

Dispensations of Partition: The Legacies of Balkanization in the Space-Time
of 20th Century World Literature

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Introduction: Legacies of Partition: The History, Politics, and Culture of Balkanization from the Berlin Conferences to the Berlin Wall and Beyond	1
The Literature of Balkanization: Methods and Texts	6
The Political Dispensations of Balkanization in the Balkans and Africa	12
The Aesthetic Horizons of Balkanization	21
Balkanization Histories and Berlin Conferences	29
Rationale of Texts and Chapter Outline.....	35
Chapter One: “What Makes Men Lust After Death”: History, Religion, and Nationalism after Imperial Partition in Rebecca West’s Travelogue <i>Black Lamb and Grey Falcon</i>	43
The Travelogue of Interrupted Return: Genre and Background	50
Gone “Guesting”: Beyond Tourist and Traveler	57
Macedonia: Europe’s Past and Nexus of Its Future.....	64
Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: St. Augustine and the Fallacy of Atonement.....	68
Manichaeism, Iconostasis, and the “Speculative” Soul of the Southern Slav	75
Slav Blood, Culture, and Nationalism: The Travelogue as Political Tract.....	85
Conclusion	95
Chapter Two: From Blood Tax to Blood Ties: The Eschatological Impulse of Ethnic Partition in Ivo Andrić’s Chronicle-Novel <i>Bridge on the Drina</i>	99
The Chronicle-Novel: Regimes of Time in Three Historical Eras of the Bridge	106
The Erstwhile Chronicler of Višegrad and the Chronicler-Narrator of <i>Drina</i>	116
Immanentizing the Katechon: <i>Pričanju</i> and the End of Time	124
From Blood Tax to Blood Ties: The “Slow Fever” of the Ottoman Empire	130
The Post-Partition Regime of Limitless Expanse and Quantification	138
The Apocalypse of Balkanization.....	145
Conclusion: Alihodja and the Reemergence of Individualism	150
Chapter Three: “Mutually Assured Development” and the “Color Wall”: Race at the Limits of Non-Alignment in Oskar Davičo’s Anticolonial Travelogue <i>In Black and White</i>	154
A Non-Aligned Canon: The Anti-Colonial Travelogue	161
The History and Origin of the Non-Aligned Movement: From Bandung to Belgrade...	167

The Cultural Development of the Non-Aligned Movement	175
“A Former White Man”: Africa and the Ethics of Racial Difference.....	178
“Similarities Do Not Bind”: Highlife and the “Same Old” Troubles	186
“They Are the Obligation of all Freedom-Loving People to Uphold”: Solidarity in Partition.....	191
Conclusion: The Legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement.....	196
Chapter Four: Apocatastasis Now!: The Failure of <i>Bildung</i> and the Regeneration of History in Ayi Kwei Armah’s Postcolonial Chronicle <i>Two Thousand Seasons</i>.....	203
Postcolonial Chronicle-Novel: The Janus-face of <i>jetztzeit</i> and <i>gleichzeit</i>	211
After Anoa: Initiation into Apocatastasis	221
The Arrested <i>Bildung</i> of the African State: Disappointment of a “been-to”	230
The Heresy of Regeneration on the African Continent	237
The Coming Community of Resistance: Against the Nostalgia of Return.....	243
Conclusion: Creative Violence and the “necessary preparation of the future way”	252
Coda: New Vectors of Balkanization	262
Bibliography	270

Introduction: Legacies of Partition: The History, Politics, and Culture of Balkanization from the Berlin Conferences to the Berlin Wall and Beyond

They looked at the paper and saw nothing in those curving lines, but they knew and understood everything, for their geography was in their blood and they felt biologically their picture of the world.

—Ivo Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*

Can't you get it in your head that your global or national politics really don't count for much unless you become ruthless with the fabric of the past?

—Wole Soyinka, *The Interpreters*

In the waning years of the 19th century, after nearly a century of internecine warring and a rampant expansion of their colonial engines, the “Great Powers” of Europe decided to give diplomacy a try. Hoping to mediate the imperial jostling for influence and territory that was feared would incite a continent-wide war that Europe could little afford, German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck convened a series of political summits that have come to be called the Berlin Congress of 1878 and the Berlin Conference of 1884. Hosting the European powers at the newly refurbished and thoroughly modernized Reich Chancellery, Bismarck sought to distinguish Germany as a diplomatic and imperial force on equal footing with the rest of Europe, despite its “belated” entry into the ranks of aspiring global empires. These diplomatic conferences mark a significant shift in the strategy of Europe’s empires, implementing a logic of partition in order to limit violence that might arise on the European continent due to their policies of territorial accumulation abroad.

