated in their historical narratives.¹⁶ People believe in them, and their appeal ensures their persistence in national traditions. "Myth," as Stathis Gourgouris

¹⁶ For an introduction to the discourse of *mythistory* see Joseph Mali's *Mythistory*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.

observes, “is always co-incident with history,” due to the fact that “societies constitute and negotiate their identities out of an expressly creative/destructive force, animated in humanity’s deepest psychic reservoir.” Moreover, Gourgouris identifies the ability of societies to “control their destinies” with “the extent to which they recognize the effects of their own mythopoetic production” (2003, 43). Mythistory thus emerges as the discourse applied both by fictional and historical-nationalist narratives, and is profoundly involved with both the individual and collective aspects of memory. The adoption of the term *mythistory* as a key concept in defining nationalist narratives in this dissertation is more than appropriate in view of the growing disillusionment with the lessons of history and an intensifying disbelief in its scientific and factual claims. Itself a liminal construct of two apparently opposing concepts, mythistory adds even more uncertainty to the recognized ambivalence of the “Janus-faced discourse of the nation.”¹⁷

Despite all the common associations of ‘myth’ with ‘distortion’ or the reverse of the ‘truth,’ it is clear from Malinowski’s inclusive definition why some of its aspects appeal to nationalisms of various kinds: “myth acts as a charter for the present-day social order; it supplies a retrospective pattern of moral values, sociological order, and magical belief, the function of which is to strengthen tradition and endow it with a greater value and prestige.”¹⁸ Rather than being discredited, through the above attributes myth assumes a paradigmatic value of a past to be remembered and looked up to. Equally so, however, and this aspect of myth is by no means less appealing or less often employed by nationalists of different colors, it is one of the best mediums for callous manipulation and divisiveness.

¹⁷ Homi Bhabha appropriates Tom Nairn’s designation of the nation as a “Janus-faced” construct to define the language and discourse of national construction and cohesion. *Nation and Narration* (3).

¹⁸ Quoted in Timothy Brennan, “The national longing for form.” *Nation and Narration*, 45.

In his Introduction to *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi Bhabha proposes that “Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which—as well as against which—it came into being” (1). We should seek for the roots of the national imaginary in the sedimented layers of collective knowledge rather than in the daily events that seemingly alter the political (and geographical) landscapes beyond recognition. The former roughly falls under the denominator of ‘tradition’ that comprises collective memory and empirical knowledge and that likewise includes certain aspects of what could be designated as ‘mythical’ or ‘primordial.’ It is this traditional knowledge which circulates within a culture and is transmitted through generations that generates a deeply human anxiety about change, all the while attenuating it by demonstrating that our everyday reality is rarely altered beyond recognition but is only modified. The latter element, the one we hold responsible for the seeming mutation of the familiar universe, is what we commonly ascribe to history. Political events, elections, crises—in short, everything that threatens to disturb the delicate balance of peaceful existence and brings to the fore nationalism’s destructive potential. Contrary to commonly held belief, however, this is not the time when the full perniciousness of nationalism is generated. Such historical circumstances only create a favorable medium for the full manifestation of its latent capacities. Instead, national consciousness should be traced back to the more constant aspects of tradition that permeate historical existence, and that are frequently relegated to the legendary or the mythical. Salman Rushdie, whose own writing is thoroughly informed by myth, says that the whole history of humanity is a bloody battle over the prevalence of the *story*; namely a battle about whose story is older, greater and

better.¹⁹ One could argue that by this interpretation history becomes permanently and inextricably underscored by mythical subtext as its basic motivation. Moreover, making the mythical a foundation of something so tangible and ‘real’ as history adds an extra dimension to the long-denied truth value of myth while, in turn, the truth value of history suffers an inevitable deflation.

One of many confirmations of this idea that the true history of mankind should be searched for in traditions rather than history books or daily events is found in the words of one of the Nobel Prize laureates from the Balkans, Ivo Andrić, who thought that “[t]he true history of mankind is contained in fairy stories, they make it possible to guess, if not to discover, its meaning” (1992, 16). Yet, the sensitivity to the mythical foundations of history is not a specifically Balkan or non-Western modern cultural trait. It is enough to remember that T. S. Eliot likewise believed that it is only myth that can help us understand and cope with history. It is, therefore, the multifaceted dynamics of these two that brings to the foreground the unique national poetics, which is in this dissertation referred to as national mythopoetics.

My choice of Greek and Serbian national literatures is founded on the fact that the two nations, despite a shared history from the period of the Ottoman colonization, have had very different political and cultural destinies. Since the Romantic rediscovery of ancient Greece and the modern embrace of “philhellenism,” Greece has emerged as the only Balkan nation considered to be fully European. In political terms, Greece represents the standard against which all other Balkan nations measure their achievements. Serbia, on the other hand, sits at the opposite end of the spectrum—historically marginalized and,

¹⁹ Salman Rushdie offered this idea in the speech he gave at The College of New Jersey Writers’ Conference on April 10 2003. His exact words are not given in quotes as a transcript of his speech is not available.

until very recently, the pariah of the international community. At this stage in their history both nations feel a common anxiety of losing the specificity of what distinguishes each as a nation. Both face the challenge of preserving what they see as their national and cultural traits in the face of the current process of European integrations (and in case of Serbia, especially during and immediately after the Yugoslav wars of the 1990's, total isolation and marginalisation). One of the main reasons for this anxiety is the uniforming trends of the globalization process which tend to overwrite or completely eradicate local difference, supplanting the universal (an incarnation of the 'modern?') in place of the specific (considered obsolete, or at worst, anti-modern).

These historical processes and national concerns are neatly underlined by mythical discourse. The primary aim of my dissertation is to interpret the ways in which Greek and Serbian contemporary literatures respond to periods of national ascendancy and/or crisis. Do the novelists make use of national myths and mythical themes in their fiction? What is achieved when they deconstruct such myths and modes or when, alternatively, they imaginatively reconstruct them? Or, do they make efforts at subverting nationalist mythologies altogether? My contextualization of mythistory, both within Greek women's postmodern fiction and Serbian poststructural narratives uncovers a complex involvement with the national issue. Mythistory is as profoundly involved with the collective as it is with the individual. In the texts analyzed there emerge very distinct agendas of gender, identity, culture, philosophy, linguistics, and aesthetics, all interwoven with the national problematic. Yet, this does not mean that I am primarily concerned with analyzing mythical themes that in some of the texts figure prominently. Wherever the mythical context is evident it is acknowledged and its meaning interpreted accordingly, as is the case

with my first chapter. However, most of the texts chosen do not develop around a recognizable mythical nucleus but instead reflect their narratives around the background of nation-forming mythistorical events.

Structure of the Dissertation

My dissertation chapters focus on three comparable moments in the history of the two nations and offers intertwining trajectories of literary modernity that have been overlooked or denied by Western critics. The first one is the period of liberation of the Balkan Peninsula from centuries-long Ottoman rule. It is the first historical period remembered in the collective imaginary of both nations as pivotal to the forming of their national identities and of institutions of national culture. Thanks to the influence of philhellenism during the period of liberation, Greece became the darling of European politics, not fully accepted among progressive and modern nations but holding pride of place in the European imaginary as the cradle of Western civilization. Serbia, to the contrary, has never been considered significant in this respect, and throughout most of the historical changes pertinent to my dissertation it has been shoved to the margins, both politically and culturally. All three Greek texts considered in this dissertation reveal a profound concern with the issues that originate in the apparent contradiction between the historical fact of the Ottoman colonization and the strivings of the Greek nation to re-join Europe on an equal footing. The second historical turning point, the period towards and just after the end of World War II, which was characterized by communism in Serbia and an authoritarian regime leading to a military dictatorship in Greece. The third period considered is the current moment of European and international integrations, in which

Greece fully participates while Serbia, after a decade of conflict and isolation, finds itself again at the margins of international negotiations.

My choice of texts does not follow the pattern by which each historical period would be represented by a text in both national literatures. Instead, the texts tend to emphasize what is in my opinion the dominant concern of each national literature in itself. In case of Greece it is the problem of what Gourgouris tags the “phantasm of continuity” and the endless questioning of the Greek identity that emerges as the consequence of Ottoman colonization. All three texts analyzed in my dissertation deal with this issue both at the level of the collective (as historical fact and political dilemma) but also on the level of the individual (crises of identity and other psychological quandaries).²⁰ The Serbian literature, on the other hand, seems to be a lot less involved in the interrogations of its post-Ottoman identity. In fact, I believe, that problem has for a while been suppressed by more recent historical developments that privileged literature primarily concerned with the examinations of the national and religious identity (unconnected to the Ottoman colonization but, instead, defined by the communist and post-communist developments), the factuality of the historiographic record (as I explained above in relation to Danilo Kiš), and an ironic yet helpless stance towards the seemingly cyclical reiteration of historic events. The choice of Serbian texts, therefore, predominantly reflects this quandary through the narratives dealing with the most recent Yugoslav dissolution trauma.

In the overall structure of the dissertation, Part One functions as an extended introduction into the level of typology that is presented and analyzed in depth in the four postmodern texts of Part Two. Of the three texts analyzed in this part of the dissertation

²⁰ See his *Dream Nation*, pp. 128-140.

only Ismail Kadare's *The Three Arched Bridge* (1978) falls under the category of postmodern. Moreover, it was written by an Albanian author. Yet, together with the two other texts, the beginning of the 20th century play, *Masterbuilder*, by Nikos Kazantzakis (1909) and the post-WWII novel, *The Bridge on the Drina*, by Ivo Andrić (1945) it traces the evolution and the reoccurrence of the pan-Balkan legend of immurement in the national imaginary of virtually all of the Balkan nations. There is not a single national literature in the region that does not boast a solid collection of its renditions (ancient and modern alike). Despite many known interpretations of the most compelling of all Balkan metaphors—that of the bridge—it seems that the full repertoire of its meanings and associations can never be exhausted. As such the bridge has been constructed, deconstructed, crossed, defined, and described, while some more recent times have witnessed attempts at its physical or metaphorical annihilation.²¹ It is, therefore, expected that a dissertation concerned with the mythistorical narratives of the Balkans should pay its due to this powerful *topos*.

Although the legend possesses recognizable mythical-ritual origins reflecting the struggle of culture and nature, male and female principles, and so far has been interpreted through that particular lens, my proposition is that the bridge narrative distinctly reads as a national allegory. In conjunction with ample textual evidence this claim is further substantiated by the fact that the legend's multiple oral versions were recorded all over the Balkans at the time when the fascination with folkloric production emerged as a direct result of nationalist movements all over Europe. Its innumerable interpretations range

²¹ I refer to the physical destruction of bridges during the 1999 NATO bombardment of Yugoslavia and the reference to the 'blowing-up' of the bridge by Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić in the Introduction to their *Balkan as Metaphor*.

from mythical-ritual to feminist; from psychoanalytical to overtly chauvinist whose main concern is the primacy of one version over others. This latter fact of a contest over the legend's appropriation further emphasizes its importance for the Balkan collective imaginary and poses it as an inevitable introduction into any literary explorations of national mythistorical foundations in the Balkans.

Following Part One, which for the first time brings forward the some of the themes that reoccur in the analyses of postmodern fiction in the second part of the dissertation, my first chapter examines the inscription of the female in mythistory through a reading of Eugenia Fakinou's *The Seventh Garment* (1983). Written at the time when Greece, still recovering from the period of dictatorship, aspired to the membership in the European Community, the novel juxtaposes the two temporally coexistent 'nations'—the traditional rural community, and the burgeoning urban society. The closure of the gap between these opposites and the underlying mythological and historical discourses is made possible through healing pagan rituals performed by a community of women. Mythistory in Fakinou's text surfaces at both the thematic and narrative levels. Thematically, it directs a retrospective gaze at the most important and testing historical periods in Greek history since the Ottoman conquest—the beginning of the patriotic uprising against the colonizers in the first half of the 19th century, as well as the disastrous consequences of nationalist endeavors to reestablish the pre-Ottoman Greek borders a century later. Such conflation of temporally distant yet repetitive historic events establishes a firm articulation between the contemporaneous moment of collective national re-examination and the two narrated periods that threaten national identity. Fakinou's technique reveals a decisive establishment of a female postmodern narrative concept through the utilization

of multiple female voices and an unreserved dismantling of even the slightest perceptible boundaries between the mythical and the historical. In her deployment of the Persephone-as-nation dynamics, Fakinou's text establishes new limits to the designated genre of 'national allegory' that has been, and still is, the dominant paradigm of male authors. Unlike such narrative privileging of religious riots, wars, electoral and parliamentary crises and other historiography-worthy events, the novel thoroughly restructures the patriarchal claim to the historical by giving precedence to women not only as narrators and performers of pagan rituals, but also by positing them as the very creators of history. My reading of this text is reinforced with feminist theory by Simone de Beauvoir, Sandra Gubar and Karen Van Dyck, among others.

My second chapter is an exploration of Milorad Pavić's *The Dictionary of the Khazars* (1984), which I interpret through a wide application of poststructuralist linguistic theory, most notably by Jacques Derrida, Maurice Blanchot, and Michel Foucault, as well as through the historical analysis of the Serbian national question directly related to the novel. Pavić's text, to a great extent a precursor of the wildest postmodern stylistic and thematic experimentations, hides a profound engagement with the national question that is promulgated as a philosophical-religious debate over the conversion of a historically obscure tribe. The novel engages mythistory in all its multifaceted forms and meanings—from its subject, based on dubious historical sources and reconstructed with myth, to the historical personages who exist alongside the underworld creatures of our imagination. While exposing the mythical at its many levels, it exhibits an equal suspicion of history, which assumes the metaphor of the human body in constant flux and change, never permanent, even when tattooed all over our skins.

History is so inextricably grown with our lives that the only respite from it is possible in death. Written in the period when most of the formerly Yugoslav nation still enjoyed the slumber of its dream of national unity, the text was accused of, if not exactly stirring, then contributing to the national controversy among the Serbs. In its hidden context of the uncertain outcome of the conversion process interpreted differently by each monotheistic religion, the novel balances between a determined rebuttal of any kind of totality and human ambition and need to create it. Despite its fragmented form that resembles a trilingual dictionary whose entries, even when referring to the same term, unfailingly provide diverging explanations, the text obsessively searches for some kind of ontological understanding and unity. It is this aspect of the text that reads as an uncanny projection of the imminent future of the Yugoslav nation—torn apart by messianic promises of homegrown nationalists and imported soothsayers, the whole nation is in danger of dismemberment.

Rhea Galanaki's *The Life of Ismail Ferik-Pasha* (1989) is the focus of my third chapter and I interpret it through the lens of Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic *chora* as well as through the application of certain tenets of Postcolonialism. Based on a historical personage of a janissary Greek boy who reaches the highest ranks in the Ottoman army, the text is a thorough engagement of mythistory, both in structure and its subject. Defined as 'mythistorema' in the title, a Greek word for a 'novel,' the text is divided into a 'mythical' and 'historical' part. His capture by the enemy from the relative safety of the conflated mythical worlds of Zeus's cave and his mother's womb, as well as his subsequent life as an Ottoman subject, are depicted as the boy's first, figurative death and his final departure from the realm of the semiotic, the mythical realm connected to

the feminine and his childhood. His physical death is the logical consequence of his return to the island as an Ottoman army leader sent to quell an uprising, but only after the imminent reunification of his split personality and the reconnection of his two disparate identities. The two periods, marked by two sequels of a story which in some aspects is, but in many other is not individual-specific, are juxtaposed at several different levels. Through a third-person narration of his 'mythical' and first-person testimonial of his 'historical' existence, the text transposes his individual destiny to that of the whole nation whose figurative death and a pre-historic hibernation under the Ottoman rule is sharply contrasted with the post-liberation efforts for a reconstruction of the nation's interrupted history. Simultaneously, the character's homecoming is a reconciliatory gesture between the nation's pre- and post-Ottoman selves, as well as between its own image of itself and the one projected upon it by Europe.

David Albahari's *Bait* (1996), the subject of my fourth chapter, is the center around which evolves a study of one's personal involvement with, and the impossibility of the extrication of the individual from the collective-driven forces of mythistory. An introspective fictional biography, *Bait* offers a self-reflective narrative of an exiled poet searching for the truth in the New World. His contemplations consider the possibility of the creation of a text in a foreign language, independent of his historical, linguistic, and territorial rootedness; as they simultaneously define his poetic self against a stereotypical western writer preaching ahistorical individualism refracted in non-verbal aesthetics. This aesthetic poetics of his journey through the repetitive cycles of Yugoslav wars fueled by strikingly similar syntax of nationalism reflects on one level a postmodern narrative in conversation with post-structuralist linguistic theory as well as the postmodern

approaches to history. On the more personal level, the narrator is arrested in a deeply melancholic dejection at the loss of the relative safety of his shared national identity and I fittingly interpret it through the application of Freud's and Kristeva's psychoanalytical theory. Posited against the individuality of the West in which he seeks an asylum from the collectivist Babel of Yugoslav post-communist nationalisms, his aesthetic and his individualist searches ultimately fail as they are both founded on insubstantially established ground. Although on the surface a text involved with an individual search and contemplations, *Bait* to a great extent reflects the existential and political self-interrogations of the Serbian, as much as most other post-Yugoslav nations.

PART ONE

The Balkan Immurement Legend: Between Myth and a Nationalist Project

The immurement of the female body into the foundations of an edifice, usually a bridge, city walls, or a monastery, is one of the most common tropes found, with minor variations, in all national literatures of the Balkan region without exception. The narratives that are based on the legend of the immurement can roughly be divided into pre-modern oral narratives and modern and postmodern renditions of the ancient legend. Greece alone boasts over 300 versions of the legend, the best known being the ballad *The Bridge of Arta*; in Serbia and Albania it is known as *The Building of Skadar/Scutari*; in Romania as *Master Manole*. Numerous versions of the ballad are known to exist in Bulgaria, and its slightly changed versions are widespread between Hungary and Cyprus. Its significance for the national imaginary seems to be of such magnitude that a great deal of the criticism dedicated to the legend has dealt with its dispersion and origin. Critics have tried to outdo one another in uncovering ever new ‘evidence’ that the version prevalent in the national literature they speak for predates all others. Some more recent research, however, links its origin to ancient Indian legends in which the woman did not die in an architectural edifice but in a water spring.²² However, it is the fashion in which 20th-century Balkan writers use the legend that seems the most intriguing. Their fascination with the immurement motif resulted in masterpieces that span the whole century—from Nikos Kazantzakis, who first used it in his 1910 play, *Ο Πρωτομάστορας* [The Masterbuilder], to Aris Fakinos, in whose novel *Το όνειρο του πρωτομάστορα Νικήτα* [The Dream of Masterbuilder Nikitas], written in 1999, the legend saw its latest reappearance.

²² Cf. Alan Dundes, ed. *Walled-up Wife*.

The basic model around which all of the known Balkan versions of the legend revolve can be summarized as follows: builders gather around the task of constructing an edifice, but their structure is destroyed nightly by a supernatural power demanding a human sacrifice to support the foundations. In most versions of the legend the nightly demon demands the master builder's wife as the sacrificial offering; in some versions, however, the apparition first requires a couple of baby twins, but eventually settles for the master builder's wife. Various interpretations as a reflection of the substitution of nature by culture or matriarchy by patriarchy, the triangular dynamics between the female victim, the apparition, and the architectural enterprise has received remarkable critical attention in various psychoanalytical, feminist, folklorist, and ethical theories.²³

The three renditions of the legend offered in this article, Nikos Kazantzakis's *The Masterbuilder* (1910), Ivo Andrić's *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945), and Ismail Kadare's *The Three-Arched Bridge* (1978), were all written at pivotal historical moments for their respective nations, as well as the Balkan region as a whole. All three so-called 'bridge narratives'—with the exception of Kazantzakis's—have received significant attention in their own right. However, they have been predominantly analyzed with respect to the reappearance of the bridge metaphor and the immurement motif, where Kadare's novel is read as a 'response' to that by Andrić. What has been completely omitted from these accounts is a cohesive thematic link between the legend and its re-emergence in these 20th-century narrative appropriations. I argue that these renditions of the legend of immurement address

²³ See Olga Augustinos "Arches of Discord, Streams of Confluence: The Building of Bridges in the Balkans," *Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions, and Cultural Encounters since the Enlightenment*, Dimitris Tziouvas, ed., Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003; Zora Devmja-Zimmerman, "The Changing Roles of the *vila* in Serbian Traditional Literature," *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 16:3 (1979): 167-175; Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, trans. Philip Mairet, New York and Evanston: Harper Torchbooks, 1960; Artemis Leontis, "The Bridge between the Classical and the Balkan" (this volume).

nationalist sentiments while the sacrificial motif stands as the central locus of nation building.

This article traces the gradual disappearance of the female victim from the 20th-century texts and interprets this disappearance as part of a greater paradigm shift that witnessed the alteration of the original mythical properties of the legend and its utilization in the service of nationalist rhetoric. The very fact of the legend's popularity and persistence in national memory, its ability to attach itself to any spatial, temporal or architectural particularity and to mutate accordingly, emphasizes its significance for different Balkan nationalist projects. The legend's traditional attributes of the preservation of natural fertility/death cycles are blurred in its 20th-century renditions, as it becomes a historical-political allegory that addresses the nation's efforts to construct a recognizable collective identity. In its metamorphosis from a mythical-ritual story into a vehicle for political metaphors, the legend is rationalized to the extent that its central element—that of the female sacrificial victim—shifts its focus upon male bodies sacrificed and sanctified as either accidental or heroic victims of history.

Kazantzakis: The Bridge over the Gap of History

The legend was first recorded in its currently circulating variations by Balkan folklorists and anthropologists at the time of the 18-19th-century national revivals, shortly preceding or following the liberation of individual Balkan territories from Ottoman rule, which was, likewise, the process of the negotiation of modern Balkan national identities and the definition of the institutions of national culture.²⁴ This

²⁴ The process of nation formation and cultural revival in the Balkans was triggered in the late 18th century, in the anticipation of the break-up of the Ottoman Empire. The Serbian version of the ballad, for example, was recorded by Vuk Karadžić (1787-1864), who was the most prominent figure in the cultural revival in the Ottoman-occupied Serbia, and personally responsible for the preservation, in

interest in the oral traditions of the Balkan hinterlands by European folklorists was generated by a larger pan-European anthropological enterprise of recording oral traditions all over the continent. On the whole, this cultural operation was part and parcel of the wider undertaking of political and cultural modernization. Modeled on the Western European example of nation building through the creation of a national body capable of absorbing progressive ideas, unification and creation of the nation-state, the institution of national literature began to emerge among the Balkan nations. It first appeared in the elitist circles of diasporic communities in Western Europe, but soon spread to the territories still occupied by the Ottomans. The determination to follow the Western model clearly positioned Balkan peoples within the group of nations that identified themselves as *modern* and, as such, in need of defining their national identities. One of the biggest challenges for all Balkan national entities was the creation of historical continuity out of the rupture caused by the Ottoman conquest. As a result, the period saw an upsurge in the rehabilitation (and fabrication) of the usable past that could be safely connected to the current political moment.

In this respect the Greek case is specific, and to a certain extent it deviates from the situation in the rest of the Balkans. Thanks to the influence of philhellenism that revived the glories of the ancients in the European national imaginary, Greece became a darling of European politics in the period of liberation from the Ottomans. It was placed on a pedestal as the mythical cradle of European civilization to which the West remains permanently indebted. Inspired by the romantic worship of their classical past, early 19th-century Greek nationalists had an incentive to force a link between their ‘orientalized’ present and classical past via the Byzantine period. This secured for the newly formed Greek nation a place in the *mythistorical* past but, ironically,

written form, of the greatest body of famed Serbian oral poetry. This interest in the folkloric treasures of the Balkans was part of an overall European process in which print culture was committing to paper (and permanence) oral literature from where it was distributed into respective national literary canons.

sentenced the whole nation to a past-worshipping slumber with eyes and minds turned backwards, and with little idea of how to move forward into modernity.

Nikos Kazantzakis was one of the intellectuals who envisioned the future of the Greek nation in modern Europe, rather than in a slavish adoration of its heroic antiquity. However, rather than calling for the repudiation of tradition, he used the metaphor of the bridge to close the fissure between the nation's classical past and its modern future. His play *Ο Πρωτομάστορας* (1910), significantly modifies the symbolism of the female sacrifice, and emphasizes the heroic efforts that the nation will have to make on its road to modernity.²⁵ In this early play that derives both from the immurement legend and classical Greek tragedy, the efforts of the Masterbuilder are subverted just as they are in the old ballad. Every time he constructs his bridge it collapses into the gorge. The main obstacle to the creation of his masterpiece is his passion for a woman, the obsession that wastes his creative energies and prevents him from fully dedicating himself to his masterpiece. The Masterbuilder is a man of the new age, guided by a Nietzschean spirit of individualism, who refuses to surrender himself to collectivism and traditional superstitions.²⁶ He distinctly resembles Oedipus in his scorn of Fate and God, and the trust he assigns to human powers. His exaggerated belief in the omnipotence of the human mind, his contempt for the villagers' lack of initiative and their slavish obedience to the Village Lord, as well as his passion for a woman, make up his tragic error and will all be instrumental in teaching him humility. Placed into an indefinite mythical time, yet modern in its

²⁵ Kazantzakis published this play under a pseudonym Petros Psiloritis in 1910. It has been turned into an opera by the composer Manolis Kalomiris (1912), but remains untranslated and relatively unknown. All translations from the Greek original are mine.

²⁶ The play offers an interesting insight into Kazantzakis's later literary and philosophical developments, besides making a point in question about the contemporary political state of the Greek nation. It attempts to reconcile the modern ideals (of individual power) and mythological/religious tradition (concerned with the survival of the collective), the subject that Kazantzakis revisits in most of his later writing. The overtly nationalist subject of the play, however, may be one of the reasons for its poor dissemination, as there are speculations that he was ashamed of this play and the fact that it brought him a national poet laureate reward.

message, the play juxtaposes modernity and tradition, individualism and collectivism, patriarchal gods and more ancient chthonic deities. The conflict between these dualities is of such nature that it does not offer space for victory. Rather, both sides have to compromise for a greater common good. The villagers are suspicious of the Masterbuilder's new bridge, which has collapsed three times taking people's lives. They warn him that his blasphemy and disrespect of Fate will not go unpunished: "Proud youth, nobody has upset the laws of God without danger (Psiloritis 17)."²⁷ It seems that the tug-of-war between the modern individual who believes in his own and human abilities in general, and the traditionalists who complacently follow well-trodden paths cannot be resolved, as both sides ardently defend their positions. Designating the Masterbuilder as the reason for disturbing their peace, the villagers plot to sacrifice him to the river, appease Fate and return to the untroubled existence that preceded his arrival: "We'll hang a stone round his neck... And we'll hurl him like a piece of meat into the hungry and roaring mouth of Old Man River (10)."²⁸

As in the ancient legend of immurement, the solution to the problem of solidifying the shaky bridge and ensuring it never collapse again arrives from a demon requesting the sacrifice. Kazantzakis, true to the conventions of the ancient Greek tragedy, transforms the sacrifice-hungry ghost into "the oracle-like Mother, the white-haired Mother, the holy woman of the village, who lives in a cave by the river—like a ghost (24),"²⁹ who informs the Masterbuilder that he will not be able to finish his work until his "hands are freed for absolute attention to his great mission—

²⁷ «Νέε περήφανε, ακίντυνα ακόμα δὲν ἀναποδογύρισε κανένας τοὺς νόμους τοῦ Θεοῦ.» As there is no published translation of the play all page references to Kazantzakis's play point to the original Greek edition from 1910. All translations mine.

²⁸ «Μαύρη ὦρα ποὺ το πόδι του πάτησε στὸ χωριό μας! [...] Θὰ τοῦ κρεμάσομε ὕστερα μιὰ πέτρα στὸ λαιμό... Καὶ θὰ τότε ρήξομε κομμάτι κρέας στὸ στόμα τοῦ γέρο-ποταμοῦ, ποὺ πεινᾷ καὶ μουγγρίζει.» It is interesting that in the play the river is referred to as 'γέρο-ποταμός,' or 'Old Man River,' rather than sharing feminine attributes which rivers and waters generally assume in the mythical imagination.

²⁹ «ἠ γριὰ Μάνα, ἡ ἀγία τοῦ χωριοῦ, ποὺ ζεῖ σ'ένα σπήλιο τοῦ ποταμοῦ—σὰ στοιχειό του.»

[and] he is willing to renounce his personal happiness” (Bien 1975, 406). In this episode, much like the one in which blind Tiresias suggests to Oedipus that he plays a part in the sufferings of the city of Thebes, the Mother cryptically reveals that the Masterbuilder himself is ruining the bridge: “The Masterbuilder! That’s who’s to blame! He wrecks the bridge! (Psiloritis 26).”³⁰ “Ο Ξανθός Λεβέντης,” the Great Blond Man, as Masterbuilder calls himself invoking the Nietzschean ideal, scorns the superstitious beliefs of the ‘rayah,’ the common people, and affirms his loyalty to the Olympian patriarchal gods, rather than the ancient earthly deities. However, traditional deities still command respect. Witnessing a part of his bridge collapse into the river anew, the Masterbuilder demands that his lover show courage and, in line with the spirit of the time that requires personal sacrifice for higher goals, let herself be immured into the foundations of the bridge. The entire village/nation now expects the sacrifice: “Joy to him who for the whole nation dies (29).”³¹ The sacrifice is required of the village Lord as well, as it is his daughter who is to die in the foundations of the bridge. The woman, Smaragda, bravely enters the foundation and, repeating the words that her legendary predecessor first uttered in *The Bridge of Arta*,³² slowly dies as the builders surround her with iron and asbestos: “Iron I will make my heart, iron will become the bridge. Iron I will make my hair, even the travellers will become iron, my love! (46).”³³

³⁰ «Ο Πρωτομάστορας! Νά ποιός φταίει! Νά ποιός χαλά τὸ γιοφύρι!» Mythical characters abound in the play, as both the Masterbuilder and the village Lord take up the role of Oedipus in certain scenes. The insults that the Masterbuilder throws at Mother and his emphatic invocations of the Olympian pantheon are reminiscent of Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, in which Apollo insults matriarchal deities, Furies, and in which the death of two other women is required for patriarchal enterprises: Iphigenia is sacrificed for favorable winds to attack Troy; the death of her mother and queen, Clytemnestra, by the hand of her son Orestes remains unpunished for the sake of peace in the nation.

³¹ «Χαρά σ’ ἐκείνον ποὺ γιὰ ἓνα Λαὸν ὀλόκληρο πεθαίνει!»

³² For the integral text of the Greek version of the ballad see Artemis Leontis (this volume).

³³ «Σίδηρο θὰ κάμω τὴν καρδούλα μου σίδηρο νὰ γενεῖ καὶ τὸ γιοφύρι. Σίδηρο θὰ κάμω τὰ μαλλάκια μου, σίδηρο νὰ γίνουν κ’ οἱ διαβάτες, ἀγάπη μου!»

After the masterpiece has been finished, and the construction of the bridge celebrated by the people, the Masterbuilder leaves the village deeming his work complete at that place. The structure that is supposed to connect the opposite banks, but instead keeps collapsing into the chasm, is a metaphor for the situation in which the Greek nation found itself at the beginning of the 20th century. The Masterbuilder's passion for the beautiful woman emblemizes the Greeks' passion for their rehabilitated past, the past they had forgotten and hardly considered theirs before European Romanticism reinvented it for them, but which once reconquered, seemed too precious to be given up. The construction of the historical continuum—the bridge—can, therefore, be complete only once the nation gives up its servile relationship to the past and makes it the foundation of its future. The building enterprise calls for a determined individual, a master builder, the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, who commands respect by his sheer willpower and guides the village-nation without sentimental looking back over his shoulder. Thus, the bridge itself stands as not only a timeline between the classical heritage and modernity, but also as a link connecting Greece to its Europeanness that was suspended five centuries earlier. Structurally, Kazantzakis's play is as much an experiment in form, as it is bold in content. Refusing to submit himself to the pitfalls of idealized representations of the Greek reality popular at the time but, instead, building a link between the traditional dramatic forms and modernist expression, Kazantzakis wrote a play whose form not only incorporated the classical theatrical tradition and folkloric elements, but which also challenged the audience with daring modern ideas that were difficult to digest at the time the play was written.³⁴ Kazantzakis was warning Greeks that

³⁴ The play features the chorus and follows the Aristotelian 'unities' characteristic of classical Greek tragedy. The structure of the tragedy is boldly incorporated into the contemporary obsession of the Greek elite that the only way forward for the nation is to reconstruct the severed link with Europe (the bridge). In the light of the debate between populists and Europe-oriented elite, this idea was guaranteed

without a clear vision of an expanded future they would not be able to survive as a nation. His play, however, sings the litany over the burial place of the female sacrificial victim. The female victim and all that she stood for—myth, ritual, the past, oral culture—witnesses her final burial in Kazantzakis's text. The modern woman realizes the significance of the social project which necessitates her death and she agrees to sacrifice herself. She willingly steps into the foundation and submits her body to history. Kazantzakis's play thus becomes the final occurrence of the female sacrifice at the bridge that Balkan literature is to record.

Male Body as a Locus of Nationalist Desire

In many ways, the process by which the woman symbolically and permanently disappears from the nation-constructing site is contrary to the appropriation of the female body by the politics of male nationalist desire. In this scenario, re-enacted through the duration of the history of nation/community construction, the female body has a very distinct function in the political imaginary. Nationalist rhetoric commonly appropriates the female body so that its metaphorical roles range from the founding 'mother of the nation' to the 'daughter of the nation.' The period of modernity in Europe and the Balkans is likewise the period of the ultimate expression of nationalist desire and, therefore, it would be expected that the imaginary symbolism of the woman's body should gain in significance in the totality of the nationalist project. Yet, in the Balkan narratives of immurement the female victim, present from times immemorial, abruptly disappears and never returns to the site of political spectacle. The disappearance roughly corresponds to the time of WWI, a watershed for new political and intellectual ideas that completely changed the social and economic

an unwelcome reception with the conservative opposition to the modernizing efforts.

landscape of Europe. This period also witnessed new methods of warfare, like the trenches of WWI which, thus, become a new way of *entombment*, of being buried alive.³⁵ The paradigm shift to the historical nationalist imaginary in Balkan literature culminates with the sacrifice increasingly envisioned as a martyred man who dies a victim of history. Moreover, the discourse shifts from the direction of *constructing* a nation, where the female victim had a prominent symbolic meaning, into a discourse about *invading* or *defending* it, in which the attack upon a nation is analogous to the attack upon its patriarchal hierarchy. By extension, the edifice acting as a metaphor for nationalist efforts has in the collective Balkan imaginary finally got impressed as that of the bridge.³⁶

The original structure, as recorded and remembered in Balkan traditions, which unites the efforts of the patriarchy is predominantly a bridge (Greek, and most versions all over the Balkans). Yet, a great number of the versions of the legend mention other edifices such as a fortress, city walls (Serbian, some Bulgarian, Albanian), or a monastery (Romanian), and all play a significant role in national imaginaries. By what process the bridge was singled out as the most appropriate symbol which continues to inspire the imagination of Balkan writers even today, and moreover, how it became the popular metaphor of the whole geographical-political region becomes clear when the ontology of the bridge is applied to our argument. The bridge prevails in significance over all the other edifices in pre-modern versions of the ballad and bears a multiplicity of meanings: it is simultaneously a very ancient and a

³⁵ An example is Stratis Myrivilis's account of WWI in *Life in the Tomb* (1923).

³⁶ The bridge was not the only site of the female sacrifice. Although it was the predominant site of the legendary immurement, it was not exclusive. The Romanian tradition nowadays mostly records the monastery as the site of the sacrifice; the bridge is, however, the only site of the immurement in the over 300 collected versions of the Greek legend; in the Serbo-Albanian ballad the site is the city walls. Yet, this topographic diversity has been distilled into the bridge, which became not only the site of the female sacrifice, but also the dominant referent for the whole region. Likewise, all the subsequent renditions of the legend that I analyze in this article begin and end at the bridge.

very modern construct incorporating both ancient bridges and modern technological marvels; a liminal construct spanning worlds, meanings, historical periods; a metaphor of the fragility of the construct of national identity facilitating invasions and wars; the synonym of the equally indefinable construct of the Balkans—and the list is not exhausted. Primarily, the bridge is a distinctive *crossing* point, connecting or dividing, and like the body immured into it, who is neither a stranger nor a fully integrated member and, therefore, the most likely victim for the purpose, the bridge is a liminal construct, fixed in the position of non-belonging and in-betweenness in geographical or spatial terms, a construct defying definition.³⁷

In that respect the Balkans correspond to Martin Heidegger’s definition of the bridge:

[The bridge] does not just connect banks that are already there. The banks emerge as banks only as the bridge crosses the stream. The bridge designedly causes them to lie across each other. *One side is set off across the other by the bridge.* [...] But the bridge, if it is a true bridge, is never first of all a mere bridge and then afterward a symbol [my emphasis]. (152)

There are two notions in this definition of the bridge that I see as applicable to the Balkans. The first is the notion of the bridge acting not as a *connecting* point but, in fact, as a construct which sets the two oppositions further apart. The banks emerge as opposing sides only when a bridge is placed between them. Would the banks seem more in harmony with one another, and the gap less problematic and insurmountable

³⁷ Ruth Mandel in “Sacrifice at the Bridge of Arta: Sex Roles and the Manipulation of Power” interprets the woman immured into the foundations as neither the ‘other’—ξενή nor the ‘self’—δική. The wife brought to her husband’s house finds herself in an in-between position, where she is neither the ‘self,’ a position occupied by parents and children of the man of the house, nor the ‘other,’ as she is not a complete stranger to the house, which makes her an appropriate choice for the sacrifice, much easier than his mother, sister, or daughter. Since a wife, by definition, has no status in a patriarchal family (which only mirrors a woman’s position in society), the liminality of her status corresponds to the liminal construct of the bridge. While some versions emphasize the grief of the husband, although he eventually agrees to the sacrifice, others contain bargaining scenes between the husband and the supernatural power demanding the sacrifice, in which he shamelessly offers his dearest family members, including his children, to be sacrificed for the sake of his ambition, but none get accepted. His final offer is his wife, to which the spirit agrees. The wife is offered last, not as the most precious offering, according to Mandel, but as the least deserving one, since the master builder states that she can easily be substituted by another.

without the bridge? A natural chasm might seem less frightening if observed from the banks than from the bridge which supposedly makes its passage easier. If we try to push the metaphor of the bridge further and apply this definition to the Balkans, this idea does not seem immediately plausible. The view that a territory acting as a 'bridge' between two supposedly antagonistic and opposing civilisations, making the transition between them easier and less abrupt in cultural terms, should be considered an obstacle without which the two alleged opponents would interact with less friction, does sound unusual. However, the problem lies in the concept of the Balkans as a 'buffer zone' between the East and the West, in which the demographic, cultural, and religious differences have accumulated to the extent that they represent a focal point of possible explosion rather than a zone of the dilution of oppositions. The other idea drawn from this quotation, that the bridge is never only a bridge but always primarily a symbol, stresses its primacy of a symbol over its usefulness as a material object and explicates a host of meanings ascribed to the object and the symbolic they acquire in the national imagination. The cultural traditions of the Balkan peoples arguably boast some of the richest bridge symbolism. Not only is the bridge symbol found in the already mentioned folk ballads and traditional songs, as well as in the many writings of authors from the region, but the population of the region has fully interiorized the metaphor and tends to perceive itself as an indispensable structure, sometimes a bridge, at other times a wall-like barrier, connecting and/or keeping apart the political East and West.³⁸ Such interiorizations of the metaphor lead to the self-liminalization

³⁸ All Balkan nations have at times employed the metaphor in defining their own political standing, identifying themselves with the 'last bastion' of 'civilization,' 'Europe,' or defenders of the loosely defined 'West.' Milica Bakić-Hayden illustrates this tendency of *othering* on the example of the former Yugoslavia, where the significant qualifier of a nation's civilizational achievement is the absence of Ottoman and Orthodox Christian elements (the purported 'historical connections' of particular nations with the West, in this case, basically occlude their subjugated position within Austro-Hungarian Empire). See Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalism: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54 (Winter), 4: 917-931.

and, ultimately, marginalization of the population by means of identification with the indefinable position assigned to the territory they inhabit. This positive identification with the bridge is perhaps one of the reasons for the survival of the legend in its many different forms and for its continued popularity in the region. Of all the edifices that circulated in the multiple versions of the ballad, that of the bridge has been singled out as the most convenient for conveying the metaphor since “the bridge itself crossed the temporal frontier from epic time of foundational origins, now immobilized in legend, to historical processual time of crossings and passages, of shifting frontiers and transformed identities” (Augustinos 156).³⁹

The two best-known novels from the Balkans that rewrite the immurement legend are Ivo Andrić’s *The Bridge on the Drina* and Ismail Kadare’s *The Three-Arched Bridge*.⁴⁰ Separated by a considerable time gap, Andrić’s novel dating from 1945, and Kadare’s from 1978, the two texts are often compared to one another, mostly in the way they both deal with the legend of the sacrifice in the construction of a bridge. In Andrić, the interaction between the river and the bridge is the background against which people’s stories are spun or their destinies undone, all of which gets inscribed into the local archive, the stony edifice. Unlike Andrić’s, Kadare’s Ujana e Keqe bridge is part of a capitalist enterprise whose economic interest shows no appreciation of natural forces. Kadare’s text transplants capitalist economic practices into a medieval historical background, and reiterates the dangers for the population of Albania that the construction of roads brings with it:

³⁹ Augustinos defines three stages of construction of “stone and word” in the legends of immurement and its modernist renditions: separation, transition, and integration, which resemble the three stages through which the sacrificial victim passes on her way to the world of the dead: “First, by his intrusion man separated himself from nature. Retribution was demanded in order for this division to be bridged. Before the final appeasement, there was a period of transition when the immured victim occupied two domains, the human and the natural, where the animate and the inanimate intersected. It was a moment of liminality and as such, a moment of ambiguity and unset definition, a threshold leading from the turbulent state of humanness to the immobile state of legend” (160).

⁴⁰ The bridge keeps reappearing as the site of historical memory in other writings by Andrić: *The Bridge on the Žepa* (1931), or in the collection of non-fictional prose *Bridges* (1933).

[...] one only had to see those barrels loaded with that horrible stuff to be sure that only wizards could take to such a trade, and alas for anyone who permitted carts to cross his land loaded with these barrels, that leak drops of tar in the heat, sprinkling the roads—no, what do I mean, sprinkling?—staining the roads with the devil's black blood. And these drops of pitch always sow disaster. Now it has become a main raw material for war, and this great wizard is selling it everywhere, to the Turks and Byzantium on one hand, and to all the counts and dukes of Arberia on the other, fomenting quarrels on both sides.⁴¹ (1993, 23)

Despite the fact that Andrić's bridge on the Drina eventually becomes part of the thriving community, the very act of the construction of roads and bridges is perceived as a threat to the populations in both novels, as their primary purpose is to facilitate the conquest of new territories and their economic exploitation. Usually constructed by the conqueror, these fictional bridges are equated with foreign impositions and colonization which unite the national body in resistance. At moments of national crises, a return to the mythical seems to be a way of countering external threats and envisaging a radical change of the current unacceptable situation. Myths “generally relate present needs to future hopes through a reference, more or less elaborate, to the past” (Smith 34). The invocation of myth is an attempt to find an answer for the present concerns by recounting a past situation in which the national entity was similarly challenged, yet emerged victorious. No wonder that the populations of the communities in both texts reach into their traditions trying to revert, or at least delay, the imminent Ottoman threat. Dragan Kujundžić sees Andrić's bridge in an ambivalent relationship between birth and death, as a “sarcophagus of history” that “keeps and eats away the bodily remains” (105), as well as a “source of nourishment, fertility, a breast of sorts, a giant mother, but also the site

⁴¹ “[...] mjaftonte të shikoje fucitë e mbushura me atë llahtarë, për t’u bindur se vetëm shtriganët mund ta kishin për zemër atë punë, se mjerë ai qe do të lejonte të kalonin nëpër tokën e tij qerret e ngarkuara me këto voza, të cilat nga vapa pikojnë serën pikë-pikë, duke spërkatur rrugët me gjakun e zi të djallit. Vec kësaj, kjo serë, që kudo që pikon ndjell fatkeqësinë, është sot lënde lufte e dorës së parë, dhe ai shtrigani i madh ia shet atë kujtdo, nga një anë turqve dhe bizantinëve dhe nga një anë kontëve dhe dukëve të Arbrit, duke nxitur të dy palët për kapërthim”⁴¹ (27). All original quotations were taken from *Ura me Tri Harqe*, Tirana: Onufri, 2004. I am grateful to Julia Musha for her generous help with the Albanian original.

of a violent, deadly separation, a sarcophagus for the newly born walled into the bridge to die” (107). The ambivalence replicates the dynamic informing Ivo Andrić’s entire opus—a “disgust with history and [a] desire to return to it” (104). As such, the bridge acquires the meaning of a tombstone for victims ranging from young boys taken from their mothers to the mighty patron of the bridge.

Andrić’s bridge is a gift, albeit laced with pragmatic intentions, of a powerful Grand Vizier from Istanbul who was once taken from a Bosnian village to fight in the janissary corps.⁴² However much his ‘gift’ to his people is supposed to heal the rift hurting in his chest since crossing the river as a child and being taken away, it has the practical purpose of constructing a road for a possible westward expansion of the Empire. His enterprise causes additional suffering, especially to the Christian population in the valley, due to the cruelty of the supervisor of construction works. As a consequence, the legend of the water fairy, undoing by night what the workers build by day, and demanding a human sacrifice, begins to unfold:

The common people easily make up fables and spread them quickly, wherein reality is strangely and inextricably mixed and interwoven with legend. The peasants who listened at night to the *gusle* player⁴³ said that the *vila*⁴⁴ who was destroying the bridge had told Abidaga that she would not cease her work of destruction until twin children, Stoja and Ostoja by name, should be walled into the foundations. Many swore that they had seen the guards who were searching for such a pair of children in the villages (the guards were indeed going around the villages but they were not looking for children but listening for rumours and

⁴² Janissaries were Ottoman foot soldiers who were used as front-line fighters and were notorious for their cruelty. Their ranks were exclusively filled with boys periodically taken from occupied territories, in special actions of collecting ‘blood tribute,’ at a very young age and trained for the purpose. Their cruelty is generally attributed to the fact that they never knew family life and were unable to form attachments. Upward mobility was not limited, however, and there were many known cases of gifted individuals who spearheaded in their service, reaching the highest ranks of a Grand Vizier. Balkan traditions abound in stories of janissaries who, returning to their village as conquerors, meet their mothers or sisters, who recognize them by a body mark and thus prevent being slain by them.

⁴³ The archetypal figure of the storyteller, who is in most Serbian epic poetry a blind man, sings his stories by the fire playing the *gusle*, a string instrument producing a monotone sound which is only the backdrop for his singing.

⁴⁴ A *vila* is a wood or a water creature, but she is as elusive as her nature is indefinable. Sometimes she is represented as a benevolent creature helping humans, even marrying mortal men, and evil only when provoked; at other times, however, she is capricious and jealous, and can cause harm.

interrogating the people in order to try and find out who were those unknown persons who were destroying the bridge.⁴⁵ (Andrić 1959, 33)

Andrić's narrator rationalises the legend by explaining that the story derives from a half-witted woman who had still-born twins and was told that they were buried under the foundations of the bridge. The text further departs from the legend when the first 'sacrificial' victim happens to be the Serbian peasant responsible for the nocturnal damage to the construction, and who is impaled on the bridge in one of the most gruesome torture scenes in literary history. This sacrifice is soon followed by the accidental death of a young 'Arab' worker, whose lower body remains buried under one of the foundation stones, as well as by a rather bizarre murder of the Grand Vizier himself in Istanbul soon after the completion of the bridge that links his two homelands. In this ironic role reversal between mythical and historical elements, the sacrifice of a female body, however irrational and contingent solely on a capricious demand by a, for the most part, undefined supernatural force, is substituted by the sacrifice of male bodies.