At the time, Germany was considered Europe’s “belated nation” (*die verspätete Nation*) because it had only undergone national unification in 1871, when the disparate Prussian states defeated France and subsequently unified under Emperor Wilhelm I and Chancellor von

Bismarck to form the Second Reich.¹ Therefore, when the Ottoman empire began its descent into terminal crisis in the mid-19th century and could no longer adequately contain Russian and western European territorial and strategic aspirations in eastern Europe, Germany sought to step into this void as the diplomatic mediator of Europe. Bismarck was eager to distinguish himself in the game of diplomacy, to both catch Germany up to its European imperial counterparts and to showcase its diplomatic influence on the world stage, quelling the simmering tensions that were pointing to total war. The outcomes of both conferences were, at least temporarily, a huge boon to German diplomacy, serving to quell Russia's territorial ambitions and temper competition between the rest of the Great Powers.

The two Berlin conferences were instrumental in effecting this tectonic shift that would come to reshape not only Europe but the world map itself. In the Berlin Congress of 1878, the humanitarian crisis of the Christian population in the Islamic Ottoman empire was used as an excuse to partition the Balkans in the aftermath of the Russo-Turkish War of 1878. To curtail both Russian and Ottoman interests in Eastern Europe and shore up Western Europe's strategic interests, the Great Powers granted national independence to a very select few Balkan nations while remanding the rest to imperial administration by Austria or Turkey. The Berlin Conference of 1884 was convened to establish the ground rules for colonization of the African continent. Adopting the principle of "effective occupation," the Berlin Conference of 1884 incited the "Scramble for Africa" which gerrymandered the Continent into colonies exclusively to suit European economic and imperial aims. As a result of these two meetings in Berlin, the culturally and geographically disparate entities of the Balkans and Africa respectively confront an expansionist Europe at nearly the same time through the mechanism of territorial partition.

¹ See Helmuth Plessner, *Die verspätete Nation*.

When viewed through the lens of partition, the history and legacy of the Berlin conferences do not merely end with Europe's remapping in WWI, nor in the horrific brutality of mechanized mass death in WWII but contain a much longer afterlife. In fact, the partition of Berlin itself, with the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, is yet another node in this history that profoundly illustrates the intense materiality of this process, from which not even western Europe was exempt.² Though there are innumerable critical and creative studies of Berlin, this is nevertheless a side of the city that even Germanists have missed.³ Furthermore, those who focus specifically on the legacies of Berlin in the Balkans do not trace out the myriad connections to Africa and vice versa.⁴ And yet, in the mid-20th century, West Africa and Yugoslavia quite self-consciously fostered political and cultural ties precisely on such historic grounds in order to bridge the Pan-Slavic experiment, enshrined in Yugoslavia as a federation of socialist nations, and the Pan-African experiment, fostered by Guinea, Senegal and Ghana through the Organization of African Unity.

My central proposition is that because of their mutual encounter with European empire, the partitioned spaces of Yugoslavia and West Africa suffer a similarly unique set of economic, political and cultural legacies that leave comparable traces in their cultural consciousness, producing what I call a literature of balkanization. I believe that focusing on the histories of the Berlin conferences in the late 19th century reveals the various dispensations of balkanization in

² Bismarck's Reich Chancellery would have overlooked the Wall had it not been destroyed in 1945 by the Red Army for hosting Hitler's final bunker.

³ For canonical (semi-fictional) depictions of Berlin in this era, see especially Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) and Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* (1945). For critical work, see especially Katherine Roper's *German Encounters with Modernity* (1991) and Manfred Wilke's *The Path to the Berlin Wall* (2022) which impressively synthesize the myriad historical contexts of Berlin, the construction of the Wall and its legacy.

⁴ Mark Mazower and Misha Glenny both devote extensive space to the contexts and legacies of the Berlin Congress (1878), though Mazower's account is much less hampered by a thoroughgoing western exceptionalism and is therefore a markedly better account. See chapter 3 of Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: From the End of Byzantium to the Present Day* and chapters 3 and 4 of Misha Glenny, *The Balkans: Nationalism, War, and the Great Powers, 1804-2011*.

the 20th century as a logic of territorial, ethnic, religious, racial, and national partition: the imposition of political boundaries based on certain historical narratives which legitimate the division and distribution of land. Such partitions manifest themselves in culture at the periphery of the world's great historical empires, formally encoded in geographies, social intercourse, and the mundane happenstance at empire's frontier, and ultimately in their narrative description.

In particular, I read balkanization as a historical phenomenon articulating a technique of empire that is deployed by the hegemonic powers at Berlin which subsequently develops into a *cultural pattern*. I suggest that balkanization structures an epistemology of partition that arises out of the material history of imperialism, forming a cultural critique of the various structures that conditioned partition and exploited pre-existing differences in order to power the accumulative engine of empire. In mid-20th century Yugoslavia and West Africa, this produces a unique coalition of resistance to the forces of partition, rooted in internationalism and cross-cultural unity, which is locked in a constant battle with the worst excesses of nationalism and revanchism, read as symptoms of imperial partition.