All of the exclusively male victims who die around or on the bridge, or whose severed heads are impaled on sticks and placed on the bridge as a warning to the local population, seem to be random victims of chance, rather than having any real historical import. Thus, Radisav, the local peasant, is accidentally caught one night after many successful attempts at causing damage to the bridge and is impaled alive. The 'Arab' is killed in a construction accident. In yet another incident, which introduces a whole chain of beheadings of Christian peasants in the hands of the

⁴⁵ "Narod lako izmišlja priče i brzo ih širi, a stvarnost se čudno i nerazdeljivo meša i prepliće sa pričama. Seljaci koji su noću slušali guslara pričali su da je vila koja ruši gradnju poručila Abidagi da neće prestati sa rušenjem dok ne uzidaju u temelje dvoje dece bliznadi, brata i sestru, Stoju i Ostoju po imenu. I mnogi su se kleli da su videli sejmene kako po selima traže takav par dece. (Sejmeni su zaista obilazili, ali nisu tražili decu nego su po Abidaginom nalogu prisluškiivali i raspitivali po narodu ne bi li saznali ko su ti nepoznati ljudi koji ruše most" (36). I used two editions of the English translation of *The Bridge on the Drina*.

Ottoman ‘headsman,’ a villager and a priest are beheaded simply for expressing sympathies for the leader of the Serbian uprising against the Ottomans of 1804, Karadžorđe: “So these two, whom no one before then had ever seen or heard of, remained together in memory, a memory clearer and more lasting than that of so many other, more important victims” (Andrić 1977, 90).⁴⁶ It seems that there is no more logic in the deaths during the historical age of the bridge than there was in the choice of the sacrificial victim in the legend. On the contrary, the social marginality of male victims seems to replicate the liminality of the sacrificed woman, perpetuated both in her social and familial relations. In her analysis of the ancient Greek ballad of the immurement, Ruth Mandel interprets the choice of the wife of the masterbuilder as a sacrificial victim over his female relatives by virtue of her being a ξενή (outsider) in the family and, therefore, replaceable, unlike his mother or sister. By analogy, the male victims of both Andrić’s and Kadare’s bridges represent a different kind of the social and racial ‘other’—peasants, foreign workers, or randomly chosen villagers. The national being thus feeds itself by devouring the bodies of socially insignificant elements, or of some designated ‘other.’

These male victims of the bridge’s historical age imprint themselves firmly onto the collective memory, either as popular heroes defining the suffering of the population, or as the ‘other’ whose pronounced difference further consolidates the national body. Thus, Radisav, the crucified peasant, achieves the status of a martyr sacrificed by the hated oppressor, and continues to live in legends glorified as a saint fallen for his people and Christianity. The ‘Arab,’ however, who is transformed into a ghost inhabiting the hidden recesses of the bridge structure and coming out at night, feeds the imagination of the children who play on the bridge. When at the end of

⁴⁶ “I tako su njih dvojica, koji se pre toga nisu čuli ni videli, ostali zapamćeni zajedno i pamćeni su bolje i duže od tolikih drdugih, znatnijih žrtava” (108). I took the freedom to slightly modify the translation at this point, as the translation edition states ‘most’ rather than ‘more.’

WWI the Austrians plant explosives into a drilled hole on the bridge and cover it with a metal door, the story of the terrifying ‘Arab’ takes on the meaning of a concrete threat against the bridge structure. In contrast, the body of the sacrificed woman as the actual physical victim of the construction enterprise is all but erased from collective remembrance, her place now permanently occupied by the memory of the men who died at the bridge. The woman-in-the-bridge persists only by extension of the ancient metaphor in the apparently nourishing properties of the ‘milk’ that drips from the limestone structure; in the figure of the madwoman who roams around the construction site looking for her still-born children; and, most importantly, in the symbolism that the bridge assumes—of the “umbilical cord” between the kidnapped boys and their wailing mothers (Kujundžić 106). This separation of the female body from the actual site of history, therefore, permanently relegates the female principle to the mythical, irrational, natural, and ahistorical.

The Elasticity of Tradition

Fully enveloped in the modernist project of writing a chronicle of events surrounding the construction of the bridge on Ujana e Keqe, Kadare’s narrator-monk is determined to tell the objective ‘truth,’ while the ancient immurement legend is modified and misused by competing enterprises in attempts to rival one another in their profit-making businesses. Altered from its original form to fit the current needs of the powerful, the legend becomes a vehicle for gaining political advantage or economic profit:

The ballad had been changed. It was not about three brothers building a castle wall, but about dozens of masons building a bridge. The bridge was built during the day and destroyed at night by the spirits of the water. It demanded a sacrifice.

Let someone come who is willing to be sacrificed in the piers of the bridge, the bard sang.⁴⁷ (Kadare 1993, 104)

Unlike Andrić's text, where the legend is used in an attempt to subvert authority, since it is the Christian population that spreads the ancient story in order to stop the works that are materially and physically exhausting, Kadare's narrator observes the legendary being resurrected for the exclusive purpose of manipulation of the masses. Even the alleged self-sacrifice of the man who went out at night to damage the structure is economically motivated—he was paid to delay the construction by one company, and was caught and killed by the other: “But in whatever way the incident had happened, its essence remained unchanged: the bridge builders had murdered Murrash Zenebisha in cold blood and immured him. The crime had only one purpose—to inspire terror” (124).⁴⁸ Kadare's narrative focuses on the sacrifice of a man caught destroying the structure, while the legend gets deconstructed by being reduced to motives of pure greed on the side of its promoters, and ignorance on the part of the people. The legend mutates several times before its bloody climax triggered by the actions of the two rival companies—each bribing a host of tradition-makers: bards, legend collectors, and even an epileptic—in promoting their particular version. Tradition loses the attributes of a fixed structure that reaches the present in its pristine form. Instead, it is treated as an elastic construct susceptible to alterations and modifications which the population adopts without even noticing or questioning the disappearance of the preceding version. The legend is further altered towards the end of the narrative until all the different versions collapse into one which is rendered in a tourist-guide fashion:

⁴⁷ “Ballada ishte ndryshuar. Nuk ishin tre vëllezër, që ndërtonin murin e një kështjelle, por me dhjetra muratorë, që ngrinin një urë. Ura ditën ngrihej e natën rrënohej prej shpirtrave të ujit. Ajo kërkonte një fli. Le të vinte vetë njeriu që pranonte të flijohej në këmbët e urës, këndonin rapsodët” (85).

⁴⁸ “Sidoqoftë, sido që të kishte ndodhur ngjarja, thelbi i saj mbetet i pandryshueshëm: ndërtuesit e urës e kishin vrarë gjakftohtësisht Murrash Zenebishën dhe pastaj e kishin muruar. Krimi ishte bërë vetëm me një qëllim: për të krijuar tmerr” (99-100).

They seemed to tell us that it was a woman who was walled up, but this is a man. They even told us that we would see the place where the milk from the poor woman's breast dripped." "Oh," two or three voices would reply simultaneously, "Are you still thinking of the old legend?"⁴⁹ (171)

The communities of the two novels differ significantly in the ways they deal with and remember the sacrifices offered to their respective bridges, as well as in the ways they accept them and learn to live with them. The bridge on the Drina soon after its construction becomes the defining locus of the developing town and plays a pivotal role in creating a particular identity of the growing community that exceeds ethnic and religious boundaries: "The town soon began to move downwards from the hillside to the water's edge and expand and develop more and more about the bridge and around the caravanserai, which the people called the Stone Han" (Andrić, 1959, 71).⁵⁰ The bridge is not only a silent witness, a sort of a 'stone chronicle' of all events and historical changes that affect the community, but is, in fact, the generative force behind the thriving town which develops almost exclusively due to the existence of the bridge.⁵¹ The narrative does not for a moment leave the reader free of apprehension regarding the destiny of the bridge, as almost every chapter of the novel ends with a view of the bridge that stresses its permanence but which, in fact, reveals its vulnerability: "Its life, though mortal in itself, resembled eternity for its end could not be perceived" (71).⁵² The closer the narrative draws to a close, this chant addressing the unalterable state of the bridge on the Drina changes its tone, until it

⁴⁹ "[...] po ne sikur na thanë që e muruara ishte grua, kurse ky qenka burrë. Madje na thane se do të shihnim edhe vendin ku pikon qumështi i gjirit të asaj të gjore. Ohu, i përgjigjeshin dy-tri zëra përnjëherësh. Ende me gojëdhënë e vjetër ti?" (131).

⁵⁰ "Varoš je brzo počela da se spušta sa brega ka vodi i da se širi i razvija i sve više sabija oko mosta i oko karavan-seraja koji je narod prozvaao Kamenitim hanom" (81).

⁵¹ Cf. Kadare's 1971 novel *Chronicle in Stone*. The line of similarities and derivations between the two authors does not end here. In *The Bridge on the Drina*, Andrić briefly mentions the powerful Albanian family Quprili, whose name translates as 'bridge,' which produced some of the most important men of the Ottoman Empire. Kadare in his *Palace of Dreams* (1981) develops the story around a member of the Quprili family employed by the Ministry of Dreams. The bridge metaphor is evoked as a link between the real and the world of dreams.

⁵² "Njegov vek je, iako smrtan po sebi, ličio na večnost, jer mu je kraj bio nedogledan" (82).

becomes clear that the destiny of the edifice is sealed: “The bridge remained as if under sentence of death, but none the less still whole and untouched, between the two warring sides” (326).⁵³ In its insistence on the permanence of the bridge, the narrative intentionally invokes the nationalist rhetoric of the uninterrupted continuation of a nation. Such organicist theories commonly define the uninterrupted *longue durée* of nations beginning at time immemorial (mythistorical past) and having no visible ending. Andrić’s bridge, thus, becomes a metaphor of the community-nation that evolves around the stony structure, interiorizes it and identifies its own existence with the destiny of the bridge.

In Kadare’s narrative, however, the bridge results from a brutal murder brought about by power struggle, and little wonder that there are no feelings of affection for the bridge among the Albanian people that the Bosnian community learns to show for theirs. This particular bridge, forced upon an already existing ancient community, transplants foreignness into the local traditions, creates social rupture, and threatens its integrity. Indeed, from the beginning the Ujana e Keqe bridge is associated exclusively with the evil that roads (modernity, colonization) bring with them. When the construction, despite all the curses of old woman Ajkuna and subversions of the ferry company, is completed, the bridge remains unused for a long time.⁵⁴ As soon as the first people start crossing the bridge, Uk, the now unemployed ferryman, dies. Kujundžić argues that the “history of the bridge needs to be erased in order for the story to take place and vice versa” (Kujundžić 112). In fact, it is the individual stories of people dying or sacrificed for a collective enterprise that are erased before the flesh-eating bridge is able to start living its own (hi)story. A trace of prophecy is

⁵³ “Most je stajao kao osuđen, ali još u suštini nedirnut i ceo, između dva zaraćena sveta” (395).

⁵⁴ Ajkuna is very much like Kazantzakis’s Village Mother, the remnant of the ancient mythological past whose fateful predictions command respect and fear among the villagers. As soon as the tacit prohibition inferred by her curse not to cross the bridge is broken the first Ottoman units appear in what announces their coming onslaught on Albania.

discernible in both texts: Andrić's text expresses it through the narrative tone of apprehension for the destiny of the bridge which shares the uncertain future of the nation. In Kadare's text, however, the bridge facilitates the conquest of Albania and its construction is perceived as an evil omen. It is the Ottomans who first cross the bridge in a skirmish that announces their sweeping conquests. The bridge is a metaphor for the Balkans/Albania at the time of the Ottoman threat: the Balkans/bridge is literally overrun by the conquerors with some, albeit inadequate resistance.

The Historical Encroachment

By way of conclusion, it is necessary to refer back to the beginning of this article where I argue that 20th-century alterations of the legend of immurement directly speak to the nation-forming modernist projects at several points pivotal for Balkan history and show how texts by Andrić and Kadare respond to this idea. Andrić's text covers a period of almost four centuries, from the Ottoman colonization of Bosnia to the beginning of WWI. This is also the lifespan of the bridge on the Drina. Although significant, since many of the events described in the text are historical, as is the Grand Vizier himself, Andrić treats history more as a backdrop against which revolve (hi)stories and legends which drive the community. Thus his narrative comes close to what Joseph Mali defines as *mythistory*, a story of the origin of a nation-community that evidently derives from myth but whose persistence and appeal through the ages shows a likelihood of some kind of historical involvement. The task of history, therefore, is to "illuminate," not "eliminate" myths (Mali 1). We can better comprehend this precarious borderline between the historical and mythical from some of Andrić's other writings. In *Conversations with Goya* we read:

[...] it is useless and mistaken to look for sense in the seemingly important but meaningless events taking place around us, [...] we should look for it in those layers which the centuries have built up around the few main legends of humanity. These layers constantly, if ever less faithfully, reproduce the form of that grain of truth around which they gather, and so carry it through the centuries. *The true history of mankind is contained in fairy stories, they make it possible to guess, if not to discover, its meaning* [my emphasis].⁵⁵ (1992, 16)

Andrew Wachtel in his commentary on *The Bridge on the Drina* notices that the narrative is generated by the fluctuation between “constant change” and a “denial of change” (Wachtel 85). Forces of historical advancement drive the narrative forward with imminent changes affecting the lives of all who live around the bridge and the river, except the bridge and the river themselves. It is interesting, however, that the omniscient (and metahistorical) narrator keeps insisting on the inability of the community to perceive changes or, rather, on their denial of changes. Like the insistence on the permanence of the bridge, the unconscious failure or, perhaps, the conscious refusal to notice the historical change plays a constitutive part in the development of the narrative. The reader is led to believe that however history progresses and whatever people do, the essence of their existence—the bridge and the spirit of the community constructed around it—remain unalterable and unaffected.

It is only towards the end of the text that the deceiving lull by which the bridge was surrounded, like the eternal pounding of the river against its foundations, is cut short by an event that was ominously anticipated many times in the narrative. Historically, this part begins with the events of the Balkan wars in 1912/1913 which saw the end of the Ottoman occupation of its last bastion in the Balkans, Bosnia, all its other former possessions already independent for several decades. With the

⁵⁵ «...да је узалудно и погрешно тражити смисао у безначајним а привидно тако важним догађајима који се дешавају око нас, него да га треба тражити у оним наслагама које столећа стварају око неколико главнијих легенди човечанства. Те наслаге стално, иако све мање верно, понављају облик оног зрнца истине око којег се слажу, и тако га преносе кроз столећа. У бајкама је права историја човечанства, из њих се да наслутити, ако не и потпуно открити, њен смисао» (25).

definite arrival of modern (European) history on the bridge-stage, the pace of events accelerates and the failure of the community to acknowledge the changes can be understood only as their conscious denial thereof: “By a strange exception, just these things which were of such great importance to the fate of the bridge and the town and all who lived in it came silently and almost unnoticed” (Andrić 1959, 238).⁵⁶ This emphasized lull forecasts fateful events which were to storm the country: “Time, it seemed, was holding its breath over the town. It was just then that it happened” (238).⁵⁷ The text treats 300 years of the existence of the bridge as part of Ottoman Empire as a period of relative uneventfulness and isolation which is mainly represented through a set of individual stories revolving around the bridge. However, the arrival of the Western, Austro-Hungarian Empire breaks the mythical lull and literally stamps history onto the bridge community by abruptly transplanting the accumulation of changes from Europe into the Bosnian community. The 1914 Sarajevo assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne by a Serbian student gave the western empire a much desired pretext for war. This historic event, which was an introduction to the dissolution of two great empires stretching over half of Europe, brings an end to the importance of both the bridge and its community:

The great stone bridge which, according to the ideas and the pious intentions of the Grand Vizier from Sokolovići, was meant to link the two parts of the Empire, and ‘for the love of God’ make easier the passage from West to East and from East to West, was now in fact cut off from both East and West and abandoned like a stranded ship or a deserted shrine.⁵⁸ (240)

The narrative, however, continues to insist on the inalterability of the bridge, although now *de facto* devoid of its former significance.

⁵⁶ “A po nekom čudnom izuzetku, upravo to što je bilo od tolike važnosti po sudbinu mosta i kasabe i svega što je živelo u njoj, došlo je ćutke, gotovo neopazice” (289).

⁵⁷ “Vreme je, izgleda, zaustavilo dah nad kasabom. I upravo tada se desilo” (289).

⁵⁸ “Veliki kameni most, koji je po zamisli i pobožnoj odluci vezira iz Sokolovića trebalo da spaja, kao jedan od beočuga imperije, dva dela carevine, i da ‘za božju ljubav’ olakšava prelaz od Zapada na Istok, i obrnuto, bio je sada stvarno odsečen i od Istoka i od Zapada i prepušten sebi kao nasukani brodovi i napuštene bogomolje” (291).

In his article, “Inventing Greece,” Peter Bien draws a parallel between nationalism and religion, stating that the modern nation is a substitute for religion and, therefore, acquires all its attributes, including that of the ultimate sacrifice:

[...] people fight and die all the time, [...], for their nation [...] and seem seldom to question the appropriateness of such martyrdom, which means that the nation has usurped the role of religion in providing the ultimate justification for existence. (218)

The void that formed following the death of God in modernity, however broadly defined, had to be filled with some kind of community-creating adhesive. The modern phenomenon of the nation, appropriating the attributes thus far associated solely with God’s immortal being, slips into the emptied slot positing itself as the next thing worth dying for. It assumes the functions of both the signified and the signifier of the religious system it dislocated: its presence as the entity to which the sacrificial body is offered is simultaneous to that of the body itself. By means of this paradigmatic coup, the self-imagined collective body of a nation usurps God’s position assuming the theological dogma of immortality concurrent with that of Christ’s sacrifice. In its self-identification with a god-like essence, the nation foregrounds its claim to the antiquity of origin, and even that of the transubstantiating body which, whatever befalls it, will muster the strength to recreate itself and rise anew. Translated into Andrić’s metaphoric language, the transience of human events leaves no trace on the eternal body of the bridge, and the collective body of the nation may suffer losses and injuries but its immortal essence remains unalterable and indestructible. Perhaps the answer to the question why the community of the Bosnian bridge does not or, simply, refuses to be perceptive of the changes affecting the world around it, may lie in Gregory Jusdanis’s observation that “[N]ationalist discourse, with its tales of progress, self-fulfilment, and manifest destiny, allows modern individuals to deny their mortality in the face of change” (Jusdanis 165). In acknowledging the historical changes that

engulf it, the bridge community—the microcosmic Bosnian nation—would plunge into a struggle with history, waking up to disturbance of centuries-old hierarchies and irreparable social ruptures endangering the community/nation that grew around the bridge and served as a model of multireligious cohabitation and tolerance. According to Bien, “Although nations do have a beginning, they seemingly have no end and thus are thought to be at least relatively immortal” (Bien 2005, 218). The little community around the bridge prefers to hold on to the illusion of its immortality choosing the slumber of the mythical repetitions of its indestructibility over the soberingly painful reality brought on by the onslaught of history.⁵⁹

It seems, though, that this collective denial is not peculiar to any particular nation. In *Topographies of Hellenism*, Leontis recognizes it as a strategy of communal resistance, “the Eastern nationalist’s opposition to Western systems,” against more universal and foreign concepts intended for the preservation of its particularity:

This communitarian vision upholds the value of regional communities over the state, indigenous roots over Western influence, traditions, manners, codes, and a local base over institutions, systems, centralized government, and uniform overcoding of an abstract sovereignty. (83)

Resounding with the adage of the bridge’s timelessness that closes each chapter of Andrić’s text, the community/nation chooses to project itself into the past and ignore historical events as temporary disturbances that may shake its foundations, but cannot affect the immortal essence of its collective body. In this way the text draws a visible boundary between the Ottoman-mythical roots of the community and its long, slow, and relatively undisturbed drowsy existence, and the Austrian-historical one of much shorter span albeit marked with rapid, profound, and irreversible impact upon

⁵⁹ In the text, the 300 years of the existence of the bridge as part of the Ottoman Empire is perceived as a period of relative uneventfulness and isolation, and is mainly represented through a set of individual stories centered around the bridge. However, the arrival of the Western, Austro-Hungarian Empire breaks the mythical lull and literally stamps history onto the bridge community by abruptly transplanting the accumulation of changes from Europe into the Bosnian community.

the microcosmic nation. For that reason, the final scene in which a Serbian mine detonates the explosive left on the bridge by the Austrians, carries a double symbolism.⁶⁰

Not only is it the end of the colonial era of which the bridge is a material, though silent witness and a reminder, but it is also the end of an era of significance for the true signified—the Balkans. Increasingly the Balkans lost their importance as a ‘connecting bridge’ between East and West, as other parts of the globe gained historic importance, and the Balkans were, in effect, left to struggle with their own ‘insignificance’ and problems. On the other hand, however, the destruction of the bridge carries the potential for a new beginning. It indeed arrived in the form of the liberation and unification of all south Slavs and the creation of their first common state—the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia. The symbolism of Andrić’s narrative is at its most powerful in the closing scenes of the novel, which witness the almost simultaneous death of the last true Ottoman subject, Alihođa, the guardian of the bridge, and the destruction of the bridge itself: “The *kapia* was there where it had always been, but just beyond the *kapia* the bridge stopped short. [...] The broken arches yawned painfully towards one another across the break” (331-332).⁶¹

Kadare’s text barely spans a decade and ends at the time preceding Andrić’s narrative—prior to the Ottoman conquest of Albania, around the end of the 14th century. Thus, his narrative written several decades after *The Bridge on the Drina* textually predates it and acts as a temporal introduction to Andrić’s chronicle. Although set in the times before the Ottoman conquest of Albania, it draws a parallel between three historically distant conquests of the Albanian territory, and the three

⁶⁰ This scene refers to the historic destiny of the Balkans, always caught in a death trap of its own differences and resentments which were, ultimately, created and used by greater powers.

⁶¹ “Kapija je bila na svom mestu, ali odmah iza kapije most je bio prekinut. [...] a između dva grubo prelomljena luka zja praznina” (401).

national crises set in the twentieth century. The Roman conquest of the Illyrian lands is mirrored by the Italian annexation of the Albanian territory preceding WWI; the Byzantine conquest in the Middle Ages, which arrived hand in hand with the imposition of Orthodox religion, is replicated in the pressures to which the Albanian communist state was exposed by the Soviet Union, the Orthodox-turned-communist empire of indeterminate East-West geography; finally, the 1970's alliance of the Albanian leadership with China, after a fallout with the Soviet Union, duplicates the invasion by the rising empire of the East, that of the Ottomans. In contrast to Andrić's community which, although bearing sacrifices throughout the construction process, shapes for itself a very modern or, it is safe to say, *global* multicultural identity, Kadare's text clearly coins a distinct 'native European' identity of Albania, and puts forward its claim of the most ancient nation in the Balkans, with all influences perceived equally foreign and threatening to its uniqueness. Despite this rather mythical approach to national question, Kadare's text reveals a distrust of myth and history alike. Both are denuded to show that they are little else but means to facilitate the manipulative discourse employed by a joint economical-political enterprise that presents itself as beneficial for the entire population. And, while the modernizing enterprise of the bridge's construction is closely connected with the suffering of the population in both texts, it eventually assumes a liberatory role in Andrić's narrative. Kadare's text, on the other hand, stops on the threshold of the greatest tragedy for the Albanian nation, which is as facilitated by the bridge/road construction, as it is by the acquisition of modern economic practices. Any attempt at modernization is received with suspicion by traditional communities and, Kadare seems to think, rightfully so, since every such attempt encroaches further into the integrity of the national body and changes its spiritual essence. For that particular reason Kadare shows no interest in

romanticizing the sacrifice legend visible in the other Balkan text explored in this article and, by analogy, no sympathy for the structure raised on the immured body. Kadare's bridge symbolizes not the construction of the nation, but its ruin, and as such loses all attributes of nourishment assigned to the earlier Balkan bridges whose victim was a woman sacrificed for the greater common good. Instead, his text insists that the sacrifice is a brutal murder committed out of economic and political interests, whose victim is a man cheated by a legal contract. This is the reason his bridge, unlike Andrić's, never blends into the daily lives of the people but exists solely as an ominous reminder of national tragedy.

CHAPTER ONE

The Violence of Myth and the Inscription of Women in History: Eugenia Fakinou's *The Seventh Garment*

Eugenia Fakinou's *The Seventh Garment* (1983) was written nine years after the ending of the dictatorship of the military junta and at the time when Greece's membership in the European Community was still pending. Greece was again reinventing itself after a succession of wars and undemocratic developments, and was reestablishing severed links to its European origin. Tortured, victimized, and wounded, this is the image the country presented in the late twentieth century. After decades in which the nation was split in two opposing camps a union with Europe presented a chance for internal divisions to be put aside, if not actually forgotten. This is the Greece of Fakinou's novel built as a complex multivocal narrative in which several female storytellers weave a story rich in mythical and mystical symbolism. The mythistorical context and the abundant use of mythical references in Eugenia Fakinou's novel are of interest for two main reasons. One is the issue of the female presence in myth, some would argue 'enslavement' in myth, which becomes particularly intriguing in relation to this novel with respect to the fact that it was written by a woman author in a culture which is fully immersed in mythological narratives. Yet, *The Seventh Garment* is not a typical confirmation of patriarchal supremacy in myth, and even less a liberatory feminist utopia. In fact, the treatment of myth in the text is original in the sense that it proposes an acknowledgement of the patriarchal mythistory but only through a parallel female inscription. Men are not only *not* excluded in the novel, as is sometimes the case in radical feminist writing, but are

pivotal for the narrative.⁶² Fakinou's novel fails to further sustain feminist fantasies of the possibility of escape from patriarchal symbolism but, instead, adds its own recognizable mark and its presence to the body of language and history. The other strain I explore in this chapter is the subtle yet powerful reference to the question of national history in the appropriation of the Demetra-Persephone myth through which the narrative of the novel develops. The following analysis considers female visions of tradition in which layers of history and myth are virtually imperceptible, and the radical 'modernity' that envisions its extrication from the grip of myth as its primary emancipatory priority. Through the strategy of problematizing the historiographic record as well as questioning the petrified patriarchal mythology, this text affirms its postmodern affinities, although at first glance its 'postmodernity' could be dismissed.

In *The Seventh Garment* the story is told in alternating internal monologues of several female members of a family and the Tree whose monologue rounds up the whole narrative. Mana, her daughter Eleni, and granddaughter Roula are the three narrators who spin the mythistorical narrative which comprises 150 years of Greek history, and involves no less than seven generations of a family. Roula, the Athenian granddaughter alienated from her rural family embarks on her 'voyage of discovery' to the little village symbolically named Rizes (Ρίζες) meaning 'roots,' a place located off geographical maps and road routes, in order to fulfill the promise given to her dying mother that she would attend her uncle's funeral whenever summoned. In Rizes the family is getting ready to

⁶² Monique Wittig, for example, creates a radical feminist Utopia which completely excludes patriarchy and features only female protagonists. My idea certainly is not to align Fakinou with feminism, but I think it important to emphasize the difference between *écriture féminine* and the kind of writing that forefronts women in a manner that is in no way exclusionist.

carry out pagan funeral rites requiring that ritual *flamboura*⁶³ be mounted with garments of first-born male ancestors that will guarantee the safe passage of the dying man to the other side. When one of the garments in the collection mysteriously goes missing, Mana performs self-sacrifice and offers her bloody garment in place of the missing one thus enabling her son to join the ancestral spirits.

In her pertinent elaboration on the subject of the rewriting of national history that pervades Fakinou's text, Georgia Gotsi attempts to disperse the simplified notion that the narrative of *The Seventh Garment* achieves nothing new but further confirms women's secondary role in mythical narratives.⁶⁴ The text of Fakinou's novel has caused a very limited critical engagement, and most criticism dedicated to it further relegates women to the back corners of myth with the heroic centerstage still reserved for their male counterparts. In her argument Gotsi briefly mentions, but fails to polemically engage, the well-known critique by Simone de Beauvoir of the 'enslavement' women are condemned to in mythical narratives that faithfully replicates their socio-historical reality. Gotsi chooses to regard the text of *The Seventh Garment* as Fakinou's contribution to the worldwide offensive of contemporary historical narratives by women in their efforts to "repossess historical experience" (92). Her claim is supported by examples of such revisionary histories written by Tony Morrison, Maro Douka, or Rhea Galanaki. It is of primary significance, however, to note that such subversive endeavors cannot be fully effective if they function solely on the stratum of the historical 'super-ego' glossing over much earlier narratives which inform its structure. Rather, the revisionary attempts have

⁶³ The term signifies a cross-like structure clad in human clothes for ritual purposes, as defined by the novel. Otherwise, *flamboura*, remnants of Byzantine standards, are carried around churches by participants on important religious holidays.

⁶⁴ Cf. her article for further references on the sort of criticism of the novel she engages with.

to be directed at the 'libidinal' foundation of the mythological narrative where female subjectivity still awaits affirmative inscription.

In de Beauvoir's view, "Women do not set themselves up as Subject and hence have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men" (161). Accurate or not, written more than half a century ago these words still have a painful resonance. Liberation called for by this grim vision of the aesthetic affirmation of womanhood may become practicable exclusively through the agency of a fully-fledged creative activity (artistic rather than biological), and an imposition of the female Self as the subject of literary and artistic production. Even some of the more recent writings on women's creative function tend to perceive women as the *objet d'art* rather than its producer: "[I]n terms of the production of culture, she is an art object: she is the ivory carving or mud replica, an icon or doll, but she is not the sculptor" (Showalter 293). According to Xavière Gauthier the silence of a woman writer implies her refusal to "find her way" in the logical patriarchal order that fails to accommodate her needs and desires but instead dictate their own. It relegates the woman author to exist "outside the historical process," and therefore she is relegated to a kind of conscious self-marginalization. The alternative to this is her complete subjugation to the historical, therefore, patriarchal and logical order. Responding to the challenges of patriarchy using 'their own weapons' alienates the woman writer from her own being. Once the woman starts speaking and writing like a man, in other words becomes "immasculated,"⁶⁵ the only way for her to "enter history [is] subdued and alienated." (Donovan 14).

⁶⁵ Patrocínio P. Schweickart's reader response theory attempts to expound the dubious position of the female reader faced with a text written by a man. The process through which the female reader becomes

In no way is women's *presence* in the mythical narrative questioned by these premises, however. It is rather the belief that women boast no primary role in artistic/cultural production of their own that, as a consequence, relegates them to the position of the object of the narrative to the same degree as they have in art. As a consequence, women in narratives have found themselves in the capacity of the other against which the male (usually heroic) subjectivity is being created—the passive role of a submissive female; or in case that agency is granted them, it is only that of an evil force which ultimately ends up defeated. Yet, there is a wide discursive gap between such a *myth of women* and the possibility of creation of space for *women in myth*.⁶⁶ Therefore, the mythical realm, which uncannily permeates the real, is mapped as another male playground and is added to the catalogue of other man-controlled realms, with history already in the grasp of male “concrete powers” (de Beauvoir 157).

Some authors bemoan the absence of women-empowering myths and recognize it to be the primary reason why women shun mythological subjects in their creative work. Speaking about the lack of mythological subtext in contemporary Greek poetry written by women, Karen van Dyck uncovers a deep suspicion of women poets toward the Homeric subtext whose exclusion, nevertheless, opens the door for new possibilities. Van Dyck's perception of the poetry by, for example, Jenny Mastoraki, or Rhea Galanaki, who do not

sucked in the male text and her perspective assimilated with the way of thinking not common to her is defined as “immascultation.” The female reader thus acquires a perspective and logical reasoning that further alienate her from her femininity.

⁶⁶ De Beauvoir's text is a rich source of various examples of “myths of women,” narrative as well as those originating from the actual traditions that inform those narratives. Part of her text offers literary renditions of “myths of women” she discusses in detail. In my interpretation, the “women in myth” should not be mistaken for the physical presence of female characters in the mythical text—they have always been there, albeit as an *absent presence*, in the words of deconstruction. Rather, what I propose by that term is the assertion of female subjectivity by a radical redefinition of the modes of mythical representation within an inflexible tradition. Fakinou's representation is likewise limited by the rigid structure of patriarchal and religious tradition, yet it is what Mana does to inscribe herself in that predefined text that matters.

show much interest in employing the mythical subtext, steers away from opinions which designate such poetry as inferior.⁶⁷ In fact, she uncovers a systematic “emptying out of ancient Greek myth from women’s poetry” in the last two decades of the twentieth century (121). In place of renditions of well-known mythologies which evidently perpetuate patriarchal cosmogonies, what we read in Greek women’s poetry is the fierce struggle against the remnants of that tradition:

What is left of ancient myth in these collections are the signs, the residue, of a violent struggle to resist patriarchal structures of meaning, to resist men’s representations of women. The bruises, the crumpled petticoats, the blood, the shredded garments that abound in these collections are the result of this struggle, but also the very material of an alternative poetics which does not console or offer explanations, but instead exhibits the violence of rhetoric at work in the act of representation. (123-4)

In their endeavor to create other meaningful forms of self-representation Greek women poets, according to van Dyck, choose to ignore myth, rather than rewrite it: “Myth is no longer necessary,” she claims (124). Most importantly, the ‘democratic’ age of ancient Greece was the time uniquely disinclined to women, to put it very mildly. The age of some of the greatest achievements in politics, philosophy, and art met its dialectical opposition in its restrictive and denigrating attitude to women. Europe itself with its own democratic principles is founded on this disastrous myth of female subjugation. In this light, therefore, it becomes fairly clear why Greek women poets choose to ignore such a tradition, as its undermining appears to be too unrealistic a project.

This is not the case with many European and American women poets who obviously hold that silence about myth is not an answer and, instead, prefer to rework the familiar stories in a new women-empowering context. Tracing the frequent occurrence of mythological themes in their work, Alicia Ostriker argues that the large-scale use of

⁶⁷ Van Dyck uncovers a rather conservative stream of interpretation which posits mythically informed poetry above that which lacks the mythical context.

mythology by many women poets is fundamentally revisionist. While female poets “do not share the modernist nostalgia for a golden age of past culture, [...] their mythmaking grows at least as much from a subterranean tradition of female self-projection and self-exploration as from the system building of the Romantics and moderns” (Ostriker 317). Thus female poets change myths beyond recognition “by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy” (318).⁶⁸

The Grip of the Mythical Enclosure

Illuminated by mythistory, *The Seventh Garment* appears to the reader as a two-fold inscription of women: on one side it proffers a revisionary rendition of the past which allows for the joining of women’s history to mainstream history, of “placing women’s history in history,”⁶⁹ while on the other it proposes a concurrent reclamation of agency for the feminine in the mythical realm. The *owning* of the story defines the political advantage not only in the national, but equally in the gender arena. One of the most obvious strategies that Fakinou employs to extricate women from the limitations of men-imposed myth is the foundation of her narrative in the distinct space of pre-Olympian, pre-Homeric mythology. Although in no way anti-, or un-patriarchal, and itself already a substitution for an anterior Goddess-oriented worship, Uranian mythological cosmology employed in Fakinou’s text nevertheless preserves some characteristic remnants of ancient beliefs linked to the matrilineal genealogy of the universe which leaves more

⁶⁸ The woman as the foundation of a patriarchal project—a recurrence of the theme whose literal rendition is the immurement myth I deal with in my first chapter.

⁶⁹ Cf. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Placing Women’s History in History”.

maneuvering space to women than the later Olympian cosmogony.⁷⁰ Not only does Fakinou employ myths much more ancient than the Olympian patriarchal impositions, but her narrative departs from the very point of origin of all Greek mythology—from the story of Ghea, Chronos, and Uranos into which she incorporates the myth of Demetra and Persephone and traces of the later Homeric mythology are present in the very subtle references to the *Odyssey*.

The strategy that Fakinou employs does not entail the literal overturning of the patriarchal myth (both ancient and Christian) for the sake of women. Nor is it interested in too easily created female worlds feeding off the fantasy of the existence of a parallel or separate female mythology, history, and language. Men are not perceived as the absolute enemy and most of the founding relationships of her narrators are good and solid relationships based on love. Rather, it can be said that her women *co-exist* within the strict boundaries of male history, which is their current inescapable reality, but inside that existence they create a very distinct and recognizable space for their own affirmation. Gotsi rightfully notices that the space thus created is so narrow that sometimes criticism

⁷⁰ A clear distinction should be made between the two cosmogonies. With fertility as the center of their stories pre-Homeric mythologies reflect the natural universe in an attempt to simplify its complexity and offer an explanation thereof. The Olympian mythology, in contrast, posits the male-oriented, and male-dominated world, presided by the arch-deity, Zeus, whose power was assured by the universal act of violence against the old order—*τιτανομαχία*. (The Olympian hierarchy thus prefigures the later development of a monotheistic universe.) Some more ancient deities are incorporated into the new pantheon, even female ones; however, while more ancient male deities overall become relegated to secondary capacities, the ancient goddesses end up confined into stereotyped functions that are largely simplified versions of those they used to fulfill in the old pantheon. One of the most striking examples is Aphrodite (Venus to the Romans) whose capacity of a protectress of love (simplistic rendition of a woman as a seductress and lover) obscures her original complex functions of a fertility goddess. Further, no child is born to the ruling couple of husband-wife/ brother-sister Zeus and Hera. Moreover, the only new female deity to appear in the Olympian pantheon, Athena, springs up from her father's head and, predictably, assumes the responsibility as the symbol of rational thinking. While ancient arch-goddesses comprised a multiplicity of functions as mothers, lovers, seductresses, etc., Hera is for the most part found getting busy with jealous retributions against the innumerable lovers of the eternal 'bachelor' Zeus (but unsuccessful in taming the patriarch himself).

does not recognize the liberatory self-inscriptive efforts of Fakinou's characters, and instead indict them on the grounds of their passive collusion with their patriarchal reality.⁷¹ Unlike strategies evident in most feminist texts to subvert the patriarchal cosmos and to replace or at least visibly undermine it for the sake of the feminist one, Fakinou's novel does not subscribe to a female utopia. What her text does is a fundamental *healing* of history—first by acknowledging the women's role in history and then by building a firm connection between the female and male worlds, closing the rupture created by historic events. In this respect the novel profoundly reflects the socio-political developments of the Greece at that time which was itself plagued by divisions and gaps begging to be sealed.

In my analysis of *The Seventh Garment* I am less interested in the actual rendition of the mythical context in the novel. Instead, my reading of the narrative concentrates on the trajectories proposed by the text: the female strategies in creating an operative space within the confines of patriarchal mythistory, the cultural friction between the refugees and the population of Greece manifested in the 'othering' of the Asia Minor population, and the inextricability of the personal story from the macrocosm of national history.

At the onset of the narrative we hear the voice of the oak tree that frames the text structurally; it will speak again only in the closing lines of the text. The oak tree, another reference to the pre-Homeric and primordial European nature-worship, identifies women as not only creators of everything living, but also as the writers of history itself:⁷²

⁷¹ Gotsi refers to Athanasia Sourbati's perception of Fakinou's novel as prohibitive to the liberatory strategies of women.

⁷² In *The Golden Bough* Frazer clearly identifies the oak as the sacred tree of "European Aryans," before the imported customs linked to the worship of the pine were brought over from Asia Minor in relation to the cult of Attis. Despite its connection to the worship of Zeus, its use in the novel places the cult of the sacred oak tree as a custom predating subsequent modifications, thus linking it to mythologies more ancient than the Homeric. Yet, its monologue which completely envelops the female narrative can equally

I love women. Women and wild flowers. I love the colours of wild flowers. White, yellow and purple. These are the colours of the land. [...] Women are suffering greatly again. It is women who write History. They carry the world's great events on their shoulders.⁷³ (7)

Despite allowing women the grace of creation, however, the Tree's monologue clearly forms the boundaries of the discursive space. No wonder that some critics perceive this space to be too narrow to allow female agency even a modicum of expansion. Anastasia Sourbati, for example, identifies this limitation as a "phallic enclosure" which defines the narrative inhibition of the female subtext, and leads her to relegate the narrative itself with all its protagonists to the service of the preservation of a patriarchal "myth of woman, which needs to be fed on the female blood of rape, childbirth and virginity" (40). However, the most obvious problem with this reading lies in the representation of men as 'present absences' in the world in which women are left to fend for themselves. The men are for the most part absent and only remembered in women's stories. Although the spirit of patriarchy holds a firm grip over the women's reality, their own men are eradicated by history. When evoked, though, men are rendered through the imagery of decapitation, the obvious referent for castration and a literal disempowerment in the face of history and the collapse of their traditional role of protectors to their womenfolk.⁷⁴ Others are rendered worthless of history or memory and reduced to rapists who thus take revenge both on history and other men. This may sound like a fairly reductionist approach and to a certain

symbolize the very clear delimitations to it, making any transgression out of its rounding structure virtually impossible.

⁷³ «Αγαπώ τις γυναίκες. Τις γυναίκες και τ'αγριολούλουδα. Τ'αγριολούλουδα έχουν τα χρώματα που μου αρέσουν. Το λευκό, το κίτρινο και το ιώδες. [...] Οι γυναίκες πάλι έχουν τα μεγάλα πάθη. Αυτές είναι που γράφουν την Ιστορία. Που σηκώνουν στους ώμους τους τις σημαδιακές στιγμές.» (7)

⁷⁴ Men are envisioned as decapitated in the women's dreams. In the opening of the narrative Roula has a premonition of what is to happen by dreaming of a blond man's head on the pillar—most likely Fotos's. Likewise, Mana keeps seeing Andronikos's head everywhere, and talking to it. The symbolical 'pillar of the house' is thus decapitated, and women are clearly left to themselves. This fact, however, is precisely what opens the door to the creation of a unique women's space.

extent counterbalances the traditional patriarchal relegation of women to the roles of mothers and seductresses. However, I cautiously consider it a clearing gesture of creating the space for female assertion it and further problematization of the narrative. It leaves the space of female affirmation free of men, most of whom are eradicated by history's cruel immanence. Interestingly, though, this does not in any way loosen the hold that patriarchy has over women, and it continues to loom as a presence whose spirit is perpetuated by the womenfolk. It is within this spirit of patriarchy that looms over their reality that the women's efforts to realize their liberatory strategies, without effacing this spirit's presence, are put into practice.

Magic is one of the few liberatory strategies allowed to women within the patriarchal confines, and the realm in which they have full control. Indeed, it can be argued that the only recourse they have within this strict division into the male and female social spheres is the undefined realm of ritual, the unconscious (dreams), and magic.⁷⁵ The text abounds in elements that underline the primeval link between women and the supernatural.⁷⁶ The women's recourse to magic is thus seen as the alternative to their total social subjection. I do not argue that this resort can in any way be interpreted as subverting the patriarchal idiom, but that, instead, it allows some space to women within the strictures of their social embeddedness. The text thus proffers a very interesting amalgamation of pagan rituals and Orthodox Christian religious practices. Indeed, it can be argued that the narrative model of the permeation of pagan practices into the

⁷⁵ The most important events are foreshadowed by women's dreams—Demos raping his daughter, Fotos killing his father, Persephone's disappearance, Mana's letter to her daughter to visit her dying brother—are all events that generate further narrative developments, and are all prefigured in the women's dreams.

⁷⁶ Gotsi offers a link between magic realism, as the strategy employed in Latin American literature, and Fakinou's text. I will refrain from repeating the premises offered in her article, and concentrate on the significance of Fakinou's use of magical elements within the scope of my thesis.

structured religious system reflects the dynamics of the women's modes of expression within their confining social reality. The text deals with the rudimentary, albeit imposing presence of paganism at several levels. The first is the very transparent identification of the novel's characters with mythological personages. On the second, more emphatic one, the pagan rituals and mythical narratives blend with Christian elements to create a unique setting that will distinctly be recognized as the female space. Mana's discovery of a garden upon her arrival at Grandma Maria's household marks her unveiling of this unique metaphysical space through which she will be able to escape from the harsh daily reality of excommunication and maltreatment. This space is located within the distinct boundaries of Christian ethics (performing the patriarchal social space), but is heavily invested with pagan rituals and beliefs that are accessible only to the initiated (the suffering, isolated ones). This religious-mythological dynamic elicits the recognition on the part of Mana of her new living space as the designated location of her reunion with the lost daughter.

Mana's decision to settle down in expectation of finding the vanished child is stipulated by the reappearance of the lost homeland within the space of mainland Greece. It is evoked by the space cultivated as a miniature of what Grandma and her husband had left in Asia Minor more than half a century before Mana was forced to do the same, and in the unmistakable affinity in the topographies between her homeland and the land she came to:⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Topography plays an important role in Greek nationalism, and literature faithfully reflects the sentiment. The underlying idea proposed by this topographic approach to the nation is that the nation itself, as much as its culture, art, and literature, sprang forth from the land, rather than simply being inspired by it. The unique Greek topography is not only reproduced in its art, but is, in fact, its main *raison d'être*. In her book *Topographies of Hellenism* (1995), Artemis Leontis explores the Greek attempt to reconcile the imaginary Hellas with their modern nation, its rhetoric with its unique geographical setting.

At the other end of the garden she had a shed, a long wooden shed, which was roofed with planks. We had that sort of thing in Vourla, too. But her garden had gone to ruin. [...] And there I was with a petticoat full of all kinds of seeds...But I hadn't saved them for other people's gardens...I would only plant them when I found my daughter, Persephone. [...] I found the rising ground on the right, and took it. Stony and barren, it was. Donkey thistles, dried out by the summer. Like the countryside round Vourla...⁷⁸ (59)

Symbolically, the little chapel of a Christian saint that Grandma's husband built on his land sits atop the hill and is accessible only through layers of ancient stones with ancient Greek inscriptions—carved by the late captain. The official religion clearly overlooks the remnants (however artificial) of the past, as well as the sacred Tree, yet the chapel is occasionally mysteriously filled with fresh seaweed, although located in the area where people have never seen the sea. The sacredness of this point of intersection of the mythical and religious trajectories is clumped by the agents of the religious-patriarchal network; however the ancient practices claim for themselves a certain autonomy within the Christian system of belief. The layer of the female symbolic operates in this domain; and since it is incapable of openly subverting the rigid strictures of the system, it imperceptibly seeps into it.

Persephone as a National Paradigm

The profound interest in the question of national identity shown by Balkan writers signifies a certain dose of insecurity in the matter of identity perceptions, internally and externally defined, and as such it achieves its manifestation both at the individual as well as the collective spheres of political life. The novels discussed in this dissertation,

⁷⁸ Στην άλλη άκρη του περβολιού είχε και σαρτί, μεγάλη ξύλινη αποθήκη, μακρόστενη και σκεπαστή με σανίδια. Είχαμε και στα Βουρλά τέτοια. Όμως, το περβόλι είχε ρημάξει. [...] Και να 'χω ένα μεσοφόρι με όλων των λογίων τα σπόρια... Όμως, δεν τα 'χα για τα ξένα περβόλια... Μόνο όταν θα 'βρισκα το κορίτσι μου, την Περσεφόνη, τότε θα τα φύτευα [...] Βρήκα δεξιά την ανηφόρα και την πήρα. Πέτρες και ξεραϊλα. Ξεραμμένα γαϊδουράγκαθα απ' το καλοκαίρι. Πού οι εξοχές των Βουρλών... (60).

therefore, are as much about an individual's perception of identity as they are about the national perceptions of identity—national allegories in a Jamesonian sense,⁷⁹ but free of the blanketing conflation of the individual and the collective implied by his critique. In opposition to the all but derogatory, all-pervading collectivism that Jameson uncritically assigns to literally any fictional piece of non-western origin, the fiction I analyze in this dissertation argues that individual traits are not eradicated and collapsed under the pressing imperatives of the collectivities. On the contrary, they only clearly expose the inviability of definitions that posit the individual outside a collective context without which she or he is unable to create a meaningful existence.