Therefore, 19th-century Berlin initiates a condition of rupture which must be overcome culturally as well as politically, explaining the constant litigation over the liberatory potential of formations like the nation-state in the 20th century, considered both an inherited structure of imperial hegemony and a vehicle of resistance and self-determination. This means that balkanization articulated a limit that 20th century philosophies and techniques of liberation had to overcome, since it both undergirds the divisive nature of political existence and contains the latent possibility of imagining the world as radically open, unpartitioned, indivisible, in which real differences of identity can emerge without the potential for their violent, oppressive and exclusionary mobilization.

I am especially interested in the literary and political legacies of the Berlin Conferences as they inaugurate certain techniques of balkanization that are captured in two specific narrative genres: the travelogue and the chronicle, representing the spatial and temporal extension of balkanization as a narrative concern of partitioned spaces. I examine Rebecca West's travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941) alongside Ivo Andrić's chronicle-novel *Bridge on the Drina* (1945) to discuss the pre-WWII cultural and political dynamics of balkanization in Yugoslavia. I follow this with an investigation of *In Black and White* (1962), a travelogue by Oskar Davičo together with Ayi Kwei Armah's chronicle *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973). As I will show, scholarship on both African and Balkan culture has failed to properly constellate the connections of these two conferences and the historical and cultural legacies that open in their juxtaposition. My dissertation seeks to fill this gap in scholarship by placing the question of genre central to a systematic approach of the cultural dispensations of balkanization, from their roots in a Berlin conference room to their logical conclusion on the battlefields of two consecutive World Wars and beyond.

Driving my investigation into the literature of balkanization are two sets of questions, the first articulating an array of political inquiries and the second aesthetic. For the first set, I consider if balkanization is a necessary and systemic precondition of colonial extraction or imperial hegemony or more strictly of the moribund European and Ottoman empires of the 19th century? Why does balkanization continue to perpetuate itself, often threatening national integrity in certain zones of religious or ethnic conflict long after the historic empires died away? What are the advantages of this structural and historical comparison? The aesthetic concerns that drive my project are: what are the ways that balkanization is registered at the formal and textual level? What is the connection between the delimitations of literary genre and the political process

of balkanization? Do we see examples of the literature of balkanization in other historic times of similar structural conditions or does the historic arc of Berlin Conference to Berlin Wall roughly represent a “periodization” of this literature? Why do the travelogues appear so optimistic about the future possibility of cross-cultural unity and the chronicles so negative? Why is balkanization often countered in cultural terms through a pious or profane messianism? How is balkanization rendered in eschatological terms as mediating both etioloical return and apocalyptic renewal?

To begin to address these questions, first I will elaborate on balkanization’s political dispensations as they appear in the texts under consideration in this dissertation, which coalesce into cycles of violence that come to be understood in terms of “ethnonationalism” in Yugoslavia and as “tribalism” in Africa. These terms, I suggest, share a common cause in balkanization, marking similar discursive trends that can be usefully compared in the context of the 20th century’s international unity movements, which attempted to overcome the inherited limitations of national political formation given the fluctuating imperial landscape. I will then address the aesthetics of balkanization through an investigation of the travelogue and chronicle genres, expanding on the way in which each contributes to an articulation of a shifting 20th century topography, though in surprisingly chiasmic ways. From there, I will address and expand the histories of the Berlin conferences and their material and cultural legacies in the mid-20th century before concluding with a final reflection on the rationale of the historic arc that structures the dissertation and some closing thoughts.

The Literature of Balkanization: Methods and Texts

The word ‘balkanization’ is a neologism that first emerges in European newspapers in the interwar period, meaning to “divide (a region) into a number of smaller, often mutually hostile,

political or territorial units.”⁵ As Europe was reeling from the collective shock of WWI, this term comes to characterize the way in which the territorial partition of the Balkans in the late 19th century absurdly led to trench warfare in the European heartland in the early 20th. Some forty years later, when the arbitrary boundaries of the European colonies in Africa become the borders of the African nation-states, balkanization once again enters the public discourse, where it is ascribed to the political reality of the fledgling African nations in which “tribalist” competition emerges over control of the colonial state apparatus.⁶ Describing nearly the same set of phenomena as in the Balkans, in postcolonial Africa, balkanization is associated with a bitter disappointment in the desultory promises of the postcolonial nation-state and the violence that attends the struggle over its administration.

After WWII, there arose new philosophies of liberation that emphasized internationalist and collectivist solutions to the ongoing onslaught of history, which in fact saw no possibility for liberation or individual autonomy without social emancipation beyond the narrowly constrained bounds allowed by the hegemonic structures governing global affairs. Indeed, the many identitarian and political unity movements that emerged in the mid-century relate a desire for transcultural harmony and class- or race-based solidarity that can overcome the inherited contradictions of political formation in the modern world. The grand ambitions of 19th century Pan-Slavism and Pan-Africanism, for example, were replaced with more geographically delimited regional sovereignty and unity movements, such as the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia or the Organization of African Unity. Furthermore, movements such as Third

⁵ "balkanize, v.". OED Online. March 2017. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/370685>.

⁶ See Frantz Fanon's perhaps most well-known critique of postcolonial nationalism "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" describes the failure of the African nation builders to fulfill its world-historic duty stems from an incapability of "extending its vision of the world sufficiently," resulting in a concomitant "falling back towards old tribal attitudes" in which "race feeling in its most exacerbated form is triumphing" (Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 195).

Worldism and Non-Alignment attempted to solidify and formalize truly global racial, cultural, and continental ties between the formerly colonized countries of the world as an alternative to the totalizing blocs that dominated Cold War geopolitics.

By examining these movements through the lens of the Berlin conferences and the historical arc of partitions they inaugurate, I suggest that balkanization functions as a formal limit of historical articulations of cross-cultural belonging that attempted to transcend national belonging as the prevailing heuristic of international self-determination. This helps to resolve the perennial questions and contradictions that critiques of postcolonial nationalism have had to grapple with, such as how to explain the nation-state's on-going and continued relevance as a political category while not totalizing every cultural expression as always-already articulating some formation of national identity. And yet, because of the failures of these cross-cultural unity movements to fulfill their liberatory mandates to overcome the limits of their artificially imposed borders, I posit that balkanization forms the basis of historical inquiry into the conditions of the very present.

In order to delineate a literature of balkanization, I adopt a methodology of comparing what Susan Stanford Friedman described as “jarring juxtapositions,” tracking balkanization as one of the “powerful vortex of geohistorical conditions that coalesce to produce sharp ruptures from the past.”⁷ The territorial partition that marks the process of balkanization comprises one such “sharp rupture” that has planetary consequences and provides a methodological basis for comparison of such disparate land masses as the Balkans and Africa as they exist through their mutual histories of partition.⁸ Such surprising juxtapositions potentiate “more possibilities of sudden breakthroughs, of innovations and transformative changes” which are unevenly

⁷ Susan S. Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms*: 155.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 154-55.

distributed through space and time and can only emerge as observable phenomena through comparison and the mutual light each context sheds upon the other.⁹ Tracing the “sharp rupture” of balkanization, the juxtapositions placed side by side in this dissertation illuminate the complexities of historical perceptions of belonging and division while simultaneously imagining futuristic investments in solidarity and unity.

More specifically, this dissertation juxtaposes a pair of travelogues and chronicles about Yugoslavia published in the immediate context of WWII with a pair about West Africa published during the Cold War era. In so doing, I am essentially establishing two vectors of comparison: the first between West Africa and Yugoslavia in the mid-century, and the second between the travelogue and chronicle as generic forms that emphasize certain spatio-temporal features of the history of partition. Reading these texts chronologically also allows me to demonstrate the way in which this history unfolds thematically and formally over the course of the 20th century, though in each case in a slightly different shape and to distinctive ends.

Each of the authors whose works I examine are canonical in their own national sphere and to varying degrees in the world literary sphere. In this dissertation, I seek to reframe them within the national, European and world literary canons by reading them at the triangulation of empire, partition, and world history which I believe has the added benefit of emphasizing forms of cultural circulation that avoid, where possible, the prescribed channels of transmission mediated by the European metropole. This dissertation takes up the critique of Enlightenment history that postcolonial studies and world literature have produced by emphasizing the priority of balkanized spaces themselves in mapping out the new global topography that attended the tectonic shifts which preceded, produced, and followed WWII and subsequently reshaped the

⁹ Ibid., 172.

time-space of human experience across the planet in such dramatic ways.

First, I look at the work of Rebecca West, a British feminist and literati, who visits Yugoslavia a number of times on the eve of WWII, writing *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941) in order to ascertain why the small tucked away corner of Europe again it seems to herald destruction for the West. Emphasizing the convoluted histories in the country which have pitted the nation's various ethnic groups against each other, West concludes her travel epic with a rousing, downright propagandistic, anti-imperialist polemic that sheds light on the historical travesties perpetrated in the name of European civilization, once again manifesting in Europe's core as Nazism. West's travelogue is juxtaposed with Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić's chronicle-novel *Bridge on the Drina* (1945), published almost immediately upon the liberation of Belgrade from Nazi occupation. A trained historian as well as high ranking diplomat, Andrić buried himself in his bombed-out apartment with his notes on the religious history of eastern Bosnia to write a stunning 400-year epic of the Mehmed Pasha Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad from its construction at the height of the Ottoman empire to destruction at the hands of a retreating Austrian army in WWI. Tracing the bridge's symbolic transition initially as a link to the wide world, it eventually comes to represent division and distance between the competing Yugoslav ethnicities at the frontiers of the "Great" empires.