The sense of rootedness, of shared ground is the common denominator of both Mana's and Grandmother's lives. Their individual exiles, which are in both cases only microcosms of large-scale population movements, translate as a reflection of the contemporaneous national condition, the threats and insecurities to which the entire collective body is currently exposed. The war-induced exile of the grandmother, the *external* exile, is duplicated not only in Mana's exile almost a century later, but also in Roula's postmodern displacement. Roula's sense of a city-dweller alienated from her roots and traditions of her family, the subject Fakinou revisits in her other novel, *Astradeni* (1991), forms the backbone of the conflict that pervades the novel.⁸⁰ The replication of the exile is not the only thematic repetition in *The Seventh Garment*. Indeed, the novel teems with reprised events and rebirths located within a collapsed

⁷⁹ See my references to his 'national allegory' theory in the Introduction.

⁸⁰ *Astradeni* is fully dedicated to the problems of the sense of alienation and uprootedness of individuals in the process of social transformation from a primitive, family-oriented structure into a 'modern' consumerist society. The girl Astradeni is taken away from a small Aegean island to start a new life in Athens. Her narrative, in which she revisits her native island through the memory of a happier time than that she faces in the big city, the reader follows not only her own transformation and growth, but the many contrasts that still exist in the two opposing parts of the Greek society, rural and urban despite the onslaught of consumerism blanketing the differences.

historical time all indicating a strong mythical structure of this text. In fact, the term *mythistory* reaches its full potential in *The Seventh Garment*, where the boundaries between pagan and religious traditions, historical events and mythical subtext become barely discernible.

Mana leaves her idyllic home in Asia Minor for Greece but never stops dreaming of the place she came from. Her attempts to recreate the atmosphere of her lost land, captured in the image of a paradise-like garden she manages with her own hands, degenerate instead into a lifetime of rape and social exclusion. The lost home in what is now Turkey, however, never stops haunting her. Her Asia Minor home is referred to in Edenic terms, forever contrasted to her current position of a refugee who is, moreover, in the eyes of her Greek hosts, not regarded as a victim of the territorial appetites of the Greek political elites but instead blamed for their catastrophic ramifications.⁸¹ In one of the most powerfully beautiful parts of the text, the two refugee women, the Grandmother Maria, and the newly-arrived Mana, relate the web of their own histories, profoundly embedded within the national history, and separated from each other by a long span of

⁸¹ It is necessary at this point to introduce the terms which will be referred to in this particular Article, and which relate to the events in Greek history underlying the narrative. The first is the 'Megali idea' (μεγάλη ιδέα), a common referent to the nationalist sentiment of the elites of the modern Greek state, which regarded the former Byzantine territories as a logical extension of the modern statehood. The military campaign for the 'liberation' of the population and territories under the Ottoman rule, and the subsequent Greek defeat by the consolidated Turkish army culminated in one of the greatest humanitarian disasters of the twentieth century, in Greek history usually referred to as the 'Catastrophe' of 1922 (καταστροφή). It may be interesting to point to a curious parallel between that particular moment of Greek history and the tragedy of the former Yugoslavia of the 1990's, both of which were, for the greatest part, created by the same sort of short-sighted nationalism and stubborn refusal to accept the current political realities. The slogan "All Serbs in one country," guiding the Serbian nationalist sentiment at the end of the last century, and now an ominous reminder of its tragic consequences, was allegedly promulgated by Slobodan Milošević. It became legitimated as a guiding idea amidst the rising nationalism and secession proclamations by the other Yugoslav republics to save the Serbian national body from being scattered in several states. The military intervention in the then already (however hastily) recognized independent states of Croatia and Slovenia was one of the tragic ramifications of that failure, which resulted in yet another (largely ignored internationally) exodus of about a million Serbs from Croatia and Bosnia. Ironically, the nationalist sentiment proved worth of its promise, as the Serbs did end up living in one (albeit increasingly shrinking) country.

almost a century. Their respective narratives which in the course of their telling cut into one another sound uncannily connected, as if they were part of the same story rather than two temporally distant episodes.⁸²

“I was sixteen years old in 1824. I’d already had my Thodoros and my Aretoula. I was pregnant with Pelagia. My husband, a captain, was fighting the Turks...

“We weren’t at war with them. We lived among them, and everything was fine. They didn’t bother us and we didn’t bother them. But when the Greek army went and took Smyrna...we took out the Greek flags that we had in our trunks, and put them out on our balconies...

“My captain was Kanaris’s righthand man. He was with him when he went to Pontos and Odessa. And he was with him when they burned Kara Ali’s flagship. and he was with him again in Samos, when they burned Hosref’s frigate.”

“My husband, Andronikos, had a tannery at Dere, near the Great Bridge. He used to draw, too. Saints, and icons, and Alexander the Great. Just for the fun of it. And one day he marked a little cross on the shoulder of my daughter, Persephone.”⁸³ (51)

The end of their narrative(s) of exile finds both women physically weakened by the accelerating pace of the events they had been recounting and the culminating collapse of the two stories into an undistinguishable confusion of mass killings and fleeing. History

⁸² Theo Angelopoulos develops this idea of the perpetually repetitive history in *Το βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα* [Ulysses’ Gaze] (1995) through the imperceptibly sequenced takes to the virtual obliteration spatial and temporal boundaries. Temporally distant historical events blend one into another to the extent of becoming just one prolonged tragedy (I already developed in my analysis of *Bait* Benjamin’s idea of a single historical catastrophe). This is even more forcefully impressed onto the mind of the spectator by his use of a single actress to play the many mythical women in the film. History affects one and all women in the same way, and their story is one long tragedy in spite of individual variations. In his use of the single actress to play all the women in the film, Angelopoulos utilizes the idea found in Kazantzakis’s *Last Christ’s Temptation* that “there is only one woman.”

⁸³ «Ημouνα δεκάξι χρονών το 1824», είπε η γριά. «Είχα κιόλας τον Θόδωρο και την Αρετούλα μου. Ήμouνα γκαστρωμένη στην Πελαγία. Ο καπετάνιος μου πολέμαγε τους Τούρκους...»

«Εμείς δεν τους πολεμάγαμε. Ζούσαμε καλά μαζί τους. Ούτε αυτοί μας παιδεύανε ούτε εμείς τους ενοχλούσαμε. Όταν πήκε, όμως, ο ελληνικός στρατός στη Σμύρνη και με τις νίκες που είχε... ε... ό,τι ελληνικές σημαίες είχαμε στις κασέλες, τις βγάλαμε και τις απλώσαμε στα μπαλκόνια...»

«Ο καπετάνιος μου ήτανε το δεξί χέρι του Κανάρη. Μαζί ταξιδεύανε στον Πόντο και στην Οδησσό. Και μετά μαζί κάψανε τη ναυαρχίδα του Καρα Αλή. Και μετά, στη Σάμο, τη φρεγάτα Χοσρέφ πάλι μαζί την κάψανε...»

«Ο δικός μου, ο Ανδρόνικος, είχε ταμπάκι στο Ντερέ, κοντά στο Μεγάλο Γιοφύρι. Ζωγράφιζε κιόλας. Αγίους, εικόνες, τον Μεγαλέξαντρο. Έτσι, για το γούστο του. Και της Περσεφόνης μου της έφτιαξε ένα σταυρουλάκι στον ώμο». (51)

with its divine-like disinterestedness in the individual human destiny is a constant and ominous presence in their stories of personal tragedy.⁸⁴

The two women's lives offer trajectories to the discussion of rootedness and connectedness to the soil as key in the definition of identity. In their life stories of striking parallelism the Edenic atmosphere of their marriages is destroyed by the aggressive encroachment of the public and historical. Grandmother's husband is busy fighting the Turks in the liberation wars of the 1820's, while Mana's beloved Andronikos, as well as her daughter, get lost to another war a century later. Her private sphere is devoured by the intervention of the public, and her life of the refugee in Greece, moreover of a woman 'unprotected' by her man, is from then on immersed in the cycle of rapes, humiliations, and total social excommunication. Mana's example is especially interesting from national-collective perspective of the notion of 'motherland.' Her exclusion from the national body granted to native Greeks compels one to ponder more deeply into the structure which is welcoming to some yet prohibitive to others. Likewise, it poses some provocative questions as to the cultural, linguistic and, racial, inclusion (or exclusion) of Asia Minor Greeks into the corpus of the Greek nation.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ A similar Edenic account to that given by Mana in her part of the story, of the pre-Catastrophe life of the Greek minority in their Asia Minor home and shared values of religious tolerance and cohabitation with the local Turks is found in Dido Sotiriou's *Farewell Anatolia* (1962), whose text reads as a nostalgic account of the life before the Greek military intervention, as well as a strong condemnation of the forces that brought the sense of insecurity and hostility to the population on both sides. This idea is promulgated through the main protagonist, Manolis's lament over his separation from his Turkish friend.

⁸⁵ Examples of exclusion of parts of the national body as a consequence of racial or religious 'tainting' in more recent history can be found in the formation of the Jewish national body of the state of Israel. In an example closer to the geography of the dissertation, however, similar unwillingness was present among the population of Serbia to accept Serbian refugees from Croatia and Bosnia during the latest wars. Viewed as the cause of the suffering of the people of Serbia because of the war which in the eyes of many was being waged for their interests, refugees who, due to the international isolation of the country during the war, could only flee to Serbia proper, were largely made feel unwelcome. By radical nationalists they were branded as 'culturally different' because of their centuries-old co-habitation with the Catholic Croats, or Bosnian Muslims. I think that in this respect the parallel between the Asia Minor Greek refugees and Greeks of Greece in this respect is very relevant.

Lost Home – Almost

One of the recurrent motifs in the text is that of *nostos*, homecoming, experienced at different times, but in eerily similar images by the founding women. Mana's entrance in Rizes is strangely replayed in Roula's arrival on the occasion of Fotos's death. The motif of *nostos*, present in Greek literature ever since the *Odyssey*, mutates several times in Fakinou's narrative. Namely, the place of 'homecoming' is something like home, but not quite. The arrival in the village of Rizes by Grandma Maria and her husband evokes the memory of the Homeric epic, as the captain decides to settle in a place where "people have never seen the sea, never seen a caique, never seen boats and never seen oars" (55).⁸⁶ Mana's and Roula's arrivals to the village, however, replay this image through several *déjà vu* sequences. On Roula's arrival, her very own *nostos* to her family roots (ρίζες), which she eventually disowns, she is at first mistaken by Mana for the long departed Archontoula. In the long search for the lost Persephone/land, Mana recognizes parts of her disappeared daughter in both Eleni and Roula, but neither of them is exactly like her. In her third reincarnation, Persephone reemerges as Roula, an Athenian with progressive views, but still roughly cut and insufficiently sophisticated for someone with a truly urban tradition. When summoned to attend her uncle's funeral Roula is immediately recognized as the heiress to the tradition, and mistaken for her mother. Her entry in the village replicates Mana's arrival to Rizes half a century before, except for the clock on the church tower which had stopped in time, clearly suspended in the liminal point of the intersection between historical time and mythical timelessness.

Mana gradually uncovers affinities between the lost home and the land she came to as her actual place of origin, although alien and hostile at first. The recurring imagery of

⁸⁶ «ο κόσμος δε θα 'χει δει ποτέ του θάλασσα. Ποτέ του καϊκι. Ποτέ του βάρκα και κουπί» (58).

landscape and architecture she left at home emphasizes the striking resemblance between the Greek mainland and territories under Hellenic influence. However, although emblematic of the migratory destinies of the Greek people and the trajectories of their cultural impact, this recognition of sameness is far from creating an instantaneous affinity between the culture of mainland Greece and the territories and populations under its cultural influence.⁸⁷ Significantly, the very first instance of recognition between Grandma and Mana that preceded Mana's topographic epiphany occurs at the linguistic level: "*Kuyum*, she said, for kettle. And *alisfakiya*, for sage. Those are *our* words. From Asia Minor. They don't use them here – they say *mastrapa* and *faskomilia*..." (50).⁸⁸ At the same instant of creating a bond between the two women that defines their uniqueness within mainstream culture, this recognition foreshadows the friction between the two cultures. After all, Mana's identification with her new land occurs only in the landscape artificially made to look like home, having been created by Grandma's husband as a replica of what they left in Asia Minor. For that reason, Mana's accommodation to the Greek geographic and cultural landscape mirrors the intrusion of the 'otherness' that was brought back to mainland Greece—the center of the rational thought—from the formerly Byzantine territories. This is a new Greekness that returns to the point of origin altered by too close a coexistence with irrational mystical cults and eastern philosophy. The process of reunification of these exiled and ultimately changed parts of the Greek nation with the

⁸⁷ Similar strategy is employed by Angelopoulos in *Ulysses' Gaze*, where Odysseus's wanderings across Balkan history and geography are neatly underlined by the narrative of the Greek cultural influence that seems to be the main unifying force in the region otherwise tortured by wars and resentments. Through this very subtle gesture Angelopoulos counterbalances the general notion of the Ottoman dominance of the region by the much more ancient Greek cultural, economic, and demographic influence. One of the many layers of this dense filmic narrative envisions the Greek presence in the region as a counterbalance to the disease of political instability and fragmentation that, as a rule, accompanies anti-colonial struggle, and that has been plaguing the region ever since the fall of the Ottoman empire.

⁸⁸ «Αλισφακιά, κουγιούμι... Αυτές είναι δικές μας λέξεις. Μικρασιάτικες. Δεν τις λένε στον κάμπο. Αυτοί λένε «φασκομηλιά, μαστραπά»...

seat of *logos*, and the mainland national body, therefore, does run smoothly. However, for the most part unwelcome by the domestic population, they carry a huge potential that the Tree barely announces to Mana: “Today you lie, as a fruitful many-branched olive tree lies, uprooted by the violent blowing of harsh winds...” (63).⁸⁹

In his informative survey of Greek fiction (written up to the publication of his book in 1977 and, therefore, not including Fakinou’s novel) based on the Disaster of 1922, Thomas Doulis weighs the pros and cons of the event on the Greek nation, its statehood, and its economy. He is, however, silent on the cultural and racial issues that I suppose must have been raised at the time, of the ‘taintedness’ of the Asia Minor Greeks brought about by too close an encounter with an ‘alien’ culture. He seems to be more interested in the influence exerted by the mass of refugees upon the Greek nation and the country’s economy and recognizes the swelling of the population caused by the arrival of refugees as a definitive step towards a sharp homogenization of the Greek national body, as well as development of “a unified national culture” (Doulis 5).⁹⁰ Certainly, with the exclusion of the ‘alien’ religious and cultural element after the ‘population exchange’ with Turkey, the nation headed towards a greater territorial and cultural homogeneity. In the shrinking of its national territory Doulis uncovers a potential for a greater territorial integrity of Greece that accompanies the cultural integration and homogenization of its population. The refugee wave created a veritable upheaval, an ensemble of alterations that

⁸⁹ «Σήμεραρον κείσαι, ως εύφορος πολύκλωνος ελαία από το βίαιον φύσημα σκληρών ανέμων κείται εκριζωμένη...» (64).

⁹⁰ Certain degree of difference between the Ottoman Greek refugees and the mainland Greeks is acknowledged in Dimitra Giannuli’s article “Greeks or ‘Strangers at Home,’” relating mostly to their political organization and religious practices. The topic still seems to be a sensitive one and is not treated from the critical and theoretical point that it certainly deserves. Sadly, more on implied racial ‘taintedness’ is gathered in old texts of 19-century philhellenes, where the racial incompatibility of modern-day Greeks with the ancient ideal reflects the alienation of the Asian Greeks when compared with their Westernized hosts, than in any seriously compiled study of the encounter of the ‘natives’ with the ‘refugees.’

significantly modified the Greek social landscape, and whose magnitude did not leave a single sphere of life untransfigured. The consequences of their significant presence manifested themselves in all aspects of class refashionings—from predominantly rural refugee population swelling Greek urban centers and creating a new proletarian class, to Asia Minor capitalists forced into agrarian economy, to the strong republican sentiment and autonomous government practices of the newcomers that sharply contrasted with the conformity of the Ottoman laws of the mainland Greece inhabitants, to many other more or less visible social modifications. In short, the period could easily be defined as both the breaking and making point of Greek political modernity. Transferred to Fakinou's narrative, Mana's life as a social outcast—treated with a greater or lesser degree of tolerance—is to a certain extent representative of the acceptance these various remnants of 'otherness' received within the mainstream Greek culture. An illustration of the persistence of alien components within the sanctioned social sphere is the reaction of the village priest to Mana's insistence on performing a pagan burial ritual upon Fotos's death. The ritual seriously departs from the Christian one, yet the priest, although reluctant to condone the pagan practices, is not entirely prohibitive. He seems to have reconciled himself to the offensive practices after repossessing Fotos's soul for Christianity by taking his full confession.

Contemporary reemergence of Persephone

All of the above invites an openly social reading of the Demetra-Persephone dynamics. Apart from its derivation from ancient fertility myths, the Demetra-Persephone story as used in Fakinou's text is appropriately modified to fit the secular national context.

Viewed in that light the loss of the paradisiacally depicted Asia Minor home (Persephone) irresistibly reminds one of nostalgic visions of the Promised Land which is to be reconquered after a long period of its dark, underworld existence, as the centuries of Ottoman rule are frequently referred to. Nowhere in the narrative can we find the exact circumstances of the daughter's disappearance, unless we account for Eleni's dream which is little else than the ancient myth of Persephone's abduction by Hades verbatim, and which is strongly insistent on the sexual imagery of the act of abduction.⁹¹ She vanishes somewhere on the way between Asia Minor and mainland Greece. She subsequently re-appears in the person of her second daughter Eleni, who has an identical cross on the shoulder to the one Andronikos drew on Persephone's, and in her urban, second-generation incarnation personified in the granddaughter Roula. Through identification by substitution Persephone-Eleni-Roula, therefore, becomes the metaphor of the motherland whose 'disappearance' is not permanent, and which, after Mana's Odyssean search through mainland Greece, resurfaces in a mutated form—as Eleni in the rural version of mainland Greece, and ultimately as Roula, her modern, still unsophisticated, at moments even vulgar, but temporally co-existent counterpart. Mana's pain at the loss of Persephone (her original home), however, is inconsolable. All her other children, though loved and welcome, are a constant reminder that she begot them at the cost of losing her ground, her love, and by being exposed to unspeakable sufferings and humiliations.

On her part, however much Eleni resembles Persephone, she is a sickly child struck with epilepsy. She is not the exact substitute for the original loss, but her debilitating

⁹¹ In the broad application of the woman-land metaphor this episode appropriately complements the graphic descriptions of repetitive acts of rape by Demos.

illness makes it possible for her to continue the female family tradition of speaking to the Tree. What Roula encounters after entering Rizes (revisiting her ‘roots’) belongs to the uncanny province of the mythical unconscious. Her presence is required to enable her uncle to die in peace although burdened by the family’s greatest secret. Thus Roula is not only accidentally mistaken for her mother – she is required to *perform* her mother in order to calm Fotos’s burning conscience. One of the many obstacles that block his safe departure to the other world is his suspicion whether he was in time to save his sister from rape. This is the mystery that Archontoula took away with her the morning she disappeared from the village severing all her ties with her family. Roula is instructed on how to talk to the dying man and ease his conscience:

‘My Archontoula...’

‘My brother,’ I whisper, as the old lady told me to.

‘Was I in time?’

That’s all he says – ‘Was I in time?’ I’ve been wondering exactly the same myself, ever since the old lady told me all those things this morning. I hug him, I kiss him, and I say: ‘Yes, my Fotos... Yes, my brother...’ I no longer even know what I’m doing... I’ve fallen into his arms and I’m crying my eyes out and saying: ‘Relax now... You can relax now, everything is all right,’ and ‘You saved me,’ and all kinds of things that I don’t even know I’m saying...⁹² (96)

One of the implications of his being late in saving his sister, however, is that Roula is not only acting as Fotos’s sister, but that she may as well *be* one, if he was late. That is a possibility, however, that the text never fully reveals, and instead remains outside the narrative closure, together with Persephone’s disappearance.

Roula makes a clear break between the tradition and urban modernity when she refuses to participate in the ritual preceding the burial of Fotos and, visibly disgusted by

⁹² «Αρχοντούλα μου...» «Αδελφέ μου...» ψιθύρισα – όπως μου ‘πε η γριά. «Πρόλαβα;...» Μόνο αυτό είπε: «πρόλαβα;...». Την ίδια κουβέντα που σκεφτόμουν κι εγώ, το πρωί του μου τα ‘πε η γριά. Τον αγκαλιάζω, τον φιλάω, του λέω «ναι, Φώτο μου, ναι, αδελφέ μου»... Ούτε που ξέρω πια τι κάνω. Έχω πέσει στην αγκαλιά του και κλαίω και του φωνάζω «να ησυχάσεις όλα καλά», «εσύ με γλίτωσες», ούτε ξέρω τι λεω πια...» (98).

the performance being enacted for the purpose, she cannot wait to leave—and, moreover, take a niece of hers to Athens. Inasmuch as she is envisioned as a possible link between the traditional and modern aspects of Greece, that thematic closure of the narrative clearly fails. The potential for Roula’s integration into the family collapses, and with it the joining of the two contemporaneous stages of the nations’ existence. There is no alternative to the modern urban existence, according to Roula who cannot even conceive of the possibility of the reconciliation between the traditional and urban realities.⁹³ Any dialogue with what she obviously perceives as rural backwardness would ultimately lead to the failure which, in Roula’s interpretation, carries much more profound implications, as it translates into the failure of the chances of Greece to follow its ancient civilizing traditions, as well as the path to Europeanness: “How are we going to become Europeans...? With bloodstained shirts and old women beating their chests and talking with the dead...?” (122).⁹⁴ Roula, epitomizing the modern urban population, clearly identifies the traditions practiced within Mana’s household as ‘other,’ and alien to the rational values to which her consciousness ascribes a uniquely Greek quality. The irrationality of the eastern mysticism imported from Asia Minor is, in Roula’s mind, sharply juxtaposed to the current political strivings of Greece to join the company of the progressive nations. Likewise, the fact that the novel was written in 1983, during the debate of the inclusion of Greece, and still feeling the consequences of the generals’ dictatorship, certainly played no small a part in the narrative dialogue of the two,

⁹³ It may be useful to draw a parallel between Roula’s unwillingness to recognize the potential for a national reconciliation of a kind, and that exhibited by the Masterbuilder of Kazantzakis’s play I deal with in my first chapter. While the Masterbuilder ends up forced to bow to the traditional and accept its significance, Roula is not persuaded. On the contrary, Mana’s self-sacrifice further alienates her from her family, and reinforces her bias.

⁹⁴ Πώς θα γίνουμε Ευρώπη;... Με τα ματωμένα πουκάμισα και τις γριές που χτυπιούνται και μιλάνε με τους πεθαμένους;...(125).

apparently, mutually exclusive forces within the nation. The alternative to joining Europe, the goal that had been the constant motivation of the urban elites since the Greek liberation from the Ottomans, is clearly identified as remaining in the Rizes-like timeless limbo of obscure and incomprehensible aspects of tradition. The very historical moment in which the narrative is taking place, and in which it was written, calls for a thorough collective self-assessment and identification of national priorities. In order to propose a comparison and to further emphasize the significance of the contemporary political moment, the text evokes some of the historical periods, preceding it, one in which the Greek nation found itself at the crossroads, and when its ancient values and traditions were under threat.

Where is the delineation of History from Myth?

Everything that Mana relates in her monologues regarding her married life in her Asia Minor home conveys an idyllic atmosphere of mutual respect, love, and related to it, fecundity and prosperity. Fecundity most of all, as Mana's personification of fertility goddess, Demetra, which is also her name, attains its confirmation not only through her natural fertility—her seven children—but also symbolic in the drawings that Andronikos paints all over her body with indelible colors: “I’ll do you the Garden of Eden. Your breasts will be roses, with all kinds of other flowers below them, and on your belly I’ll draw a great field of corn, so that it can mingle with your other corn, down there” (22).⁹⁵ Myth and history in the narrative mix almost imperceptibly producing a thick web of meanings and allusions which refer as much to the ancient worship of the land as to its

⁹⁵ «[...] θα σου κάνω τον κήπο της Εδέμ. Τριαντάφυλλα τα στήθια σου, όλων των λογίων τα λουλούδια παρακάτω, και στην κοιλιά απέραντο κάμπο με στάχια. Θα μπερδευτούν με τ’άλλα τα στάχια σου.» (20)

modern connotations. Andronikos, for example, is obsessively interested in ancient Greek history and its protagonists. He himself is a link between the two periods of Greek history which modern Greek nationalism was in such pain to reconnect. By his very name, Byzantine in origin, and his hobby of painting icons and frescoes he symbolically joins the two temporally distant periods. Not accidentally does his greatest source of inspiration lie in Alexander the Great. As Mana recalls,

He adored the ancient Greeks—Alexander the Great, Theseus, Hercules—but particularly Alexander. He used to draw him, up on his charger, riding among his enemies. He would draw him in the arms of his Roxanne, or loosing the Gordian Knot. [...] He was so crazy about the olden days that when they asked him to paint the chapel of St John, he painted the saints so they all looked like ancient Greeks.⁹⁶ (21)

Alexander the Great's name is the epitome of the military glory that was once Greece, and it carries a host of meanings for the current political moment of the liberation from the 'Turkish yoke' within which Andronikos and Mana's personal happiness is confined. His solution to the Gordian Knot puzzle, therefore, is an obvious allusion to Greek nationalist territorial pretensions promulgated under the Great Idea of reuniting all the lands of the Hellenic world; a missing link in the interrupted duration of the Hellenic spirit, as is Andronikos's portrayal of classical heroism robed in Byzantine religious solemnity.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ «Και λάτρευε την αρχαία Ελλάδα, τον Θησέα, τον Μεγαλέξαντρο, τον Ηρακλή. Αλλά κυρίως τον Μεγαλέξαντρο. Τον ζωγράφιζε, καβάλα στ' άλογο, ανάμεσα στους πολεμιστές του. Τον ζωγράφιζε αγκαλιά με τη Ρωξάννη. Να λύνει το γόρδιο δεσμό. [...] Τέτοια ζούρλια είχε με τους αρχαίους, που στο ζωκλήσι του Άι-Γιάννη που το 'χε τάξιμο να το ζωγραφίσει, τους αγίους τους είχε κάνει σαν αρχαίους.» (20)

⁹⁷ According to the legend, the Gordian Knot was a symbol and pride of the Phrygian nation. Located in the city of Gordium, ruled by Midas's father Gordius, the knot was located in a shrine to Zeus. Many had wondered about its purpose, as well as about its complicated structure which was impossible to untie. An oracle foretold that whoever solves its puzzle would rule Asia. Eventually, it was Alexander the Great, who simply cut it with his sword, and indeed conquered a great part of the continent. Its employment in the text is a transparent allusion to Greek nationalist pretensions of the time.

Although the original function of the Demetra-Persephone myth⁹⁸ has to do with the explanation of the natural cycles and fertility, I suggest that in Fakinou's text it retains its properties inasmuch as they refer to the cultural phenomenon of nation-state. Mana's exile in many ways represents the exile of a large part of the Greek-speaking population of Asia Minor in that same period, most of whom ended up settling in Greece. Likewise, the almost mystical connection to the land, motherland, to the sacred place, that pervades all the chapters of my dissertation, is here reiterated much more forcefully by Mana's double symbolism of a founding matriarch and an earth deity. Mana decisively makes the space she settles her own. This space, however, is determined by her successful search for Persephone: "When I find my Persephone, I shall make a little garden the like of which has never been seen in all the world. But first I must find her" (38).⁹⁹ In this gesture in which the remains of a primeval land (mother earth) worship mingle with *secular religiosity* irreducibly linked to the nation-founding gesture, in a lot left to her by Grandmother Maria Mana plants a small garden that is to feed her and all her children.¹⁰⁰ As becomes a corn deity, she conquers the land by her vegetative and reproductive

⁹⁸ Some of the best-known myths relate to the vanishing male corn-deity, Attis/ Tammuz/ Adonis/ Osiris who dies (often by the agency of a deity turned into a wild beast) and is sent to the underground world. His lover in various religions represented by Cybelle/ Ishtar/ Aphrodite/ Isis, looks for him in the world of the dead and manages to negotiate his release for about half a year (fertile season of spring and summer) during which he will be allowed to stay with her among the living. The Demetra-Persephone story is a modified version with a mother-daughter couple while other elements of the myth are very similar to the one of the male corn deity. It also varies from the general myth in the fact that Persephone is abducted by Hades, the god of the Underworld, and then negotiated back through the intervention of his brother Zeus, but only after Demetra demonstrated her powers by freezing the natural cycle until her daughter was found.

⁹⁹ «όταν βρω την Περσεφόνη μου, να φτιάξω ένα μπαξεδάκι, που όμοιό του δε θα υπάρχει σ'όλο τον κόσμο. Αρκεί να τη βρω...» (37).

¹⁰⁰ This oxymoron articulates my comprehension of the processes underlying the creation and manifestation of national consciousness as linked to one of its most strongly defended constitutional elements—the territorial integrity by all means derived from ancient land worship. Elaborated by Peter Bien (see the dissertation article on the sacrifice of the female body), it is further enforced in the dream-work theory of the nation developed by Stathis Gourgouris, who defies the conclusion that the substitution of religion by nation led to an essentially religious consciousness of the nation. Rather, he claims that a "set of holy icons"—the national insignia, for example—represent "the exemplary intersecting point between national consciousness and religious belief" (27), which he signifies as "idolatry" of a particular national brand.

powers, in opposition to the aggressive masculine politics of physical conquest and founding acts of violence ('civilizational' acts of violence in Benjamin's designation). Her manner of fruitful and life-reinforcing 'conquest' of the land is even further juxtaposed to the brutality of the recurrent episodes of rape that Mana is subjected to at the hands of Maria's grandson, Demos.

The compelling distinction into female and male worlds and forces underlying the text is made acutely obvious by the insistence on the recurrence of the rape motif, which the narrative sees imposed on the three women—Mana, her daughter Archontoula, and granddaughter Roula. Consistent with cyclical repetitions of a mythical narrative, the text presents the reader with the destinies of the three women that uncannily resemble each other. Following her arrival to Rizes, and her first encounter with Maria's grandson Demos, Mana's life revolves around his unexpected recurring visits to her hut, and numerous childbirths. All the idyll of her marriage to Andronikos is gone, as Demos frequents her home solely for the purpose of brutally raping her. On his first encounter with her body, Demos is faced with Andronikos's drawings, and after that never sees her naked again: "Only one other man saw them. *Him*. He was shocked. It stopped him in his tracks. At first he'd thought that I was a prostitute. Afterwards, though, he was frightened. He was scared of the drawings. He used to take me in the dark, with all my clothes on" (22).¹⁰¹ Mana's body, a territory permanently marked by another man's inscription, is off-limits to Demos. Still, if not having her willingly, he could impose himself on her by physically abusing her. An unprotected woman in the world where a woman's body is a currency of exchange between men, Mana's only consolation is in her

¹⁰¹ «Κανένας δεν είδε τη ζωγραφιά αυτή. [...] Μόνο ο άλλος. Ξαφνιάστηκε τότε πολύ. Κόπηκε. Με πήρε για παστρική. Αλλά μετά φοβότανε. Φοβότανε τη ζωγραφιά. Μ'έπαιρνε στα σκοτεινά και ντυμένη (21).»

eldest son, Fotos who assumes the protective function for the whole family both in reality of their daily lives, and in the mythical cosmology it reflects.¹⁰² The rape motif is repeated in Roula's teenage sexual escapade with a much older and ruthless businessman, who gladly pays for her abortion and abandons her after having his way with her. Handed down from her 'lover' to the doctor who is to perform the abortion, she is further objectified and abused:

So that fucking doctor - I hope he dies and his balls drop off – started sucking my tits. First one, and then the other. And what the bloody hell was I supposed to do...? Run away? But where to? If I ran off, who'd do the abortion...? Because now I really *wanted* it done... I *wanted* it...I wanted to get rid of every shred of Sotiris that was inside me, and I never wanted to lay eyes on him again...¹⁰³ (45)

Roula's harsh language gives a false impression of an emancipated city dweller who learned to struggle with daily realities and, rather than accept things, is able to fight back. However, the almost total absence of alternatives for her position is barely distinguishable from what Mana encountered in her spatially and temporally dislocated Rizis. There seems to be an uninterrupted continuity between Demos and Spiros the businessman despite the temporal and geographical distance that separates them inasmuch as there is continuity in the treatment of women that originates in Athenian democracy and survives almost unaltered in contemporary Greece. The fact of having an abortion as a way out rather than being forced to give births to innumerable children is a

¹⁰² I refer to Mana/Ghea's dream of Fotos/Chronos taking revenge on his brutal father Demos/Uranos. The dream is a reproduction of the pre-Olympian myth in which Chronos castrates his father, while Fotos murders his. Although the myth is apparently set in the times preceding Homeric patriarchal divine pantheon male powers still prevail over female. Despite her function as the Mother Goddess, Ghea still needs her son to protect her from her husband's abuse, as she is obviously powerless to revenge herself. An arguably more balanced relation of male and female energies is obviously lacking, as the female deity does not possess the agency to resolve the problem. Mana's story set in a distinctly patriarchal setting develops in a similar vein. In both examples the women create the space of their action *within* the patriarchal enclosure, but in neither case can they be defined as being in full control.

¹⁰³ «'Όμως ο κωλογιατρός, που κακό χρόνο να 'χει, κι αν δε ζει σκατά στο λάκκο του, άρχισε να μου πιπιλάει το στήθος. Πρώτα το ένα και μετά το άλλο. Πες μου, κουφάλα κοινωνία, τι να κάνω εγώ;... Να φύγω να πάω πού;... Ποιος θα μου έκανε την έκτρωση;... Γιατί, τώρα, ήθελα να την κάνω!... Να την κάνω!... Να φύγουν όλα τα σημάδια του Σώτου από πάνω μου και μετά μην την είδατε...» (45).

minor transmutation of the essence of the women's objectified and dispensable existence underlying the two women's narratives. It is Archontoula, however, whose attempted rape by her own father proves the distinct watershed in the family's reality. This is the event, prefigured in Mana's dream, that generates the murder of the rapist Demos (it is impossible to define him as a 'father') by her eldest son. Following this event Archontoula makes the big leap from a traditional village existence to the urban promise of Athens, but whether it makes any significant difference in her destiny as a woman is one of the things the text remains silent about, and is instead attributed to her request that the family never contact her except on occasion of Fotos's death.

Inscribing Herself in History¹⁰⁴

I argue that the women narrators of *The Seventh Garment* perpetuate history for their own empowerment. Historical reality, particularly with respect to its collective national applications, is seen as prohibitive to the realization of the individual subject. It is capable of not only constricting the individual, but literally crushing her. The use of history by Fakinou's women narrators thus becomes even more important, as they appropriate it as a liberatory strategy inscribing their subjectivities within the patriarchal mythologies—Homeric, and Christian alike. Yet, this claim may sound exaggerated when compared against the textual evidence in which Mana and her female progeny seem heavily invested in preserving the patriarchal line of their family—moreover the one in which

¹⁰⁴ It is interesting to compare Mana's sacrificial self-inscription with the one in Isak Dinesen's (Karen Blixen's) story *The Blank Page*. *The Blank Page* has been much discussed and quoted in feminist theory as a text exploring modes of counteracting patriarchy through its subversive exercise of rejection of the patriarchal inscription (the pen-penis trajectory introduced by radical French feminist theory) which in turn effects the 'female text'—blood stain, *écriture féminine* in a literal sense. The blankness which gapes from the clean wedding sheet of one of the princesses in the royal family, however, proffers a much more comprehensive feminine text than others precisely by virtue of its unsubmitive silence symbolizing a totality of resistance to patriarchal history and genealogy.

Mana herself, as well as her epileptic daughter Eleni, are the outcasts, the ultimate ξενέες (foreigners).¹⁰⁵ They exist rather than live, at the social margin delimited by the male member of the family whose history they are keeping (Demos), yet their integration, although blocked by social norms, however unjust and rigid, is imminent. This is not only due to the fact that as refugees and strangers to the place they inhabit their urge to belong overrides all others. A much more significant, although seemingly minor, gesture by two other women from the family makes pertinent Mana's claim to the family. Bypassing patriarchal rules of heredity, Grandma Maria leaves the little shed to Mana and her ever increasing progeny, the result of her grandson's recurring acts of violence. Although tradition has it that the unmarried woman does not have any rights to the man's property, the matriarch's decision, if not changes, than significantly modifies this rule. Likewise, on her dying bed, Demos's mother chooses to depart by making peace with Mana who she had constantly blamed for her tragic destiny. These acts of female solidarity and recognition, however insignificant they may seem to those who read them as ultimate acts of female submission to tradition, carry immense implications when juxtaposed with the ruling principles of the given historical moment. Their significance lies in promoting the leeway, however narrow, for female agency, rather than in their self-subjecting implications.

In view of the above, Mana and Eleni should be interpreted as the keepers of history—the *writers* of history, as the Tree defines them—rather than its mute victims. Through their storytelling—a perennial female activity—the women keep alive the memory of seven male family members, whose lives span no less than a century and a

¹⁰⁵ See Ruth Mandel's explanation of the wife's 'alien' status within her husband's family, which makes her the ideal object for sacrifice, in my first chapter.

half, and who all, without exception fall victims to the turbulent national history. Their non-linear and dialogic voices represent a contestation of patriarchal versions of historical as well as mythical narratives. Mana retells the narrative as originally recounted by older female family members keeping the memory of their husbands' or sons' deaths. The genealogical line and, therefore, the family (hi)story introducing the ancestors awaiting the dead Fotos in the other world, begins with the family patriarch, Captain Yiannis, who addresses the present through the medium of Eleni. Through this gesture the family's foundation is shown as contemporaneous with the wars for the liberation from the Ottomans, and with the eventual exile of the Captain and Grandma Maria from Asia Minor to Greece. The rest of the family history, whose origins are thus clearly identified with the national values of liberty and courage in the face of danger, follows its first-born sons, all named Thodoros and Yiannis consecutively, and their deaths unmistakably occurring in the defining moments of the modern Greek nation. Not all their deaths, however, are heroic, although they are undeniably caused by the circumstances relating to the national struggle. Their individual stories become firmly embedded and inseparable from the ethnic history, although the subjectivity of each of the male progenitors is preserved through the relating of names, places, and particular circumstances of each man's death. History does not efface their personal identities, but instead represents a backdrop against which all of their individual tragedies take place. Interestingly, (hi)story, although in broader terms concerned with the family of the offender Demos, neatly bypasses him personally. Not only is he a second-born son, and as such his story seems of no consequence for the continuation of the family line, but no one, save for four members of Mana's own household, is at all familiar with the circumstances of his death.

His death thus clearly falls into the domain of myth, both for its uncanny similarities with the cosmological narrative, as for the whole mystery surrounding it.¹⁰⁶

The storytelling strategy corroborates the female inscription in the otherwise purely male genealogy through more distinctly subversive tactics that imperceptibly enter the patriarchal space. Their subversiveness lies, first, in the process in which the two women lend their bodies as mediums for the male ancestors to render their stories, as when Captain speaks in her voice through Eleni's body. The other sees Mana invest the event of Fotos's death with mysticism greatly departing from the Christian beliefs, yet originating in distinctly Greek pagan mythology. Her eclectic religious approach synthesizes Christian myths with ancient pagan images, the approach that obfuscates any inflexible delineations between the mythical realm and that of Christian ethics that promulgates itself as universal history. Moreover, by replacing the missing shirt of the seventh, and last, first-born son of the family by her own bloodied garment, Mana not only claims membership in the family that disowned her but inscribes herself in the male family genealogy. The text remains silent on whether she dies after sacrificing herself in this way, but her inscription in blood becomes a permanent reminder of her own authority over the formerly male historical narrative. By cutting a cross over her chest, at the exact spot where the trees painted by her beloved husband meet, she appropriates the symbol of Christ's martyrdom, and engraves her own suffering into the family history. Both of these acts qualify her for the ultimate entrance into the history of the family and her nation. The sacrifice, indeed, takes place within the strictly defined boundaries of patriarchal system and religious belief hostile to her female nature, but that fact does not call for limited

¹⁰⁶ Mana's dream prefiguring Fotos's killing of his father is the mythical story of the castration of Uranos by his son Chronos.

interpretations of her act as the ultimate submission to patriarchy. Instead, I propose that her act be read in the light of a self-inscription whose effects, greatly limited by the social norms and beliefs, appear even more empowering for that fact.¹⁰⁷ The novel graphically records patriarchal violence but the women take on their backs the suffering. Rather than feeling victimized, Fakinou's women use the violence against them to fuel their realization as rightful subjects of history.

¹⁰⁷ It is necessary to briefly compare Mana's self-sacrifice with the sacrificial burials of women explored in my chapter on the immurement legend, as the two actions evoke numerous associations. The immurement victim is, to a great extent, forced or tricked into her death, while Mana's sacrifice is willing, albeit motivated by saving her son's soul. As I argued in the mentioned chapter, the forced burial of the female victim by the patriarchal collectivity places the woman into the figurative institutional *foundations*, as well as metaphorical, which is the effect comparable to Mana's self-inscription into the corpus of patriarchal history. Yet, the female victim in the legend is more representative of a *principle* than vested with individual subjectivity.

CHAPTER TWO

The Politics of (not quite) Narrative Fragmentation: Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*

Novel as Body, Words Made of Flesh

Milorad Pavić's lexicon-novel, *Dictionary of the Khazars*, published in 1984 and enthusiastically greeted by the international literary and critical community as the 'first novel of the XXI century,' is a text which is read and admired by many, but discussed by few.¹⁰⁸ This fact owes as much to its unusual structure of a dictionary-encyclopaedia—complete with entries, an index, and a short manual on how to use the dictionary—as to its lack of a perceptibly coherent structure that would make this particular text easily recognizable as a novel. On the surface, the *Dictionary* is a prime example of what came to be known as *hypertext*. Pavić has continued to experiment with the genre of the novel and with innovative ways of reading in his subsequent writings, most of which challenge usual definitions of the novel.¹⁰⁹ The *Dictionary*, therefore, exists in two versions: male and female, which differ in a single paragraph that significantly influences the reading of each particular version. As if this were not enough, it defies common rules of reading—in the manual on how to use the book, the authorial voice suggests that the reading can be done in any way imaginable: from the beginning, end, middle of the text, or in any other

¹⁰⁸ Most of the criticisms of the text have concerned themselves with the novel's hypertextuality and experimentation with the novelistic genre. More on the subject can be found in the following texts: Robert Coover, "The End of Books," *The New York Times Book Review*, 21: 4 (1993); Lance Olsen, "The Architecture of Possibility: Reading the Novels of Milorad Pavić," *The Writer's Chronicle*, (Sept. 2000): 34-42; Jasmina Mihajlović, "Milorad Pavić i hiperbeletristika," *Računari II*: 106 (1995): 62-63; Aleksandar Jerkov, "Nova tekstualnost. Predgovor Sabranim delima Milorada Pavića," *Anahoret u Njujorku*, Beograd: Prosveta, 1990, 175-227; Radoman Kordić, "Postmodernistička ukrštenica. Milorad Pavić: *Predeo slikan čajem i Hazarski rečnik*," *Književna kritika XX*: 2 (mart-april 1989): 69-85; Jasmina Mihajlović, ed., *Kratka istorija jedne knjige*, Vršac: Književna opština, 1991.

¹⁰⁹ His subsequent novels experiment with crossword-puzzle, clepsydra, or even tarot card reading models.

way that the reader finds fit. Structured as a dictionary, albeit divided into three books—red, green, and yellow, suggesting the three monotheistic religions whose conflicting interpretations of a historical event are the focus of the novel—the *Dictionary* is a self-reflexive text which relies substantially on poststructuralist linguistic theory that imposes a lot of demands upon the reader.¹¹⁰ Pavić discovered the model for the novel’s non-linear structure of entries that can be combined in endless ways in a much older form of sacred literature—liturgical texts which are “differently combined for every day and for every new service” (Pavić 2005, 53).¹¹¹ In the Preface to the *Dictionary* we learn that it is a “reconstructed and revised” edition of a text of which no copies were left in existence to even be “reconstructed and revised.” Namely, Pavić invents a poisonous copy of the *Dictionary* which was the only one left after all other printed copies of the *Dictionary* had been burnt. The poison was calibrated to kill any reader on the ninth page while reading the words “*Verbum caro factum est* [The Word became flesh]” (6).¹¹² Thus the very

¹¹⁰ Many outspoken critics of the postmodern, most notably Christopher Norris, denounce the application of deconstruction to self-reflective texts as redundant. Norris’s opinion is that self-reflective texts do not show any internal resistance to theory because they “pre-empt just about anything that a critic might want to say” (91). His scathing criticism of poststructuralism (albeit leaving out Derrida, whose contribution to literary theory has, apparently, been misinterpreted) accuses it of “lend[ing] support to a fashionable relativist trend which undermines critical reason, treats history as simply a collection of narratives or fictions, and renounces any claim to distinguish between truth and the various currencies of true-seeming ideological belief” (97). I find this critique useful as one of the points in dealing with Pavić, because it articulates in short the most important points of the long debate on the validity of the postmodern that are pertinent to any analysis of Pavić’s text. Norris’s willingness to leave Derrida unscathed by his criticism and, rather, ascribe the ‘problems’ of the postmodern to various misinterpretations of his theories by his followers is worth exploring. For the full argument see Christopher Norris, *What’s Wrong with Postmodernism?: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.

¹¹¹ «Нелинеарни механизам јавио се још у црквеним литургијским тектовима (који се за сваки дан и за сваку нову службу другачије комбинују).» [53, translation mine]

¹¹² [Reč postade meso] (15). This playful opening draws a parallel with Umberto Eco’s *Name of the Rose* (1980) which as the key to its Medieval murder mystery has a copy of Aristotle’s missing tractate on comedy and which kills with its poisonous ink anybody who dares venture into the prohibited labyrinthine library in search for the secret knowledge that the volume contains. Like the original 17-century copy of the *Dictionary* whose integrity is forever threatened by the tensions between the centrifugal and centripetal forces that tear apart and re-unite parts of the text, Eco’s volume on comedy is the ‘missing’ part of Aristotle’s study of drama without which the knowledge of the whole is impossible yet, which is, due to its content, relegated to oblivion.

opening of the novel plays with the religious dogma of the transubstantiation of the Word, as well as with the possibility of creating a monolithic narrative against multiple counter-narratives that threaten its survival.

Most intriguingly, the novel outlines the boundaries within which functions the most significant metaphor of the text; namely, the equation Body=Book in relation to and dependent on history.¹¹³ It is, perhaps, useful to remind my reader of one of the key propositions about the inextricability of history from Balkan postmodern fiction that I explicate in the Introduction to this dissertation. This umbilical connectedness is very literally *embodied* in Pavić's text by a character whose whole body is a virtual history book of events of the Khazar history. Through this metaphor the novel problematizes the notion of history, something that the postmodern has taken upon itself as a sacred duty; however, by the same gesture it exposes the obscenity of history's inscription on human bodies—the pivotal difference between the original (too hastily celebratory in their dismissal of history, I will add) interpretations of the postmodern and the postmodern actual complete immersion in the historical. Pavić's walking "Great parchment," the human body whose skin contains the most sensitive and contentious inscription is the ultimate victim of incomprehensible circumstances. It is a metaphor fully conscious of

¹¹³ For a thorough analysis of the Body=Book equation in the novel see Katherine N. Hayles's "Corporeal Anxiety in *Dictionary of the Khazars*" in which she discusses both the consequences of the hypertextual existence of the book and the multiple references to body inside Pavić's novel. It is interesting to point out at this time that Eco emphasizes this parallel in the *Rose*, while the director of the film version, Jean-Jacques Annaud, creates an explicit link in one of the final scenes, when the Inquisition burns several peasants at stake, while the monastery library is set on fire by Jorge of Burgos, the only person who knew the secret of the prohibited volume (the library looks very much like the one in Borges's "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," while the monk recreates Borges's fictional persona). The imagery thus suggests a very literal connection between the burning bodies and the corpus of knowledge that is being destroyed, among them the last volume of Aristotle's missing critique which will, therefore, be impossible to reconstruct. Pavić, however, skips over the claim in his text that the last (and poisonous) volume of the Dictionary had been destroyed long before it has been reconstructed in the volume we are reading. The narrative, thus, lacks the logical sequence, as the reader is never told how the book could have been reconstructed when its predecessors have been destroyed.