After WWII, as African independence movements gain momentum and seek to establish their autonomy and sovereignty, Oskar Davičo, the renowned Serbian poet, novelist and playwright, visits Senegal, Guinea, and Ghana in the wake of Yugoslavia's president Josip Broz Tito's Continent-wide "Peace Tour" promoting the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). In his travelogue, *In Black and White* (1962), Davičo articulates the shared legacies of balkanization in West Africa and Yugoslavia as the grounds for their future collaboration through the NAM,

developed as a proud non-military, anticolonial alternative to the two-bloc structure of Cold War politics, which had bifurcated the world. Davičo points to the shared past of partition as the means for a future unity and solidarity that would supererogate the balkanization of Yugoslavian and West African history. I conclude my investigation of balkanization with Ghanaian writer Ayi Kwei Armah. Armah, educated in the United States, returns to Ghana in the early 1960s and, horrified by the postcolonial bureaucracy which merely reproduced the dysfunction of the colonial system, writes a series of disappointed *bildungsromane* that earn him rather hostile criticism from his contemporaries. In response, he pens *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), a rather bleak chronicle of a semi-fictional African people's history over a thousand years of overlapping imperial incursions and self-inflicted injury that elaborates the need for a new communalist ethical system to counter the divisiveness and destruction wrought by centuries of racist exploitation and devastation.

The first pairing of this project examines the afterlife of balkanization figured as a crisis of individual autonomy in which history becomes a deterministic force which terminally limits the horizons of future possibility to cyclical repetitions of historic violence. In this reading, the Balkans are continuously presented as the well of the past. Containing what Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser's described as "too much history, too much memory—much more than it can bear..." the region offers important historical lessons but no possible modes of egress from the cycles of repetitious violence that characterize its past.¹⁰ The second pairing, on the other hand, focuses on the West African context after WWII, in the wake of the steady independence movements that began midcentury and the internationalism that postcolonial independence inspired. Here I articulate the emergence of a new cross-cultural social ethic as the necessary response to the

¹⁰ Stojmenska-Elzeser, "Does Macedonian Literature Belong More to a Balkan, a Slavic, or an European Space," 387.

crisis of individual autonomy incited specifically by balkanization. The indefatigable resistance to dehumanization and division displayed in African history presents the Continent as the horizon of futurity itself, becoming the basis for a social ethic of intercultural unity while preserving the autonomy of the individual at the same time. As promised, these pairings lead from the political to the aesthetic dimensions of balkanization, tracing the history of partition as a political technique and a cultural process.

Through these comparisons, I show how the term balkanization emerges as a result of the global upheaval of WWI drawing on Balkan history as an explosive matrix of imperial paternalism and innate division that fueled the region's cycles of bitter territorial and ethno-religious conflicts. The term congeals in the public consciousness, however, after World War II, to describe the chaotic struggle for control over the African nation-state. In both cases, it somewhat cynically captures these geographically disconnected political cycles as part of a system of imperial hegemony while pejoratively ascribing the dysfunction to the partitioned spaces themselves. This became ever more apparent in the wake of the ethno-nationalist violence that punctuated the end of the 20th century in both Africa and the Balkans, which has cemented the discursive relationship of territorial partition and ethnic violence ever since.

The Political Dispensations of Balkanization in the Balkans and Africa

Maria Todorova's field defining work *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) is central to any discussion of the Balkans and balkanization. She inaugurated a new wave of critical Balkan studies when she coined the term "balkanism" to reflect the discursive accretion of meaning, mostly pejorative, to the Balkan peninsula. "Balkanism" is similar to the mechanism that Edward Said's postcolonial critique identified as Orientalism but are regionally specific to this critical crossing point between East and West. Taking Todorova's intervention to heart, I do not employ

balkanization as an ascription of dysfunction within Yugoslavia and West Africa but rather to name a technique of empire itself. However, unlike Todorova, I posit that balkanization is both a historically fitting and rhetorically relevant term because it articulates an actual technique of imperial hegemony that was applied to the region of the Balkans and then exported to the rest of the world to varying degrees.¹¹ Used to divide and control subjugated spaces, it later resulted in a political and aesthetic consciousness of partition, in part because of the historic rupture of World War II that precipitated such annihilative horrors for the second time in the century.

Just as importantly, the critiques streamed from the spaces of colonial exploitation began to name and describe the racial and imperial engines that had pillaged Africa and Asia (and the Balkans!) for centuries in terms of balkanization and its antidotes. After WWII, balkanization no longer simply refers to the political quagmire of southeastern Europe; it was in fact exported worldwide. Yet whereas balkanization results in “tribalism” in Africa, in Yugoslavia it is characterized as “ethno-nationalism.”¹² Thus, in its Balkan context, the term cannot escape the historic weight of past cycles of ethnic violence over disputed borders and territories,¹³ while in Africa, this weight has conditioned a cultural response rooted in negation and resistance.