Foucauldian corporeal scars made by history discussed in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” According to Foucault, the body “is the inscribed surface of events” and “a volume in perpetual disintegration” (148). The body “manifests the stigmata of past experience” and is in a permanent process of disintegration, only one side of the process which is the crucial project of Pavić’s novel—the construction of the coherent *body* of truth/history/knowledge. From the start, it seems, the project of assembly is doomed, as the body suffers under the inscriptions of history which always leads to the eventual “destruction of the body” (148). The historical record is never complete. Firstly, it does not begin at ‘the beginning’ but *in medias res*, from the 7th century, because the unfortunate man has pieces of his body randomly chopped and mutilated, either “as an act of punishment” or because an aristocrat’s family history happened to be represented on it and he wanted to own it. Moreover, the content of the historiographic tattoo is constantly shifting as its content depends on the interests of those who write the authorized versions of events. This causes that the inscriptions on some parts of his skin begins to get infected, fade, and turn illegible. The burden of history on his body, “the itch” caused by the infinite alterations and corrections of the record becomes “unbearable, and it was with relief that he died, glad to be finally cleansed of history” (*Dictionary* 78).¹¹⁴ Ultimately, the body returns to the language, the words materialize themselves in flesh. Namely, as Foucault states, the historical inscription is the body’s “identity,” it is marked by all the past accumulated in the signs tattooed all over its surface. For Peter Brooks, these signs look “suspiciously like a linguistic signifier” (3).

¹¹⁴ “Umro je zato što je koža ispisana hazarskom istorijom počela strahovito da ga svrbi. Taj svrab je bio nepodnošljiv i on je preminuo s olakšanjem što će najzad biti čisto od istorije” (72).

The body is, therefore, “part of the signifying process” which maps its inextricable presence within the linguistic realm. Brooks continues:

Signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story. The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narrative—a body entered into writing. (3)

The dictum from the opening of the novel, *Verbum caro factum est*, therefore, rings throughout the text as the proposed effort of creating, of assembling a narrative body, a whole story. The project is frustrated at the onset by the inscription of death, the signs of the past, that are imminent to the body and to which it must subjugate itself.

National and Religious Allegory

Not wishing to enter into a discussion on how *postmodern* the novel is, about which a lot has been said and written, my intention here is to interpret multiple layers of the mythistorical construction of a national narrative that is of foremost relevance for my dissertation subject and which is still rather unexplored. The narrative of the novel is constructed around a mythistorical event of the “Khazar Polemic.” The event, about which there are scarce and inconclusive historical accounts, describes the debate of leading figures of the three monotheistic religions with the Khazar Khagan on possible conversion of the Khazars to one of them. In the *Dictionary* the debate takes place after the Khagan approaches religious leaders seeking the explanation of his dream which tells him that his intentions are good but his actions are not. Each of the three books of the great religions (which in the original edition of the novel were printed on red, green, and yellow paper in explicit manifestation of their symbolism) claims victory in the process of conversion and consequently in bringing the Khazars over into their respective

religious camp. Both the temporal distance of the event and the scarcity of written records about the tribe make the event excellent material for postmodern mythistorical transformations.¹¹⁵ On the most perceptible level, the text of the novel appropriates various Christian, Judaic, and Islamic sources concerning the event only to shamelessly exploit the ‘truth’ of the historiographic record by placing supernatural beings alongside holy church fathers or historical personages side by side with invented historiographers, all the while playing with the concepts of the ‘real,’ ‘truth,’ and ‘knowledge.’¹¹⁶

The novel performs narrative fragmentation through the format of a dictionary and a story that, whichever way one tries to compose it from the given entries, never reaches the same closure. The end of the story ultimately depends on the choice of entries, combination methods employed, ways of reading, or background knowledge that influences interpretation. Whichever of the three great religions the readers follow through the labyrinthine sequence of historical and mock-historical documents, the ending of the story is always equally frustrating: the obscure Khazar tribe chose precisely that particular religion to convert to. Each religion insists on the exclusive truth status of its own claims which subverts the viability of any other competing narratives. The truth

¹¹⁵ Myth shrouds the history of the Khazars to the extent that some like to interpret it as the ‘lost tribe’ of the Jews. The text itself offers multiple historical sources on the problematics. It is not known why the Khazars changed their religion (some sources even mention several consecutive conversions, the final being the one in Judaism in the 8th century), and what religion they finally converted to. Asked to interpret how the Khazars could convert to Judaism, when Judaism is a religion that does not accept converts, Pavić replied that he was preoccupied mostly with finding out what was the original Khazar religion. He concludes that it was exactly Judaism, and that the final outcome is not conversion, but rather a return to their original belief. (*Hazari, ili obnova vizantijskog romana*, 96-97). Some additional sources on the Khazars are Arthur Koestler’s *The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and Its Heritage* (1976); Peter Golden’s *Nomads and Their Neighbours in the Russian Steppe: Turks, Khazars and Qipchaqs* (2003); D. M. Dunlop’s *History of the Jewish Khazars* (1967); M. Artamonov’s *History of the Khazars* (1962).

¹¹⁶ Norris’s critique of the poststructuralist treatment of history appears useful when applied to this novel. Defending Kantian idea of the truth in the way Habermas defended it in his critique of the postmodern, Norris confirms his disagreement that the “truth can be only a matter of consensus values, or what is currently ‘good in the way of belief,’” as this makes “the thought [...] incapable of attaining any kind of critical perspective, any standpoint that questioned received ideas in the name of some better, more adequate understanding” (Norris 1997, 97).

status of the historic event is further complicated by conflicting claims of a whole host of historians, fictional and real, who give their own 'objective' account of the Khazar question.

In this chapter I offer a reading of Pavić's *Dictionary* that interprets the text within the problematic of the creation of any totality (body of the narrative, historical truth, knowledge) and its sustenance amidst contesting totalities/absolutes and its own immanences. For this purpose I dedicate some space to the article on Pavić's novel written by Andrew Wachtel that designates the text of the *Dictionary* as instrumental in the break-up of the former Federation. As one of the most direct indictments of this novel for the disintegration of Yugoslavia, it is pivotal for my argument. Published in 1993, Wachtel's article was undoubtedly influenced by the events in Croatia and Bosnia which, at that time, were already assuming the dimensions of an unprecedented spectacular carnage. Of much more importance than his biased argumentation, however, would be to trace the echoes that the publication of the novel produced independently of the Yugoslav civil war, i.e. immediately after its publication in 1984, while Yugoslavia still existed and there were little, if any, signs of what was soon to follow. Answers to the question of how much of an awareness of the national question in Pavić's novel there was among Yugoslav and international critics can be found in critical reactions to the book prior to the events of 1991-1992. Peter Cârdu's *Short History of a Book*, published in 1991, is a compilation of critics' opinions on the *Dictionary*, written in the mid-late 1980s and still uninfluenced by the wars of succession, as the Yugoslav crisis is often referred to. A glance through this rather narcissistic collection of critical accounts of the *Dictionary* shows an almost blissful unawareness of eminent critics about the alleged national(ist)

strain in the novel which, in the post-1991 period came to taint almost any reference to this book. Namely, only a handful of critics bring to the reader's attention an evident parallel between the Khazar and Serbian question.¹¹⁷ Most others, however, emphasize the national dimension of the novel, but tend to interpret it in the general sense which translates the Khazars as any nation in general, but not any one in particular.

However, a much more significant reason for the discussion of Pavić's text as part of my mythistorical analysis of the creation of national narratives is not extraneous to the text. On the contrary, it lies within the novel and represents the focus around which all the other multiple narratives enfold. In fact, there exist two distinct treatments of the national issue in the *Dictionary* that add complexity to the more obvious duality in the novel (that of the male and female copies) and that are of equal importance in understanding of the text. The first is the language of the solidification and assertion of the national body which is represented through a constant struggle between the forces that unify the body/text and those that fragment it. This tendency, explained in detail later in this chapter, is concerned with the very ontology of nationhood and may or may not exemplify any nation in particular. Some of Pavić's original statements regarding the destiny of the Khazars pointed in this direction: "The Khazars are a metaphor for a small people surviving in between great powers and great religions."¹¹⁸ Pavić emphasizes that this destiny is shared by many nations, both in Yugoslavia and the neighboring countries: "Serbs recognized their own fate; it was the same in Slovenia and elsewhere, a

¹¹⁷ Some of these are Dr. Vladeta Jerotić, Vasa D. Mihailovich, Ken Kalfus, or Michele Dzieduszycki, who in their reviews emphasize that the Khazar destiny refer to the Serbs within Yugoslavia, while the novel sounds like a "trumpet of Jericho" warning the Serbs of their future extinction.

¹¹⁸ In interview given on occasion of the publication of the first US edition of the *Dictionary*. D. J. R. Bruckner in *The New York Times Book Review*, Nov. 20, 1988, p. 16.

schoolbook of survival.”¹¹⁹ This accentuates the solidification of the national being as a pivotal process for survival within a larger unit in which small nations cohabit on the basis of mutual recognition of difference. However, the infinite adaptability of the national metaphor in the novel prompted a French critic to exclaim “We are all Khazars in the age of nuclear threat and poisoned environment,” thus pointing even to the physical survival of individuals regardless of the political or ideological spheres.¹²⁰

More strikingly, the narrative tendency I have previously mentioned in connection with Kadare, Andrić, or Fakinou, of allegorical connections between pivotal historical moments and current nation-forming events is repeated in Pavić’s text. His *Dictionary* specifically deals with three temporally very distant periods in the history of the Khazars; the data which occlude some crucial events in the history of the Serbs as well. Structured through time rather than space, the metaphor that carries the text, the body of Adam, is comprised of events-dreams that come from distant history and significantly affect the present. The skeleton of the novel is construed through characters that originate from the 8th-9th centuries, re-emerge in the 1690s, and see their third incarnation in the early 1980s. The first period is occupied by the events and historical personages instrumental in the establishment of the first Slavic (and thus, Serbian) cultures; the first ‘civilizing’ efforts by the Greek brothers Cyril and Method to alphabetize the wild tribes and create the ground for the first kingdoms of the Slavs. In their second reappearance on the historical stage, the characters of the novel find themselves immersed in the late Ottoman wars with Austria, and one of the pivotal moments of Serbian history—the Great Migrations that took place in the 1690s and that irreversibly changed the demographics of the nation.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Finally, in the third period the Dictionary deals with, the national destiny is determined by more than the nation itself; by more even than two great empires whose mutual conflicts shaped the continent in the past. Towards the end of the 20th century, however, every single destiny is implicated in the supranational global network, where mass-manipulation and unstoppable proliferation of ever smaller narratives further aggravates the unifying project of Adam.

The second tendency, however rarely it occurs in the text, may prompt readings of the novel from a more programmatic, even ideological stance, as on occasion the language of the novel slips into the recognizable vocabulary that has become a trademark of Serbian nationalists in the past two decades. One of these ‘slippages’ is found in the last Appendix to the text. Given in the form of a discussion between an incarnation of the colonizer-Devil and the Egyptian professor, Kabir Muawia, it uncovers the language of grievances that Serbian nationalists utilized in addressing the alleged subjected position of the Serbian nation within the Yugoslav federation:

Look at the results of this democracy of yours. Before, big nations used to oppress small nations. Now, it's the reverse. Now, in the name of democracy, small nations terrorize the big. Just look at the world around us. White America is afraid of blacks, the blacks are afraid of Puerto Ricans, Jews of the Palestinians, the Arabs of the Jews, the Serbs of the Albanians, the Chinese of the Vietnamese, the English of the Irish. Small fish are nibbling the ears of big fish. Instead of minorities being terrorized, democracy has introduced a new fashion: now it's the majority of this planet's population that's being burdened.... Your democracy sucks...¹²¹

Found on the repertory of literally all the former Yugoslav constitutive nations, as well as some of the defined minorities, this rhetoric of subjugation changed with respect to which

¹²¹ “Pogledaj rezultate te vaše demokratije: dosad su veliki narodi ugnjetavali male narode. Sada je obrnuto. Sada u ime demokratije mali narodi terorišu velike. Pogledaj svet oko nas: bela Amerika boji se crnaca, crnci Portorikanaca, Jevreji Palestinaca, Jevreja Arapi, Srbi Albanaca, Kinezi se boje Vijetnamaca, Englezi Iraca. Male ribe jedu uši velikim ribama. Umesto da budu terorizane manjine, demokratija je uvela novu modu i sad su na svetu pod teretom većine stanovnika ove planete.... Vaša demokratija je pičkin dim...” (Rečnik 291).

national(ist) camp used it. Thus, the Serbs perceived themselves as the greatest and oldest of all Yugoslav nations who sacrificed their national being in innumerable wars, often to help the smaller ones define their nationhood, yet that the way they were repaid was not commensurable with their sacrifice. This sentiment apparently started brewing in the early 1980s, soon after Tito's death, and exploded onto the public stage with the revelation of the secret 1986 *Memorandum* of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. This is how the text of the *Dictionary* recreates the actual Yugoslav political divisions from the Serbian angle of perception:¹²²

The Khazars are the most numerous in the empire, the others all constituting very small groups. But the empire's administrative organization is designed not to show this. The state is divided into districts. [...] the larger part of the Khazar state, inhabited only by Khazars, is divided into several districts, all with different names. This was done so they would have only one of these purely Khazar districts carrying the Khazar name [...] In view of the circumstances and the Khazars' unfavorable position in the empire, many Khazars disclaim their origin and language, their faith and customs....¹²³ (146-147)

¹²² Playing with the long-extant rumor about the conspiracy of the ultra-nationalist intelligentsias on all conflicting sides and their decisive role in the bloodbath that ensued, David Albahari in his novel *Dark* (1997) introduces a mock-historical device in the form of confidential files stolen from the secret police that document the role of writers and other intellectuals in the fragmentation of the country. Albahari's mock-document might as well perform the role of the real one, criticized and blamed for the ensuing war even before its first unauthorized fragment appeared in the press, and full nine years before its authorized version was published by its writers. The text in question is, of course, the infamous *Memorandum* of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts from 1986, which is still one of the most controversial issues in any discussion on the Yugoslav crisis, both for its content and the way its multiple versions became known to the public. In his article, Wachtel implicitly uses Pavić's later association with the SANU (Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences) and bases his argument on a Pavić's public statements in which he identifies himself and the Serbian nation with the Khazars (lost language, dissipation of the national body, fragmentation of the territory, etc). For clarity's sake, however, it is important to state that Pavić became a member of the SANU only in 1991, long after the controversial *Memorandum* was written, signed, and came to its infamous public existence, and that most accusations made against him claim his responsibility by *association*, from the fact that he was a member of the SANU during the period of the 1990's.

¹²³ "U carstvu su najbrojniji Hazari, svi ostali su u sasvim malim grupama. Administrativna podela carstva, međutim, ide za tim da ovo ne pada u oči. Država je podeljena na okruge [...] dok je deo hazarske države, na kojem žive samo Hazari, izdelfen na nekoliko okruga pod različitim imenima. To je načinjeno tako da samo jedan od tih čisto hazarskih okruga nosi naziv hazarskog okruga [...] S obzirom na sve okolnosti i nepovoljan položaj Hazara u carstvu, mnogi Hazari se doista odriču svog porekla i jezika, svoje vere i običaja...." (128).

This rendition of the organization of the Khazar Empire faithfully replicates the structure of the Yugoslav Federation. The whole people is seen as divided by administrative decisions made specifically to dilute the (Serbian) national body, the situation which is reflected in the state bodies. It seems to be primarily directed at the state organization in the post-Titoist governments which elected a representative from each republic into what was at the time ridiculed as a ‘collective president’:

These districts’ representatives to the court are in proportion not to the number of people they stand for but to the number of districts, which means there are always more non-Khazars than Khazars at the court although not in the state as a whole.¹²⁴ (147)

The common collective self-perceptions of the Serbs likewise play an important part in their grievances:

Khazars [...] share their own decorations and monetary prizes in equal parts with others, even though they themselves are the most numerous. But in the southern provinces, where there are Greeks, or in the western regions, inhabited by Jews, or in the East, where there are Persians, Saracens, and others, decorations are conferred only upon these peoples’ representatives, not upon the Khazars, because these provinces or districts are considered non-Khazar, although there are just as many Khazars as anybody else there. And so in their own part of the state the Khazars share their bread with everybody, but in the rest of the land nobody gives them even a crumb. (148-149)¹²⁵

Equally rated are their sense of heroism and duty to sacrifice to the the nation that in the collective memory reaches mythological proportions and grandeur. The final lines of the following quote encodes an indication of Yugoslavia’s looming tragedy:

¹²⁴ “Predstavnici ovih okruga na dvoru nisu zastupljeni u srazmeri sa brojem duša koje zastupaju nego prema broju okruga, što znači da je na dvoru uvek najviše onih koji nisu Hazari, a u državi je obrnuto” (128).

¹²⁵ “[Hazari] odlikovanja i novčane iznose koji ih prate dele s ostalima na ravne časti, iako su mnogobrojniji. Ali, u središtima južnih provincija, gde ima Grka, ili zapadnih, gde su se naselili Jevreji, ili onih na istoku, gde ima Persijanaca, Saracena i drugih, odlikovanja se dodeljuju samo predstavnicima tih naroda, a Hazarima ne, jer se ove provincije ili okruzi smatraju ne hazarskim, mada u njima njih ima koliko i ostalih. Tako Hazari u svom delu države dele pogaču sa svima, a u ostalim delovima niko im ne daje ni mrve” (130).

As the most numerous, the Khazars shoulder most of the military duty, but the commanders come from the other nations, in equal proportions. [...] The Khazars are responsible for maintaining the state and its unity; they are duty-bound to protect and fight for the empire, while, of course, the others [...] pull in their own individual direction, toward their parent nations.¹²⁶ (149)

It is evident that due to the less-than-concealed discourse of this kind, emphasizing grievances of the (apparently not only) Serbian nation inside the Yugoslav federation in the program of just about any nationalist faction in the country, this text calls for innovative ways of reading and interpretation. After all, one of the main concerns of this novel, and of subsequent Pavić's writings is to invent ever new forms of reading that shift much of the responsibility from the writer to the readers and make them accountable for creating their own texts. As one of the Satanic scribes in the novel says, "It is not I who mix the colors but your own vision [...]. Therefore, faith in seeing, listening, and reading is more important than faith in painting, singing, or writing."¹²⁷ Here lies one of the traps of poststructuralism-informed writing that Norris is warning about: it is not the writer who creates the text any more, but the reader who is responsible for the meaning that the writing assumes in friction with her background knowledge, intentions, and pre-judgments.¹²⁸ The text's exaggerated self-awareness cautions the reader that whatever she finds in the text is the product of *her* vision, the inscription of her preconceptions and ideas, rather than the essence of the text. (Therefore, my previous interpretation of certain passages that allegedly hide implicit nationalist rhetoric may only be the product of my

¹²⁶ "Hazari, inače, nose najveći teret vojnih obaveza kao najbrojniji, ali su zapovednici iz ostalih naroda podjednako. [...] Tako su Hazari zaduženi za održavanje države i celine, oni su dužni da štite carstvo i da se za njega bore, dok, prirodno ostali [...] vuku svak na svoju stranu, ka svojim maticama" (130).

¹²⁷ "Boje ne mešam ja, nego tvoj vid [...]. Važnija je, dakle, vera gledanja, slušanja i čitanja od vere slikanja, pojanja ili pisanja."

¹²⁸ See my notes 2 and 7.

own inscription into the text of the novel (which is, by the way, a *reconstruction*). I guess this is what one can expect when getting into a dialogue with Pavić's textual tricks).

Search for the Center, or Celebration of Chaos?

The skeleton of the story of the novel is the conversion and subsequent destiny of the Khazar tribe. At the very beginning of the *Dictionary*, in the Preliminary Notes to the use of the Dictionary, the authority behind the text claims that the conversion sealed the destiny of the Khazars: "A Russian military commander of the 10th century, Prince Svyatoslav, gobbled up the Khazar Empire like an apple, without even dismounting from his horse" (2).¹²⁹ The act of conversion, it seems, makes the Khazars lose their 'authenticity' and leaves them vulnerable to the dissipation of their once unified national body: "At the time [...] the Khazars were already using Greek, Jewish, or Arabic letters interchangeably as an alphabet for their own language, but when a Khazar converted he would use only one of the three alphabets, that of the faith he had adopted" (73).¹³⁰ Although the result of the conversion debate remains unknown, and the exact religion to which they converted is a mystery no historiographic record has yet resolved, what the novel states as a fact beyond doubt is that the very act of changing their faith brought about the collapse of their national substance.

If transferred to the post-Titoist Yugoslav situation, the time in which the novel was published, some interesting conclusions can be reached. One of the many aspects of nationalist mass-hysteria in the former Yugoslav republics that culminated in the civil

¹²⁹ "Jedan od ruskih vojskovođa X veka, knez Svjatoslav, ne silazeći s konja pojeo je hazarsko carstvo kao jabuku" (12).

¹³⁰ "[...] Hazari su u stvari već koristili kao azbuku za svoj jezik grčka, jevrejska ili arapska pismena ravnopravno, ali kada bi se neko od Hazara pokrstio koristio bi samo jednu od te tri azbuke, onu čijoj se veri poklonio" (68).

wars and horrors that extend beyond the scope of this dissertation, had to do with aggressive demands by each constitutive unit to return to their 'authentic' national being. As a rule, those demands consisted of retrograde requests for religious, ethnic, and linguistic purity (in addition to territorial claims), with the situation particularly problematic inside the so-called Serbo-Croatian-speaking nations/territories, where the demarcation line was the most difficult to determine.¹³¹ Pavić's metaphor of a converted Khazar who practically degrades from the totality of (linguistic and epistemic) knowledge to its one-sidedness (and, paradoxically, perceives it as advantageous) applies to the whole of Yugoslavia, but to Bosnia in particular. Namely, it is in Bosnia that the religious affiliation (Judaism played little or no import in the last war, but the two factions of Christianity had an added momentum) came to determine national and linguistic belonging in the extreme.¹³² The linguistic controversy is at its peak with the demise of Serbo-Croatian as official language, so that the three religious/national communities now utilize what they respectively call Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian language(s). Thus Bosnia, in which the religious and linguistic demarcation lines were the most blurred, and which was additionally burdened by the absurdity of not having a nation status within the former Federation (always considered a miniature Yugoslavia, complete with all the advantages and disadvantages of the multiethnic and multiconfessional state) witnessed the extremes of blind nationalist passions.

However, according to Pavić's retrospective reflections on possible interpretations

¹³¹ Slovenia and Macedonia, albeit plagued by certain problems of their own, stayed outside the most heated nationalist debate, and as such suffered least in the ensuing post-secession civil wars.

¹³² Bosnian nation was politically not recognized in the Federation, while both Serbian Orthodox and Catholic Church of Croatia requested that religious affiliation determine ethnic—Serbs were those who belonged to the Serbian Orthodox Church, while Croats had to be Catholic. No combinations were possible. Moslems, on the other hand, as there was no possibility of combining Serbian/Croatian ethnicity with Islamic confession, were practically given the status of a nation.

of the *Dictionary*, through the process of conversion the Khazars may have indeed re-established the authenticity of their national being, not by exchanging their religion for another one, but by, in fact, *returning* to the one they had followed before. Interpreting the Khazar conversion to (most likely) Judaism, as a kind of a ‘return’ to their original faith, Pavić states that “it happens so often [...] that you keep being pushed into some other faith, then a third one, then fourth, but in the end you still return to what is properly yours” (2005, 98).¹³³ Thus the actual ‘conversion’ is only the acknowledgement of their ancestral tradition which was lost at some indistinct mythistorical point in time and represents, in fact, a return to their organic national *essence*. It is not difficult to recognize that some of the accusations against Pavić spring from such parallels between the Khazars and Serbs, who likewise perceived that their national being was blanketed and alienated inside the common Yugoslav federation (although the identical rhetoric was promulgated by all nationalist camps in the Yugoslav crisis).¹³⁴ The ‘conversion’ is on the one side, a process of reversal of the loss of what constitutes the Serbs (Khazars, Croats) as a nation, and a veritable homecoming. On the other hand, this solidification of the national body is done at the cost of a radical removal of elements defined as alien to the self-body. Such assertion of the singular national narrative, therefore, can only be achieved at the price of the sacrifice of the Yugoslav common narrative—and this is the point which leads to Wachtel’s exaggerated criticism of the text.¹³⁵ Following the conversion, after all, the Khazar Empire disappears without a trace in history.

¹³³ “U svetu se to toliko često dešava [...] da vas uvek negde guraju u neku drugu veru, pa u neku treću veru, pa četvrtu, a vi se na kraju uvek vraćate onome što je vaše” (*Hazari, ili obnova* 98, translation mine).

¹³⁴ Indeed, some of his own statements point to this conclusion. See his interviews with Ana Šomlo.

¹³⁵ I am tempted to draw a comparison between this conclusion and Salman Rushdie’s indictment of the dangerous ‘oneness’ that his fictional persona, poet Baal contemplates in the desert of Jahilia. The *Satanic Verses* (1988) interpret the substitution of religious multiplicity by the monolithic religion as a negative development that arrives from the emptiness of human soul. See esp. pp. 101-104. Likewise, in Pavić’s text a multiplicity (of beliefs, narratives, histories) is replaced by an exclusive singularity.

From Petar Ramadanović's reading of the *Dictionary* as a search for the Father/God, one can deduce that his perception of the Khazars is that of the symbol of a unified national being, a model of *any* nation that has a historically defined national body and politically limited territory:

The delimiting line between Khazars and non-Khazars is not exactly the line between two nations, but the line within the very concept of the group. [...] Pavić's model does not differentiate between 'us' and 'them,' but rather between 'us' and those 'among us' who are denied a name and a language. Khazar, then, stands not only for the 'extinct nation,' but also for the concept of nation as always already threatened and thus in the need of preservation, in the need of permanent watch over [its] unity. (186)

The 'Khazars' are, therefore, a nation whose self-confidence and the certainty of its identity has been threatened. It is easy to perceive globalization or the development of some supra-national entity as a hazard for its fragile homogeneity. Their collective mythology teaches that they have managed to assemble Adam's body in its wholeness and that they are the ones who have discovered the unity of its absolute existence, and who have, therefore, found God the Father. All such unified bodies of nations look alike and are able to cohabit in mutual respect. Those 'others,' who "do not look alike" and "have no representatives," however, are the enemy (190). As Pavić's priest, Theoctist Nikolsky says in the *Dictionary*, "woe upon those who have deserted Adam's body, the body of man's first father, for they will not be able to die with him or like him. They will become not people but something else" (319).¹³⁶

But this is not all. In yet another speech delivered by a Satan's representative on earth, the ultimate danger to the identity, peace, and understanding among nations does not seem to come from those who preach difference amongst nations but, quite the

¹³⁶ "Teško onima koji su otpali od Adamovog tela, od tela praoca čoveka, jer neće moći umreti s njime i kao on. Oni će postati nešto drugo, a ne ljudi" (*Rečnik* 282).

opposite, from those liberals who blanket difference in the name of mutual understanding:

Have nothing to do with things that involve the three worlds of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism here on earth, so that we may have nothing to do with their underworlds. For those who hate one another are not the problem in this world. They always resemble one another. Enemies are always the same, or become so with time, for they could not be enemies otherwise. It is those who actually differ among themselves who pose the greatest danger. They long to meet one another, because their differences do not bother them. And they are the worst.¹³⁷ (52-3)

Playing the Devil's advocate (literally) the text infers that supra-national formations encompassing various ethnic and religious entities, prime examples of which are Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union (the rupture of which ended in bloodshed of more or less confined magnitude), tend to be considered artificial and untenable. Within the space commanded by *Dictionary's* national politics there is no space for such indiscriminately inclusive concepts.¹³⁸ A nation can only feel secure within the limits of a fully defined national state. Such perception assigns the nation-state attributes of a body that grew naturally and where an *ethnos* exists in full confidence of the inviolability of its culture, language, and the boundaries of its territorial sovereignty.

Yet, it is in this discourse which expounds on the importance of the reinforcement of monolithic nationalism for the sake of world peace that Slavoj Žižek perceptively uncovers remnants of ancient racist rhetoric which he tags "postmodern racism," meaning

¹³⁷ "Nikakvih poslova u kojima se mešaju tri sveta, islam, hrišćanstvo ili judaizam ovde na belom danu! Da ne bismo imali posla sa podzemljima tih svetova. Jer oni koji se mrze, s njima na ovome svetu nema teškoća. Takvi uvek liče jedni na druge. Neprijatelji su uvek isti, ili s vremenom postaju isti, inače ne bi mogli biti neprijatelji. Oni koji se među sobom istinski razlikuju, oni u stvari predstavljaju najveću opasnost. Oni teže da se upoznaju, jer im razlike ne smetaju. I ti su najgori" (55).

¹³⁸ In the many interpretations of the predicament in which Yugoslav (and Balkan) nations find themselves at the end of the 20th century it has also been argued that such all-inclusive forms of government disappeared with the simultaneous implosion and explosion of the last empires, the Ottoman and the Habsburg (see Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*). In much of the discourse created around the Yugoslav civil war, one of the theses promulgated by anti-Serbian nationalists has been that the Yugoslav state was designed on the obsolete imperial model that only helped serve Serbian ambitions while other peoples were kept in subjugation to the Serbian majority.

more or less the same as Etienne Balibar's concept of "metaracism." According to Žižek, this form of racism, which is not new at all but has only modified its jingoist repertory, is not direct any more, but "reflected," in the sense that it can even "assume the form of its opposite, of the fight against racism" (233). Pointing the finger at the contemporary cosmopolitan and multicultural society, the "postmodern" racist deplores the fact that

in the contemporary Babylon the experience of belonging to a well-defined ethnic community, which gives meaning to the individual's life, is losing ground ... in short, the true culprits are cosmopolitan universalists who, in the name of "multiculturalism," mix races and thereby set in motion natural self-defense mechanisms. (233-4)

The text of the *Dictionary* carries references that contain such telling "postmodern racism," although to what end, whether to warn of racism's multifaceted incarnations, or to betray a more sinister racism behind the semi-official self-victimizing rhetoric of (not yet institutionalized) Serbian nationalism, it is hard to tell.¹³⁹ The Devil-talk of the *Dictionary's* Nikon Sevast, therefore, betrays a broader problem of Eurocentrism which with mesmerized passivity directs its gaze into the colorful spread of various cultures, extolling their 'diversity' and 'originality,' yet strongly objects their 'infiltration' into Europe.¹⁴⁰

Ramadanović's reading of the novel uncovers an even more patriarchal and traditional trait in the text when he translates the Khazar Polemic as search for Adam the Father, the endless pursuit of the gravitation center as a focus around which those who

¹³⁹ In his conversations with Ana Šomlo, Pavić betrays traces of this discourse that Žižek slams as "racist," in revealing his fascination with different cultures, provided they remain located in their 'natural' geographic environment and not spread around.

¹⁴⁰ Žižek recognizes this gaze in the treatment of the Yugoslav wars (precisely, Bosnian) by the West. Fascinated by the "barbaric spectacle" of carnage, the West is, according to Žižek, greatly responsible for the whole Yugoslav tragedy. In his interpretation, what used to be the threat to the 'national body' and 'purity' has been translated into capitalist terminology of the exclusion from or inclusion into the circle of the privileged. Therefore, insurgencies and wars are now led for the right to be "inside" as revenge by those who are left "outside."

are “alike” will gather and unify. The nation, thus, assumes a familial structure, where the patriarch presides over the benefit of his kin, where “likeness,” physical, cultural, and ideological, is a common denominator and a factor of exclusion. There are always those who are for some reason or other denied the right to belong. Their destiny, whether they are individuals or whole nations, is the most difficult: “those ghosts, those wanderers have no side to identify with, no death to die, and no ground to be buried in. The Father is the father of all of mankind except the ones that have deserted Him” (Ramadanović 190). The “likeness” between people/individuals within a nation is thus a result of order, of the knowledge of the Center, of Adam. Those whose reality suffers the lack of these certainties are predestined for chaos, loss of identity, and the ultimate erasure of their name and all memory of their existence.

A confederate model of government appears to offer a balanced response to this kind of latently hegemonic rhetoric, as it seems to be able to overcome much of the trappings of nationalist and religious resentment yet still preserve some sense of a unity of nations that feel culturally linked to one another. Such a model was, in fact, one of the suggestions for the solution of the Yugoslav dead-end, but was rejected by the overwhelming requests for autonomy and full independence. A confederate model is currently gaining shape in the process of European integrations, where nation-states enter on their free will into a legally-bounding contract of economic cooperation and peaceful co-habitation. One of the greatest obstacles in the idea of a Yugoslav confederation is what some critics interpreted as the ‘immaturity’ of the constitutive nations for this kind of political union in which nations feel whole, and hold no claims against others. In the Yugoslav case, however, historical ‘injustices’ left too much space for mythistorical

manipulations and breeding of dangerous nationalist passions.¹⁴¹ The confederate model, therefore, requires a detachment from history that, due to the most intimate relationship between the Yugoslav and Balkan past and present, seems almost impossible to establish.¹⁴²

Is Pavić's text, an allegorical call for the recognition of individual nations at the cost of the dissolution of the supra-national state, or is it a vision of the chaos that will ensue in case of the disappearance of the central authority?

Dictionary as a Model of National Dissolution

Clearly, it is not possible to determine all the forces that brought about the downfall of one of the last metanarratives of the 20th century, that of the viability of a multinational and multiconfessional federation, and we can only speculate about the potential culprits in its aftermath. In the Yugoslav case, many an accusing finger is being pointed at the nationalist intelligentsias of the former republics, and most of all Serbian. Andrew Wachtel's article is pertinent inasmuch as it places this text and its writer in the focus of a nationalist debate which, although never conducted at home, came to somewhat taint the text itself and its author, both abroad and in Serbia, where Pavić's work is sometimes dismissed as 'overtly nationalistic.' Wachtel bases his argument on the significance of literary production in Yugoslavia (but also "all over Eastern Europe") which, in his opinion, had a much more powerful influence over society than is the case in the West.

¹⁴¹ This proposition has, in turn, caused a lot of criticism from nationalists, to whom any suggestion of the 'immaturity' of a nation could be unacceptable and who prefer to interpret the destiny of small nations through the lens of exclusive responsibility of the 'great' ones. It is the 'great' nations who are undeniably liable for most of the tragedy of world history; yet, in most extreme cases nationalist discourse is reluctant to own any responsibility for a nation's demise.

¹⁴² I have already explained this connection in the Introduction.

This assertion smacks of Fredric Jameson's ill-reputed theory of "national allegory," in which he attributes to "Third World" intellectuals a kind of a *vox populi* role by which "the intellectual is always in one way or another a political intellectual."¹⁴³ Yet, the belief is not Wachtel's alone, as the conspiracy theory of the Yugoslav (and, particularly Serbian) intelligentsia acting as some kind of *eminence grise* in the breaking apart scenario has been widely accepted. The inclination to seek roots of the Yugoslav civil wars almost exclusively in the 'hatespeak' of the nationalist intelligentsia prompted many commentators of the crisis to translate the war into the word. Such simplified decoding motivated Svetlana Slapšak's observation in her *New York Times* article that "draftees were sent to be killed with writers' words on their lips."¹⁴⁴ In this scenario politicians turn problematic concepts into 'national visions' launched by prominent cultural figures, while the rest of the population mindlessly parrots slogans that emerge out of a chimerical collaboration of evil ideology and subservient culture. The word indeed materializes and assumes murderous powers.

No discussion of this novel can be complete without considering the relationship between postmodern thinking/narrative and the fragmentation of Yugoslavia. The comparison is all too easy to make and, at the same time, very tempting. Such is precisely Andrew Wachtel's indictment of the *Dictionary*. It is the kind of poststructuralist

¹⁴³ See Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1985): 65-88. His controversial argument of virtually *all* non-Western fiction, reading as a 'national allegory' denies any development to non-Western fiction which he sees at the end of the 20th century struggling with the same issues that Western fiction treated in 18-19th centuries, the time of the emergence of modern nations in Europe. This act of confining literature to forever reproducing the same kind of *collective* identities by extension denies subjectivity to non-Westerners as well, as they are never seen evolving beyond impersonal members of a nation into individual citizens, which is still the prerogative of Western readers.

¹⁴⁴ Svetlana Slapšak takes on prominent Serbian writers who, she says, inspired the Serbian ideological crusade that, eventually, led to bloodshed. She includes Matija Bećković, Milorad Pavić and, especially, Dobrica Ćosić among those responsible for *hatespeak* launched from Serbia during the decade of the 1990s. It is beyond any doubt that Wachtel's conclusions are based on similar claims, widely popular at the time.

application which, according to Norris cannot fail in its intention thanks to the fictional text which manages to “preempt just about everything the critic might want to say” (91). Ultimately, it is not Wachtel’s overall argument that I find problematic and which, from everything I have said above, offers a more or less similar framework to mine. The part of his argument which I find flawed, however, is his key point; namely the causal relationship between the novel and dismemberment of Yugoslavia. The problem lies in the fact that he assigns to the novel the role of a cultural determinant of the Yugoslav break-up instead of considering the novel as (not so) fictional reflection of the political break-up of the state.

Andrew Wachtel makes Lyotard’s designation of the postmodern as the ‘death of all grand narratives,’ as his point of departure in proving the role of Pavić’s postmodern text in the fragmentation of Yugoslavia: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives. [...] The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal” (Lyotard xxiv). This immediately establishes the transparent proposition through which Wachtel’s critique operates—the Yugoslav grand narrative was disembodied by a very literal interpretation of the novel by the Serbian intelligentsia which was, according to Wachtel, “sensitized to nationalism” (639). I will return to a more detailed investigation of the connection between Lyotard’s propositions and the Yugoslav situation later in the chapter. First, however, it is necessary to stress that Wachtel’s interrogation of the possible link between the *Dictionary* and the dissolution of the Yugoslav Federation is not an isolated example. Of the few articles written about the novel *after* the Yugoslav ordeal had exploded into its daily televised existence, most try to establish a definitive

connection between the significance of the novel and the break-up of the country, seeing in the postmodern model of narrative subversion the very replica of the political situation in the field. The shocking physical violence of the civil war thus got projected onto the text, blurring its other qualities and meanings and suggesting only the most obvious one—that of decentralization, break-up, and ensuing chaos.

In Wachtel's interpretation the weakened and weakening "modernist metanarrative" of Yugoslav unity, unlike the modernist narrative which was the foundation of European democracies, showed open disrespect for alterity. The planting of "postmodernist thinking" in such a ground, therefore, produced an "ivory tower impact" leading to the "proliferation of mutually exclusive local narratives of legitimacy of precisely the type that postmodern theory predicts" (628). The parallel between the postmodern and Yugoslav post-1989 conditions, however, does not lend itself to an easy comparison, as I have explained in my Introduction. The postmodern condition in the West is mostly interpreted as a disintegration of traditional values, beliefs, and all the grand narratives that people live by. In the post-Yugoslav situation, however, this paradigm change acquires a very different form of a substitution of one grand narrative (Yugoslav) by a multiplicity of narratives which are, and this is the critical difference, perceived as more ancient, solidified, and defined than the loose and all-encompassing Yugoslav narrative. Therefore, the Yugoslav postmodern narrative dissolution does not represent the process of the substitution of a traditional one by a void, but its exact opposite—a return to a more traditional narrative which shows affinity with European modernist ones. For this reason, the Yugoslav situation can be discussed not through a simplified engagement of Lyotard's definition, as a disappearance of a grand narrative but, on the contrary, as a

substitution of one grand narrative by a collection of purportedly more ancient grand narratives. Neither does the classical interpretation of the postmodern as dissipation of all traditional values and beliefs fully apply to the post-Yugoslav situation. Quite the opposite, in fact, since the break-up of the federation led to the re-discovery and re-invention of traditions and beliefs that lay stifled underneath the ideological blanket that, reportedly, denied national and religious particularities for the sake of conflict-free cohabitation. Thus the resurgence (and new discovery) of religiosity, patriarchal traditions, and other aspects of cultural conservatism that became the dominant cultural paradigm of the post-Yugoslav society, can in no way be decoded by a literal application of postmodern definition. It is interesting that the whole retrograde ‘movement’ that swept Yugoslavia in the late 1980s was internally being interpreted as a return to traditional ‘European civic’ values of nationhood, citizenship, and religious consciousness, that its proponents saw as ruined by Communist ideology. At the time it was defined as a veritable *rapprochement* with Europe, rather than a postmodern dissipation of traditional values. In this respect, post-Yugoslav form of postmodernism is much closer to the disintegration of the Communist narrative all over Eastern Europe, rather than the devaluation of traditions, which happens to be the common denominator of Western postmodernity. The Croatian writer, Dubravka Ugrešić rightfully states that

The issue that was painful for Yugoslavia clearly was not Communism but nationalism. Communism and its downfall served the Yugoslavs as a convenient interpretation, palatable to foreign interpreters and politicians, and therefore as a ‘legal’ alibi for war. The collapse of Yugoslavia [...] was a prime moment for picking up where World War II left off, and changing its outcome.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ See her “The Souvenirs of Communism: home as marketplace or deletion of the past.” Trans. Ellen Ellias. *The Hedgehog Review* 7:3 (September 2005): 29-36.

Wachtel further claims that “the very concept of Yugoslavia grew out of and was to a great extent dependent on the metanarratives of the European enlightenment” into which postmodern thinking is introduced (629). Not too distant from Jusdanis’s controversial idea of the “belatedness” of Balkan modernity, this claim utilizes the same premise to create from the obsolescence of the Yugoslav entity a fertile ground for the ideas of fragmentation, dismemberment, and other forms of narrative mutilation.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, this idea is soon followed by an argument (much used by anti-Yugoslav nationalists) of the evolution of the Yugoslav state out of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, reigned over by a Serbian dynasty (629). Perhaps this is intended as a proof of the much repeated accusations of the subjugation of other nations in the Serbian-ruled, and Serbian-created state. If this argument led to its logical conclusion, however, it becomes obvious that the Serbs would in that case insist on the preservation of the state at all costs rather than tend to narratively (and literally) demolish it.

What I find most disputable, however, is the first part of this proposition, in which Wachtel derives the idea of Yugoslavism from the enlightenment. The proposition is neither new nor problematic in itself; however, it fails to account for the fact that *all nationalism* is in this way or that a product of the ideas of the enlightenment. A major difference between the Yugoslav and other European nationalisms, however, is that Yugoslavia by its very nature was never a nation-state proper, due to its multiethnic and multireligious character. Other European nations have, *arguably*, achieved a higher level of national homogeneity and, by the same token, unity.¹⁴⁷ This happens to be the

¹⁴⁶ Gregory Jusdanis, *Belated Modernity and Aesthetic Culture: Inventing National Literature*.

¹⁴⁷ Many indicators, however, point to the fact that it is a strong financial base and economic interests that act as much better ‘nation preservatives’ than collective awareness and belief into the unity and cultural sameness within any particular European nation. It is questionable how many currently standing European

homogenous national model that Pavić calls for in the above quoted passages from the *Dictionary* and in most of his statements. He seems to suggest that such national and cultural homogeneity and solidification ensure the survival of the nation and prevent resentments and hostilities among neighbors. Along the same lines, thus, run the propositions by some anti-Yugoslav exponents, who thought that the disruption of the Yugoslav narrative was a veritable *re-establishment* of the enlightenment ideal of the nation, rather than its violation. Likewise, this is the motivation behind Pavić's claim that the conversion of the Khazars was a return of their national being into the state they had lost, rather than the loss itself.

Male and Female Narratives

Ivan Callus, albeit in passing, interrogates possible connections between the evident chaos of the civil war and the narrative chaos that rules in Pavić's text. What is even more striking, is that similarly to Wachtel, he proposes Pavić's narrative of dissolution as an antithesis to Ivo Andrić's efforts of constructing both the narrative and the community (e.g., in his *Bridge on the Drina*). For example, Callus leaves open the question of Pavić's text acting as an "allegory of the racial, ethnic, and religious divisiveness tormenting political and social life in the region," or even as "an indictment, [...] of the same excesses which vex that other classic of Eastern European literature: the more conventionally configured *Bosnian Chronicle* by Ivo Andrić" (5). Wachtel, on the other

nation-states would endure the test of failed economy and bankrupt ideology, as was the case with former Yugoslavia. The idea of the cultural and national 'homogeneity' of the Italian nation, for example, has been challenged ever since its inception, with the never-closing rupture between the North and South; the resentment which gives rise not only to territorial or economic, but also to racial and linguistic issues. Commentators of the Yugoslav crisis seem to forget that the 'artificiality' of the Yugoslav state started to show when its West-financed and domestically mismanaged economy went bankrupt, creating fertile soil for just about any kind of demagoguery and mythistorical mass-manipulation.

hand, juxtaposes Pavić's deconstructing narrative to that of Andrić, which he perceives as a "narrative of synthesis," according to Lyotard's definition, striving to build a kind of an "imaginary" Yugoslav community (637). In that respect he places Pavić with a group of Serbian writers who, in his view, have openly nationalistic programs—Dobrica Ćosić, Slobodan Selenić, and Vuk Drašković—and whose monolithic narratives are in opposition to the Yugoslav-oriented writers of the Belgrade literary scene, most notably Ivo Andrić and Danilo Kiš.¹⁴⁸

It is up to the narrator, Wachtel claims, to tell their readers "the truth" and thus resolve the controversy of conflicting narratives, a gesture that Andrić uses throughout the *Bridge*, but Pavić deliberately avoids in the *Dictionary*.

as in Pavić's novel [in the *Bridge*] we appear to have irreconcilable claims, but in this work the narrator enters the text to explain the origins of these stories and to tell the reader *the truth*. [...] Thus, the narrator, standing outside of his own text, illustrates that the seemingly irreconcilable positions of "the common folk" can be overcome by the knowledge that history provides. (637, emphasis mine)

By thus rationalizing conflicting mythistorical claims the narrator *guides* the reader into accepting what Wachtel obviously considers the 'right direction,' subsuming different interpretations under a very rational explanation, and thus avoiding nationalist/religious controversy. This gesture obviously functions within Andrić's (and early Kiš's) realist-modernist tradition, but is not in line with the interrogations of the very basic characteristics of postmodernist fiction, which assigns no authoritative role to the narrator and instead allows for a multiplicity of interpretations.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, this proposition

¹⁴⁸ One of the major problems with this article is the very clear one-sidedness from which it addresses its complex subject. Wachtel's failure to mention a single author or text that is not defined as 'Serbian' or Serbia-based author imposes a conclusion that he does not consider the validity of other, non-Serbian, narratives in any way significant for the Yugoslav drama.

¹⁴⁹ Further elucidation of Kiš's position is necessary. While it is true that Kiš is considered the last 'Yugoslav writer,' there is no justification for a comparison of his work with that of Ivo Andrić's 'reconciliatory' stance regarding the national issue. Kiš never addressed the nation as such in his work, but

returns us to the structuralist idea of the narrative ‘truth’ (or the belief in the existence of ‘the truth’ of any kind) and assigns scientific attributes to history as the carrier of the knowledge of the past. It is, furthermore, facilitated by a deliberate bypassing of the long and unfinished debate of the alleged ahistoricity of the postmodern, as well as the whole line of critics who further complicate the controversy by blurring the line between the narrative fiction and the historical claims to facticity. The argument concludes by denying Pavić’s novel any prospect of the narrative reconciliation, achieved by Andrić:

In sum, the central features of Andrić’s novel are 1) a cyclical view of time; 2) a recognition that what characterizes Yugoslavia at any moment in time is difference, but difference heightened by the unavoidability of intercourse among seemingly irreconcilably opposed groups; and 3) that difference is potentially surmountable on a mundane level through the actions of people in the world and in literary texts through the ability of the story-teller to know the truth and to unify the world in his work. [... The *Dictionary*] reproduces parts 1 and 2 of Andrić’s Yugoslav equation, while completely rejecting the possibility of part 3 (which is, precisely, the part in which Yugoslavia is imagined, despite all the problems caused, particularly, by part 2). (Wachtel 1997, 637-8)

One of the main features in Pavić’s narrative and the one that holds the key to the (possible) attitude of the text (and its author) on the problematics of narrative dissolution is omitted from Wachtel’s analysis. What I propose here for consideration is the text’s evident twofoldedness or even three-foldedness. It is perceptible through the book’s material existence (the male and female copies), as well as the parallel worlds in which the text and its protagonists exist. For every thing or being in the text there exists its corresponding double, its reverse other which complements the picture, and without which the image is always incomplete. Even the nation of Khazars have a double in the

he always insisted on the Jewishness of his experience. His writing cannot be read as national championing, and until the *Tomb for Boris Davidovich* controversy he did not voice his opinion on the national issue (*Čas anatomije*). However, when upon the publication of the *Tomb* in 1976 he became targeted on the nationalist ground (and we may ask whether the Jewish question is a national question) his sharp renunciation of nationalist rhetoric used in the criticism of his book became known to the reading public. Therefore, aside from writing on a (nationally) ‘neutral’ subject of Jews, Kiš’s oeuvre does not allow analogies with allegedly ‘reconciliatory’ rhetoric of Andrić’s texts.

“false Khazars,” who took to speaking Khazar and representing Khazar history as their own. Even the Khagan’s double is assembled when bodily bits and pieces identical to his are cut off from different people so that not even his lover can notice the difference. The narrative moves between two worlds—the visible world of God and the underworld of the Devil—which is simultaneously the textual world, alphabetical; it deals with events that can be both mythical and historical; every human being has its complementing other, whose dream and waking state exclude each other, for one always dreams the conscious life of the other; on top of all, all humans and underworldly creatures have their incarnations in more recent history. All these doubles and their centrifugal or centripetal interactions represent mutually exclusive inclinations of two discursive/energy opposites to tear the narrative apart or join the fractured parts together—male and female energies.

One paragraph that represents the sole difference between the male and the female versions of the book is part of the stream of thought of Dr. Dorothea Shultz, an Israeli Slavist from Yale, in a passionate and adulterous relationship with Dr. Abu Kabir Muawia, a historian from Cairo University. It is during their meeting on the Khazar polemics that Dorothea’s thoughts distinctively alter the outcome of the two narrative versions. Thus, the male version of this paragraph goes as follows:

And he gave me a few of the Xeroxed sheets of paper lying on the table in front of him. I could have pulled the trigger then and there. There wouldn’t be a better moment. There was only one lone witness present in the garden - and he was a child. But that’s not what happened. I reached out and took those exciting sheets of paper, which I enclose in this letter. Taking them instead of firing my gun, I looked at those Saracen fingers with their nails like hazelnuts and I thought of the tree Halevi mentions in his book on the Khazars. I thought how each and every one of us is just such a tree: the taller we grow toward the sky, through the wind and rain toward God, the deeper we must sink our roots through the mud and subterranean waters toward hell. With these thoughts in my mind, I read the pages given me by the green-eyed Saracen. They shattered me, and in disbelief I asked Dr. Muawia where he had got them.

The same paragraph in the female version reads:

And he gave me a few of the Xeroxed sheets of paper lying on the table in front of him. As he passed them to me, his thumb brushed mine and I trembled from the touch. I had the sensation that our past and our future were in our finger and that they had touched. And so, when I began to read the proffered pages, I at one moment lost the train of thought in the text and drowned it in my feelings. In these seconds of absence and self-oblivion, centuries passed with every read but uncomprehended and unabsorbed line, and when, after a few moments, I came to and re-established contact with the text, I knew that the reader who returns from the open seas of his feelings is no longer the same reader who embarked on that sea only a short while ago. I gained and learned more by not reading than by reading those pages, and when I asked Dr. Muawia where he had got them he said something that astonished me even more.¹⁵⁰ (293-4)

It is clear that the narrative tension operates at the level of gender stereotypes, where the masculine aggressive energies are sharply contrasted to the more pronounced emotional feminine ones. This basic division is found in Pavić's statement that this gesture simply reflects the division of time into "collective/male" and "individual/female" times (Pavić 2005, 18).¹⁵¹ However, these two contrasting tendencies are the major forces that determine the destiny of the narrative. The whole text is pervaded by mutually exclusive unifying and fragmenting forces, or female and male energies.¹⁵² Yet, the struggle between these two mythical principles that pull the narrative apart and those that try to reconstruct it from the torn pieces, is at the foundations of the project of constructing the perfect, truthful, and absolute narrative. At the same instance, the transference of the

¹⁵⁰ "I pružio mi je onih nekoliko kserokriranih listova što su ležali pred njime. Dodajući mi taj svitak on mi dotače na trenutak palac svojim palcem i ja se naježih od tog dodira. Imala sam osećaj da su naše prošlosti i budućnosti u našim prstima i da su se dodirnule. Zato kad počeh da čitam ponuđeni tekst umesto da pucam izgubih misao štiva i utopih je u svoje osećaje. U tim magnovenjima odsutnosti i samozaborava sa svakim pročitanim ali neshvaćenim i neprimljenim retkom protekli su vekovi i kada sam se posle nekoliko časaka prenila i opet uspostavila dodir sa štivom, znala sam da onaj čitalac koji se s pučine svojih osećanja vraća nije više onaj koji se maločas otisnuo na tu pučinu. Više sam dobila i doznala ne čitajući nego čitajući te stranice, a kada upitah dr Muaviju otkuda mu, on mi reče nešto što me još više začudi" (257).

¹⁵¹ Translations from this text mine.

¹⁵² In this light it is very interesting to note Pavić's decision to authorize only the *female* versions of the novel for all subsequent reprints. (*Roman kao država*).

seventeenth-century struggle over the Book is transposed into the twentieth century, where it relentlessly continues while geographical and political maps of the world change at a dizzying pace.

What further complicates the picture is that there is always a *third*; the one who is doubtless one too many in the process of the completion of the whole, but whose presence adds weight in the project of its destruction. The *third* are people without their own reality, for they tend to lean to either extreme at different times and their “free will is twice as restricted by the unconscious as that of the other two.” This renders them the inauthentic kind who live off the “small part of the dream [that] is always left over” (100).¹⁵³ Thus, the joining of the two opposites into a harmonious whole becomes an even more complicated task because the third always sticks out of the picture and tends to fragment it in order to make space for itself. A kind of war on its own merit, this textual struggle exists at all levels of the novel and determines the life or death of everybody involved in the task of composing the monistic image of Adam. It also offers a comment on the pursuit of knowledge *per se*, by reiterating the Faustian lesson that “The quest for knowledge [...] is futile unless it contributes to a greater whole, the Body that we are driven to complete and that will nevertheless always remain incomplete” (Hayles 1997, 811). Such a ‘third’ who misses his chance is the dream-hunter Masudi, who travels through the dreams in which Avram Branković and Samuel Cohen dream each other and live one another’s reality. As the ‘third’ is always destined to miss their best opportunity, Masudi chooses to learn the secret of death rather than continue the pursuit of the knowledge of the Book. When Branković is killed on a battlefield and Cohen remains

¹⁵³ “[...] njegova slobodna volja je dva puta više ograničavana podsvešću nego što je kod one dvojice slučaj”; “[...] malo sna pretekne i s jedne i s druge strane” (94).

trapped inside his death which he dreams and from which he can never wake up, Masudi, mesmerized by the sheer spectacle of the experience, forgets his primary goal of assembling the body of Adam and submits himself to death.

Adam, or the (W)Holy Trinity, or the Truth of Plurality

What exactly is Adam, what it is that the dream-hunters of the *Dictionary* are trying to create is not clarified in the progress through this text that does not have a beginning, a middle, or an ending. What is certain, however, is that Adam is a totality, an absolute, a collectivity, oneness, undivided unity, perfection. It is the ultimate monistic idea that has forever been the unattainable striving of humanity—in some interpretations, something like a Tower of Babel. Hayles sees it as the reincarnation of God’s Word in Flesh (Book=Body). Considering that the Khazars “imagine the future in terms of space, never time” (*Dictionary* 145), Hayles reads the body of Adam as “eternity,” the “total Body that will span millennia and represent all combinations of all possible narratives” (807). Its assembly seems to be the ultimate offense against God and is punished by death which is the only way to know God and eternity in an instant. The agents of death are, paradoxically, of an undeniably diabolic nature.

Thus, the constructing of Adam and the conversion of the Khazars to one of the religions of the book are parallel processes whose completion in both cases leads to death—corporeal and historical respectively. Adam’s body is created at three levels, in the manner that mimics each of the three religions’ attempts to convince the Khazar tribe of the truthfulness of its own religious argument. In each of the three stages of assembly, Adam’s body evolves and improves. In the Christian book, Adam is created of the earthly

substance. Following the death of his son, Petkutin, whom he shaped out of mud and breathed life into his nostrils, Avram Branković's ambition shifts from the creation of a mud body to an alphabetical one: "From man to Adam" (42).¹⁵⁴ He undertakes the enterprise of compiling the once lost Khazar dictionary, the assignment so dangerous in its heresy that his demonic scribe warns him that "it is much more dangerous to compile a dictionary on the Khazars out of strewn words, here in this peaceful castle, than to go to war on the Danube" (53).¹⁵⁵ His book creation, however, is not the end in itself, and only his diabolic servant-scribe recognizes that Avram's heresy will have unfathomable consequences: "his *Khazar Dictionary* is but a bookish preparation for forceful action..." (48).¹⁵⁶ Avram Branković dreams of a certain young man, his alter ego, whose dream is Avram's life, just as he lives his conscious reality in Avram's dreams. The man happens to be a Jewish dream-hunter, Samuel Cohen, who has undertaken the task of composing the majestic body of Adam Cadmon. Adam Cadmon, according to the Jewish book of the *Dictionary*, is the "primordial man, [...] who was both man and woman and born before eternity" (224).¹⁵⁷ It is in the Jewish book, therefore, that Adam obtains the next dimension by gaining reason—the *logos*/word. His body is still incomplete, and only in the third book could the process of assembly be finalized, when in the Green Book of Islam Adam Ruhani is made of dreams. Petar Pijanović views this detail theologically and claims that only when all three levels are combined can Adam become whole as "in its idea [Adam] embodies a being made of mud-body, letter-reason, and dream-soul. But

¹⁵⁴ "S čoveka na Adama" (46).

¹⁵⁵ "opasnije [...] sastavljati od rasutih reči rečnik o Hazarima, ovde u ovoj tihoj kuli, nego ići u rat na Dunav" (56).

¹⁵⁶ "*Hazarški rečnik* njegov samo je knjiška predprema za snažno delovanje..." (51).

¹⁵⁷ "[...] pračovekom, predvečnim Adamom Kadmonom, koji je bio i čovek i žena" (222).

it is impossible to make that being a model of mankind” (166).¹⁵⁸ Thus, as long as each of the three dream-hunters create Adam(s) that correspond to their religious beliefs independently of each other their heresy is less dangerous than if they were able to join forces. As long as they stay disunited, therefore, there is no danger coming their way. However, once they start dreaming of meeting each other and entering other people’s dreams in search for material Adam is made of their transgression unavoidably ends in death.

All three books of the *Dictionary* unanimously point to one and the same outcome for anybody who transgresses the strict confines imposed on humans and dares overcome these limitations. What drives them to attempt the assembly of the forbidden is, in fact, their *nostalgia for the absolute* (to borrow from Northorp Frye). For example, the Jewish book explains that the body of Adam Cadmon consists of all the letters of the alphabet, is never complete, and is constantly “breathing” because the letters keep being added and changed: “the white space between the letters denotes the rhythm of the body’s movements. The one always retreats to make room for the other, just as the other pulls back to let the former expand” (227).¹⁵⁹ This is the poetry of creating God’s Book on earth, the human interpretation of divine words that cannot but be erroneous and confined within the limits of our knowledge. This is how the Islamic representative in the Polemic explains the goal of dream-hunters: “you are trying to [lift yourselves up to Adam Ruhani] by conceiving Adam as a book being written by your dreams and dream hunters.

¹⁵⁸ “u zamisli ovaploćuje jedno biće stvoreno od blata-tela, slova-razuma i snova-duše. Ali, to biće nije moguće učiniti modelom ljudskog roda.” Pijanović’s interpretation of the three levels somewhat departs from mine. He interprets Avram’s son, Petkutin, as a replica of Christian creation of Adam out of mud but does not attempt an explanation of his ambition to start building Adam’s body in the dictionary, which is the development the reader learns about after Branković starts dreaming Cohen.

¹⁵⁹ “...dok beline između slova označavaju ritam pokreta tela. [...] uvek se jedna od njih povlači da bi načinila mesta drugoj i obratno, kad se druga širi, prva je u uzroku” (223).

Those are your deeds and they are wrong, for you perform them by creating your own book in the absence of the Holy Book” (153).¹⁶⁰ Such distinction between the Holy *Book* and the *book* replicates the dissimilarity of the Book of God’s creation and writing that has been one of the pivotal premises of poststructuralist theory. Thus the *Dictionary* translates Derrida’s theory of human writing, of “bad writing (writing in the “literal” [*propre*] and ordinary sense” as erroneous interpretation of God’s word which itself is “good writing,” or “writing of truth in the soul” (Derrida 1976, 15).

Human writing is, by this token, a “laborious, finite and artificial inscription” (15) of God’s creation, and what the *Dictionary* does is not simply to question its viability, but openly condemn it as an audacious act against creation that must fail. Being a misinterpretation, human writing and interpretation of the Truth is dangerous, it breeds nothing but destruction and death; and death is the ultimate truth that for a few brief moments dawns on all who dare violate God’s word by profaning it with the devil’s trade, as writing is referred to in the novel. The inaccuracy and failure of that mirror-truth is already inscribed in the very nature of writing, since “writing in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death” (Derrida 1976, 17).

Another viable conclusion of this logic, however, is that death is already inscribed in the project of the absolute body, since the body is composed of fragments each of which is already infected with death. Adam is doomed to death because the letters his body is made of originate in the underworld and can produce nothing but death. The represented body is, therefore, in itself an impossible project as the “three-partite Adam

¹⁶⁰ “ti i tvoji sveštenici pokušavate da se uzdignete do [Adama Ruhaniija]. To su vaše namere i one su dobre. Ali vi to pokušavate da ostvarite tako što Adama shvatate kao knjigu koju ispisuju vaši snovi i lovci na snove. To su vaša dela i ona su pogrešna, a vi ih činite stvarajući svoju knjigu u nedostatku *Božije knjige*” (134).

always wakes up to his own death” (Pijanović 166).¹⁶¹ Such a three-partite body is easily the body-politics that Rousseau defines in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* as a fragile “represented” due to the “evil” and corruption inherent in its representatives (individual citizens). Rousseau draws on an analogy between the systems of writing (representation) and the body politics/sovereign (collectivity of a people). By that correlation, the third and last stage of phonetic representation that he describes, or alphabetical writing, corresponds to the highest organization stage in human society, the civil stage, by which people are already “gathered into a nation” (Derrida 1976, 291). This interpretation does not necessarily designate God and His laws as that absolute towards which humanity strives but is unable to represent, the notion that Pijanović in his analysis of the *Dictionary* seems to favor. Quite the contrary, the idea of the “Sovereign, who is no less than a collective being,” (Derrida 1976, 297) takes us back from such hierarchical understanding of the absolute to the much more populist one which I proposed at the beginning of this chapter. It seems that the idea that Pavić’s text elucidates in the passages which to the initiated reader betray a dose of latent nationalism, that the ‘totality’ which is the ultimate end of this enterprise is the recognition of the unified national being.

That the novel relies on the relation between “graphics and politics,” as Derrida states, will become clearer by a better illumination of Rousseau’s argument. His example is that of the “people [...] legitimately assembled as a sovereign body,” therefore one organism that is treated and imagined as a unified whole despite the incongruence of its individual constituents. The full inconceivability of such a totality, however, becomes obvious when the representer (therefore, each citizen) is forced to give up their political

¹⁶¹ “trojedni Adam [se] uvek budi u svoju smrt.”

liberty in order to merge with other representers into the unified body of the “Sovereign” (Derrida 1976, 297). Moreover, the very act of the representation of the totality defies its purpose, because “the moment a people allows itself to be represented, it is no longer free: it no longer exists” (297). Thus the body of the represented is an inconceivable idea because once described, defined, and represented it disappears.¹⁶² Do, therefore, the Khazars vanish from the historical stage after they become representable in the *logos*—written law of their chosen religion? It is of little significance which one of the three is chosen in the end, as they all prepare an intricate alphabetical snare to “[cage] the unruly language in them like a bird” (*Dictionary* 64); while “hunger for writing” extinguishes in people all “thirst for remembering” (323).¹⁶³ After the process of metamorphosis of memory into the text is completed, the textual corpus is not proven to be any more falsity-proof than human remembrance. On the contrary, all solidity and alleged textual impermeability to mythmaking is masterfully shattered by an unofficial appendix to the novel, where a monk confesses (off-record) of inscribing pages and changing the contents of the books he is entrusted as a copyist. Manipulation with the factual or original content of the text does not seem to represent a problem, and neither does the lie that through this channel enters the human consciousness. The original textual content is soon forgotten and is easily replaced by the latest alteration. The betrayal of the ‘truth’ of the text never becomes an issue, either, since the ‘lie’ of myth is always preferred to the documented ‘truth.’ As the monk discloses:

Instead of discovering and investigating my misdeed, the monks began asking me to do more and more transcribing, preferring my books, with the insertions, to books by other scribes [...] Not only did I add stories to the Lives, I began inventing new

¹⁶² A pertinent connection can be made with postcolonial criticism which protests the act of colonial representation and definition of subjugated peoples.

¹⁶³ “zatvorio taj nepokorni jezik, kao pticu” (64).

recluses, adding new miracles, and my transcriptions began selling at a higher price than the books from which they had been transcribed. Little by little I felt the tremendous power I held in my inkwell, and I let it flow at will.¹⁶⁴ (307)

Considered from these standpoints, death is the punishment for two acts of human insolence—attempt to reach the ultimate, and daring to do so by employing the language infected by death. Why does man, then, risk death and employ the devilish trade by vainly striving to the unattainable knowledge? Perhaps the answer lies in the belief that there *is no* other truth, and no other way of knowing the absolute but in death (as the Ottoman underworld representative so poignantly shows in the parable of a moth whose only awareness of the presence of the inexplicable force arrives in the brief moment when its life perishes between its murderer’s palms (*Dictionary* 127/*Rečnik* 116). Man is, perhaps, fully aware of the dangerous heresy present in his book project, but since this is his only path towards the knowledge of the incomprehensible, he consciously sacrifices himself and attempts the impossible purely for the purpose of joining with the absolute in the brief yet infinite moment of death.¹⁶⁵

Alternatively, however, according to a Foucauldian interpretation of Nietzsche, the *volonté de savoir*, the “instinct to knowledge” of historical consciousness is “malicious”

¹⁶⁴ “Umesto da se moje nepočinstvo otkrije i razvidi, monasi počеше sve češće tražiti da im prepisujem i moje knjige s pomenutim umecima uzimali su radije nego knjige drugih prepisivača [...] Ne samo da dodavam priče uz žitija, nego počeh izmišljati i nove pustinjake, dodavati nova čuda i moji prepisi počеше se prodavati skuplje no knjige s kojih su prepisivani. Malo-pomalo osetih strahovitu moć koju držim u mastionici i puštam u svet po volji” (272).

¹⁶⁵ Considering some of Pavić’s own religious inclinations it is possible that this intention should be read through some of the basic principles of Jewish Kabbala, according to which the word of God is shattered into fragments, as is his intention, and only the chosen ones can make it whole and understand His intentions. The building of the body of Adam from words and letters in this context assumes its rightful meaning, as through that work God’s intentions would become fully comprehensible. Man starts on this dangerous path, in full awareness that failure brings death, because the reward of becoming one with God is too tempting. In the story of the Khazar Jar the teacher breaks the jar leaving the dumbfounded student to ponder at the meaning of this action. The teacher is sure, however, that if the student were *meant* to understand the purpose, he would gather it from the shattered pieces just as he would from the unbroken vessel. If, however, he is incapable of fathoming its secret, it is the same to him whether the jar is whole or broken.

and “murderous,” a prime enemy to the “happiness of mankind.” Foucault continues: “It discovers the violence of a position that sides against those who are happy in their ignorance, against the effective illusions by which humanity protects itself, a position that encourages the dangers of research and delights in disturbing discoveries” (Foucault 1977, 162-3). Exposed and turned against the blessed in their ignorance, the inquisitive consciousness subjects itself to the ultimate sacrifice. Eventually, and this is the destiny of all “subjects of knowledge,” they have to be sacrificed, eradicated. Yet, death as a consequence is not feared but, on the contrary, accepted with full awareness. It is understood to be the rightful compensation for the insatiable “passion which fears no sacrifice, which fears nothing but its own extinction” (163). For this reason Pijanović envisions in this apparent rebellion against the strictures of the law the endeavor on the part of Man to “surface from himself, to break the membrane of the world and learn the truth about himself” (Pijanović 169).¹⁶⁶ This poetics of ‘surfacing’ from the confines of human destiny and reaching higher spiritual knowledge is in the *Dictionary* phrased by the dream-hunter Masudi, who explains that the ultimate aim of assembling Adam is “true awakening from one’s own reality, just as one awakens from a dream, and this leads to a condition where man is even more wakeful than when conscious” (165).¹⁶⁷ The process of surfacing takes place at the four levels of the Book that represent a higher achievement in the understanding of the Truth and are acquired in particular order by each religion. Yet the order in which these levels are appropriated (only the first of which is dismissed as it is the literal one) uncovers the profound nature of each religion. While the process of awakening as to the higher spiritual levels of existence can have both an

¹⁶⁶ “da izađe iz sebe, da probije opnu ovoga sveta i sazna istinu o sebi.”

¹⁶⁷ “istinsko buđenje iz sopstvene jave, kao što se budi iz sna, a to vodi stanju u kojem je čovek još budniji no na javi” (146).

individual and collective dimension, the *Dictionary* insists on its collective impact. Each man contributes to the collective dream if ever in his life one “becomes a part of Adam, and when all these moments are assembled, one gets the body of Adam on earth, not in form but in time” (320).¹⁶⁸ Reaching higher consciousness, then, seems justify the employment of the lie in the apparent attempt of creating the truth. However, each such alteration of the ultimate narrative takes the collective task of the assembly of Adam further away from its completion. Rather than putting it together the human propensity to mythopoetics constantly undermines its own goal of Adam’s assembly.

According to Derrida, the “idea of the book is the idea of a totality” which “always refers to a natural totality,” and is “profoundly alien to the sense of writing” (18). Adam’s body is, therefore, the totality that each of the three holy books claims for itself, albeit being insufficient to compose it in its entirety.¹⁶⁹ In their efforts the three religions act independently of each other and in open competition with each other. Each one insists on the absoluteness of its own narrative in which God’s word is transmitted in its authenticity. All three parties are involved in the similar project of creating their own absolute narratives which inevitably fails. They are competing with each other, they threaten each other and, eventually, subvert each other. And when towards the end of the 20th century three historians, each from a different ‘world civilization,’ intend to meet in the seat of several previous empires, Istanbul, with the purpose of comparing the documents about the conversion of the Khazars that each side kept hidden from all the

¹⁶⁸ “postaje deo Adama. Ako se svi ti časovi skupe, dobija se telo Adama na zemlji, ali ne u obliku nego u vremenu” (283).

¹⁶⁹ In Derrida the distinction is between the *book*, or God’s creation, and *writing*, which is the pale and incomplete human interpretation of it. With Pavić, however, it is Adam that reflects the totality which the *book* has in Derrida’s philosophy, while the *Dictionary* represents human efforts to assemble it in its totality. Either way, however, the totality is unattainable to humans, while their pitiful attempts (which may just as well manifest their vane ambition) are penalized by death.

others, their reconciliatory gesture is brutally interrupted. It is the creatures of the three underworlds (or, parallel worlds) that re-emerge only to thwart the only chance of the Khazar puzzle ever being solved. Harking back at what one of them uttered in the past, that enemies unfailingly look alike, the devils are reincarnated as a Belgian family, each member of which has a task to prevent one of the three key historians from exchanging documents and learning the truth out of the pieces of knowledge each one possesses. These vampiric reincarnations resurface to hinder any idea of the three divided human tribes ever meeting each other at the same point and thus united comprehending the truth. For those who dare attempt the ultimate accomplishment the punishment is, undeniably, death. A divided humanity remains forever incapable of learning the forbidden.

On a slightly different note, Blanchot's project of the reconciliation of the apparently extreme polarities of Nietzsche's dialectic in which he strives for a unified totality and yet rejects any monolithic truth, could help us uncoil some of the *Dictionary's* complexity. This apparent inconsistency in Nietzsche's philosophy to a great deal resembles the dynamics between the ostensibly implacable forces that rule Pavić's novel. Blanchot does not see Nietzsche's tendency to totality as an aberration in his pluralistic thought, but rather as a logical inclination of particles towards unification: "Even disengaged from a unitary system and engaged in an essential plurality, this thought must still designate a center" (Blanchot 1993, 151). How else can we reconcile the apparent antitheses in Nietzsche's belief that "Nothing exists apart from the whole" (152), but that nevertheless, "One is always wrong," while "truth begins at two" (154)? What with Rousseau's unified Sovereign whose body is composed of the multiplicity of "representers"? Or, with Pavić's novel which is supposed to constitute the Truth upon

assembly, yet each one of its particles claims to already contain it? Does this apparent contradiction undermine the principle of the whole?

It seems that to better comprehend this oxymoron we need to revert to the principle of *e pluribus unum*, the oneness of the many, which uncovers itself in the reading and interpretation of the text. According to Blanchot, the apparent paradox is resolved if our attention is averted from the truth itself to the multiplicity of interpretations to which a text offers itself: “interpretation [...] does not consist in the unveiling of a truth that is unique and hidden, or even ambiguous, but rather entails the reading of a text in several senses at once, with no other meaning than ‘*the process, the becoming*’ that is interpretation” (154-5). The relationship between the plurality and oneness seems to be less confusing when understood as the many ways in which the truth is sought in the text, the variety of alleys by which the monolithic being of the truth can be approached. Its own nature, however, does not become any the less mysterious, as it remains equally unattainable and incomprehensible.

In the novel this principle assumes the meaning of a cautionary tale of the dangers that misinterpretation poses for the understanding of the truth, if there ever is any. Throughout the novel Pavić reiterates that the *Dictionary*, as any other book, we may add, becomes dangerous when read in the wrong way. Not that he suggests that there is indeed the *right* way of reading it, he prefers to leave it to the reader to discover the secret. The introduction to the book already enumerates many innovative ways in which the novel can be read, at the same time as it warns the reader that the path ahead can be dangerous and even kill, as its original poisoned precursors did in the past.¹⁷⁰ The creator

¹⁷⁰ Here again the text resorts to the Kabbalistic principles mentioned in Note 58. Another link leads to Umberto Eco’s killing book, although there might easily be other, more sinister precursors to this idea.

of the *Dictionary* cautions the unsuspecting reader that the truth learned in the text belongs to the text alone and that utmost caution must be exercised in applying its message outside of the text: “Be careful, in future, not to place the cross on the lock [...] when the spirit is residing outside the book. It fears the cross and, not daring to go back into the book, it wreaks havoc all around” (7).¹⁷¹ The “evil spirit” that inhabits the novel should, therefore, not be interpreted outside of its textual context, for it is then that they acquire their deadly potency. Rather, in a Derridean sense of understanding the meaning solely within and out of the text, the novel offers limited and false freedom to the reader. The reader is enticed with the purported limitless possibilities of interpretation that the text lays in front of her. On the other hand, everything seems to already have been inscribed in the text and does not allow for clumsy and uninformed paraphrasing of its intended signification. When transferred outside the book, the words assume deadly powers, just as the ill-assembled body of the Khagan’s double whose disproportionate growth became a threat to the empire and had to be slain. This is the reason Robert Coover warns that dream-hunting and assembling Adam’s body “is a mortally dangerous vocation, and the reconstructed Adam may turn out, alas, to be a monster” (18). In the context of competing religions racing to understand the meaning of God’s word, this cautionary tale sounds much more like a serious warning against palpable political

Namely, in one of his critical essays, Danilo Kiš, warning of the danger of nationalism which is spurred on by the written word, refers to, perhaps, the most infamous book in human history, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a forgery that describes a purported Jewish conspiracy to dominate the world. Kiš reminds the readers “there are books that must not be taken lightly,” and that “the *Protocols* are one of the most dangerous books-murderers, [...] responsible for about a hundred holocausts and several million dead.” (“Moć i nemoć angažovanosti” [The Potency and Impotence of Engaged Literature], *Čas anatomije* [Anatomy Lesson], 200. Translation mine).

¹⁷¹ “pazite ubuduće da ne stavite krst na bravu [...] dok duh boravi van knjiga. Jer se od krsnog straha ne sme vratiti u knjigu, pa čini čuda i pokore” (16).

consequences arising out of tendentious mythistorical misinterpretation than a philosophical dictum.

Blowing up the Totality and the Self-establishing Order

Before proceeding towards a conclusion, it is necessary to revisit Andrew Wachtel's usage of Lyotard's premises on the postmodern for the purpose of the indictment of the *Dictionary* as a model for the dissolution of the Yugoslav federation. Denying that the *Dictionary* possesses a quality that searches for the impossible narrative unity, and simply perceive its parodic and subversive traits, as Wachtel in his rather hasty critique does, would mean overlooking one of the important peculiarities of Yugoslav postmodernity that I already defined in the Introduction to this dissertation. But, let me remind the reader again that my starting proposition deals with the differences that the Balkan (in a general sense) postmodern embodies in comparison with the Western. In the Introduction I state that the texts I am presenting in this dissertation dive into the past and face the inevitable fragmentation of their narrative bodies, but that there is always a counter-process that undermines the inevitable course of fragmentation. In case of Pavić's novel I recognize this counter-force as a remnant of the modernist ideal of totality and desired but unattainable triumph of the re-established order. The two are engaging one another in a perpetual struggle which always and unmistakably ends in a death. Up to this point Wachtel faithfully follows Lyotard's cry at the end of his definition of the postmodern calling for an all-out war on totality (Lyotard 82). What it fails to observe, however, is precisely this residual quality of modernist striving towards wholeness and order that is so ubiquitous in Pavić's novel. In its constant competition between the two

opposing forces, the text invokes this aspect with a certain dose of nostalgia, even though it shatters all such idealist illusions at the very next step by presenting the reader with yet another in a series of deaths that renders the establishment of such a totality less and less likely.

Lyotard acknowledges this dynamics as a nostalgic “aesthetic of the sublime” (81), but does not recognize its existence in the postmodern. Instead, his idea of the postmodern is of the one that “denies itself the solace of good forms” and which, ultimately, abolishes nostalgic indulgence in the idea of the unrepresentable and unattainable. His perception of the postmodern is the one that came up with new rules designated primarily for the task of shattering of modernist residues. This destructive development seems to be a necessity, as the extreme consequence of this illusion of totality is terror: “The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience (81).” Translated in the language of the *Dictionary*, we see the threatening image of Khagan’s doppelganger’s body, assembled to perfection from mutilated pieces of many other bodies, growing unstoppably out of the chains that tie it to the walls of the dungeon. However, Lyotard’s proposition very likely suggests the destruction of the *oneness* embodied in national, cultural, religious, or linguistic unitary models. The shattering of such monoliths would certainly represent a postmodern feat. Yet, it is still opposed to what Pavić’s novel seems to promote: a dissolution of a multinational (global) development for the purpose of a re-emergence of a consolidated totality. This is the picture that appears when this textual imagery is transposed to the

actual nationalist-political field where supranational developments tend to be perceived as a growing threat to particular national interests. The only reasonable defense against the renewal of such horrific ideal of the whole, according to Lyotard, is its dissolution.

Nevertheless, the *Dictionary* proposes a model of search for a unified totality through an endless struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces; between the efforts to join the components together, or disjoin them and keep them apart. The attempted whole consists of fragments that find themselves involved in a poetic movement that mimics the “breathing” of the text whose motions resemble sea waves caused by the letters’ alternating efforts to make space for new ones and then compact their lines and settle down. This process at times resembles a war of competing particles, but at other times it is no less than a harmonious poetry of creation. War and death are not a constant, although they are inevitable. The chaos that occasionally seems to rule the narrative settles down by itself and a certain order is established whose rules are no less comprehensible than those of the state of anarchy that seemed eternal just moments before. Pijanović defines this aspect of the novel as “ordered chaos, encyclopedic warehouse of narrative particles decentered in a scattered dynamic order. Encyclopedism and chaos are two poles of the oxymoronically structured vertical and narrative reality of Pavić’s novel” (205).¹⁷²

Similarly, in a distinctively scientific approach to the *Dictionary* which interprets the text through Ilya Prigogine’s theory of self-organizing systems, Tomislav Longinović views the seemingly chaotic and disorganized structure of the narrative as guided by some internal and self-generating order which is established on its own terms as long as

¹⁷² “On je uređeni nered, enciklopedijsko skladište narativnih čestica koje su decentrirane u razuđenom dinamičkom poretku. Enciklopedizam i nered jesu dva pola na oksimoronu građene vertikale i pripovedne realnosti Pavićevog romana.”

the reader stays with it to follow its transformation.¹⁷³ The apparent chaos of the narrative and mutually incompatible versions of the ‘truth’ reflect the subjective desire to know the world and shape it into a fully functional system—a kind of a total reality. Longinović recognizes Prigogine’s self-organizing theory in the emergence of poststructuralism, which he defines as “a reaction against [...] petrified institutional practices by focusing on the centrality of language as a nonlinear and self-organized medium whose role is not limited to the articulation and communication of ‘external realities,’” as well as in the Freudian ‘science of the human soul’ (184). The creation of ‘ultimate knowledge’ of reality however, is impossible, and the subject can only “substitut[e] words for reality” in a nonlinear, chaotic fashion (185). Despite all, the emergence of some kind of order is inevitable due to the system’s self-organizing logic which is ultimately unknowable to the subject. Transferred to the narrative of the *Dictionary*, some kind of order is bound to emerge (so the narrative voice tells us) out of the evident chaos that rules it and that makes any literal application of interpretative mechanisms to it rather an intimidating experience due to the text’s internal resistance to them:

No chronology will be observed here, nor is one necessary. Hence, each reader will put together the book for himself, as in a game of dominoes or cards, and, as with a mirror, he will get out of this dictionary as much as he puts into it, for as is written on one of the pages of this lexicon, you cannot get more out of the truth than what you put into it.¹⁷⁴ (*Dictionary* 13)

¹⁷³ Ilya Prigogine won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1977 for his pioneering work that bridges the gap between natural and social sciences. Self-organization designates the internal ordering of a system without outside impetuses. Apart from natural sciences, physics and chemistry primarily, it has also been observed in anthropology and economy. His *End of Certainty* (1997), escaping the trappings of classical physics which explains the world as deterministic, explores the world through “deterministic chaos” and attempts a reconciliation of natural laws with subjective reality. By virtue of subjecting the physical, ‘objective’ reality to the test of our subjective experience of it, as well as by introducing the concept of self-ordering of this multiplicity of subjective views (*ergo*, ‘narratives’), Prigogine’s research sounds like a scientific explanation and justification for the apparent chaos of the postmodern.

¹⁷⁴ “Nikakva hronologija ovde neće biti poštovana ni potrebna. Tako će svaki čitalac sam sklopiti svoju knjigu u celinu kao u partiji domina ili karata i od ovog rečnika dobiti kao od ogledala onoliko, koliko u njega bude uložio, jer se od istine—kako piše na jednoj stranici ovog leksikona—i ne može dobiti više no što u nju stavite.” (*Rečnik* 22)

The system-creating logic is, however, non-uniform, and this creates another level of the reading of this text in which each particular (and subjective) ordered system of interpretation will unavoidably act as an obstacle to the appropriation and validation of all others. This characteristic of the system is of particular significance in my analysis of the novel as a model of a multiplicity of self-imposing and self-validating nationalist narratives. It takes us back to Wachtel's problematic proposition that the *Dictionary* actually acts as a model and inspiration for the break-up of the grand Yugoslav narrative. First, it neglects the reality of a myriad competing nationalist narratives, present both in the text of the novel and in the actual Yugoslav crisis, all of which seriously threaten to overwrite the unifying Yugoslav grand narrative. Moreover, this premise designates the Serbian nationalist narrative either as the only one that succeeded in, or the one that instigated the whole overwriting hysteria. This is a very easy and tempting conclusion to make but, unfortunately, fails in its relation to the actual political situation in the field. It also disregards probably the most prominent quality of Pavić's novel—that back in 1984 when it was written, the novel may have rather represented a *premonition* of what is in store for the common state, rather than a *literary* call to arms. Its self-proliferating narrative combinations reflect the multifarious combative nationalist mythologies all of which were invested in the goal of further fragmentation of the (supra)national body.

Inasmuch Pavić's text reflects the public opinion of the time, in the sense that it seems to celebrate the process of dismemberment of the grand narrative as a feat of the reinforcement of a smaller, unified, albeit homogenous myth, it does something else as well. The novel does not allow its grand narrative to die without a struggle or before it denudes the whole mechanism employed in the creation of a monolithic truth. It insists

on exposing the fragility of such concepts and undermines their claims by juxtaposing them with contradictory ‘truths’ that derive from other narratives. One of the most evident examples of this tactic is the death of princess Ateh, which in two books of the novel has very contradictory accounts, while the third book denies it stressing her immortality. A striking affinity with poststructuralist theory exists even in this strategy of chaos which Hayles explores in Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*. Read through this lens, the chaos in the text is “always already” there. In fact, the *Dictionary*, just as any other text is a “reservoir[...] of chaos” (Hayles 1990, 180). This to a degree explicates the unusual (chaotic) structure of the novel, the impossibility of assembling of the coherent body of knowledge, as well as the contradictory claims of the three religious books about the same dictionary entry. Perhaps the ‘secret’ of the futility of the effort of composing *the truth* should also be searched in Derrida’s notion of textual chaos. Namely, Hayles uncovers it in his concept of iteration where every word “acquires a slightly different meaning each time it appears in a new context” (180). Seen in this light, the three versions of Princess Ateh’s death are not only the three competing accounts of authorities each of which claims ownership of the truth. They are, in fact, the repetition of the same signifier (Ateh) in different contexts that creates the narrative disorder undermining our notions of definite and knowable truths.

The novel is pervaded with events of dubious authenticity whose mutual conflict directly prevents the unifying counter-forces from ever succeeding in putting the story together. Most of all, however, the text draws the reader’s attention to herself and to her own power in composing the narrative. The very difference in truth claims in specific parts of the text allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. The reader is constantly

reminded that this is supposed to be a peculiar feat of readerly powers, as the text seemingly permits an indefinite number of accounts and, therefore, an infinite number of truths created solely by the reader herself. At the same time, however, this false freedom emphasizes the absurdity of interpretation it claims to celebrate. The sheer number of accounts and their contradictoriness represent an insurmountable obstacle to any consistent and meaningful rendition. No single narrative is favored, no single truth is given precedence over any others. The reader (the agent who creates truth claims) and the meaning, thus, find themselves in an impossible situation which does not leave space open for resolution. Pavić renders this relationship through an imagined triangle in which the reader and the writer find themselves on the opposite ends with a “a mutual thought captured on ropes that they pull in opposite directions” (14).¹⁷⁵ The thought is embodied as a puma, threatening to eat either one of them should they go off guard and loosen the ropes. If misinterpreted, any idea, thought, or myth can show in plain view their dangerous traits. Falsification and misrepresentation of events, as well as their promulgation as the truth, become the central points of interest of the *Dictionary*. Far from being simply interested in the postmodern deconstruction and subversion of the narrative totality, this text unmask the very mechanisms that stand behind the all-powerful systems of belief manipulation. As such it does not celebrate narrative fragmentation but rather exposes it. Transposed to the arena of Yugoslav mythistorical narrative battle, if this text was ever intended to mean anything in the grander scheme of national politics, I would rather say that it was an apprehension of the destruction to come, rather than a license to narrative (and physical) violence.

¹⁷⁵ “zajednička misao uhvaćena na uzicama koje vuku u suprotnim smerovima” (22).

CHAPTER THREE

Identity Crisis in Rhea Galanaki's *Ismail Ferik Pasha*

The title of Rhea Galanaki's *Life of Ismail Ferik Pasha*, written in 1989, contains the designation *μυθιστόριμα* [mythistorema], the Greek word for 'the novel' that encompasses both the fragile boundary between myth and history, the pivotal concepts in this dissertation, but at the same time interrogates another apparent dichotomy—that between history and fiction. The novel is comprised of three parts— 'Myth,' 'History,' and 'Epilogue,' the first two of which deal with two distinct parts in the protagonist's life in different narrative modes. The 'mythical' part is narrated in the third-person singular, while the 'historical' tells of the events in the first-person singular. As the author's prefatory note claims, the distinguishing features of the former are "a style adopting poetical modes, an almost abstract treatment of events, and a symbolic rendering of time" (8). In the latter, however, reality interferes with the protagonist's rendition of his story so that "a realistic account of military operations keeps breaking into the narrator's monologue" (8). It is interesting to point out that the part entitled 'Myth' tells of the events leading to the protagonist's captivity and subsequent life in Egypt; the 'History,' on the contrary, narrates the military expedition he undertakes when he is sent as an Ottoman general back to his native island of Crete to quell the rebellion masterminded and financed by his own brother; the expedition that ultimately leads to his death on the island. His last memory of the island, the visions of his mother looking for him among the prisoners being taken away, and a whole lifetime he spends as an Ottoman subject is thus relegated to the imagery of myth, un-truth, or fiction; the return to his homeland, on

the contrary, his *nostos* and description of the military campaign against the Cretan rebels interrupt his inner monologue with the dry vocabulary of a history book.

The novel contains a multiplicity of dualities, some of which are hidden in its self-reflexive body, while others are laid out in the open. Most significant of all is the duality of the protagonist's identity—both sexual and national—which implies a host of other, equally intriguing binary relationships, all of which act as determinants of his identity. Such is, for example, his relationship with his parents, in which the memory of his loving mother is completely antithetic to that of the authoritative father; his relationship with his brother, particularly with respect to the stark difference in their destinies although they both set off from the identical point of Ottoman captivity; such is the ambiguity of his shared life with his 'step-brother' and friend, Ibrahim, which likewise plays a significant point in his inner identity struggle. Ultimately, all this leads to his double/conflicting identities of a Greek-born Ottoman subject and the eternal opposition between the primordial forces of nature (his birth-identity) and social conditioning (his assumed Ottoman self). Finally, there is more to the novel's division into two parts with apparently conflicting and mutually undermining tendencies. Namely, the subtitle to the novel, *spina nel cuore* [thorn in the heart], refers to the rebellious island of Crete as a 'thorn in the side of Venice' which, given in the Italian original, is in direct opposition with the Islamic name of the novel's protagonist. Reminiscent of the 'rift' that hurt Mehmed Pasha Sokolović's chest and that forced him to build a bridge between his two selves, the Italian derivation of Galanaki's subtitle reinforces the split of the protagonist's identity between his Oriental and Occidental selves.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Mehmed Paša Sokolović is the *spiritus movens* behind the bridge project in Andrić's *Bridge on the Drina* analyzed in Part One of my dissertation. It is interesting to note that the way in which different texts

The few critics who write about this novel draw comparisons between this and two other texts that share a striking affinity with the subject matter of Galanaki's novel. One is the short story by Georgios Vizyenos, "Moscóv-Selim," while the other is the *White Castle*, a novel by the latest Nobel Prize winner, Orhan Pamuk.¹⁷⁷ Both of these texts emphasize the crises of identity between a Western self and the Oriental Other as their main subject. In both cases the contesting extremity of otherness is embodied by the ultimate Greek/Balkan Other—the Turk.¹⁷⁸ My analysis of Galanaki's novel puts a strong emphasis on the ambiguity of the protagonist's personal, gender, religious and national identity, all refracted through the motives of captivity, *nostos*, family, and the nation. Concurrently with the investigation of the magnitude of Ismail's identity crisis, the examination of the relationship of myth to history remains my important concern.

Identity between the Semiotic and the Symbolic

Utilizing Kristeva's concepts, Dimitris Tziovas explains Ismail's life journey as a cross from the semiotic into the symbolic phase and ultimate return into the semiotic, therefore a full circle (Tziovas 2003b, 265). My proposition is, in contrast, that it only further establishes him within the paternal law and culture of a changed provenance—from his adopted father (and, therefore, language and identity) to the natural one. Moreover, in the

treat destiny of janissary boys, in this case Mehmed Paša Sokolović and Ismail Ferik Pasha, is very similar. Their irretrievably split personalities keep struggling between the loyalty to their birth-natural self and the acquired identity they assumed as Ottoman subjects.

¹⁷⁷ Such approach is found in Vangelis Calotychos's (2003) and Dimitris Tziovas's (2003b) analyses of the novel.

¹⁷⁸ In *Modern Greece* Calotychos dedicates a chapter to Galanaki's novel and analyzes it against Orhan Pamuk's *White Castle* with the idea of examining "the meaning of 'Greek' and 'Turk'—the ultimate antinomy of the region and even of Greek Otherness—at a moment of globalization, in which the migration of people, images, and cultural products dislocates entrenched notions of 'home,' 'self,' and 'other' in confusing and, perhaps, even liberating ways." (267).

process his identity undergoes another shift—from the national/collective towards a closely defined familial and individual self-recognition.

Virtually every aspect of the novel is founded on the existence of dualities although the boundaries between them are nowhere so clearly circumscribed as to render their co-existence untenable. Instead, the seemingly conflicting opposites inhabit the same semiotic space in order to create a unique narrative as well as a cultural setting. The dualities come to the forefront in the Foreword, where Galanaki explains the reasoning behind her poetic/novelistic work. Within the narrative itself, the dynamic play of the opposites begins in the cave on the Lassithi Plateau during an Ottoman attack.¹⁷⁹ Ismail, then still known by his Christian name, Emmanuel, lives through the process of death and immediate rebirth into somebody else in the earth's womb, in the cave where the villagers found refuge escaping the Ottomans. The cave scene is simultaneously the place of his greatest psychological trauma as he loses his whole family in the siege and from that moment onward spends his life in captivity. Moreover, the cave generates the ambiguity of his gender identity just as much as of the national/gender/religious one. Feeling that his place was among the men fighting (and getting killed outside) rather than with the weak and women inside the cave, his memories of the cave, in which his mother figures most prominently, are always tainted with a dose of shame about the he failed to fulfill as a man.

It is in the cave that his journey really begins. Disobeying his mother's calls he knows that he "would not be going back to her." He wants to explore the depth of the cave, the unfathomed depths of his soul (*Ferik Pasha* 14). His turning away from his

¹⁷⁹ It may be interesting to point out that the cave with which the narrative opens is the cave which holds the claim to be the place where Zeus was born to Rhea and Chronos.

mother and acquisition of a knife which is to keep him revolving within the “orbit of knives” for the rest of his life indicates his transposition from the maternal sphere to the realm of the Father’s Law. It is appropriately tagged his ‘first death,’ and a ‘rebirth’ into another life in Ottoman captivity and subsequent military career. This is the frame in which his self will continue to exist, wavering between the two opposites but forever escaping full identification with either of them. Yet, the figure of the father throughout his Ottoman existence is curiously absent from his memory. Apart from the distinctly phallic symbol of the rusted blade that he holds close to his body and which keeps him revolving in the “orbit of knives,” any reference to his own father is missing.