Todorova defines the Balkans as a region of southeastern Europe that draws its name and any coherent cultural credibility as a concept from its Ottoman legacy, though it has “always

¹¹ Todorova objects to the discursive web associated with the word balkanization as a pejorative, tied into a long history of the Balkans serving in the European imaginary as that unclean, backwards zone of barbarism. However the term is far too historically and materially relevant to the practice and proliferation of partition. Furthermore, Todorova’s ethical objection is rooted in her rather pronounced insistence of Bulgarian association with ethnic violence in the Balkans, since Bulgaria (and Romania), she argues, does not have the same history of ethnonationalism as the Yugoslav Balkans. Sympathetic as I am to defenses of one’s oft-beleaguered Balkan homeland, Todorova’s conclusion is neither true nor particularly critically useful, since balkanization did emerge and does characterize global perceptions no matter how much as any person from the Balkans may love the region for its many admirable qualities. See Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 32, 168-170.

¹² Fanon, “Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” 105.

¹³ Though I do not have time to expand here, per Mazower, it is in no small part due to the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s that such cycles become seen as the teleological endpoint for its “inevitable” failure as an experiment (*The Balkans*, 147-48).

evoked the image of a bridge or crossroads.”¹⁴ Akin to what Mary Louise Pratt calls “contact zones,” this small, mountainous peninsula sitting between the Ottoman and Western empires has been a critical crossing point, nevertheless remaining only liminally part of Europe.¹⁵ Larry Wolff described it as “a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe. Eastern Europe defined Western Europe by contrast, as the Orient defined the Occident, but was also made to mediate between Europe and the Orient.”¹⁶ It has, as a result, accumulated a weighty pejorative discursive value, especially in the wake of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Captured in such characterizations as Paul Ricœur’s description of the uneven spatial and geographic distribution of traumatic memory in the Balkans, figured as phenomenological overload, Todorova’s term “Balkanism” describes the process of discursive villainization that such ascriptions perpetuate.¹⁷

I believe it is still less obfuscatory to simply name the pre-existing term balkanization as a technique of empire, injecting a virulent form nationalism into the changing nature of global affairs starting in the 19th century into the present. In what scholars have termed the “ethnic turn” in nationalism, the organizing principle of the nation-form undergoes a transformation, (which has been pinned to about 1880, though I suggest a better date would be 1878), which enshrines the formerly maligned micro-nationalism, or “balkanization,” as the de facto mode of national self-determination, with ethnicity and language becoming the decisive criteria for enforcing

¹⁴ Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 15, 176.

¹⁵ Pratt, *Imperial Eye*, 4.

¹⁶ Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, 7.

¹⁷ Ricœur’s study of the psycho-historic trauma in the wake of the Balkan wars leads him to suggest “symbolic wounds calling for healing are stored in the archives of the collective memory. More precisely, what, in historical experience, takes the form of paradox—namely, too much memory here, not enough memory there—can be reinterpreted in terms of the categories of resistance and compulsion to repeat, and finally, can be found to undergo the ordeal of the difficult work of remembering” (Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 79).

historical claims to ancestral homelands.¹⁸ As a result, empire no longer advances its strategic and economic aims through territorial expansion so much as intentional national fragmentation or tenuous “stabilizing” of territorial conflicts.¹⁹ For Eric Hobsbawm, 1880 then marks the moment where the primary objective of imperial expansion shifted from a focus on acquiring territory *qua* territory to accumulating capital in its various forms; the nature of imperial borders experienced a correlate shift.²⁰

No longer fluid, porous, minimally-patrolled and surveilled marginal hinterlands, where various legal and underground economies thrived and where numerous groups accreted and settled, post-1880 imperial borders began to take on the much more rigid sense of impermeable, bureaucratically controlled political boundaries of modern states.²¹ However, only a select few ethnicities initially qualified for statehood, based on certain principles of national integrity rooted in racialized European ideals of proper state size, population and function.²²

As smaller and smaller nations appear after WWI, it becomes the primary heuristic of belonging within nations themselves, introducing a new tendency in nationalism away from the early 19th century ideas of *grossstaatenbildung* (formation of large states) advanced by early theoreticians of nationalism such as Gustave Kohn and Giuseppe Mazzini and toward the

¹⁸ This leads Walker Connor for instance to state that there is no key difference between the terms nationalism and ethnonationalism (*Ethnonationalism*, xi). See also Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1870*, 31, 102. While Hobsbawm does not specifically limn the Berlin conferences in this shift, the historical constellation he draws places Berlin squarely in the center of these new political movements in history; whether the conferences themselves were the causal impetus or merely symbolized this shift is a conversation for historians and political scientists to hash out.