Tziovias draws the distinction between the two operational concepts that create the base for his analysis of the novel. According to him, “The semiotic consists of nonverbal and non-representational conditions of signification.” The symbolic, in contrast, is “the organized and systematic introduction of [this] bodily polymorphism and heterogeneity into the social arena [and its order] is primarily represented through language” (265). Since “the semiotic is associated with the mother and the symbolic with the father and patriarchy” (Tziovias 2003b, 267) it means that Ismail/Emmanuel in the cave scene abruptly leaves the protection of the mother’s/semiotic realm and emerges out of it tied (literally) to the symbolic. Before merging into the symbolic order of the Father—through the acquisition of language, introduction to history and social laws—the child must leave the protection of the maternal sphere. The child/narrator thus enters the paternal, or historical—the symbolic, which will mark his new life. As I stated above, however, nowhere does the novel emphasize the exclusivity of any of the dichotomies it deals with. The semiotic and symbolic are constantly interfering with one another, which

corresponds to Kristeva's perception of their interaction within the subject: "the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (Kristeva 1986, 93). Ismail's abrupt transition into the symbolic, therefore, in no way means the eradication of the primordial and feminine. In fact, the two are so implicated with each other that they render his character and his identity ambiguous and utterly confusing.

A clarification of such ambiguity, according to Sourbati and Tziovas, arrives with the homecoming episode. The experience Ismail has in his parents' house prompts him to return to his 'original' self and to his 'natural' language. In the scene which repeats Odysseus's *Nekuia* (blood sacrifice in the Underworld) Ismail returns to the house and discovers that "the door I leaned against had grown taller, while I had shrunk to the size of a child" (*Ferik Pasha* 145).¹⁸⁰ As a token of the reconciliation with his past, but most of all with his family, Ismail buries the rusty knife he had found in the cave on that fateful day and thus breaks the vicious circle of violence that had been following him ever since. However, it is too easy to interpret this homecoming as a genuine undermining of the symbolic and return to the semiotic phase. Tziovas reads the first, mythical, part as a "manifestation of the semiotic," while his 'historical' existence as an Ottoman subject "represents a manifestation of the symbolic," which is followed by a "sort of return to the semiotic" (2003b, 268). In this framework, Tziovas concludes that

¹⁸⁰ «Διαπίστωσα πως η πόρτα, που πάνω της στηριζόμουν, είχε ψηλώσει, ενώ εγώ είχα μικρύνει σε παιδί» (171). Theo Angelopoulos in *Ulysses' Gaze* utilizes this gesture in the New Year's scene, when A., the Greek-American director, revisits his family home in Romania and in the group picture taken appears as a child. Both Angelopoulos and Galanaki, however, hark back at George Seferis's poem "The Return of the Exile."

“the *nostos* of the protagonist is the *nostos* for the semiotic and the negation of the symbolic” (268). I argue that something quite the opposite is the case.

Unlike Sourbati and Tziouvas, who interpret Ismail’s circuitous route to Egypt and back to Crete as the ultimate *nostos*—return to his original, unmitigated self, Judith Butler argues in a different context that Kristeva’s rendition of the Lacanian symbolic does not allow for such dynamism but, rather, permanently establishes the subject within the symbolic. Butler states, “Kristeva’s strategy of subversion proves doubtful. Her theory appears to depend upon the stability and reproduction of precisely the paternal law that she seeks to displace” (102). My reading of the homecoming scene leans towards such a problematization of Ismail’s homecoming and questions whether his *nostos* can be truly considered a circuitous return to his primordial, semiotic origin.

Ismail’s Greek identity and the language begin to undermine his acquired second self immediately after he learns of his brother’s activities as one of the major benefactors of the Cretan rebellion for the liberation and unification with mainland Greece. It does not resurface, however, until he revisits the actual site of memory, his family house. Everything that ensues during that visit—the ritual spilling of blood as a sacrifice for summoning the ghosts of the dead; his semi-delirious conversation with his whole family, including his brother who is still alive, and Ibrahim, his ‘second family’; the burial of the symbol that guided him through the “orbit of knives” and the military violence that marked his second life—signify the definitive shedding of one paradigm and its substitution with another. Still, the process is not the substitution of Father’s Law and a determined rapprochement with the lost primordial self symbolized by the mother. In fact, Ismail never really abandoned the memory of the mother. Quite the contrary, if he

ever had any recollections of his ‘first life’ they all had to do with his mother. It was exactly his father whom he was never able to summon and whose approval of the metamorphosis of his cultural being was missing. Thus, when father’s spirit finally speaks to him in the house he never exchanges the symbolic for the semiotic again. Rather, he swaps one symbolic, marked by his ‘foster’ father, Mohammad Ali, and Ibrahim, and their ‘alien’ culture for the final permission by his own, natural, father to again carry his name. When father first addresses him he does so by invoking his Christian name through a hymn he sings to him: “He no longer knew how to address me, by my Christian or my Muslim name; which was the reason he chose to chant that hymn, continuing to call me inwardly by my Christian name” (*Ferik Pasha* 147).¹⁸¹ Contrary to the father’s recognition contingent on Ismail’s national and religious loyalty, his mother offers unconditional love. Throughout his life in Egypt he feels that she loves him regardless of what and whom he has become. The father, however, is missing from the picture and he knows that this fact has to do with the shame he himself feels for not being killed with the rest of the male population fighting the Ottomans but, instead, hiding in the cave with the women and the infirm. The reconciliation between the father and son, therefore, is not complete before the father forgives him what he had become: “I accept you,” says his father, “though I had great trouble arriving at that decision. [...] I want you to know that I would rather be slaughtered again than dishonoured” (147).¹⁸²

His father’s hand envisioned as stretched out in a gesture of Michelangelo’s God giving Adam the gift of life is a second, and final, rebirth for Ismail/Emmanuel that can

¹⁸¹ «Δεν ήξερε πια πως να με αποκαλέσει, με το χριστιανικό ή με το μουσουλμανικό μου όνομα, για τούτο ήμηνε βέβαια συνέχιζε να μ’ έχει στο μυαλό του με το χριστιανικό» (173).

¹⁸² «...σε δέχομαι, αν και τυραννίστηκα μέχρι να το αποφασίσω. [...] ... ξανά θα προτιμούσα τη σφαγή απ’ την ατίμωση» (173).

only lead to his death. It is also the gift of the restoration of his original identity but the identity already circumscribed by the political, national, and familial that can in no way be considered as a return to the primordial innocence that the semiotic stands for. More likely he re-enters the metamorphosed symbolic which Kristeva defines as “a social effect of the relation to the Other, established through the objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences and concrete, historical family structures” (1986, 97). Father’s recognition sanctions Ismail to be rightfully re-established among the ‘family trinity’—his father, mother, and brother—that is the constant subject of his memories while in Egypt, but whom he could never join while suspended in his Islamic existence:

He had not wished to know me as an Ottoman in Egypt, but had waited for me to turn into a child again, to step into the old house, before he could envisage me as a person, even if it had to be as a person who had failed to embrace and forward his guiding choices. He had been waiting to see those tears in my eyes.¹⁸³ (148)

In order to be recognized by his father, however, he has to completely shed the otherness of his Ottoman existence and feel genuine remorse for the reprehensible life against his *natural* being that he has been leading. In this scene of religious forgiveness, the father re-claims the prodigal son for himself, his religion, and his nation. The son, therefore, never escapes culture to return to any kind of a primordial bliss and re-establish himself in the semiotic sphere symbolized by his mother. He never truly leaves it, for it is not his mother’s acknowledgement that he has been seeking but his father’s. On the contrary, the mythical memory of his mother keeps interfering with the historical reality of his second existence. In the recognition scene, therefore, no excursus takes place outside of the

¹⁸³ «Δεν ήθελε να με ξέρει σαν Οθωμανό στην Αίγυπτο. Περίμενε να ξαναγίνω παιδί, να ξαναμπώ στο ίδιο σπίτι, για να με σκεφτεί σαν άτομο, έστω και σαν άτομο που απέτυχε να προεκτείνει τις δικές του επιλογές. Περίμενε να με δει να κλάίω» (175).

symbolic. Instead, he only exchanges the imposed cultural identity for the one which he feels is his by birth—from Ismail back to Emmanuel.

Janissary or Conqueror, or Memory and Identity

It is, however, the concluding pages of the novel, more specifically the *epimythion* or Epilogue that mostly tends to lead to the interpretations of a circular *nostos* and Ismail's return into the "semiotic chora" (Tziovas). The Epilogue reiterates the conflicts of historical interpretation and mythical belief that permeate the text by dwelling on the uncertainty of the actual manner in which Ismail dies. His end is shrouded in mystery in the same way in which his mother's death is unknown to him. The Prologue thus offers three versions of his death—murder by poisoning, death of an infected wound, and suicide—which complement the three versions he knows of his mother's death—ascension to Heaven, murder, and grief at her whole family's disappearance. Interestingly, none of the versions offer Ismail's redemption through a heroic death in battle (therefore, appropriate for a man). Instead, and consistent with the overall ambiguity of his gender identity, all the death scenarios offered are considered unworthy of a man (as are his life in captivity and shadowing of Ibrahim's victorious military campaigns). His suicide, which seemingly offers a vehicle for him to be transported back to his childhood innocence and, possibly, the *semiotic* realm, however, proves equally deceptive as any other route of return to the beginning which, instead, reveals itself as ultimately unreachable:

On that night then, in his old house, innocence smiled down on him like the rediscovered guardian angel of memory. Still not daring to believe in the miracle, he stretched out his childish hand to touch the angel. Only then did he see the black serpents coiling round the angel's radiant head. He fell back; in a flash he understood

that there does not exist, nor has there ever existed, anything so innocent as to have been lost. And this meant that *there does not exist, nor has there ever existed, a way back*.¹⁸⁴ (166) [Emphasis mine].

The cyclical route is, therefore, frustrated by the very point of origin which is being interrogated. As Calotychos states, the “cyclical promise of return, anticipated by the myth of *nostos* is countered by the ‘quivering line traced by the course of the Nile’ (Calotychos 273). Calotychos views the disruption of both the mythical circular route of return and the rectilinear progress of history as work of historiographic metafiction. At the same time, the text creates multiple versions of Ismail’s and his mother’s deaths as variable points of return that indiscriminately undermine the very idea of unadulterated memory, the ultimate symbol of which is the janissary. I have already commented on the myth of the janissary who returns to his village as a conqueror but stops short of either murder or rape after a sudden activation of the mnemonic mechanisms and a subsequent re-discovery of his forgotten identity.¹⁸⁵ Along those lines, Calotychos defines the janissary as an agent of “forgetting as part of remembering” that creates the very foundations of cultural memory (276-7). The idea that forgetting is lifeblood of a healthy commemorative culture is most notably articulated by Nietzsche’s meditations on the use of history. He draws a balancing line between an ahistorical existence and an existence overwhelmed by the “burden of history” (to quote Hayden White’s famous phrase).¹⁸⁶ While the total oblivion of history, according to Nietzsche, equals the unconscious existence of animals and its validity is, therefore, dismissed, historical awareness must

¹⁸⁴ «Εκείνη λοιπόν τη νύχτα στο παλιό του σπίτι η αθωότητα χαμογελούσε σαν ο ανευρισκόμενος φύλακας άγγελος της μνήμης. Διστάζοντας να πιστέψει το θαύμα, άπλωσε το χεράκι του ν’ αγγίξει τον άγγελο. Τότε μόνο είδε τα μαύρα φίδια, που τυλίγονταν στους φωτεινούς βοστρύχους, κι οπισθοχώρησε. Το μυαλό του έλαμψε ξαφνικά και κατανόησε ότι δεν υπάρχει, ούτε και υπήρξε, κάτι τόσο αθώο ώστε να χαθεί. Άρα, πως δεν υπάρχει, ούτε και ποτέ υπήρξε, επιστροφή» (197).

¹⁸⁵ See footnote 21 in Part One of this dissertation.

¹⁸⁶ This is discussed in the character of Donald in my next chapter on David Albahari’s *Bait*.

necessarily be in equilibrium with forgetting: “without forgetting,” Nietzsche says, “it is impossible to *live* at all. [...] *There is a degree of insomnia, of rumination, of historical awareness, which injures and finally destroys a living thing, whether a man, a people, or a culture*” (Nietzsche 90). Both the life without and the life totally immersed in history are thus rendered inconceivable as harmony between the two is pivotal for the sustenance of culture.

Another theorist of memory and forgetting, Paul Ricoeur, privileges Freudian interpretation which uncovers in the work of memory the compulsion for cyclical repetition of past mistakes that are commonly perceived as a vicious circle of history prohibiting extrication from its repetitive movements.¹⁸⁷ Ricoeur states, “Too much memory recalls especially the compulsion to repeat, which, Freud said, leads us to substitute acting out for the true recollection by which the present would be reconciled with the past” (79). It is possible to read the partial failure of the cycle of Ismail’s *nostos* to terminate at the exact point of origination as a consequence of too much memory which is not true recollection, according to Ricoeur, and frustrates the meeting of the past and present. This is a kind of memory that “resists criticism” but, instead, leads to a kind of historical fatalism. Ricoeur argues instead for true recollection which, he claims, is “critical memory” and which would, by that token, stop the circle of compulsion and exclude the reiteration of past errors. Furthermore, Ricoeur connects the work of memory with mourning work as defined by Freud. Although Ricoeur tends to assign a greater import to mourning at the level of collective memory, Ismail’s example strongly argues

¹⁸⁷ This is likewise the subject of my next chapter.

for the application of mourning for the lost object at the individual level as well.¹⁸⁸

Ricoeur defines this dialectic in the following terms:

the overlapping of the work of mourning and the work of recollection acquires its full meaning. When it is a matter of national self-love, we can properly speak of a lost love-object. It is always in terms of its losses that the wounded memory is forced to confront itself. (79)

Such interpretation is particularly pertinent in view of equation lines being drawn between the nation (as vehicle of collective identity—attributed to the non-European) and the family (as vehicle of European subjectivity) that further emphasize this affiliation evidently present in Galanaki’s novel. Both Tziouvas and Anne McClintock seem to count on the association between the two social units and both, in different contexts, make case for the double identity crisis of their subjects faced with ‘double colonization’: gendered and racial.¹⁸⁹ To Tziouvas, whose geometry of Ismail’s *nostos* reveals that of a full circle and a safe return to mother and death, the perception of Ismail as melancholic is particularly attractive. Ismail’s memory of home, which could easily be interpreted as day-dreaming, offers a temporary escape and a “correction of actual life” (Freud 2000, 157), from which the father is only present as a feeling of shame at the son’s failure to fight like a man, and which unmistakably concentrate on the mother—is an expression of the deepest melancholy of a subject who fails “to form an identity in the order of the symbolic because the separation from the mother has not been completed.” Against this evidence, Tziouvas reads Ismail’s, and any other gender identity, “as a melancholic

¹⁸⁸ Both issues are revisited in my next chapter which deals with the efforts of another individual character to step out of the circle of repetition of past errors and create a meaningful existence for himself. Likewise, he is interpreted through the Freudian lens of melancholic/mourning work for the lost object—in this case the common nation and collective identity with which he could identify.

¹⁸⁹ Of course, their contexts are different. Tziouvas does so in his critique of Galanaki’s novel, while McClintock speaking about Fanon’s conspicuous silence about the double colonization of women in the context of Algerian liberation struggle.

condition” (Tziovas 2003b, 269).¹⁹⁰ However, I have already argued my view according to which Ismail never turns the full circle and thus, in fact, fails to arrive at the point of departure, to his mother and the “semiotic chora.” By the token of this association between the national and the familial being, I choose to read Ismail’s “mourning work” more in the terms in which Ricoeur explains them, as a lost object of national/religious love rather than the melancholy for the loss of mother and the origin still untouched by the Father’s Law.

At the same time, in the process of homecoming Ismail attaches the individual feeling of being part of his father’s family to the collective feeling of belonging to the Greek nation that never really left him. His individual existence re-emerges after being established as part of his father’s family. Resonating with the vocabulary of Eurocentrism, this shift reflects the departure from his Oriental collective philosophical thinking and his return to the more individualist one inherent to the West and Greece. Like the whole *nostos* scene, this change in Ismail is triggered by the sight of the parental house: “I had, unawares, substituted in my memory the outer for the inner world; which meant that I had no real knowledge of all that my soul enclosed” (144).¹⁹¹ Revisiting his parental house signifies Ismail’s shift from a lack of subjective awareness to the emphasis on his individuality. Simultaneously, the change of his inner being reflects the definitive re-appropriation on his part of the importance of knowledge of his own self, one of the distinctive traits by which classical Greek (and thus, European) thought tends to differ itself from Eastern philosophy. Individualist thought is thus emphatically attributed to the

¹⁹⁰ It can also be said of Albahari’s narrator in my next chapter who tries to free himself from his historical/national/religious identity through overwriting his mother’s recorded memory.

¹⁹¹ «είχα [...] αντικαταστήσει στη μνήμη μου τον έσω χώρο με τον έξω, χωρίς να έχω επίγνωση της αντικατάστασης αγνοούσα λοιπόν εντελώς την ψυχή μου» (169).

European Greece, and Ismail himself becomes aware of his own familial bonds only when he once again feels part of the Greek nation. The life of an Oriental subject in Egypt, in contrast, dictated the annihilation of his self and his acceptance of the existence solely on the collective level. Thus his parental home comes to represent the principle of secluded familial life which is sharply juxtaposed with very one-dimensional sketches of his family in Egypt rendered through the mere mention of the harem and a multitude of wives and children. The image of the house “had never tormented my spirit in the way that the memory of the plateau as a whole had done” (143),¹⁹² says Ismail revealing his passage from an unindividualistic to a more independent perception of himself.

In the Foreword, the authorial voice enumerates the themes and motives pursued by the novel: “Captivity and homecoming (Homer’s *nostos*), innocence and guilt, the call of death, the idealization of a life lost in the past, and its final negation, the changing tricks and traps of history, the dissemination of contemporary European ideas in the Eastern Mediterranean, the hero’s solitary, inviolate inner life” (9). It becomes clear from this catalogue that the novel treats the individual as inseparable from the national entity and its history. The intimate life of the individual and the sobering reality of history interrelate in the same manner in which the author’s note randomly mixes the motives treated by her novel. As Galanaki stresses in the long essay on her authorial process on the novel, *Βασιλεύς ή στρατιώτης* [King or soldier], the novel is engaged with interconnectedness of the personal and public spheres (as it is in the whole trilogy consisting of two more novels, *I shall sign as Loui* (1993) and *Eleni, or Nobody* (1999), in which she likewise problematizes the issues of identity and belonging) while neither of the two should become the single lens for interpretation. Galanaki’s text, therefore,

¹⁹²«[...] δεν είχε ποτέ βασανίσει τη σκέψη μου, όσο η ανάμνηση του τόπου» (168).

attempts an articulation of the full ambiguity of the individual's involvement with the collective by making the public sphere a vessel for the expression of private lives of her characters rather than prioritize the public sphere by allowing it to engulf the individual. Her interest in history lies in making the "historical certainty [...] a stage of the documentation of spiritual anguish" (20) of an individual.¹⁹³ In this way her writing transfers the "conflict of the ideological elements (nationality, religion, etc.) [...] from the field of the battle to the level of individual spiritual conflicts" (20).¹⁹⁴

Sourbati proposes that Galanaki's novel, unlike the genre of the historical novel in general, which regularly serves "as a vehicle" for "discourse of nationalism," in fact incorporates the strategies of 'historiographic metafiction' to the aim of "exploring an analogue for a contemporary version of the individual, not as a monosemantic entity defined by nationalistic classification, but as a site of contradiction" (Sourbati 124). The novel about a religious convert from the past, therefore, reveals the impact of historical events on Modern Greek identity. All the trials and tribulations of Ismail/Emmanuel incite the collective national self-interrogations and uncover the inviability of pure and monolithic entities. The modern Greek identity, according to Galanaki's novelistic inquires, is not viewed as the idealized Eurocentric invention, but rather as a distinct mixture of Oriental and Western historical influences. Calotychos sees Galanaki's poetic style of writing and the novel's claim to historicity constantly tearing at one another preventing either from taking over the novel on its own right (Calotychos 272). Athanasia Sourbati categorizes this authorial gesture as the process of the demystification of "the

¹⁹³ «Τά ιστορικά γεγονότα [...] στάδια τεκμηρίωσης μιας ψυχικής βασάνου.» [In Greek, all translations from this text are mine].

¹⁹⁴ «Η σύγκρουση ιδεολογικών στοιχείων (εθνικότητα, θρησκεία κ.ά.) [...] άπο τό πέδιο των μαχών στο επίπεδο των ψυχικών συγκρούσεων.»

way in which the public recording of the past attempts to annihilate any contradictions that may develop within the individual by referring them to the unbroken unity and continuity of the ‘omniscient’ language of historical discourse” (Sourbati 122-3). I would like to intervene at this point by clarifying that rather than “annihilating any contradictions” within the individual, the intrusions of the historiographic discourse into Ismail’s soliloquy in the novel reflect their intimate relationship and impossibility of the separation of the two. This method is most visible in Part Two, where the “realistic account of military operations keeps breaking into the narrator’s monologue” (*Ferik Pasha* 8), as well as in the strategy of blurring the fact with fiction in the three accounts that exist both of Ismail’s mother’s death and his own and that co-exist without any mutual competition over their truth status.

Gender and Colonial Identity

Perhaps the major ambivalence of Ismail’s character is attributed to the uncertainties of his masculinity. This is the source of what Tziouvas calls his “double identity crisis,” as both his national/religious and his gender identities seem insufficiently determined when compared to other male figures in the text. This particular literary gesture in *Ferik Pasha* is employed specifically for the purpose of investigation of the identity not only of Greeks in relation to the Ottomans, but also of the colonized with respect to the colonizer. Gendered discourse is part of the hegemonic rhetoric of the colonizer through which the agency of the subjected is not even doubted, but dismissed as non-existent. This discursive economy assigns male attributes to the colonizer, aggressor or, ultimately, it is the West that assumes the ‘male’ discursive gender as its prerogative; the gaze directed at

the Other unmistakably reproduces it as the female.¹⁹⁵ Galanaki's novel disturbs that unwritten rule in ways that further complicate laws of gender determinism. According to Tziouvas, "gender identity and national identity coalesce" through Ismail's loss of paternal affection: "identity appears to be a matter of allegiance and devotion: first to the father and secondly to the homeland. When these two allegiances are shaken, then the identity of the protagonist loses its stability" (2003b, 254). Indeed, Ismail loses his homeland and, by extension, the allegiance to the kind of masculine identity that the fatherly figure epitomizes. Tziouvas bases his argument on the "Western metaphor of the nation as a family" (McClintock 283) which pervades the two key scenes in Galanaki's novel—the cave scene and Ismail's homecoming. In both settings the family triangle mother-father-child is portrayed through movements of their hands stopped or resuming the actions at the moment of the Ottoman attack and Ismail's return to the house, respectively. The "spindle, the reins, the apples" is thus the image of the family triangle from which Ismail-the-child is always missing, the only child actually in the picture being his brother. The family/nation, therefore, remains frozen at the moment of the massacre and remains in this suspended state for the rest of Ismail's absence from the island. Once he returns to Crete, as a conqueror but foreshadowing the liberation that will come out as a consequence of the uprising he came to quell, they wake from their prolonged sleep and resume the actions they were about to do as if uninterrupted. Their suspended state, therefore, lasts as long as Ismail/Emmanuel is absent from the familial setting and their activity recommences when the prodigal son returns asking to be pardoned and accepted by the father. Ismail's re-establishment as a family member/child, therefore, corresponds

¹⁹⁵ For more on this see Edward Said's *Orientalism*, especially "Pilgrims and Pilgrimages, British and French," 166.

to his rediscovery of his ‘natural’ Greek origin, within what Anne McClintock designates as the “naturalness of nationalism as a domestic genealogy” that foregrounds the family as the “truth of society—its organic, authentic form” (McClintock, 284, 293).

The end of the novel thus rehabilitates Ismail both as a national subject and as a male, but it is his life in Egypt that abounds in references pointing to his ambiguous gender (as well as religious/national) character in which he for the most part assumes the role of the Other. The first time the boy Emmanuel recognizes himself as his own future other is in the face of the Ottoman conqueror of Crete killed by his bolting horse. Lifting the head of the dead Turk the boy “instantly tossed him aside in horror; the conqueror’s face resembled his own” (*Ferik Pasha* 17).¹⁹⁶ The recognition of himself in the face of the Other (who is also his Double) forecasts not only the life of submission that he will be forced to live from then on but also his death as the future conqueror of his native island (Calotychos 273). From this moment, virtually every concept and principle warranting certainty in the face of volatile history is blurred. This mode which Patricia Felisa Barbeito designates as “transvestite effect” opens the space of the narrative *potential* while bypassing any rigid designations through its active problematizing of the issues of identity (Barbeito 301). However, Ismail’s gender ambivalence is most strongly accentuated when he is placed side by side with the other male characters. The text exhibits a curious absence of female characters—it is really only his mother that figures as a female character in the novel, while it abounds in the vocabulary of the almost exclusively masculine domain—military, war, aggression, killings, murder, conquest, politics. Any other female characters are mentioned, rather than defined, in the briefest of outlines. It is, therefore, solely the dynamics between men that generates the text and

¹⁹⁶ «[...] αμέσως τον πέταξε πέρα φοβισμένο το πρόσωπο του κατακτητή έμοιαζε στο δικό του» (19).

Ismail's character that maintains the unsettled equilibrium created within the almost exclusively patriarchal universe. Defined as Other through his non-belonging to the European/Greek entity, Ismail is precisely the pivotal subject-object through which the core of Greekness is constructed. His gender ambivalence is most acutely sensed in comparisons between himself and the authoritative male figures whose influence dictates his life—the unforgiving memory of his father, his 'step brother' Ibrahim, and his blood-brother Antonis.¹⁹⁷

Interpreting Ismail from the perspective of his threatened masculinity I am not attempting to erase the specificities between the subordination of women and that of male colonial subjects. It has been noted that even the most reputable of postcolonial critics often fail at the gender test, glossing over sexual differences and the dissimilar effects that colonization inflicted upon female and male colonial subjects.¹⁹⁸ Such overgeneralizations and “gender blindness” threaten to homogenize the female with the colonial subject in ways that do not reflect the full complexity of their positions (Loomba 160-165). Still, a cautious dose of generalization between the two discourses is necessary in order to better understand the ambivalence in Ismail's character and his relation to the male protagonists of the novel who are defined in fully masculine terms. More to the point, Ismail's overall non-belonging and in-betweenness (gender, racial, religious,

¹⁹⁷ In an essay which interrogates representation of the European Other through gendered discourse, Mary Leontsini analyzes the representation of female characters in Alexandros Papadiamantis's short fiction as a model of gendering the Greek nation. In fact, this is what the intriguing title of the essay promises to deliver. The article itself never manages to articulate this relevant comparison.

¹⁹⁸ Both Ania Loomba and Anne McClintock notice the absence of specific attention given to the female colonial subject *per se* in the works of Franz Fanon and Homi Bhabha. While in Bhabha opus the female colonial subject is conspicuously absent, Fanon goes so far as to deny the evidence of the double otherness of African and Algerian women through the strategy of their entrapment both from their own and the colonial patriarchies. Both their critiques relate predominantly to the fact that the colonial subject is as a rule male, while the female subject is always white. Race and gender conflict in their critique to an extent that never appears in *Ferik Pasha*. Still, postcolonial interpretation of gendered and racialized discourse remains pertinent to my reading of the novel.

national) is perceived as such on both sides, Greek and Turkish, and he is an example against which both Ottoman and Greek masculinity (therefore, the symbolic) are defined and reinvented.

In the relationship between Ismail and Ibrahim, Calotychos recognizes an ambiguity by which Ibrahim is at times referred to in sexual terms while at others as the one who “had mothered” Ismail’s second life (Calotychos 273). Indeed, in most of his reminiscences of Ibrahim, Ismail utilizes the discourse of female love and emotions full of overtly sexual connotations:

Ibrahim came, beautiful as I remembered and loved him, and sat on the ground by my side. He put his arm around my shoulders, his eyes fixed on the monastery. And I hated him then, for the first time and with my whole being, for he had never cared to look upon the autumn of my past, whereas I had devoted myself to him entirely. [...] I hated this man, the son of a great sovereign, who had pretended to love me [...] (*Ferik Pasha* 99).¹⁹⁹

Like a faithful and unfulfilled wife, Ismail projects his own ambitions and disappointments upon Ibrahim (99) and sharing in his grief after the indignity of having to subject himself to the Sultan despite his military victories (44). After Ibrahim’s death Ismail marries “according to his station, thus sweetening his grief over the loss of his beloved friend” (45). Ultimately, the memory of his mother joins that of Ibrahim who “succumbed to grief” while Ismail’s marriage serves the purpose of relegating both of them to oblivion as “other women would now be taking care of him” (45). Interestingly, Ismail’s subconscious sends him signals in situations in which his manhood seems to be questioned, and he is quick to “make sure the rusty blade from the cave [is] still there,” and his loyalty to the father unwavering (45).

¹⁹⁹ «Και όμως ήρθε, ωραίος όπως τον είχα αγαπήσει, ο Ιμπραήμ, και κάθησε δίπλα μου στο χώμα. Έφερε το χέρι του στους ώμους μου, κοιτάζοντας συνέχεια προς το μοναστήρι. Και τον μίσησα τότε, πρώτη φορά κι αχέραια, ότι ποτέ δεν θέλησε να δει το παλιό μου φθινόπωρο, ενώ εγώ του είχα δοθεί. [...] Τον μίσησα, ότι γιός λαμπρού ηγεμόνα προφασίστηκε πως με είχε αγαπήσει [...]» (119).

Further and pivotal evidence of Ismail's fluctuating gender identity, however, comes under the spotlight in his relationship with his brother, Antonis. Although their point of departure is identical—both of them are taken captive after the cave siege and separated; Antonis is taken to Istanbul and Ismail to Egypt. It is at this point of their separation that for the last time the novel treats them as equal in their gender ambiguity, ascribed greatly to the fear the two children feel at the uncertainty of what lies ahead of them. Shackled to each other, the two boys remember time:

by the way their hands and bodies touched. They both felt that at such a time there was no room for the strict upbringing that forbade any show of mutual tenderness between men, even 'little' men. They never spoke a word, their bodies clinging to each other in unbroken silence – as if words might have stifled the secret found of tenderness, that sudden, desperate tenderness that made a brother's cheek feel as soft as a mother's and caused the sweat of the forced march to smell of milk (24).²⁰⁰

Here surfaces the full inconclusiveness of the brother/mother relationship and their unified representation in Ismail's memory, which is later transferred to Ibrahim and his mother. Once the Greek language he was fearing resurfaces and Ismail begins a correspondence with Antonis, the letters convey the same pain and buried emotions they felt for each other as children at the same time as they reveal the same sexual confusion that defines Ismail's relationship to Ibrahim (67, 68, 70). It is easy to detect in the novel a certain reliance on Freudian theory of the novel as 'family romance.' Ismail's incessant day-dreaming about mother and the primeval cave scene, as well as his ultimate goal of re-joining the family circle affirmatively fall under that category. According to Freud, these fantasies have "two principal aims, erotic and ambitious—though an erotic aim is

²⁰⁰ «όσο από τους τρόπους που ακούμπησαν τα χέρια και τα σώματά τους. Αισθάνονταν κι οι δύο τους πως, τέτοια ώρα, δεν είχε θέση η αυστηρή ανατροφή, που απαγόρευε ακόμη και στους μικρούς άντρες το φανέρωμα μιας αμοιβαίας τρυφερότητας. Δεν μίλησαν καθόλου, αποσιωπώντας το άρπαγμα του ενός σώματος από τ' άλλο εξ' άλλου οι πολλές κουβέντες μπορεί να διέλυαν τη μυστική πηγή της τρυφερότητας. Που ήταν ξαφνική και απεγνωσμένη, θυμίζοντας ότι το μάγουλο του αδερφού ήταν εξίσου τρυφερό με της μητέρας και πως ο ιδρώτας της πεζοπορίας τους μύριζε γάλα» (26-7).

usually concealed behind the latter too” (157). Thus the ambiguous eroticism of Ismail’s relationship with Ibrahim, both in his role as a friend/brother/lover or the husband on whom Ismail projects the ambitions he is unable to achieve himself, proves this point. A significant departure from the Freudian application lies in the absence of the disappointment and shame that the child feels towards the parents and whose replacement with more suitable models the activation of day-dreaming fantasies actively seeks. Through these mechanisms Galanaki’s text transposes a macrocosm of Greek ambitions, ambivalences, and contemporary historical and political turmoils within a familial setting, at the same time eradicating the line between the intimate (private) and the outside (collective) spheres. Similarly to the manner in which Antonis’s masculinity comes to the forefront when placed side-by-side with Ismail’s (stereotypically feminized) passivity, his Ottoman counterparts (Ibrahim and Mohammad Ali) likewise pass the test of masculinity in comparison with Ismail’s wavering sexuality.

Even though given (or, better, denied) the same possibilities and starting their new lives as captive children, the two brothers have very different destinies, the problem which throws additional light on the question of Ismail’s gender crisis. Such an account of Ismail is furthered by the fact that towards the end of the novel the two brothers ‘meet’ again, but this time they find each other in completely different situations. Unlike Ismail, who practically remains captive all his life, Antonis manages not only to emancipate himself from the Ottoman subjection but, moreover, achieves the status of a benefactor of the liberation movement in Athens. Such a development clearly exculpates Antonis and makes him acceptable again to his father’s attention (something that Ismail reluctantly achieves in the homecoming scene), but also incontestably determines Antonis as yet

another of Ismail's gender opposites. Interestingly, this strategy may easily suggest the othering or gendering of the enemy which, by this time, Ismail undeniably represents for Antonis's cause. The perception of the enemy as a female, therefore, determinedly diminishes his clout and the overall threat to the national entity which is juxtaposed to it. It is to be deduced from the parting that the brothers take from each other in the opening of the novel that the relationship between them will lead to this kind of ambiguity, when on the point of separation Emmanuel asks his brother to speak his name, "Antonis Kambanis Papadakis, son of Franghios." Unlike Emmanuel, whose name is not heard on this occasion, Antonis never really leaves his father's orbit and always appears to be consistent with the ideals of Greek national and religious independence. Although the reader never learns through what channels Antonis achieves his current status, he seems to have never betrayed the loyalty to his father and his people.

Being thus placed in opposition to Eurocentric/Hellenocentric values, small wonder that Ismail's thought will continuously be plagued by indecision and deterministic belief in fate, which characterize his, by now, fully orientalized system of values.²⁰¹ Ismail's indecisiveness and uncertainty about important issues clearly reflect the discursive representation of his fluctuating and undetermined identity. At moments it seems that all his questioning and thinking is an excuse not to act, and that, instead, he embraces a fatalistic vision of destiny. This positions him in sharp contrast to Antonis, who (although we are not privy to his internal doubts as we are to Ismail's) never seems to doubt the course of action he embarked upon and who fully epitomizes the Western conviction in

²⁰¹ In my discussion I do not claim to uncover Orientalist discourse of the text itself, as claimed by Adil in her review of the novel. She finds the novel written in the worst orientalist tradition and character misrepresentation. I do not charge Galanaki's text of such intentions. I find that the novel intentionally draws the readers' attention to such discourse by pinpointing it, rather than utilizing it for the purposes of binarist definitions.

human agency. On his part, Ismail prefers to interpret the stark difference in their situations as a matter of luck, where Antonis “had been placed by chance on the right side, a side fully vindicated by patriotic ideals. He was further privileged to find himself in Athens, where he would not have to witness the daily betrayal of those ideals” (83).²⁰² Positing the brothers in such stark opposition to one another the text illustrates numerous undefined and indefinable identitarian concepts, subjectivity and agency being only two among them, that purportedly represent the sharp distinctions between national and religious *essences* of the two cultures.

Colonialism in Reverse

In reference to the overarching topic of this dissertation and in connection with my discussion about the modernity of the Greek nation that dominates Part One and Chapter One, I would like at this point to reflect on the fact that the novel places its protagonists into the time of one of the greatest historical and political shifts in modern Greek history, precisely at the point of birth of the modern Greek nation, the process as similar to other European nations as it is different. One of the specificities of the Greek national self-definition lies in the fact that towards the end of the 19th century Greece represented an almost impossible combination—rapidly catching up with European modernity while at the same time balancing its Oriental and colonial legacy. There is no need to repeat the historical specificities of the evolution of Greek modernity that I explained in Part One and Chapter One of this dissertation, when analyzing the work of Nikos Kazantzakis and Eugenia Fakinou. Both of them revolve around the creation of a new and recognizably

²⁰² «Η τύχη τον είχε ακουμπήσει στη μεριά που πατριωτικά ιδανικά την εδικαίωσαν. Και τον ευλόγησε να βρίσκεται στην Αθήνα, απ’ όπου δεν θα μπορούσε να παρευρεθεί στην καθημερινή τους διάψευση» (100).

Europeanized Greek identity with strong reliance on the firm foundations of their past history. However, the past that both these texts are concerned with is predominantly the classical Greek heritage as a direct link to European modernity; the actual Ottoman origin of Fakinou's protagonists at many points in her novel serves the purpose of negative comparison with and shocking contrast to European modernity.²⁰³ Kazantzakis's play, on the other hand, to a great extent reflects the almost universal disregard for Byzantine and Ottoman historical heritage which creates the gorge into which his bridge keeps collapsing.²⁰⁴

In comparison with these two modern Greek texts, Galanaki's novel introduces an original approach to the problematic and, apparently, never obsolete politics of identity. The novelty of her approach lies on the greater emphasis on the Ottoman period of Greek history as its colonial past and a legacy that cannot be either forgotten or eradicated from the collective national psyche. In its approach to this sensitive subject, her novel does not make the point by utilizing the orientalist rhetoric, as some criticism has argued.²⁰⁵ Instead, it shows a full awareness of orientalist discourse and appropriates its drawbacks and inconsistencies as the major strength of the novel which, eventually, manages to undermine the many disputable concepts on which orientalist rhetoric of othering is founded. One of these is the already discussed fluctuating identity of Ismail and the ultimate inconclusiveness of his *nostos* which does not resolve his identity crisis but, perhaps, deepens it even further. "I had joined the entire nation in seeking an outlet, be it only minimal, from its frozen sanctity; some way of becoming attuned to the rush of new

²⁰³ Especially in Roula's monologues.

²⁰⁴ Artemis Leontis accentuates this problem in her well-known essay on the bridge of Arta (Leontis 1999). Also see my discussion in Part One of this dissertation.

²⁰⁵ See my previous note on Adil's scything criticism of Galanaki's method.

ideas animating the nations of Europe,” Ismail muses, “but how could there be an end to the sense of irremediable loss, the sense of otherness?” (151).²⁰⁶ Although it treats the Greek obsession with the revived link with classical antiquity in a way reminiscent of Kazantzakis’s passionate criticism of Greek somnambulist adoration of their past, Galanaki’s novel refutes any chances of an easy (re)connection with Greek Europeanness through a destruction of Ottoman mementos. Thus Ismail’s cenotaph on the island of Crete suffers the same destiny of many other sites of the memory that the new nation is committed to conveniently abolish on the grounds of its ‘alienness’ with regard to the Greek ‘natural’ being:

The cenotaph survived for a considerable number of years, approximately the same number as the years of Ismail Ferik Pasha’s life, shared between the island and Egypt. During the third decade of the following century, however, the erection of a communal school on the site brought about the destruction of the graves in what had until very recently been the Turkish cemetery, since they henceforth belonged irrevocably to a different nation with a different state religion and different requirements. Apart from anything else, the old graves were blatantly inconsonant with the Europeanized image the city was intent on presenting, or at least acquiring with admirable speed.

In certain quarters there were attempts, grounded on traditional oral accounts of the Pasha’s secret Christianity, to protest against the destruction of the cenotaph, relegating all other versions concerning him to the written record of official history.²⁰⁷ (165)

The only attempts at salvaging the past from oblivion are, therefore, based on the selective preservation of those of its elements that presumably contain however

²⁰⁶ «...είχα αναζητήσει μαζί με μίαν ολόκληρη χώρα τη μικρή έστω έξοδο από τήν ακίνητή του ιερότητα, κάποιον συγχρονισμό με τις ιδέες που κινούσαν με ταχύτητα την Ευρώπη.» «...πως όμως θα τελείωνε το αίσθημα του οριστικά χαμένου και του διαφορετικού;» (178).

²⁰⁷ «Το κενοτάφιο στεκόταν αρκετά χρόνια, οσα περίπου έτυχε να ζήσει και ο Ισμαήλ Φερικ πασάς στη νήσο και στην Αίγυπτο μαζί. Την τρίτη όμως δεκαετία του επόμενου αιώνα, η δημιουργία δημοτικού σχολείου κατέστρεψε τα μνήματα του πολύ πρόσφατου τούρκικου νεκροταφείου, όταν πιά αμετάκλητα άνηκαν σε διαφορετικό κράτος, σε διαφορετική επίσημη θρησκεία και σε διαφορετικές ανάγκες. Ήταν ασύμβατα και με την εξευρωπαϊσμένη εικόνα, που η πόλη επεδίωκε να δώσει, η έστω ν’αποκτήσει, με μια θαυμαστή ταχύτητα. Ύπηρξαν κάποιον, που στηρίχτηκαν στις προφορικές μνήμες για τον κρυπτοχριστιανισμό του πασά και διαμαρτυρήθηκαν για γο γκρέμισμα του κενοτάφιου, εξωθώντας τις υπόλοιπες εκδοχές στον γραπτό λόγο της ιστορίας» (196).

negligible quantities of ‘sameness’ that would facilitate the assimilation of the alien principle within the homogenous national code.

It is a matter of equal significance that the text juxtaposes two of the greatest world ancient civilizations, Egypt and Greece, albeit at the given historical moment subsumed under the blanket of the supra-national Ottoman Empire.²⁰⁸ Rather than being pitted against one another, the two ancient cultures are represented as a canvas upon which the Eurocentric imaginary projects its own self-defining fantasies. Ismail and Ibrahim’s journeying around and ‘discovery’ of Europe is as entertaining as it is critical of this projection. In the art they admire in European museums they in fact marvel at their own fabricated image as they have never been able to see it with their own eyes:

The works of art [...] depicted battles, odalisques, bazaars of such beauty that he concluded they were deliberately presented so; and he admired them for this very reason, for he had never come upon anything as beautiful and as real in Egypt itself.²⁰⁹ (66)

Furthermore, this analogy between two ancient cultures looking in amazement at European utopian renditions of their purported essences is intended to articulate the magnitude of the Orientalist discourse, with a twist. According to Edward Said, the practices of ‘scientific’ Orientalism had the purpose of defining and classifying the Orient and accommodating that whole system of knowledge to Western requirements, forming “a simulacrum of the Orient and reproduced it materially in the West, for the West” (Said 166). In contrast to such aggressive and systematic intrusion upon civilizational values, Ismail and Ibrahim are undeniably “fascinated” with Europe and its achievements but,

²⁰⁸ Perhaps indented as a tacit comment on the current blurring of identities and cultural specificities under yet another empire.

²⁰⁹ «Ό,τι είδε [...] του παρουσίασε μάχες, οδαλίσκες και παζάρια τόσο όμορφα που συμπέρανε πως επίτηδες ήταν έτσι φτιαγείχε και τα θαύμασε για τούτο, αφού ο ίδιος ποτέ δεν είχε δει στην Αίγυπτο κάτι τόσο ωραίο και πραγματικό» (79).

unlike the European travelers who ‘discovered’ and ‘represented’ the Orient, they soon realize the full insidiousness of Orientalist rhetoric and the logic of its application. Through Ismail’s eyes the text follows the process of growing European hegemony culminating in the death of Mohammed Ali who under the influence of European ideas of change and progress took upon himself to reform the decaying empire. His successor, Ibrahim, however, lives to be humiliated and betrayed by those same ideas by the new Europe that no longer fears the powerful enemy, but becomes the one to dictate conditions and diplomatically change outcomes of military victories:

It looked as if the workings of history in the West were now conducted in a different currency; history no longer used the old standards to gauge the consequence of this battle. [...] In the days when his father won a battle, his victory was real; but then Mohammed Ali was not dealing with Europeans.²¹⁰ (36)

In the diplomatic arena Europe is increasingly deciding the fate of its former arch-enemy, but transposed into the narrative and the identitarian discourse I discussed in relation to Ismail’s otherness, it opens the door to wider interpretations. I have previously analyzed Ismail as the principal model against whom both his Western and Eastern counterparts define their own sexual identity. However, with the amplification of European power, European rhetoric directed at the collective Ottoman other becomes simultaneously aggressive and sexualized. Seen through this prism, the loss of military power and the inability of the corrupt Ottoman state plagued by internal conflicts (*Ferik Pasha* 40-41) to influence politics and diplomacy castrates its power (manhood) and thus feminizes it. It is Ibrahim now who finds himself weakened by political and diplomatic humiliation and crushed by melancholy.

²¹⁰ «Φαίνεται πως η ιστορία είχε αλλάξει νόμισμα στη Δύση και δεν μετρούσε με το ίδιο μέτρο το αποτέλεσμα της μάχης. [...] Ο πατέρας του νικούσε, όταν νικούσε στη μάχη αλλά δεν είχε να κάνει με τους Ευρωπαίους» (42).

The Greek post-Oriental Condition

I would like to conclude the discussion of Galanaki's *Ferik Pasha* by a final argument about the viability of the application of Saidian critique to Greek Ottoman history. Recently, some academics who have voiced the need for a new interpretation of the Greek Ottoman past as a colonial past and the overall beneficial effect that such an approach would produce if certain parallels between the postcolonial and post-Ottoman conditions were considered with the distinction they deserve.²¹¹ The proposition underscores a necessity for a radically different interpretation of the Ottoman period by Greek historiography. Commonly dismissed as the 'dark age' in the national history, the perception of the Ottoman colonization is still for the most part studied as a 'block' of centuries-long gap in the cultural development and collective memory of most of the Balkan nations. The very *otherness* of the Ottoman colonizer causes the period to be indistinctively treated as an unremarkable, albeit prolonged, void whose specificities, protagonists, and events do not deserve the same studious efforts dedicated to other episodes of the interruption of national continuity—like the Balkan or world wars, for example.²¹²

This idea, however, comes loaded with contradictions. I borrow the subtitle to this section from Tomislav Longinović who elsewhere voices K. E. Fleming's critique of ever

²¹¹ See Calotychos, 272.

²¹² This particular civilizational analogy directly points to the controversy caused by the publication of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987-2006) that sparked one of the most prolific discussions in the academia in recent years. The project is an ambitious body of evidence, originally planned in four volumes, three of which have already been published, the latest one in 2006, which proposes the *Revised Ancient Model* of study of classical Greek antiquity in place of the widely accepted *Aryan Model* that Bernal ascribes to racism. The first book caused the famous row with Mary Lefkowitz, a prominent historian, and other experts in the field attempting to undermine Bernal's claims that classical Greek heritage was largely influenced by Afroasiatic and Semitic cultures, in contrast to the Indo-European Aryans who are generally accepted to be the sole source of Greek civilization. Unfortunately, lately the discussion has diluted into increasingly unscholarly and scientifically unfounded appropriations of Egyptian and Greek cultures by Afrocentric and Eurocentric radicals respectively, and has all but departed from Bernal's original hypotheses.

more common, albeit insufficiently correlating applications of Edward Said's premises in *Orientalism* to the Balkans and chooses to discuss the Balkans as a post-*Oriental* rather than post-colonial space.²¹³ Fleming argues that Maria Todorova's caution not to equate Balkanism with Orientalism has not been heeded by some scholars who find the parallel too attractive and tend to interpret the Balkan situation through the lens of postcolonial discourse. In "*Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography*" Fleming argues that neither the historical circumstances nor the consequences of the two colonial situations—the one inflicted by the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans, and the post-colonial state of former European colonies—are comparable to the extent that justifies a direct application of the premises of Orientalism to the Balkan territories. The major obstacles to such a discursive treatment of the Balkans, according to Fleming, lies first in the "absence both of West European colonial control over the Balkans and of a longstanding Western academic tradition of studying the Balkans" (1228). Secondly, the "old empires of the Ottomans and the Habsburgs" which practically divided the Balkans, "followed, more or less explicitly, the imperial model of Rome" and cannot be qualified as imperialist in the way in which Said defines it (1222). Finally, the different histories of the Balkan nations and the fact that they were colonized by a Catholic and an Islamic empire likewise shaped the Balkans in a much different way than the European imperialist practices did the Orient (1221-2). For this reason my interpretation of Galanaki's novel through the Saidian critique remains within the boundaries of the discourse that Greece, in its self-perception as the West, directs at its Ottoman Other. The nascent modern Greek nation defines itself against the Ottoman Other using the same strategies and discourse that the 'West proper' applies in its own self-definition; the strategy by which the West measures

²¹³ See his "Post-Oriental *avliya*: Translating the Balkans into *Globalese*," in Aleksić, ed.

its own ‘westernness’ against ‘Orientals,’ the Balkans and Greece included. Thus this eastward movement of orientalist discourse, from the Greek need to define itself as the West in relation to the Ottoman East, resembles what Milica Bakić-Hayden tags “nesting orientalisms.”²¹⁴ Moreover, once Greece becomes the focus of the Philhellenic attention of the European genealogical search for its own civilizational descent it shifts from the object described to the one that allows itself the privilege of describing.

It may, therefore, be interesting to examine the peculiar exclusion of women from the narrative of the novel (that is, moreover, written by a woman) against this politics of representation and defining of the self versus the other. The narrative is, and at times disturbingly so, devoid of female characters in any form, save for the looming memory and idealization of Ismail’s mother. In every respect the novel is emphatically involved with the patriarchal rhetoric of power that uniformly leaves women out. The woman is the semiotic that Ismail abandons at the very beginning of the text and for the rest of the narrative his search is dedicated to the transposition from the symbolic realm that is considered an imposition to the one he believes is naturally his. Thus he forever remains within the ‘orbit of knives’ and the masculine discourse that defines it. I propose that this model of Ismail’s movement from the semiotic to the symbolic be applied to my previous statement about the image of Greece that the politics of self-representation contrasts to the image created *about* Greece by Europe. If Ismail, as Ricoeur would have it, is an individual melancholic who epitomizes the collective melancholy of the nation for the

²¹⁴ Bakić-Hayden illustrates this tendency of *othering* on the example of the former Yugoslavia, where the gauge by which a nation’s civilizational achievement is measured is the absence of Ottoman and Orthodox Christian elements. The wave of orientalist discourse in which every former republic-nation defined itself as more West-oriented (therefore, progressive) than its neighbor, begins its sweeping movement in the northwestern parts of the former Yugoslavia and culminates in its southeast. The insistence on the purported ‘historical connections’ of Slovenian and Croatian nations with the West, intended as rhetorical verification of the non-existence of incriminating Byzantine and Ottoman traditions, basically occlude their subjugated position within the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

lost object, then his journey from the semiotic to the acceptance by his ‘natural’ symbolic could be translated not only into the national ‘journey’ from the subjected position of an Ottoman colony to the newly found dignity of an independent state; in fact, it equally successfully illustrates the process of Greece’s transformation from the entity defined and imagined as the one that, in the light of its liberation from the Orientalist discourse, grants itself the privilege of defining.

In this respect, regardless of where the otherness resides, it is unfailingly rendered in the images of femininity and the instability that accompany it. The ambivalences that plague Ismail throughout the text between his ‘lost’ masculinity refer to the greater context of the alienation of the Greek nation from its ‘natural essence’ of national, linguistic, and religious—thus, fully *symbolic*—affiliation with the West. By the same token, Ismail’s repatriation and re-admission into his familial/national setting reveals the re-establishment of Greece as rightful (albeit ‘tainted’) part of the European civilization—and the re-establishment of its lost ‘masculinity.’ The female semiotic, ascribed to the images of otherness and non-belonging is rendered in complex relationships not solely between the West and the Orient, but also in relation between the otherness that Ismail represents within the Ottoman setting. He is alien both to the Greek masculine self embodied by his father, brother, nation, as he is to his acquired family of the Ottoman rulers. His own imperfect life circle parallels that of the whole Greek nation that puts forward its claim for the recognition of its European origins. For as long as both Ismail and Greece are unable to establish their European claim they are defined as part of the Ottoman other—therefore, gendered, feminized.²¹⁵ The homecoming scene is,

²¹⁵ An interesting referent for Ismail’s imperfect life circle is found in the film *Before the Rain* (1994) by Milčo Mančevski. The film’s motto, “The Circle is not Round,” is rendered through incomplete reiterations

therefore, not only the return of the prodigal son who disgraced the family name by altering his essence and becoming something else, but also the re-establishment of the Greek nation in the European family in which it is expected to resume its rightful place, tainted as it is.

of historical episodes and life stories of the protagonists. The circle of history, therefore, always repeats itself with a variation and never completes the full and identical circle. Still, as the efforts of the narrator in my next chapter show, even from such an imperfect circle the extrication seems an impossible task.

CHAPTER FOUR

Extricating the Self from History: David Albahari's *Bait*

One of the key tenets of psychoanalysis is the importance of verbalizing “memories and insights in order to make them therapeutically effective” lest the content of the previously repressed memories should find itself anew and possibly permanently, “repressed and lost to the conscious mastery of the ego.”²¹⁶ What happens, however, when silence is the only defensive system the self can muster against the repressed, which happens to be nothing less than history? Furthermore, what developments are entailed after the almost forced confession of the repressed is extricated from the ‘subject’? From the opening of this chapter it seems fairly clear that it will be to a certain extent concerned with the psychoanalytic approach I intend to apply to David Albahari’s introspective novel *Bait*; my concurrent interest in this chapter is to expound on the influence of repetitive and oppressive history on individual and collective psychologies. This particular approach to Albahari’s text seems in this case pertinent as self-examination of a profound and genealogical involvement with history on the personal level, it soon becomes obvious, in the least reflects, if not even stands as a powerful metaphor for the collective state of almost mesmerized paralysis with which the Serbian nation in particular (most other ex-Yugoslav nations to a lesser degree) has reacted to the magnitude of the turn-of-the-century dismemberment of Yugoslavia.²¹⁷ In the wake of the turmoil of civil wars,

²¹⁶ Ernest S. Wolf and Ina Wolf, “‘We Perished, Each Alone’: A Psychoanalytic Commentary on Virginia Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse*” in *Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self*, Layton and Shapiro, eds., p. 266. This is a collection oriented towards a biographical-psychoanalytical approach to the text, and although my affinity does not in any way lie with biographical orientation in textual interpretation, I found it of some, albeit limited usefulness in reading Albahari’s novel.

²¹⁷ One of the favorite metaphors through which the whole nation was ‘analyzed’ throughout its long and bloody ordeal of fragmentation was precisely the one of the state of shock following Tito’s death in 1980,

international punitive campaigns, as well as seemingly radical shifts on the domestic political stage, the Serbian nation has begun a long and painful process of collective self-interrogation. Unlike this painful, yet necessary process for any nation's collective mental health, which is rarely completely self-induced, the text of the novel offers a profound and very revealing introspection of the state of an individual caught in historical events whose magnitude threatens his preservation. The extrication from history as such, therefore, cannot be achieved without first making peace with it. This seems to be the task upon which the narrator embarks in his complex and self-reflexive text that eludes any easy conclusions. Although not a long text, *Bait* proves to be a narrative of immense complexity whose pages reveal a seductive entanglement of the individual and collective spheres permeated throughout with the problematic of history, memory, exile, and language. The darkness of its mood, and the all-pervading sense of death, real or substitute, testifies as much to the full complexity of the given historical moment, as to the difficulty that an individual/collective psychology faces in making sense of its predicament.

Bait (1996) by David Albahari is an introspective personal journey presented and recorded in an unusual form.²¹⁸ Albahari creates a unique setting by having his mother

resulting in the loss of his fatherly authoritarian grip over the by no means homogenized and unproblematic co-habitation of the many ethnic and confessional differences. Such simplified explanations, however, are barely more serious than those in which the root of the tragedy is interpreted as the existence of some primeval and autochthonous Balkan evil which automatically renders any peaceful ethnic and religious coexistence unimaginable. I will try to stay away from such one-dimensional interpretations without dismissing them outright; instead, I will incorporate them into a much broader picture and story of the nation that this dissertation is attempting to draw primarily through the use of literary responses to periods of great political and national turmoil.

²¹⁸ In this Chapter the definition of *exile* is all-inclusive of any kind of displacement, brought either by forced necessity of war or postmodern inner desire for change. 'Internal' exile defines displacement within the boundaries of a country/nation, such as the movement from a rural to urban area, represented by Archontoula in *The Seventh Garment*, but also the exile of Mother in *Bait*, who was forced to move from one ethnically defined area to another—from Croatia to Serbia, although within the defined boundaries of a common country. 'Foreign' exile, on the other hand, is the more-or-less chosen condition of the narrator of

tell her story, and her memory of history, and have it recorded on a set of audio tapes which her son takes with him to the destination of his self-exile as the only record of and link with his previous life. The protagonist of *Bait*, much like David Albahari the writer, leaves his native Serbia for Canada in an act of self-imposed exile, apparently in reaction to the civil wars in the former Yugoslavia of the 1990's. It is there that he finds himself involved in the process of negotiating his identity as a foreigner who still mourns the inevitable loss of the old world he left and does not want to return to, but is equally incapable of, and dislikes the idea of fully integrating himself into his new cultural environment. Interestingly, neither of the worlds—the one the exile feels he (once) belonged to, nor the one he adopts are presented as worlds of choice. The world he was born into, however, creates a set of values which distinguish him and by which he defines all other worlds. With the loss of that center the final destination does not really matter: “[W]hen the place from which a person moves away and according to which he reckons his position in the universe no longer exists, then every direction is equally good” (115).²¹⁹ Bound in a position of indeterminacy between the Serbian past and Canadian future this exile creates an open-ended narrative that offers no easy answers. He posits himself in a dichotomous world in which *tertium non datur*, there seems to be no third option, but the choice appears no more obvious or acceptable due to this fact. It is important to say that the narrative places a very distinct limit to analysis, as it soon becomes clear to the reader that at no time the narrator examines his decision to leave. His exile is clearly as irrevocable as it is difficult. What he does contemplate, therefore, is

Bait who emigrates from Serbia to Canada, but equally so the refugee plight of Mother in *The Seventh Garment*, fleeing for her life from Turkey to Greece which is the subject of my next chapter.

²¹⁹ “kada više ne postoji mesto od kojeg se čovek udaljava i prema kojem određuje svoj položaj u svemiru, onda je svaki smer podjednako dobar” (186). All subsequent quotations were taken from Peter Agnone’s translation entitled *Bait*, Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2001.

only his current state in which his actions resulted, and from which he is attempting to devise a fissure through which he will glimpse the long-desired liberation from the seemingly unshakeable burden of the past.

According to Julia Kristeva, that theorist of foreignness and self-alienation, there are two kinds of exiles and, therefore, foreigners to others and themselves:

On the one hand, there are those who waste away in an agonizing struggle between what no longer is and what will never be—the followers of neutrality, the advocates of emptiness; [...] On the other hand, there are those who transcend: living neither before nor now but beyond, they are bent with a passion that, although tenacious, will remain forever unsatisfied. (Kristeva 1991, 5)

It is not too difficult a task to place the narrator of *Bait* into the former category, the kind of exile who is not thinking of going back, but cannot move forward either—the “advocate of emptiness”. The dark tone which pervades his narrative, and the impasse in which he finds himself both at the end as at the beginning of his story testify to that. Although he justifiably perceives that the world is created in a Platonic version of binary mirror images in reverse, he dismisses such a division and makes an effort to subvert it. Forever in a limbo, unhappy with the worlds to which he both belongs and doesn’t, he sees little or nothing capable of reconciling the apparent radical opposites and attenuating the differences between them. Unable to imagine himself in either world he looms over the void created by the symbolic collapse of the constituents that defined his former identity.

Despite the indecisive conclusion that the narrator reaches, an effort on his part to bridge the two worlds in order to move forward with his life cannot be denied. In order to negotiate his future he must first face the past he has been repressing. The negotiation of his new identity requires the humbling acceptance of his original one, loaded with

history, memories and all the meaning and meaninglessness he hoped to escape through his self-exiling act. Inevitably, this path leads him back to the beginning—to his mother. The past he has to face is not only the one he lived through, but his mother's as well; for the germination of his present condition lies deeply embedded within her past, which is also his own even if it predates him. He follows the trajectories of his mother's past in the form of the audio tapes which he listens to for the first time only a decade after her death and when he is already an émigré in Canada. Mother's testimony, recorded through a long and painful process following his father's death, connects him to the untold history of his family, and acts as a missing link to his Jewish origin and the broader history of his now fragmented country.²²⁰ Through Mother's recorded testimony the narrator seeks to fill in the lacunae in his own memory and bridge the gap separating him from a more holistic understanding of his own past. In the same instant, however, it is also a catalyst for his historically burdened past, national and religious identity, all unified in and symbolized by the figure of Mother. For, as much as his narrative reads as homage to his mother, it is much more an attempt at his self-liberation which necessitates that the memory of her and all she represents be laid to rest. The whole text, therefore, is a dark continuous monologue about his existence in limbo, in the state of in-betweenness, and non-belonging. Its subsequent inconclusiveness and ambiguity stem from the impossibility inherent in its conflicting desires of denial of history and drowning in it.

²²⁰ The fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia began by the formal recognition of independence to its two seceded republics, Slovenia and Croatia, by Germany in 1991. The state of confusion ensued primarily due to the fact that by then 5 of the 6 constitutive republics of the former federation (with the exception of Montenegro, which is currently in the process of secession from what is left of the former common country) had elected right-wing nationalist governments, each lobbying for the independence and secession from the Federation. Under the aegis of parallel ultranationalist governments amassing of weapons and creating of paramilitary units was widespread, with former governing bodies impotently issuing proclamations and, basically, using the situation for illegal financial transactions leading to the overnight impoverishment of the population, economical paralysis, and an all-out civil war. Rough estimates of the number of educated people who left Serbia alone in the 1990's have been placed at around half a million.

Exile—a Substitute for Suicide?

His decision to leave his country follows the painful realization that the bloodshed of Yugoslavia seems to be a bottomless pit of ever new unspeakable tragedies, as well as from what he feels as his personal involvement with the course of history while working as a translator and mediator for the UN mission in the already dismembered country. In the words of the narrator, “Exile is [...] only another name for the truth, although it is possible to claim [...] that it expresses our permanent condition, since Adam and Eve were exiled from the garden of Eden after learning the truth” (*Bait* 74).²²¹ Is exile, therefore, the punishment for realizing the truth, the truth itself, or something else? The narrator seems to be uncertain of this as further in the text he claims that he decided to leave “because [he] could no longer endure the pressure of the truth” (71).²²² What this “truth” actually is, and where it resides remains unspoken. All sides in the conflict have their own versions of the truth and insist on it. However, as a “mediator of history” at the position of a translator between the warring sides and peacekeeping missions he realizes that those who destroyed the common house which used to be his country drew the same kind of pleasure out of the ensuing chaos that God must have felt after creating linguistic confusion at the tower of Babel: “If God was satisfied with what he had done, then it is difficult to deny such satisfaction to others” (73).²²³

The fact that the narrator’s search begins only once he finds himself in exile, albeit voluntary, from the familiar settings of his culture and language he recognizes as his own is indicative of the situation of the exile. Once outside the elements that comprise the

²²¹ “Izgnanstvo je [...] samo drugo ime za istinu [...] premda je moguće tvrditi, [...] da ono izražava naše trajno stanje, s obzirom da su Adam i Eva izgnani iz rajске bašte kada su spoznali istinu” (*Mamac* 118-9).

²²² “zato što više nisam mogao da podnosim pritisak istine” (114).

²²³ “Ako je Bog bio zadovoljan kada je video šta je uradio, teško je takvo zadovoljstvo odreći drugima” (118).

totality of his shared memory and define him within a broader context the exile embarks on a retrospective search for the self that was lost in transition/translation. On the other hand, exile can equally successfully be interpreted as a diversion of the suicidal drive, or even its substitution. Such deciphering of one's decision to leave the past behind and, in case of our narrator, deliberately 'kill' his language and with it every trace of the memory of the past, seems to be a pertinent approach of this culturally intransigent radical action that is, however, necessitated by one's instinct for self-preservation. Both Mother's and his own life force upon them the burden of perpetual examining of their identity and an ambivalent sense of not having one to begin with. His own ambiguous Jewish identity is the one that Mother imposed upon him, rather than the one he feels as his own. Sent away from a desperately poor home as a child Mother never had a family and a true sense of being part of an entity which was "the most difficult form of belonging" (24).²²⁴ This feeling of not belonging anywhere, and being forced to choose one's identity, mirrors the historical destiny of the Jews in their particular sort of unhappiness which owes to the mixture of a cosmopolitan freedom crossbred with homelessness. It was for the reason of being able to easily recognize herself in the Jewish destiny that Mother's conversion to Judaism and her firm decision to make herself and her children Jews seemed such a logical choice. Upon marrying a Jew in Croatia at the time the persecutions had already begun she converts to Judaism seeking acceptance by his Orthodox Jewish family, and insists on raising their sons as Jews even when her husband firmly opposes it in his letters sent from a death camp. Forever destined to create her identity, she believed that at least her children should "know what they were and who they were" (14).²²⁵ In her second

²²⁴ "što je najteži oblik pripadanja" (39).

²²⁵ "znaju šta su i ko su" (22).

marriage to a Jewish survivor whose whole first family perished in a death camp in Serbia, she again tries to instil the sense of belonging in her two children, the narrator and his sister:

[W]e joined the Belgrade Jewish community, not in order that I make you, you and your sister, into real Jews, because almost everyone there was only a little piece of a Jew, a shard of broken pottery, but in order to develop in you, and in myself, a sense of real belonging, in order to find some solid ground, there where everything was sliding or turning into agitated voices.²²⁶ (52)

Thus narrator finds himself in the same identity dilemma that his mother had before him. His own dubious identity, and his inherent sense of non-belonging which he, unlike his mother, dismisses for freedom, “because the greatest freedom is when you don’t belong to anyone” (24), leads him to the two-fold path of a parallel recognition and rejection of his mother/nation.²²⁷ Thus he remembers his decision to leave Serbia:

I hadn’t wished to leave, as I hadn’t wished to stay, and the emptiness of the sleeves which embraced the voice transformed into an electromagnetic record could only have added to my indecision; but it was just those two absences that made me lower the lid and close the snap locks.²²⁸ (4)

In similar terms of absence and in-betweenness does Kristeva define the exile:

[...] the exile is a stranger to his mother. [...] Arrogant, he proudly holds on to what he lacks, to absence, to some symbol or other. [H]e seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond. The foreigner, thus, has lost his mother. [...] One has not much noticed that this cold orphan, whose indifference can become criminal, is a fanatic of absence. (1991, 5)

But does this definition which assigns the exile’s gesture to the quintessential search for the Father bring us any closer to a more complete understanding of the

²²⁶ “učlanili u beogradsku Jevrejsku opštinu, ne da bih od vas, od tvoje sestre i tebe, stvorila prave Jevreje, jer tamo su skoro svi bili samo parčići od Jevreja, krhotine razbijene posude, nego da bih u vama, a i u sebi, razvila osećaj stvarne pripadnosti, da bih našla neko čvrsto tlo tamo gde je sve klizilo ili se pretvaralo u uskomešane glasove” (83-4).

²²⁷ “jer najviša sloboda je kada nikome ne pripadaš” (39).

²²⁸ “Nisam želeo da otputujem, kao što nisam želeo da ostanem, i praznina rukava koji su grlili glas pretvoren u elektromagnetni zapis mogla je samo da doprinese mojoj nedoumici, međutim, upravo su ta dva odsustva učinila da spustim poklopac i zaključam bravice” (6).

complexities of this text? It is interesting to point out the background role the text assigns to the father. In Albahari's second novel *Tsing* (1988), which is dedicated to the memory of the father, the reader discovers the promise of a liberation brought about by the father's death:

I thought that the blessing of dying might be found in the fact that one finally ceases to be someone's son: the curtain drops, and for a while one walks as if the whole world belonged to him. It is a terrible feeling which cannot be endured for too long. It is terrible, of course, because it is beautiful, and every beauty is exhausting (40).²²⁹

This parricidal instinct further elucidates the previous claims about non-belonging and exile being in fact manifestations of freedom rather than punishment. It remains to be seen whether the narrator's liberated ego is capable of existing in such an unattached condition. The father in *Bait* undergoes the transformation into an 'absent presence' and even the recording of Mother's memories is triggered by his death. Is it, then, all about the Father? Moreover, at the time of the recording the narrator admits to have been "blinded" by the love for his father and the rage at this sudden loss. However, the most curious of absences in this text which abounds in them (the narrator is indeed "a fanatic of absence") is the total and perhaps deliberate omission of his sister. While it is clear from Mother's confession that the narrator has a sibling from her marriage to his father, she is nowhere even mentioned in his narrative. The sister exists in Mother's text, but is curiously absent from his own. In his self-absorption, the narrator demands the undivided attention of both parents.

²²⁹ "pomislio sam da je blagodet smrti što neko napokon prestaje da bude nečiji sin: skida se sa tebe zastor i, bar za neko vreme, hodaš kao da svet pripada samo tebi. Užasan je to osećaj i ne može se dugo izdržati. Užasan, naravno, zato što jelep, i što svaka lepota iscrpljuje" (45). Cixous interprets this feeling as a release from the indebtedness to the parents for the gift of life, the obligation to gratitude which creates tension within the family, as well as the whole ambivalent dynamics of filial duty and hatred between the son and father.

In *Black Sun*, Kristeva explains that such an “imaginary father” tends to be “deprived of phallic power, now attributed to the mother” (45). All the attributes of pragmatic thinking and active performance assigned to the Mother by the narrative, as opposed to father’s lingering existence inevitably leads to this conclusion. The father is a symbolic denominator connecting Mother’s and narrator’s lives. It is his Jewishness which affects both of them, and in which they recognize a pattern of their existence. Unlike Mother, neither of her two Jewish husbands insisted on their religious identity. On the contrary, the first one, fully aware of the historic burden his religion imposed upon him, was adamant in not bringing up his children as Jews. Our narrator, who has read the desperate letters this man, his precursor although unrelated to him, had been sending from the death camp, holds this fact against his mother believing that this was the one thing in which she betrayed him. Her second husband, the narrator’s father, had no particular opinion on the matter of religion. Having had his first wife and children killed by the Nazis he barely walked through life, and even that thanks to Mother who held him: “Father, when he returned from the camp, would probably have sunk like a stone thrown in water. [He] always looked back, while Mother went forward” (*Bait* 18).²³⁰

It may well be said that Mother is the one who supported both of them, as now, years after her death, the narrator fully recognizes himself not in hers, but in the image of his father. She was the presence that gave them life, that instigated both of them to action. She was the ‘doer,’ the one with a practical sense while the two of them, father and son, depended on her invisible presence to do things for them that they barely noticed. The

²³⁰ “otac bi verovatno, kada se vratio iz logora, potonuo kao kamen bačen u vodu. [...] ali se otac stalno osvrtao, dok je majka išla napred” (29).

realization of his and his father's passivity in dealing with life is sharply contrasted to this image of Mother:

Everyone is the blacksmith of his own fate, she said. Only once did I hold a blacksmith's hammer in my hands, and I knew, as my muscles strained futilely, that I would never be able to forge anything. So now I'm sitting here in the North, watching my life diminish and sizzle like red-hot iron in water (20-1).²³¹

His exiled condition can, according to this realization, be equally interpreted as a state of passivity and helpless recognition rather than struggle to create an existence for himself in the country whose political chaos threatened to swallow him. It was easier to pack oneself up and leave.

The Loss

I will make a temporary pause in an attempt to add a new momentum to the reading of the text through a greater employment of the tools of psychoanalytic literary theory. Such a reading is necessitated by the dual perception of the narrator and Mother as subjects whose involvement with history is on the one hand of a personal nature, while on the other they become indistinguishable from other unnamable victims. In the former sense the speaking subject(s) suffer the loss of a personal nature—Mother on her side loses a husband and children to WWII, while her son is left without both parents—although the loss of his mother has a more symbolic meaning. On a more general level, both of them are left without what Mother calls a “nest,” a common ground, and a sense of belonging, the fact that adds theirs to the collective experience. Moreover, Mother suffers this particular loss no less than twice. In a more general sense, this fact helps in

²³¹ “Svako je kovač svoje sreće, govorila je. Samo sam jednom držao u rukama čekić iz kovačnice, i znao sam, dok su mi se mišići zaludno naprezali, da ništa neću moći da iskusim. Zato sada i sedim ovde, na severu, gledam kako mi se život smanjuje i cvrči kao usijano gvožđe u vodi” (33).

elucidating the perception of the two speaking subjects of the narrative not as isolated individuals, but rather as microcosms of a nation, equally disoriented, groundless, and ‘motherless.’

In “Mourning and Melancholia” Freud defines the reactions to the loss of a loved object which is partly applicable to the condition in which the narrator of *Bait* finds himself upon the loss of both his mother and country.²³² The loved object is not always and not only a loved person, but can include any object of love, specifically “some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, and ideal” (153). Mourning is, according to Freud, a normal reaction to the loss of a loved object which eventually and with the transfer of the libido to a different love object ebbs away. Melancholia, on the contrary, is characterized by “profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings” (153). In addition, melancholia can be a result of the “loss of a more ideal kind” (155). Applied to *Bait*, this definition enables an interpretation as a melancholic post-traumatic reaction to the loss that the narrator experiences. The loss of the nation and country is made even more emphatic by the almost simultaneous death of his mother whose body, in more than a symbolic literary image, slowly decomposes as her once country is being dismembered by the civil war. The ambiguity of his oral text, therefore, stems directly from the feeling of dejection caused by his double loss or,

²³² I propose the application of Freud’s definition of melancholia to this text with great caution. However attractive may seem its use as the main frame for the analysis of Albahari’s text, the full identification of narrator with a melancholic, as defined by Freud and Kristeva for example, would be, in my opinion, too stretched. *Bait* eludes any single-sided interpretation. Therefore, my use of psychoanalytic theory in relation to this text is intended solely for the elucidation of some of its significant points which remain obscure after the application of other theories.

perhaps it is the same loss, the death of his mother symbolized and amplified by the loss of his country.

Although defining whether the narrator is a mourner or a melancholic in this respect is not my primary goal and, after all, not all of the premises proposed by Freud and later Kristeva in their respective analyses of melancholic and depressive conditions caused by a loss apply to this text, it is still pertinent for my analysis to distinguish between the two conditions and try to define both the narrator and his mother accordingly. In Freud's definition the melancholic is blocked from action, incapable of forming new attachments and prone to denigrating self-perceptions, all the while incapable of consciously defining the loss he or she suffered. The mourner, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by the acute grief at the loss of the loved object, but this condition allows for a healthy healing process, and formation of new ties. Mother, having lived through the death of her first husband and the accident which killed both her children realizes that she had just witnessed her first death: "my life truly expanded; it came, in fact, to its end and contracted to a point after which, whether I liked it or not, it had to begin expanding" (*Bait* 23).²³³ Her 'libido,' if we want to stay true to Freudian terms, was after the initial tragedy capable of adopting a different love object, of transferring the affection to another man and even creating a new family with him. Moreover, even her collective being satisfied the urge of its own 'libido' by accommodating itself to a life in a new, politically and geographically different nation to the one she previously 'belonged.' Endowed by the common sense born from a fatalistic acceptance of all that life brings Mother rejects even the possibility of lingering over the apparent meanings

²³³ "moj život se tada doista proširio, došao, zapravo, do svog kraja i sažeo u tačku posle koje je, htela ja to ili ne, morao da počne da se širi" (37-8).

involved in her losses and her intimate involvement with history. She refuses to verbalize either her happiness or pain, “History had been the sum total of facts, sentiments had had nothing to do with it, and everyone had had to come face-to-face with them: face-to-face with history, face-to-face with facts, and face-to-face with sentiments” (19).²³⁴ Mother can be interpreted not only as a mourner whose acute grief gives in to a new life experience, but also as one gifted with self-regenerative powers capable of renewing herself and engendering new life, of “changing her being” as her son puts it. It is not the original loss, therefore, but the reprisal of it that ultimately saps Mother’s strength, upon which she “decided to join death” (99).²³⁵

However much the representation of Mother’s and her son’s losses are individual, they are still caused by and profoundly involved with history. It is important to note that the text turns out to be fully reflexive (and self-defensive) about easy comparisons between Mother’s fate and the fate of the country, so much so that the narrator refuses such identifications and rather espouses the opinion that Mother “simply repeated what had been written into the space around her” (*Bait* 112).²³⁶ (This is simply one of many attempts at subverting the patronizing opinions of the fictional Donald whose stereotyped western views relegates Eastern Europeans to inhabiting collective entities, unlike westerners who function as individuals). Thus, expanding this particular example into a larger picture (an expansion Donald is never capable of exerting) where Mother’s personal strife is emblematic of that of ex-Yugoslavs, a comparison between the two wars/losses is very pertinent. WWII for the former Yugoslav nation is a kind of historic

²³⁴ “Istorija je bila zbir činjenica, osećanja nisu imala nikakve veze s njom, i svako je morao da postavi sebe naspram njih: naspram istorije, naspram činjenica i naspram osećanja” (31).

²³⁵ “rešila da pristupi smrti” (159).

²³⁶ “jednostavno je ponavljala ono što je bilo upisano u prostoru oko nje” (182).

catastrophe in which the enemy was for the most part clearly recognizable, the war having been an outside aggression.²³⁷ At the end of the war the mourning phase gives way to a process of collective recovery. The civil war of the 1990's that ensues half a century later, however, is an internal dissolution of its collective national being in which the enemy is by no means easily discernible. In addition, a civil war is always of the kind in which no side in the conflict can hold a claim to victory. No amount of self-examination and reconciliation seems to be able to relieve the deadlock. After the trauma of a civil war a nation is sentenced to a permanent condition of melancholic reminiscences of bygone times, self-doubting, and painful and always problematic cathartic attempts. This is precisely the state in which the disaster of the latest Yugoslav civil wars leaves the newly-formed nations, the experience of which is emblemized in our narrator as its microcosm.²³⁸

Throughout the text it seems that the narrator is able to define his losses as he investigates *what* exactly it is that he lost in them, in a word, the personal implications of the losses. His narrative, as well as Mother's recorded testimony, it seems, are a vehicle of this self-search, ambiguous as it is, but still a healthy attempt at translating the losses into words, at *naming* them as an act of verbal therapy. However, a more pronounced characteristic of the state of melancholia, that of the total inability to act, of moral self-

²³⁷ Although the experience of WWII was not the same in all parts of the former country, still an amount of generalization is necessary to define the collective experience of the war. The experience of the war for Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia, for example, was in many ways different from that in Serbia proper, and was for the most part an ethno-religious civil war, a prequel of the events of the 1990's, where Nazi occupation additionally complicated perceptions and enemy/friend distinctions.

²³⁸ It may be useful to mention just a few of the most famous exiles from the territory of the former country who abandoned their place after losing not the country in a geographic sense, for it is still there albeit with reshaped borders, but the one which they felt part of. Writers Dubravka Ugrešić and Slavenka Drakulić of Croatia, film director Emir Kusturica and musician Goran Bregović of Bosnia, to mention just a few, joined the ranks of the exiles of the 'brain drain,' translating themselves into more-or-less silent or loud voices from the once-upon nation.

denigration, and lack of awareness as to the quality that was lost with the loved object is absent from *Bait*. Quite the contrary, it seems, as the narrator dissects his soul for the reader and perceptively analyzes the effects that the death of his mother, as well as the dissolution of his country had exerted upon him. The conclusions are arrived at slowly and through a lot of painful introspection, and although the final, resolving conclusion is lacking, it is perceptible that the impulse to write, contemplated throughout but taking place at the end of the process of self-examination, is to be understood as the final attempt on the part of the narrator to move on and resolve the status quo through a new stage of therapeutic work.

“It Is Not Silence That Frightens Us”

In his ambivalent position the exiled narrator is not too unlike the image of Klee’s “Angelus Novus” who, in Benjamin’s interpretation, with his back turned to the future amazedly observes the “storm” that is history (1969, 257). The wind from Paradise, or the future, is taking him from the scene of what from his perspective appears to be a “single catastrophe” of history. It is only the limited perspective of human existence that makes this catastrophe look like a long rectilinear sequence of events unstoppably running its course towards the future. The Angel, therefore, leaves for the Paradise of the future without being able to accomplish the task of repairing the damage that history inflicted on humanity, to “awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed” (257). The Angel is incapable of “redeeming” history for humanity, and that task, in Benjamin’s account, falls to humanity itself whose each new generation is “endowed with a *weak* Messianic power” (254). The transference of the task of “redemption” to

humanity is, perhaps, a lot less than what Benjamin's Angel was prepared to do. In possession of only weak powers, it is enough if the human race *extricate itself* from the cyclical repetition of history, from an unstoppable whirlwind of repeated tragedy which our short-sightedness prevents us from perceiving as anything else than continuous progress. To simply *stop* it is enough. However, to each generation the challenge seems to be too much as they unfailingly retrace the steps of those before them. According to Benjamin, though, the redemption of the past is equally necessary for the sake of its preservation as well as for reconciliation with it. Once the catastrophe has been prevented from reoccurring, the past has to undergo a meaningful transformation rather than be forgotten. It must be converted into a set of recognizable images in the present that will be deposited into the collective memory to create the foundation for the future, "For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" (255). Could, then, our narrator as an individual be correcting what his parents' generation before him had failed to and was in return collectively sacrificed to the repeated cycle of history? "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" [...]. It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger," says Benjamin (255) It is a necessary effort on the part of the narrator to recreate as much of the history that belongs to him personally, to make it recognizable to and acknowledged by the present if he is ever to proceed.

Most of the narrative ambiguity of *Bait* lies in the dichotomous linguistic space of the narrator's conflicting desires. On the one side lies Mother's attempt at salvaging memory from speech, and on the other his effort to convert it to a written text and,

moreover, translate it into a foreign language. In order to reconnect with the past the narrator decides to listen to the audio tapes he had never heard after recording them years before and leaving his country with them and a dictionary of Serbo-Croatian as the only “proof of [his] existence in time” (107).²³⁹ As part of his project of the acquisition of a new identity via a linguistic route he plans to translate that story into a text. At first the tapes yield nothing but an uncomfortable silence lingering in the air between himself and his mother; he in control of the machine ready to rob Mother of her only possession—her life story, and Mother trying to postpone the moment of that ultimate embarrassment: “I don’t believe that life can be told [...], still less that it can be written down” (95),²⁴⁰ Mother says, for “if it could be told in words, [it] would no longer have to be lived, one would merely have to state it” (80).²⁴¹ Gradually the reels unwind but fail to yield words. Instead, they recreate for him a living memory of Mother, for what he hears recorded on the tapes is not her speech but her sounds: her silent crying, sniffing, sounds reminding him of when she stood up from her chair, walked over to the kitchen to prepare coffee, her steps on the kitchen floor, her resuming her seat facing him, and an embarrassed plea to do the recording some other time.

Relevant to this process is Meir Wigoder’s “History begins at home,” which analyzes family photographs in an attempt to negotiate the totality of memory caught between a mental and a photographic image, and define a very personal moment within the sweep of depersonalizing history. Similarly to Roland Barthes’s intention in *Camera Lucida* (1984) to recreate the memory of his deceased mother from her photographs,

²³⁹ “jedini dokaz [...] postojanja u vremenu” (172).

²⁴⁰ “Ne verujem da život može da se ispriča [...] još manje da se zapiše” (152).

²⁴¹ “kada bi mogao rečima da se ispriča, ne bi više morao da se živi, dovoljno bi bilo da se izgovara” (129).

Wigoder contrasts the memory of a person recreated by a photograph and the one we keep in our mind:

A photograph can show us the person's features but still fail to show character because it "lacks life" [...] The person we see in the photograph may invoke a completely different image to that of the person we know in our minds. Hence, we become aware of our ability to animate the photograph [...] (31).

The memory preserved in audio tapes, then, finds itself halfway between the recreation of memory from mental imagery and photography. In the audio recording the person does not have to be animated, it *is* alive in sounds, movements, voice, words spoken. What this kind of memory lacks is the face, the feature that fluctuates in our mental images and which either has to be refreshed by our resorting to photographs or suffers inevitable mutation. Sigrid Weigel's proposition of the term "corporeal memory" finds its application in the kind of memory that Albahari's narrator recreates of his mother.

Corporeal memory is a kind of "pictorial memory." By Weigel's definition,

[...] pictorial memory becomes recognizable as a memory of the languages of gesture and of the body. The gesture—or, more precisely, the gesture as represented in the image—is here understood as a symbolic form, the significance of which is not disclosed through translation into language, but only through the recollection of the form and experience actualized within it. The fact that an image in the form of a bodily expressive gesture becomes engraved in memory, the so-called 'pathos formula' is attributed to an excitation and compared with the leaving of a trace; that is, entirely analogous with the psychoanalytical description of the mnemonic or memory trace. (151)

The "languages of gesture and of the body" create what she names the *Körper-Sprache*, where the body is the "ultimate referent for language" (Marven 29), rendering the signifier redundant. In place of the language of the spoken word, of *logos*, powerful enough to inflict wounds and kill, yet totally unable to express the essence of being, the memory that emerges from the tapes contains sounds of the primordial, instinctive, and

innocent speech. It is this kind of *wordless speech* that helps our narrator create the most vivid mnemonic images of his mother.

Körper-Sprache and corporeal memory seem to be the vehicles of memory that Albahari uses not only in *Bait* but also in some of his other writings to emphasize the impossibility of communication with words. Contrary to the fear of the power yet inadequacy of language, elsewhere Albahari's characters frequently reiterate the impotence of words to make things happen, and realize that "Silence is stronger than any words" (1996, 147). In *Bait* the uneasy relationship to, and even a kind of fear of words is expressed by Mother many times, and underlines her firm belief that life cannot be told in words: "he who does not know how to keep silent cannot hope to find comfort in words" (6).²⁴² The narrator remembers that his mother "taught without anything, only by her presence or absence, by silence, without words [...] One should never believe too much the teacher who instructs by means of words" (66).²⁴³ Mother imposed herself by her silent presence, as well as by her craftiness, by the many things she simply did with her hands without defining them by words. In his memory Mother is always connected with doing things, regardless of whether it is planting flowers in spring, mending socks, or shelling peas. Whatever she did she did with ease, a gift that is lost on him. All he has left is words. When Mother did speak, however, the narrator remembers that she used to express herself through proverbs, fragments of epic verse, and traditional wisdom extracted from original context. Even so, she knew how to "intertwine several folk narrative phrases, to line up a row of adjectives, to scramble the structure of a sentence, to tell a story" (31). Out of that fragmentariness she was able to spin a meaningful tale.

²⁴² "onaj ko ne ume da ćuti ne može da se nada da će u rečima naći utehu" (9).

²⁴³ "podučavala bez ičega, samo pristustvom ili odsustvom, tišinom, bez reči. [...] Nikada se ne sme previše verovati učitelju koji podučava pomoću reči" (107).

The total narrative disruption occurs with the first signs that the cycle of history, and with it Mother's personal story, threaten to be repeated. It is at this point that the fine thread which used to connect her story begins to break, a gesture that indicates a profound distrust in and fear of the potency of language. Mother's lost ability to tell a coherent story is thus acutely emphasized through her recorded breakdown.

Therefore it is necessary to interpret Mother's initial silence recorded in the tapes as signifying more than an inherent fear of being robbed of her life story by a technological device. As much an act of protest as a sign of fear, Mother's silence derives both from the refusal to give a new life to the unnameable by naming it, to resurrect history by reliving it through words, and from the fear of annihilation of herself as a speaking subject, and her experience by that same act of speech. Wary of the double function of language—powerful enough to create and destroy things, yet insufficient for meaningful expression—Mother's first instinct is to refuse to speak on the issue of her past. This contradictory function of language, a sort of a functional application of 'doublespeak,'²⁴⁴ finds its articulation in the writing of Maurice Blanchot, who ascribes to language the ability to simultaneously create and annihilate both the speaking subject and the object of speech. According to this, "I," as the speaking subject, "deny the existence of what I am saying, but I also deny the existence of the person who is saying it" (43). By naming the object of speech, by giving it existence, speech/language changes its essence—assigns it alien properties until it mutates to non-recognition. If, therefore, nothing substantial can ever be fully expressed it is clear why Mother rejects the ultimate devaluation of her memory and lived experience that their articulation through language threatens to enact. Moreover, her silence is equally an act of defiance against the immanent violence of

²⁴⁴ The reference here is clearly to Orwell's 'newspeak' as used in his *1984*.

history that shaped not only her life, but her body as well. Her refusal to utter history implies an impotent protest of a victim who, failing to articulate history naively hopes that she can defer its force.

Her son's silence that blocks his expressiveness in Canada is contingent upon a somewhat different process. It emerges as a consequence of his precarious and insecure position of an exile. On the one side, his silence is a by-product of the conflict between the New World's over-/ab-use of language rendering history and the past utterly meaningless and his internal revulsion against the imminent sacrifice of his 'essence' that the accommodation to it requires of him; on the other, lies the equally potent refusal to relapse into his mother tongue which is, on the contrary, too immersed in history, and burdened with tradition.

Mother's silence endeavours a dethroning of history while simultaneously operating as a death-defying stratagem. What Mother refuses to speak about is history, her life shaped by the great historical movements of the century. For her, silence equals the defence from history, a singular strategy of bypassing a complete surrender to it since her immersion in history is already undeniable and unavoidable. There are two possible reasons for silence about history. One is the silence of the perpetrators which is symptomatic of the denial of their criminal involvement; the other is the protest of the victim muted by the sheer horror of the lived experience. Should I not pursue further elucidations of this problematics posed by Albahari's novel, I could wholeheartedly subscribe to the belief that Mother's silence is of the latter kind. As a victim of history

she finds that any meaningful translation of her losses into words is impossible, and instead makes a powerful statement by remaining significantly silent on the subject.²⁴⁵

To a certain extent Mother's determination to ignore history by not talking about it can be viewed as her intention to create her alternative space rid of history and its attributes even though such an *historyless* existence confines her to an existence apparently outside the conventional societal order. She herself, however, seems to be aware of the power of silence although in her interpretation the underlying motivation for refusing to speak is not protest but defense, fending off the fear of what comes after it is broken. "It is not silence that frightens us but what follows it: the unavailability of choice, the impossibility of change, the irreversibility of time, the order of things in the universe" (6), states Mother in her first sentences communicated to her son holding a microphone.²⁴⁶ Her words will take on a much heavier meaning in the closing lines of the novel when her son is faced with the alternative choice of remaining silent, or "utter[ing] his conflict," the strategy that Kristeva links to the exile's choice between self-assertion and invisibility²⁴⁷ and which *Bait*'s narrator eventually translates into a story.

²⁴⁵ Perhaps the best-known literary example of the latter tendency, besides that of Primo Levi, is found in W.G. Sebald's fictional character Austerlitz, whose affinity with history taught in English textbooks reveals a strange silence of the most recent events of WWII. His own repressed memory of the child transport in which he was sent to safety of England re-emerges in his contact with architectural documentation of the historic event which thus marked his life. Thus his destiny serves as a metaphor for the "conspiracy of silence" about the Holocaust that Sebald ascribes to the German nation. The long silence of Paul de Man about the period during which he wrote for a collaborationist Belgian paper, unfortunately, seems to have become exemplary of the former tendency in the circles, even academic ones, prone to unsubstantiated judgments and sensationalist discoveries. His silence seems to derive in a much more complex relationship with history, as is well analyzed by Shoshana Felman in "After the Apocalypse."

²⁴⁶ "Nije tišina ono što nas plaši, već ono što posle nje sledi: neminovnost izbora, nemogućnost menjanja, nepobitnost vremena, raspored stvari u svemiru" (10).

²⁴⁷ *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 17.

“Real Speech Is Not Heard, It Is Spoken Within”²⁴⁸

The exile does not merely find himself on the other side from the state of *belonging* to a shared geography, tradition and collective memory of his previous life, but equally, if not primarily so, he feels alienated from his language. His onslaught on his mother tongue and his conscious decision never to speak it again after landing on the Canadian soil, the act that Kristeva elsewhere tags “matricide,”²⁴⁹ reveals an unconscious fear of the power of language laden with all the attributes of history, memory, past, all the things constitutive of one’s inherited identity but detrimental to the conscious attempt of creating a new one:

the whole time I was tormented by the fear that a return to my native language, reinforced by the fact that it was precisely my mother who was speaking it, would bring me back to where I no longer wanted to return, especially now that, thanks to someone else’s language I was finally beginning to feel like someone else.²⁵⁰ (*Bait* 106)

Kristeva’s exile, for example, is a “disenfranchised citizen of nowhere” (2006, 52) who “absents” herself whenever she finds herself on the familiar terrain exposed to the language she understands. Her exile is a fully postmodern type of nomad who speaks in “borrowed” languages without ever laying a claim to any in particular. *Bait*’s narrator likewise listens to people speaking Serbian in streets and shopping malls, but refuses any kind of communication with them.²⁵¹ They recognize each other, but he insistently remains voiceless. He has intentionally muted the sound of his language:

²⁴⁸ *Bait*, p. 17 [”pravi govor se ne čuje, on se izriče iznutra” (28)].

²⁴⁹ Cf. her novel *Murder in Byzantium* (2006).

²⁵⁰ “sve vreme me je proganjala bojazan da bi me povratak maternjem jeziku, pojačan činjenicom da ga izgovara moja majka, vratio tamo gde više nisam hteo da se vraćam, pogotovo sada kada sam, zahvaljujući tuđem jeziku, napokon počeo da se osećam kao neko drugi” (171).

²⁵¹ Canada boasts a large ex-Yugoslav immigrant community, predominantly created during the wars of the 1990’s. Majority of highly educated people of the working age left the country in what is generally designated as the worst “brain drain” in the country’s history. It is estimated that over half a million of educated people left Serbia alone, the number that is multiplied several times when emigrants from other

One can die in a language just as one dies in real life [...], and if I've already died, and I have died, then I don't have the slightest wish to be a vampire or a ghost and to wander the expanses of that language like some forlorn creature from the tales of Edgar Allan Poe.²⁵² (77)

His reaction to the familiar sounds is likewise one of absenting himself and remaining silent, but unlike Kristeva's postmodern traveller his absence from language is caused by the desire he feels to absent himself from much more than his linguistic identity alone. This matricide that he is committing against the Serbian language is an equally forceful renunciation of his Serbian identity, and his personal/family and collective/national history, of all the elements that constituted his recognizable identity, now consciously repressed into the darkest recesses. The speed with which he deals with the remainders of the past is indicative of his desire to shed it as efficiently as possible. An illustrative example of this striving is the lack of sentimentality he exhibits for the material remainders left in his possession after his parents' death. Almost a decade after his father's death Mother still held on to all his possessions with which she surrounded herself recreating in that way a palpable memory of her husband. Her son, however, disposed of both of their belongings until nothing remained that could physically remind him of his parents only days after Mother's death. This act foreshadows his current symbolic matricidal/parricidal exfoliation of layers of meaningful history while concurrently generating a disparate mode of remembering. Exclusion of material reminders clears the space for the narrator's absence from his original identity. Through the exiling act he absents himself from the participation in the national tragedy, and now

ex-Yugoslav republics are counted in. It is virtually impossible to walk the streets of any major city in Canada without hearing the familiar sound of Serbo-Croatian language(s) spoken by first generation immigrants.