¹⁹ Timothy Brennan writes that “once European nationalism was a project of unity, but is now a project of consolidation” and citing Hobsbawm, says “the characteristic national movement of our time is separatist, aiming at the breakup of nation states.” (“The National Longing for Form,” 69).

²⁰ See Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, 33.

²¹ Whereas prior to 1880, the power of the state was much more heavily concentrated in its geographic centers than its peripheries, after the formal territorialization of the entire planet through imperialism, there was a shift in the nature of state power toward a more even distribution of sovereignty throughout the extent of its territory; thus, the territorial integrity of a nation became the bulwark upon which rests the notion of political sovereignty in the modern age (Hobsbawm, “Some reflections on ‘The Break-up of Britain,’” 3).

²² See Hobsbawm, *Nation and Nationalism*, 31.

formerly abjured balkanized *kleinstaaterei* (system of mini-states or micronationalism).²³ While the concepts of the nation and ethnic identity pre-existed this moment, stretching all the way back into antiquity, this moment marks a new turn in the legitimating basis of a nation's claim to a territory and introduces ethnicity, alongside attending concepts like religion and language, as this primary legitimating basis.²⁴ Here for the first time in modern history, ethnicity is inextricably tied to the legitimating force of the nation as justification of state sovereignty.

Neither Smith nor Hobsbawm, however, connect these phenomena to the Berlin Conferences, which formally ensconced the ethnic basis of the nation at the international level. Even Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, while suggesting that the nation is the "most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time,"²⁵ does not fully account for the effect of the Berlin Conferences on the trajectory of nationalism's expression, why ethnicity became the primary imaginative mode of thinking in terms of national belonging and became the basis of national legitimacy after the territorialization of the whole planet.

Anthony Smith suggests this "ethno-linguistic" revanchism prevails in Eastern Europe from 1870-1914 and returns in the 1970-80s in Asia and Africa, and in the 1990s in the Balkans, "after the anti-colonial civic political nationalisms...had spent their force."²⁶ But he does not offer an account as to what had depleted their energies. And despite the fact that Todorova roots her account of Balkanism in Said's notion of Orientalism, unpacking the discursive history that

²³ Ibid., 31, 93.

²⁴ See Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. According to Smith, the period surrounding the Berlin Conferences mark the intersection of the trajectories of two tendencies in the nation-form: the territorial and ethnic states (133-38, 144-147). Over the course of the 19th and into the 20th century, the ethnic model by necessity takes over the territorial, as all existing territory had all been claimed by one sovereign power or another. The ethnic, though, emerges in order to supplement the "revitalization of ethnic ties and sentiments – by the tracing of alleged pedigrees and from the rewriting of history from a nativist standpoint" (ibid., 145).

²⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 3.

²⁶ Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, 121. Later, Smith reflects on the more recent changes in nationalism and notes the resurgence of ethnic nationalism on a global scale after World War II is especially heightened in the former colonial nations.

has shaped imaginings of people from the Balkans in stereotypical terms like barbaric, sexist, lazy, racist and racially other, and beholden to Europe to civilize,²⁷ she also does not connect such assignments to many of the same characterizations of Africa that served to justify its exploitation as well.²⁸ Adding to Anja Jovic Humphrey's correlation of the remarkable coherence in the strategies of dehumanization and racialization that were applied to Black Africans and to (Southern) Slavs, balkanization suggests a historical system that accounts for the similarities of racializing regimes and preserves racial difference.²⁹

In both cases, however, nationalism emerges as a direct result of the Berlin partitions and quickly becomes identified as a poisoned well. Tito's greatest struggle in maintaining Yugoslavia's standing in geopolitical affairs was juggling the simmering nationalistic tensions within each of the federal republics.³⁰ Upon his death, these tensions would boil over into the civil war that broke up Yugoslavia in 1990-91. In West Africa, national liberation optimistically attempted what Adom Getachew calls "worldmaking," to shore up the nation-state's promises of self-determination, autonomy, and stability, but there was a concrete gap between the level of

²⁷ Ultimately, for Todorova, the Balkans cannot be analyzed through a postcolonial lens under the banner of Orientalism, because "the Balkans are Europe, are part of Europe, although admittedly, for the past several centuries its provincial part or periphery" (Todorova, *Imagining*, 17). We run into the problems of this articulation of Balkanism here on two grounds: first, Balkanism articulates a discursive field that applies to a geographically specific region whose geographic specificity Todorova rejects as the basis of its conceptual coherence on the grounds of its discursive composition. Aside from this tautology, Europe has no geographic particularity except where it prevents the previously colonized region of the Balkans from being understood under the aegis of postcoloniality because its experience of colonialism was not of the European persuasion (we will see why this is factually incorrect in our later discussion of Andrić). While we agree that the lens of postcolonial studies does not fully articulate the historic experience of the Balkans (nor certainly Said's Orientalism), balkanization seems like the perfect term to theoretically flesh out this experience rather than simply attempt to negate it on such tautological grounds.