²⁵² "U jeziku može da se umre kao i u stvarnom životu [...] i ako sam već umro, a umro sam, onda nemam ni najmanju želju da budem vampir ili duh i da lutam prostorima tog jezika kao kakvo neutješno stvorenje iz priča Edgara Alana Poa" (124).

he attempts to absent himself from his language, to “cut the maternal source of words” (Kristeva 1991, 16), and thus accomplish the process of identity metamorphosis. Ironically, precisely at the moment of finding himself anew in his origins and history through the agency of Mother’s voice he is in a hurry to lose himself again to a foreign language and an ahistorical existence. The new world which he is trying to assimilate into seems to necessitate the death of both his language and his memory, and condemns him to forced silence until he is able to speak in neither language available. However, in spite of the inability to speak, he feels an inexplicable urge to write although, as he keeps reiterating, he is not a writer and cannot write.

“There is properly no history, only biography”²⁵³

As gradually Mother’s fear of the tape recorder and, possibly of facing her past subsides, the tapes uncover her particular memory of history. Her narration constructs and maps the space of her exile which predates and in many ways foreshadows the exile of her son half a century later; both exiles caused by the more-or-less same circumstances, and by the ideological progeny of the former protagonists. Her exile winds her way through the war-torn country, escaping Croatia in which the Nazis were greeted with “flowers and chocolates,” and in which her double otherness of Serbian origin and Jewishness by choice stigmatizes both her and her children.²⁵⁴ They are forced into exile after the

²⁵³ Ralph Waldo Emerson.

²⁵⁴ The text here refers to the fact that in Slovenia and Croatia the Nazi forces were greeted by citizens on their entrance in Maribor and Zagreb in 1941, unlike the Serbian capital, Belgrade, which was carpet-bombed in the dawn of 6 April 1941. It is interesting to note that all three nations/republics were part of the pre-WWII Yugoslavia, then a monarchy ruled by the Serbian Karadorđević dynasty which, like many nations all over Europe, signed a nonaggression pact with Germany. Upon signing the pact, on 25 March 1941, an anti-Nazi coup and massive demonstrations in Belgrade, allegedly lead by the Communist Party, toppled the Government two days later. Croatia is for the most of WWII governed by a puppet Nazi regime, with Jews, Serbs, Gypsies and communists persecuted and murdered in death camps modeled on

deportation of her husband to a death camp, and head for Serbia hoping to reach safety. The geography of her journey simultaneously maps the path of the war from Croatia to other parts of the country and ends in central Serbia. Its description as a descent into the ultimate darkness of war anticipates the Yugoslav wars of the 1990's that will replay her life in the exile of her son.

A distinct shift in Mother's language takes place in the course of her story as it changes from the language of tradition and assumes certain discursive elements that at least superficially resemble the rhetoric of historiography. Her account of the war is told in plain words, matter-of-factly, and without emotion or figurative language otherwise characteristic of her speech. For Mother things either happened or they didn't; she thinks it is silly to even use conditional sentences. Paradoxically, however, it departs from the language of the official historical record because there is nothing in the contents of her testimony that invokes a single date or name. A great extent of convergence between the private sphere and official history is unavoidable in Mother's testimony yet, her remembrance accounts for little or nothing of interest to historiography. Rather than navigating her movements through history by recorded events that shaped the continent

those organized by the Nazi regimes elsewhere. The horrific crimes taking place in the most notorious of the death camps, Jasenovac, disgusted even the Nazis who visited them. In an eerie repetition of events, half a century later, in June 1991, Slovenia and Croatia seceded from the post-war Yugoslavia. Their independence, initially recognized only by Germany, was suspiciously received by the numerous Serbian minority. Soon persecutions and murders resumed on both sides in Croatian villages predominantly populated by Serbs. The period of WWII is currently still the subject of problematic historical revisions both in Serbia and Croatia. Some streams in conservative Serbian historiography tend to represent the period as a civil war, with Communists, sponsored by the Allies in a conspiratorial division of Europe with the Stalinist Russia on one side, and pro-monarchy, democratic forces on the other. In Croatia, on the other hand, it is interesting to note the silence surrounding the crimes against humanity perpetrated by its pro-Nazi regime, and Jasenovac death camp. Interestingly, both sides, for very different reasons, choose to ignore the fact that WWII was for the most part a pan-European, even global anti-fascist struggle. How problematic the reiteration of this historical episode can still be to some was made obvious by the unprecedented hysterical campaign against Emir Kusturica's (undeniably tendentious) usage of this documentary footage in his film *Underground* (1995) juxtaposed by the footage of the devastation of Belgrade.

during the period of war, she measures history by her own time, by the events that define her, by her losses, and by her two consecutive lives. This strategy produces a narrative that, although deeply immersed in and stemming from the collective memory, makes a definitive claim for her own right to remember. It is an example of Norean memory that has been, not only “transformed” by its “passage through history” but perhaps even *created*, or generated by history, since without the historic events of the time Mother’s testimony would have a very different form.²⁵⁵ Even so, however, at no point does Mother make a conscious effort to try to contest the historical record and claim the subversive agency of countermemory for herself.

Yael Zerubavel in her interpretation of the mythistorical nation-forming narratives of the state of Israel considers countermemory to be an “essentially oppositional” narrative that “stands in hostile and subversive relation to collective memory. If the master commemorative narrative attempts to suppress alternative views of the past,” she

²⁵⁵ In his “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire,” Pierre Nora distinguishes between “true memory,” and that “transformed by its passage through history” (13). The first, located in “inherited gestures,” body of knowledge, and “unspoken traditions,” is closest to what is otherwise characterized as collective tradition, the kind of memory one is almost unaware of, takes it for granted, and would probably not define it as ‘memory’ in any sense of the word commonly used. The repository of this kind of memory is oral storytelling, traditional mythological knowledge comprising ancient stories, proverbs, and beliefs, nowadays not rarely rejected for superstitions. Traditional memory is spontaneously and unnoticeably ‘deposited’ in the collective memory of the people, or “peasantry,” whose eradication from the map of the modern world Nora sees as the reason for the deplorable loss of this kind of mnemonic practice. It is this kind of idealized traditional knowledge that can be defined as a true collective memory though not in the sense that identifies ‘collective memory’ with the remembrance of historical events, orchestrated and sponsored by state authorities. The latter brand of memory celebrates founding and defining historical acts of violence. In contrast, Nora presents us with a collective memory unstained by history and arguably resistant to exterior manipulation. Although its ‘truth value’ is questionable in itself, due to the inconstancy of the mnemonic process, and an absence of any kind of written record its putative *innocence* makes us sentimental for its loss. The second kind of memory defined by Nora is dialectically opposed to this. It is “deliberate, experienced as a duty, [...] psychological, individual.” This is the memory of the witness of history, memory already touched by history. In fact, Nora seems to be reiterating the Platonic regret for the obliteration of memory caused by a violent act of writing, the forceful inscription of history. True memory is therefore completely and undeniably dead. All that remains of it is the *memory of memory*, the distinct remembrance of the concept, of the fact that it existed in time which predated history: “What we call memory today is [...] not memory but already history. [...] The quest for memory is the search for one’s history” (13). Nora argues that his *lieux de memoire* derive from and owe their existence solely to the fact that “there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives.”

continues, “the countermemory in turn denies the validity of the narrative constructed by the collective memory and presents its own claim for a more accurate representation of history” (10). In order to be able to question the accepted version of the past the alternative narrative has to derive from the collective pool which is in possession of its own memory. An individual testimony does not carry enough weight to challenge the master narrative, and as such is usually ignored and excluded from historiography without the need to be suppressed. Mother’s testimony neither follows the prescribed elements of history generated for statist or nationalist purposes, nor directly opposes it. Hers is, in the words of Mary Layoun, “the simultaneous though not uncontradictory telling of personal and official history” (1990, 6).

How are we, therefore, with respect to all of the above, to interpret Mother’s acquiescence to speak? The paradox of her situation is likewise the paradox of the text— as a speaking subject she denies herself, but at the same time she creates a life-giving narrative authority. In his differentiation between storytelling as an act of forestalling death and writing as a manifestation of death drive, Foucault states that storytelling, therefore speech, in ancient narratives guaranteed the continuation of life, either through the posthumous narratives of one’s heroic deeds, as in Greek epics, or a literal warding off death, as is the case in the *Arabian Nights*. In the latter case, which has more applicability towards Mother’s sudden decision to talk, it is the fear of silence-as-death that keeps the words running in the hope of cancelling death; the never ending process of overwriting the emptiness of silence by language, of mapping its blankness. According to Foucault, “Scheherazade’s story is a desperate inversion of murder; it is the effort, throughout all those nights, to exclude death from the circle of existence” (117).

I feel it is necessary to elucidate the basic terms of ‘witnessing’ and ‘accounting of history’ that are rather prominent in my reading. In her insightful analysis of the nature of the particular silence that Paul de Man kept about his collaborationist writings in Belgium during WWII, Shoshana Felman proffers a series of ideas that can shed more light on some aspects of the complexity of *Bait*. What I have in mind in relation to my reading of *Bait* is primarily Felman’s attempt at refutation of the very possibility of witnessing of history. She juxtaposes two witnessing accounts springing from the dialectically opposite positions—one offered by the allegedly responsible party, that of de Man, the other by the ultimate survivor, Primo Levi. The psychoanalyst in Felman is determined to reveal in the whole of de Man’s theoretical opus a kind of apologetic subtext providing a defensive discourse through which his conscience is extricating itself from the conscious knowledge of the Holocaust. Her analysis of his collaborationist role stipulates its origin in the delusion that it was a result of his own ideological conviction, while in fact being dictated by the socio-political syntax, as verbalized in his confession that “the subject does not dominate its own utterances” (de Man 1986, 75). In fact, his incriminating journalistic work, Felman explains, was “‘thought-controlled’ and thus pre-empted as a testimony by the very grammar of [its] language,” by the “unrecognized coerciveness of the Nazi rhetoric of promises” (Felman 1992, 139).²⁵⁶ De Man’s commentary on Benjaminian scepticism towards translation work which ascribes to history the same kind of inhumanity inherent in linguistic structures can indeed be taken as a rectifying rhetoric of such involvement. However, it is another aspect of this equation between history and language that interest me at this point. Felman in her article renounces the very

²⁵⁶ The reference is obviously to the original Nazi rhetoric of social equality and an uncorrupted new Europe that was so seductive to the proletarian class.

possibility of *witnessing* history and provides examples that claim that *à posteriori* recollections of events do “not provide narrative knowledge,” and instead represent the account of the “failed witness [...] of the witness, that is, who failed to be and who has returned mute” (139). Felman reinforces this argument with the example of Primo Levi, who stands firm that a survivor cannot be a true witness of events. Speaking from a dialectically opposite position to that of de Man, he nevertheless denies the possibility of witnessing to those who lived through an experience. Instead, only the “submerged” ones, the dead, or those muted by the experience would, if they were able to, give a full and uncorrupted account of history which is, according to de Man, “not human” and, therefore, resists representation by *human* language: “Things happen in the world which cannot be accounted for in terms of the human conception of language. And they always happen in linguistic terms, or the relation [to] language is always involved when they have [happened]” (de Man 1986, 101).²⁵⁷ Events of which the Holocaust to Levi and de Man was the ultimate example of the inhumanity of history, therefore, lead to the “historical disintegration of the witness” (139), a conclusion that further complicates the narrator’s intention to bring about a change, to provide the meaning by his written text. Felman’s text proposes an affinity between the failure of the witness and that of a translator to convey the horror of the original/history. Failure seems to be the link between the two, as in their effort to replay the true meaning, the *truth*, for the reader

²⁵⁷ De Man assigns the inhumanity to linguistic structures “the play of linguistic tensions, linguistic events that occur, possibilities which are inherent in language” (*Resistance to Theory* 96), which he then equals to the inhumanity of history. This is the kind of language “which would be pure signifier [...] completely devoid of any semantic function whatsoever, a purely technical linguistic language” (96-7) that “does things which are so radically out of our control that they cannot be assimilated to the human at all” (101). He still recognizes the existence of human language which changes and is, actually, formed by the human usage. This analogy between the technicality of language and history revokes any humane attributes to history and reduces it to a purely impersonal and blind force, thus denying humanity the ability to influence history in any meaningful and significant way.

both of them fail. The witness fails to give a true account of history, for she is ‘only’ a survivor while the truth belongs to the drowned; the failure of a translation to communicate the truth of the original is, likewise, consequential to the idiosyncrasies of language. The role that is left to language in relation to history, in Felman’s conclusion, is that of a mediator ironically unable to convey the *meaning* of this terrifying inhumanity of history. Thus Felman’s analysis stresses even further the poststructuralist disbelief in the signifier so predominant in *Bait*, and assigns to language the role to *translate* history, but even that to a degree in which the original, which by now is fully identified with history, is lost to the reader “who relies on a translation” (160). When all said above is transposed into the text of my concern in this chapter it looks like the deeper we delve into the meaning of the text, the further it pushes us from any possibility of knowing it. Every step believed to approach the truth of the text in fact only leads a step away from it, until everything becomes a rendition of a rendition: The narrator of *Bait* is in pain to *translate* into writing Mother’s original testimony which is simply a second-hand version of history, indeed witnessed by her, but of diminished significance precisely for that fact. Interestingly, however, Mother seems to be instinctively aware, if not fully cognizant, of her ironic position in relation to history, and thus assigns a lot less importance to it than does her son.

Writing as matricide

Before entering the final argument of this chapter, I wish to shortly point to the structural nature of narrative language in order to distinguish it from the writing/speaking dichotomy which characterizes the rest of the analysis. *Bait* performs an *oral text*, yet not

of the kind delivered by a traditional storyteller. Storytelling implies, if not active participation, then at least an existence of an audience of listeners involved with every segment of the performative aspect of a shared knowledge. This particular narrative, however, rejects the very existence of an audience. In fact, the text stresses the *absence* of any such audience, while the narrator's insistence on the impossibility of writing refutes the creation of an audience of readers. One of the many ambivalences of the novel is that it is simultaneously monologic and dialogic although. Still, the minimal distinction in the discourses of his protagonists cannot help but invite at least some limited attention to this gesture. The very fact that most of the narrative takes place in the narrator's head in the method which replicates stream of consciousness emphasizes its monologic nature. On the other hand, a good part of his narrative transcends simple monoglossia because it comprises memorized conversations between him and Mother or his Canadian friend, Donald. These excerpts of the narrative are structurally dialogic, although all the conversations are given through his renditions of memorized conversations with Donald, or the audio recording, in case of Mother's speech, and embedded into his dark and at times monotonous soliloquy.²⁵⁸ Mother's language of tradition and proverbs is *spoken about* rather than transmitted verbatim in the text. Therefore, the reader is only told how Mother used to speak, while being denied the full reference to this particular discursive difference between her and her son. Adding to this the fact that the text of the narrative is written in Serbian, the language he tries to repress in the same instant in which he is attempting a transliteration and translation of Mother's (and his) history (into writing, and

²⁵⁸ It is questionable whether in this narrative we can speak of true heteroglossia, or polyglossia since Donald is supposed to speak in a foreign, not only socially heterologous language that would distinguish him from both Mother and the narrator, precisely because the narrative is presented as the narrator's monologue that evens out most of the differences logically expected in people of different age, status, education, as well as experience.

English language respectively) might perhaps enable us to glimpse the full complexity of the position of in-betweenness in which both the narrator and his narrative seem to be trapped, as well as all the various levels of entanglement of the many linguistic layers of this text.

One of the uneasy dichotomies present in the text which emphasizes the narrator's ironic position lies in the dual process of narrator's listening to Mother's oral testimony, and in his own attempt to shape his voice into a written text. The struggle between the orality of Mother's story and the textuality of his written story is symbolic of the paradox of his desire yet inability to assimilate into his new acquired culture. His potential integration into the Canadian culture seems to be suspended for the duration of the oral phase of his memory. This simultaneously proposes one of the many antinomies in the text—that of the oral property of the 'old world' he came from, and the insistence on the written materiality of the new he has come into. Benjaminian "redemption" *from* history, which by no means implies redemption *of* history, therefore, translates into creating a rupture between the memory of the past and promise of a future; into extricating the narrator's individual existence from the vicious cycle of repetitions and revivals that so profoundly affected the lives of both of his parents and the nation as a whole. And the way he undertakes to do so is by substituting the oral properties of his mother's story by the alphabetical ones of his text. Overwriting memory by history. Killing utterance by the *gramma*. This ultimate act of violence against the memory of Mother, and Mother's memory is contemporaneous with finding his own (textual) voice in the society that gives priority to the letter over speech. Simultaneously, though, writing is the exhaustion of both life and authorial subjectivity. Athanasia Sourbati argues that writing is "a process

of annihilation of the subject and writing about one's life in the past figures both as a repetition of life as well as the sign of death" (287). The narrator's subjectivity is in an ironical position. The same act of writing, driven by the instinct for his preservation, threatens to annihilate the subjectivity it begets. Says Foucault, "Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself; it is a voluntary obliteration of the self that does not require representation in books because it takes place in the everyday existence of the writer" (117).²⁵⁹

Derridean linguistic theory tends to isolate the violence that the letter performs against orality claiming that "language [...] suffers the aggression of writing as the accident of its disease, its defeat and its fall" (Derrida 1976, 106). Thus the narrator's original idea to textualize Mother's speech represents the ultimate death blow to her story that he is trying to pull off for the sake of his own redemption. However, he finds his voice muted by the overwhelming effect of his new circumstances: "Mother's voice is an illusion, a tangle of magnetic records and my voice doesn't exist, my voice is mute, I've been keeping quiet for a long time now" (*Bait* 76).²⁶⁰ With his writer friend, Donald, an object of dislike and desire, and an embodiment of his ambivalent feelings of loathing and attraction for the adopted culture, the narrator leads long discussions on the feasibility of symbolic transformation of Mother's testimony. It underlies their many conversations on the nature of history, narrative, and the impossibility of telling a story in the western world, all of them revelatory of the inherent disbeliefs and stereotyped

²⁵⁹ Milorad Pavić takes this a step further in his *Dictionary of the Khazars* and assigns destructive properties to writing—a trade practiced by an incarnation of the Devil. One of the main protagonists of his dictionary-novel, princess Ateh, has on her eyelids painted letters killing anybody who would ever see them. In a strange play with 'fast' and 'slow' mirrors, it so happens that the princess sees herself blink, reads the letters and dies.

²⁶⁰ "majčin glas je varka, splet magnetnih zapisa, a mog glasa nema, moj glas je nem, ja odavno ćutim" (122).

differences between the old and the new worlds, the life in history and that without it. “If I were a writer,” and “If only I knew how to write,” are the adages that accompany iterations of the many difficulties that the narrator encounters in the contradictory processes of justification of his difference to Donald, and the interiorization of Donald’s otherness.

Donald’s insistence on the urgency of his friend’s integration into the new culture, however, emphatically excludes the possibility of his doing so through the agency of writing Mother’s story. “Life, he said, is not grammar. Language is a structure that does not exist in the world [...] If you want a story, he said, then first you have to forget about language” (93).²⁶¹ To the likes of Donald, portrayed forever scribbling words on paper pads lest he should forget them, language is no longer necessary: “all languages say the same thing, only their sounds are different” (93).²⁶² Lest Donald’s opinion on the matter should lead the reader into believing that rejection of language he expresses betrays the anxiety akin to that of Mother’s or narrator’s, it is important to stress its diverse origin. His repudiation of language is by no means abnegation of the Word. On the contrary, it stems from his unshakeable belief in the necessity of the text, the opposite of Mother’s fear of both language and history, whose ability to cause death she has witnessed many times. The text, as well as history, according to Donald, is the repository of the truth. He cultivates a firm belief in the necessity of an unhistorical existence in the present, in the absence of the past. Contrary to Mother’s paradigmatic struggle against the destructiveness of history through a recreation of family life, history for Donald represents a rectilinear path to the future, a “textbook, manual of events which, once

²⁶¹ “Život, rekao je, nije gramatika. Jezik je struktura koja ne postoji u svetu [...] Ako hoćeš priču, rekao je, onda moraš prvo da zaboraviš jezik” (150).

²⁶² “svaki jezik govori isto samo što se njihovi zvukovi razlikuju” (150).

played out, the way the authors claimed, can never be repeated” (113).²⁶³ It is precisely because Mother’s story does not possess defined attributes that it seems to be unsuitable for textual conversion. It is too involved with the past, and does not project itself to a definitive point in the future.

“Life is not change [...], life is repetition,” says Mother (8).²⁶⁴ Her two lives defy the purported linear progress of history and, instead, resemble cyclical repetitions more suited to the realm of myth. As Mother tells her story, the listener gathers that she understands the war as an immanent and unavoidable ferocious act exercising violence against life. It happened, period. Once World War II is over, the process of her mapping of the old country is finalized by the period she spends in Kosovo with her second family. There, carrying our narrator in her womb, Mother anticipates the germination of yet another Nietzschean “eternal return” of mythistory that will act as a climax to the obscene end-of-millennium tragedy of the former country in the 1990’s: “The war was over in some places, but here, in Kosovo—she felt that in her womb, in the new fruit within her womb—it was only just beginning” (35).²⁶⁵ It is here, exposed to the simultaneous Serbian and Albanian transliterations of the ‘truth’ which perpetually overwrite one another, that her mistrust of language takes a definite shape: “There where every voice has a double echo, there can be no truth” (26).²⁶⁶

²⁶³ “užbenik, priručnik o događajima koji, jednom odigrani, kako su tvrdili autori, ne mogu više da se ponove” (182).

²⁶⁴ “Život nije promena [...] život je ponavljanje” (14).

²⁶⁵ “Rat se negde završio, ali tu, na Kosovu, osećala je to u utrobi, u novom plodu u utrobi, tek je počinjao” (57).

²⁶⁶ “Tamo gde svaki glas ima dvostruki odjek, tamo ne može da bude istine” (43).

Body in History-Body of History

Mother's disturbing involuntary immersion in history need not have been put into words or text in order to be understood. Her whole body exuded history, it was shaped by history, it lived history, it *was* history. "The fact that my mother had walked a little bent over, as if she were constantly climbing a steep slope, as if she were resisting something that was pulling her downward, [would have been] attributed to rheumatism and not to historical reality," says her son (113).²⁶⁷ History in *Bait* is comprehended as a force which drives human lives and which offers no respite. It is during their visit to Israel that Mother and her second family learn how Jewish survivors deal with their memory of history: "What had been before belonged to another time, to a time that had ended. It hadn't been forgotten, but it simply wasn't mentioned, it was history" (59).²⁶⁸ Does, therefore, turning away from history, denying it the status of the subject of speech make it less virulent? Once again Mother infers that the source of her silence about history is a determination not to acknowledge its existence by choosing the strategy of silence about it. Even when she does speak it is about her life within history, badly shaped and misshaped by its forces in an effort to claim her life for herself.

Creating the rupture between the present and the past, the void in which both Donald and Mother, albeit out of different motivation, force themselves to believe, "promotes a selection between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten*" in order to make the present both intelligible and livable (de Certeau 1988, 4). This strategy

²⁶⁷ "To što je moja majka hodala malo pognuta, kao da se stalno penje uz strminu, kao da se odupire nečemu što je vuče naniže, [moglo bi se pripisati] reumatizmu a ne istorijskoj zbilji" (182).

The only liberation from history arrives at the time of the death of the suffering subject, with the body relieved from the pressure of history: "[the envoy] passed away, because his skin inscribed with the Khazar history began to itch terribly. The itch was unbearable, and it was with relief that he died, glad to be finally cleansed of history" (78).

²⁶⁸ "Ono što je bilo pre toga pripadalo je drugom, okončanom vremenu. Nije bilo zaboravljeno, već se jednostavno nije pominjalo, bilo je istorija" (95-6).

creates a reversal mechanism allowing the repressed past to return anew with an even greater momentum. De Certeau interprets it as a “return of the repressed,” in psychological terms, “a return of what, at a given moment, has *become* unthinkable in order for a new identity to *become* thinkable” (4). Translocated into the ex-Yugoslav reality of the 1990’s, the aggressive assertion of new national identities of the independent nation-states carved out of the once collective body of what used to be Yugoslavia, recreated the ethnically and religiously grounded bloodbath enacted fifty years before, in what resembled a local microcosm of WWII. As Mother fears, the reenactment of the past hibernating under the blanket of multireligious and multiethnic co-habitation emerges exactly half a century later deadlier than ever. Unable to face it once again, Mother succumbs to death. This last war Mother experiences in front of her TV but unlike typical postmodern viewers whose convenience requests that disturbing images reach the TV box sanitized to non-recognition. The almost verbatim reenactment of her life by other refugees, the replay of history she never stopped fearing but refused to believe could take place finally overwhelm her. Says her son, “If it can be said of one that they died at the right moment, then it can be said of her, because she passed away before history, which she thought had ended irretrievably, came back to life in full radiance” (*Bait* 44-5).²⁶⁹ Ironically, it is History that has the final say, not Mother.

Interestingly enough, Donald’s understanding of history seems comparable to that of Mother’s, although their positions originate in very different spheres. A rather stereotyped version of a new-world inhabitant, Donald cherishes the ‘absolute’ freedom of an existence exterior to history and its tragedies. The all-American myth of

²⁶⁹ “Ako se za nekoga može reći da je umro u pravom trenutku [...] onda se to može reći za nju, jer je preminula pre nego što je istorija, za koju je mislila da je nepovratno okončana, ponovo oživela u punom sjaju” (72).

unrestricted movement and unconquered frontiers entails that of a rootless and displaced existence, even if that is only the myth of the settlers; the ancient culture of native Americans cherished a belief in the sacredness of place. As opposed to this, Mother's desire for an egzohistorical existence is a direct result of her own experience of the brutal force of history rather than the lack of it. Donald's position is made possible by a cultural belief in the rupture between the present and past which, according to De Certeau, is representative of the western understanding of historical progression. Nowhere else is the past perceived as residing outside of the present moment. On the contrary, it is "a treasure placed in the *midst* of the society that is its memorial, a food intended to be chewed and memorized" (de Certeau 1988, 4). In pre-modern societies, therefore, the present and the past exist in a relationship that borders synchronicity, with layers building one upon another. "History is the privilege," says de Certeau speaking of the significance of the past for traditional societies, "that must be remembered so that one shall not oneself be forgotten" (4). However, a disruption of this historical arrangement is what Mother deems responsible for the destruction of one's present and chances for a meaningful future: "you can't be happy when the past is all you have and when you don't give up your memories. [...] Whoever lives with history is not living with life, he's a corpse even when he's alive" (*Bait* 59).²⁷⁰ Her son offers a more structured analysis of the problem of societies arrested in the discourse of the past:

Suddenly everyone knew what the real meaning of the past had been, but no one noticed that the future was no longer being talked about, nor even the present, that it was not a question of a psychoanalytical reliving of some event in order to establish its true sense, but that the past, life in the past, was being offered in exchange for life in the present, that a life already lived through was being designated the only genuine

²⁷⁰ "onaj ko živi sa istorijom, ne živi sa životom, mrtvac je čak i kada je živ" (*Mamac* 96).

life; that is, life was being asked to be a constant marking of time, a continual reenactment of the past, which becomes merely an end in itself.²⁷¹ (86)

It is not an exaggeration to say that ‘the past’ was the common denominator around which the ex-Yugoslav crisis and the subsequent civil wars revolved. Its various revisions offered by nationalist-chauvinist forces of Yugoslav constitutive nations were thrown as a bone of contention to the people amidst a disastrous economic situation and power struggle among different nationalist lobbies in the common Federation. In the massive abuse of historic discourse, launched from positions of power but soon sweeping the country as an epidemic, the past of each nation was being reinvented and reimagined in an endless game of placing their roots as far back into antiquity as the popular imagination allowed. The past was being used as an excuse for the rectification of, and vengeful punitive campaigns against the alleged perpetrators of ancient wrongs.²⁷² In relation to the narrator’s problematizing of such revisionist discourse of the past it is

²⁷¹ “Odjednom su svi znali šta je bilo pravo značenje prošlosti, a niko nije primećivao da se više ne govori o budućnosti, čak ni o sadašnjosti, da nije reč o psihoanalitičkom preživljavanju nekog događaja ne bi li se utvrdio njegov pravi smisao, već da se prošlost, život u prošlosti, nudi kao zamena životu u sadašnjosti, da se preživljen život postavlja kao jedini stvarni život, odnosno, da se od života traži da bude stalno tapkanje u mestu, neprekidno odigravanje prošlosti koje postaje samo sebi cilj” (138).

²⁷² Collective memory and official history were manipulated on all sides in the Yugoslav conflict. History became the most sensitive, and potentially dangerous, subject to teach, prone to frequent revisions and radical changes. Whole periods of history lessons disappeared from school textbooks overnight only to be replaced by the revised past achievements of particular nations. It was a period of true ‘history in the making’ anticipated by Pavić’s *Dictionary* almost a decade prior to the actual events. The period that suffered most radical revisions was WWII, as mentioned above, although no period or event of even the most minor significance for a particular nation was spared. It must be emphasized that mother tongue(s) both as school subjects and spoken languages shared the sad destiny of history. For example, only the *Rules of Writing (Pravopis)* of the Serbian language saw no less than nine revisions in the period between 1990-1993, published by different bodies including the major linguistic authority, the SANU (Serbian Academy of Science and Art). This manipulation of the language, extant at all levels of society, was manifested by the general confusion of media houses, public and private, which were in obvious disagreement on even the most basic language principles. One of such issues was the official script of the Serbian language. As Serbo-Croatian, thanks to the reformations dating back into the 18th century, can be written both in Cyrillic and Roman Latin scripts, the script issue became one of contention between different nationalist camps. Thus, Serbia saw a public revival of the long-neglected Cyrillic script, while Croatia forbade any public use thereof. Both scripts used to be taught at schools in both nations prior to the breakup of the Federation. Roman Latin script remains in use in Serbia, both as a tool of writing Serbian, as well as foreign languages. During the period in question, mother tongue textbooks likewise changed in motion, with the removal of writers belonging to the rivaling nation(s), and the addition of, sometimes quite obscure, national writers.

interesting to note that Mother interprets the position of Jewish Holocaust survivors as one which, in spite of the horrors which cannot be forgiven or forgotten, is not the one which blocks the construction of the future. Unlike Serbs, Croats, Albanians, and others from the ex-Yugoslav territories, whose competitive versions of the truth keep them clinched in battles, wars, and resentments which are forever new incarnations of more ancient ones, the Jewish nation has moved on. Mother's silence is directed precisely against this kind of history created for the purpose of setting a normative of power and control. In the divided attention she gives to each in her testimony she sharply distinguishes between the collective historical discourse and *her* own experience as a victim of its consequences.

The extrication from the past is a duty that the individual owes to him/herself alone, not for the sake of justifying the victims or stigmatizing the perpetrators, but exclusively for the purpose of the creation of an individual consciousness of the past dedicated to life in the future. This, however, does not entail the erasure of the memory of the past, although it leans towards the position de Certeau ascribes to the West—of the creation of a rupture between the past and present. What is problematic is the interpretation of the rupture—whether it is taken to be a definite break with the past and turn towards the future in an attempt to erase the previous history, or whether it is a gesture towards an *evolution* into the future founded on the past, but not burdened by it. Another problematic issue that emerges is the willingness of the victimized party to participate in the creation of this rupture, or whether its sole purpose is in easing the guilty consciousness of perpetrators. In *Bait* this position of the distancing between the past and present, and of the affirmation of the present without relegating the past to oblivion is exemplified by the

stance of the Jewish community towards the crimes committed against them. When asked to name the guilty ones for the crimes against Jews during WWII in Yugoslavia, “the Jewish community merely produced the lists of names and places and refused to speak. [...] the Jewish community did not believe in the naming of the guilty but rather in the naming of the victims” (70).²⁷³

Mother’s silence about the events that led to her suffering resonates with the silence of the Jewish community. The gesture of omission of the names of perpetrators and globally remembered events functions by the logic of the annihilating silence that Mother applies to most of the commonly known and recorded history. It is intended as a diminution of history’s significance to the point of erasure. Instead of giving any stage time to the perpetrators, Mother accentuates her own importance, and identifies herself as a victim of historic injustice. The victim appropriates history for herself, in fact, appropriates a small piece of it and stamps it with her name. Moreover, Mother individualizes a force that resists individualization, and instead functions in collectivities, in numbers and masses. Simultaneously, Mother assumes responsibility for the chunk of history that belongs to her. Everything that happened to her personally was a consequence of her decisions and actions. Her son echoes this persuasion in his position that each individual carries his or her own burden of historical responsibility, however negligible and indirect it may seem in a broader temporal projection. His own consisted in carrying a broken rifle for a whole year when conscripted for the army duty, and not reporting it to his superiors. That apparently insignificant episode, in his belief, was surely indicative of a large-scale collapse of the society which was badly malfunctioning

²⁷³ “jevrejska zajednica je samo izvadila spiskove imena i mesta, i odbila da govori. [...] jevrejska zajednica ne veruje u imenovanje krivaca već u imenovanje žrtava” (113).

underneath the seemingly efficient appearances. Moreover, the narrator reminisces, that same unreported broken rifle could have destroyed or saved someone's life in the latest war.

Is Extrication from History at all Possible?

At this point it is necessary to revisit the narrator's intention of writing a story, the thought that he contemplates throughout the text, which originates in the mutually exclusive dynamics of two imminent impulses. On the one hand it stems from the desire for transformation, liberation from all the layers that create his old identity: family, language, history. It implies a translation of the exile into the parlance of his adopted culture. An active impulse in itself, it involves the interiorization of the otherness represented in Donald, the acquisition of writing skills, the overwriting of the mother tongue. Ultimately, it should guide him towards attaining the truth stemming from the void left after the deletion of all previous content. On the other hand, his exercise in writing marks the production of a literary text as an expression of the self-perpetuating melancholia. It is in the unclaimed territory created by the dynamics of these opposing desires that the text-to-be and its author find themselves towards the conclusion of the narrative.

Melancholia, according to Kristeva, triggers artistic production, the assumption which makes it possible to account for the literal flood of cultural and artistic activity at times of political crises. The void created by the loss of the parental/divine/national symbol inspires a cultural production unchallenged by any singular period of relative prosperity. Paradoxically, the "subject's battle with symbolic collapse" (Kristeva 1989,

24) which prompts literary (therapeutic) creation in the melancholic competes with the exile's impulse to substitute the absent symbol by, perhaps, filling the void with his newly asserted subjectivity.²⁷⁴ In *Bait* this paradox translates into an insoluble conflict in the narrator between the deplorable loss of the symbolic and imperative of its substitution. His writing, therefore, is "that adventure of the body and signs that bears witness to the affect—to sadness as imprint of separation and beginning of the symbol's sway," which is contradicted by "joy as imprint of the triumph that settles me in the universe of artifice and symbol" (Kristeva 1989, 22). The work of "settling" of the narrator into the alien "universe" of his adopted culture implies a multilayered transformation which is a liberation from the "burden of history," to quote Hayden White, by the creation of a "rupture" between the past and present, as much as the assertion of his subjectivity by the creation of a *written text*. His text is to be the announcement of his "transformation into something else. Into someone else" (*Bait* 116), the vehicle of his conversion and proof of the accomplishment of his break with the past.²⁷⁵

As has previously been mentioned, the original idea of an alphabetical translation of Mother's testimony into a story is a possibility that is discussed throughout the novel, and at the point of the actual transformation of her speech into his writing the reader is left in suspension about the final outcome of the narrator's attempt. The reasons for Donald's skepticism about the possibility of creating a story based on Mother's testimony differ from that of the narrator. Donald's resonates with a condemnation of language to

²⁷⁴ It may be useful to go back to the discussion on the substitution of religion by nationalism in Part One in order to better contextualize the collective dimension of this text. The loss of the symbolic in that case is the national body which had successfully replaced the divine symbol. The absence thus created results in melancholia on the collective level which is comparable to its form in individuals.

²⁷⁵ "preobražaj u nešto drugo. U nekog drugog" (*Mamac* 188).

death by writing: “Writing is a disbelief in words, he said, in speech, in any possibility of narration, it is truly, he said, a flight from language, and not, as they say, a sinking in language itself” (10).²⁷⁶ The narrator’s hesitation to alphabetize Mother’s testimony cannot originate in this premise. His undertaking to write a story is further complicated by his anxiety as the author of the anticipated text that writing is simply a process of mediation: “Writing is frustration, anger against the fact that you are just an instrument, a body which has to hold the pen while writing down the story belonging to somebody else” (Albahari 1997, 54).²⁷⁷ It is a corroboration of the Foucauldian argument of the sacrificial nature of language leading towards the conclusion about the existence of a “link between writing and death manifested in the total effacement of the individual characteristics of the writer” (117). Self-effacement is thus the sacrifice of the author; not the author of *Tsing* or *Bait*, but rather the author of a text within both of these texts. Both narratives are complicated by the double play of texts-within-texts which themselves overwrite the symbolic collapse. They exist at the borderlines of melancholia caused by a symbolic or real death. *Tsing*, unlike *Bait* is concerned solely with the ‘real’ death of the father, which fuels the narrator/author of the text-within-the-text with melancholia caused by the individual grief at the tragic yet necessary parricide. *Bait*, however, contains the symbolic dimension which renders matricide inevitable.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ “Pisanje je neverica u reči, rekao je, u govor, u bilo kakvu mogućnost pripovedanja, ono je, rekao je, zapravo bekstvo od jezika, a ne, kako kažu, tonjenje u sam jezik” (*Cink* 16-7).

²⁷⁷ “Pisanje je frustracija, gnev protiv činjenice da si samo instrument, telo koje treba da pridrži pero dok zapisuje priču koja pripada nekom drugom” (*Cink* 61).

²⁷⁸ *Tsing* is very much the other half of this ‘parental diptych,’ this time about the father. After Father’s death the narrator escapes to a long trip around the United States where he finds consolation in its vast spaces and small towns, while megapolises like New York make him feel alone and depressed. It is interesting that each of the two deaths is followed by the narrator’s escape into the New World. Mother’s, however, symbolizes the total loss of ground and identity, and the escape is permanent. Each of the two books, likewise, deals with his inability to convey the memory of his departed parents into a written text. *Tsing* is to a greater extent a monologic exercise, although there is an ‘imaginary’ episodic female

Finally, it is necessary to make a connection to the previous argument of the resolution of the melancholy impasse in which the narrator's ego finds itself. The resolution of the melancholy condition in which the ego is trapped after a loss, according to Freud, fails once the ego liberated from its ties to a lost object does not make a new attachment:

The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance, and was abandoned; but the free libido was withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object. It did not find application there, however, in any one of several possible ways, but served simply to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. (Freud 159)

This "identification of the ego" with the object lost is of particular interest to my interpretation of Albahari's text. It confirms the ambiguity inherent in relation between the narrator's exiled state and the lost object(s) through which his ego identified and recognized itself—his country/mother/motherland. His ego possesses an openness towards forming new attachments, the fact most poignantly exemplified in his attempt at writing a story. Yet, it is the refutation of his intentions through the rejection of his writing effort that relegates him back to the ambivalence at the onset of his self-searching journey. The suspenseful tension of the expectation is conveyed in the narrator's anxiety about the outcome of Donald's verdict on his story. By this time he is fully identified with the story—he literally *is* the story; Donald's decision, therefore, is much more than a pronouncement passed on the quality of a friend's writing skills.

The text-within-the-text opens as the story of Mother, sucking him into itself until he identifies with Mother as the subject of the story, of the *truth*, the expression of his melancholy. It is towards the ending of the story that the competing drive towards his

interlocutor. *Bait* is to a large extent dialogic, as through most of the text the narrator's soliloquies are, in fact, conversations with Mother or Donald.

own inclusion in the adopted culture results in a “lie,” in a cliché narrative closure reverberating with the New World unconvincing optimism. Not even in this stereotyped love story of two people talking of the saving promise of love, however, can the desire to interiorize faith conquer the narrator’s inherent irony, and the loving couple departs into the sunset “trudging through the mud” (*Bait* 97) left by the rising river around them. The story becomes a metaphor of his condition, of his precarious position of non-belonging, as well as the defining moment. His narrative has effaced Mother and mutated into non-recognition. What he offers to Donald’s scrutinizing judgment is not only a story, but instead *everything*:

I’ve already put everything into Donald’s hands, and when I say this, I really do mean everything; nothing remains, least of all the part Mother spoke of, for I’ve offered Donald not only pages of a story but also everything that may happen after that story if, of course, he accepts what I have written (108).²⁷⁹

It is at this point of the total identification of the author with the story that the main conflict of the text, that between the new and old selves of the narrator, resurfaces as the focus of the reader’s attention. Implicating literally *everything*—issues of identity, historical involvement, language, memory, truth, his very existence—the conflict draws the reader back to the beginning. Once again we are reminded that what “Mother spoke of” as the major identity-identifying element was the sense of the place. Both her and her son’s exiled conditions, comparable to the family’s Jewishness, stem from the conflict between the lack of the sense of rootedness and a desire towards its acquisition. “I’m not [...] in any place, and perhaps, when I speak about a possible life, I am really speaking about place, about a life that becomes a place. A life without place is mere flitting about,”

²⁷⁹ “Ja sam *već* stavio sve u Donaldove ruke, i kada to kažem, onda doista mislim na sve, ništa nije ostalo, ponajmanje deo o kojem je majka govorila, jer Donaldu nisam ponudio samo stranice sa pričom već i sve ono što bi posle te priče moglo da se desi ukoliko, naravno, prihvati to što sam napisao” (175).

says the narrator (109).²⁸⁰ The narrator is finally able to *name* the source of his ambiguity. A possibility for its resolution is envisaged as his *mimesis* of the otherness that is so significantly embodied by Donald—his alter ego, autoerotic projection, real/imaginary friend. Finally, his assimilation into the new place, his *growing* into it cannot be perceived as a departure from the legacy of Mother, who was exemplary in her ability to adapt to the circumstances, places and situations. Rather than being transformed by them Mother managed to personalize them and make them hers. It is the father, however, who stands as a counterbalance to these efforts simply by virtue of his failure to invest himself in the place he occupies. In *Tsing*, which in many ways complements the narrative of the absent father in *Bait*, the father is identified with doubt and obstructs the narrator's access to life: "Doubt got stuck between the story and me; between life and me lay my father" (20).²⁸¹ Will, therefore, the final resolution of his condition in *Bait* incline more towards Mother's or Father's positions? Towards assimilation or resistance to it; faith or doubt?

There should be no doubt in the New World, according to Donald, because "whoever doubts remains forever on the bottom or at the beginning, which, at least for the person in question, amounts to the same thing" (7).²⁸² His response to the narrator's manuscript makes the narrator realize that his position is nowhere near the dissolution of ambiguity which defined it thus far. The closing scene is illustrative of his departure from his former identity while failing to approximate the new one embodied by Donald: "I close the folder and move aside; Donald, however, remains in the same spot. I, too, could

²⁸⁰ "nisam [...] ni na jednom mestu, i možda, kada govorim o mogućem životu, govorim zapravo o mestu, o životu koji postaje mesto. Život bez mesta je puko lepršanje" (175).

²⁸¹ "Između priče i mene preprečila se sumnja; između života i mene ležao je moj otac" (21).

²⁸² "onaj ko sumnja ostaje zauvek na dnu ili na početku, što je, bar kada je on u pitanju, ista stvar" (11).

perhaps return to my previous spot, but I can't determine where I was standing" (117).²⁸³

It is safe to conclude that the narrative closure is not achieved as the same ambiguity present at the beginning of the text reigns at its end. The "sense of the place" is absent from the final lines; it is not even a possibility any more. Donald's rejection of the written text, however, is significant to note. The edited manuscript is full of corrections, red notes, and question marks. What the narrator depicts as Donald's anger can be ascribed both to the fact that his writing is interpreted as an act against all rules of writing profession as interpreted by Donald. The narrator's wholehearted surrender of his being to Donald's judgment renders him vulnerable. Donald's refutation of his offer, however, leaves the narrator lingering in the undefined space that renders unattainable all that Donald signifies—new identity and settled, ahistorical, and unburdened existence. Furthermore, I would like to go back to Mother's remark about the impossibility of avoiding the choice that comes after a period of silence. Her son's story is a definitive break with his own muteness, yet it does not bring about the resolution of his status. On the contrary, it seems that the very attempt at speaking, i.e. *his* story, not only extends his melancholic phase but is instrumental in further deferring the resolution, at least judging by what ensues following Donald's rejection. The unresolved outcome of his writing attempt is as much an indication of yet another unresolved conflict in this text, that between words and silence. According to Donald, exiles and writers alike share the same fate both being condemned to existence on the boundaries of worlds: "the writer floats on

²⁸³ "Zatvaram fasciklu i pomeram se u stranu; Donald, međutim, ostaje na istom mestu. Mogao bih možda i ja da se vratim na prethodno mesto, ali ne mogu da utvrdim gde sam stajao" (188).

the surface, on the dividing line between worlds, on the boundary between speech and silence” (10).²⁸⁴

Let this image of “floating” above the condition of in-betweenness, therefore the *void*, lack of meaning, conclude the interpretation of the many textual complexities of *Bait*. Multiple uncertainties and contradictions arise in the curious relation between history and the narrator and Mother. Albahari employs the primordial narrative method—storytelling—to illustrate the rupture that history inflicts at the level of language. Long-forgotten magnetic audio tapes keep arrested the voice of his mother and her account of history. In order to listen to the tapes the narrator needs a magnet-o-phone, a recording device that nobody in Canada seems to possess any more. In the postmodern world that is racing its own future, the antiquated technological device becomes an appropriate metaphor for the anachronicity of memory. The narrator’s reconnection with Mother’s story is supposed to serve the ultimate end of his extrication from memory and history altogether and a beginning of a liberated, egzohistorical existence. His attempt to listen to the tapes for the first time, years after they were recorded, is supposed to lead to the ultimate death of memory—to his textualization of Mother’s story—in a foreign language, nonetheless. His striving to forget his language hides a profound fear of facing the pain in the language that is his own. Thus the medium of the recording of Mother’s story only further denudes the process of linguistic disjuncture and the elimination of the ability of language to create a coherent and meaningful narrative. The use of the audio tapes promotes a profound awareness of the speaking subject’s inevitable annihilation which comes as a consequence of her endeavors to avoid the incomprehensible logic of history and establish an order of her own. Most of all, the search for meaning and

²⁸⁴ “pisac pluta na površini, na razmeđi svetova, na granici između govora i tišine” (17).

reconnection that is juxtaposed to narrative disruption is conducted through the character of the mother whose memory enacts a feeling of nostalgia for something that has been irretrievably lost but remains unnamed.

From this inexplicable longing for the unnamable derives the title of the novel that only further emphasizes the irony of the narrator's pathetic efforts at, what Longinović tags "transhistorical becoming," or existence between identities.²⁸⁵ Longinović links the semantics of the title to the "associative value between *mama* and *mamac*," *mother* and *bait* in English, only to immediately shift "the narrative focus onto a mother, who is the real subject of the book" (np.). Longinović continues:

The new location offers the fantasy of empty semiotic spaces for new becoming through the cultural translation of memories carried from the past of the native location. It intrudes into the narrative as an afterthought by purging the debt to the native burden through writing. (np.)

The novel shows palpably painful evidence of the impossible longing for what in the Introduction I defined as the *absolute* and for the wholeness that disappears under the weight of historical reality. Mock-historical documentation employed, contrary to the unwritten rules of similar postmodern strategies, has the task of further accentuating the rupture left after the loss of the unnameable that is deplored in the text. There is no definitive closure to the narrative as it seems that the narrator never manages to overcome the void left after the linguistic rupture that faithfully reflects his identity crisis. It is again uncertain whether his crab-like steps backward in the darkness left after the disappearance of Donald and the ultimate rejection of his literary efforts suggest that the certainty should be sought in the safety of belonging. His only alternative is the continuation of meaningless "floating" over the void he himself created.

²⁸⁵ Tomislav Longinović, "Metahistories."

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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Fall 2005 Introduction to Literary Theory
Fall 2005 Introduction to Short Fiction
Spring 2005 Introduction to World Literature
Summer 2005 World Mythology
Fall 2004 World Mythology
Summer 2004 World Mythology
Spring 2004 World Mythology