²⁸ See also Dušan I. Bjelić's article "Balkan Geography and the De-Orientalization of Freud" for a psychoanalytic take on how Freud's trip to the Balkans helped him to create his theory of the unconscious and armed him to combat Europe's bourgeois, repressed sexual ethics while also relegating the Balkans to Europe's periphery, even the Orient, as a region of barbaric, savage, pre-Oedipal turmoil in need of civilizing in accordance with the European mission.

²⁹ See Anja Jovic Humphrey's article "Aimé Césaire and "Another Face of Europe," (1139-1141) for a detailed analysis of the racist discourses that permeate the works of Hume, Kant, Hegel and Engels with respect to both Africa and Slavic peoples.

³⁰ Pirjevec, *Tito and His Comrades*, 328.

political statement and the daily reality of the masses.³¹ Homi Bhabha attributes this distance to “the nation’s ‘coming into being’ as a system of cultural signification, as the representation of social *life* rather than the discipline of social *polity*.”³² Invoking Anderson’s notion of the nation as an “imagined community,” Bhabha suggests that nations are just as readily defined (self-defined, even) by ambivalence toward the social ritual of nationalism and its institutions, indeed the utterances of the State, as in the avowal of the specific ideological and cultural system that they espouse.³³

In the African context in particular, Fanon mapped out the way that the African postcolonial compradors would succumb to balkanization and undercut the modest liberatory potential of the postcolonial nation. As a result, national culture takes the form of what he called “the zone of occult instability” predicated on “fluctuation,” in which “development is uneven” and “the violent collision of two worlds has . . . shaken old traditions and thrown . . . perceptions out of focus.”³⁴ Mirroring the manner that the imperial powers implemented balkanization to shore up their strategic interests, the nation confers advantages in the bureaucratic engine of the state to certain groups based on their ethnicity. This produces what Mahmood Mamdani

³¹ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, 4. In *Worldmaking after Empire*, Getachew writes, “Central to this combination of nation-building and worldmaking was the view that the global project of European empire had radically transformed the economic and political condition of the modern world in ways that required a similarly global anticolonial project” (24), which is to say that the worldmaking project in which the nation-state becomes the “normative unit of the international order” (4) needed to be met, according to the African nation-builders, by a similarly ambitious worldmaking project. While Getachew’s project is focused specifically on the African nation builders, she makes reference to Yugoslavia through the Non-Aligned Movement and Third Worldism that would bring the African continent and Yugoslavia into close collaboration for a few decades of the 20th century. Based in Frantz Fanon’s critique of post-independence national movements in Africa, my project is premised on the fundamental similarity between the systemic issues that the African nation-builders faced at liberation as those Yugoslavia faced at its initial inception as a monarchist homeland of the South Slavs (“Yug” means South in Slavic languages) and after its socialist revolution and “war of independence” against the Nazis in WWII.

³² Bhabha, “Narrating the Nation,” 1-2.

³³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 18. This affirmation of difference does not quite address the ways in which the principles of ambivalence, hybridity, and resistance which form Bhabha’s “logic of liberation” are often combated by the weaponization and entrenchment of difference (balkanization) for the benefit of the hegemonic powers.

³⁴ Fanon, “Pitfalls,” 195.

described as the “bifurcated state,” whose borders were arbitrarily drawn and governed in an uneven system of indirect rule across much of the African continent.³⁵ Over the course of the 20th century, the world discovers (and continuously forgets) that the implementation and repercussions of such techniques are less and less confined to the supposedly “underdeveloped” world.

Achille Mbembe’s work points to the horizons of global futurity that are, in negative fashion, contained in African history. In a process he calls the “becoming Black of the world,” the mechanism of racialized dehumanization that perpetrated and perfected itself upon the Continent’s Black masses comes to extend its influence and diversify its techniques in the former centers of empire.³⁶ Though empires culturally manifest in myriad modes of inclusion and exclusion, coercion or pacification, and in their cosmopolitanism or irredentism,³⁷ the rampant expansion of the transnational corporation’s power and influence and the establishment of the “free world-empire”³⁸ has only increased the number of violent border disputes, contributing to continual resurgences of xenophobic nationalism and violence around the world. This imperial system is “not a global state, nor does it create a unified and centralized structure of rule” but “involves the proliferation of borders and hierarchies at every geographical scale, from the space of the single metropolis to that of great continents.”³⁹ Mbembe sees in this process a strictly symbolic capitalistic logic of enclosure, understood as a way of producing arbitrary but hierarchized divisions and classifications.

³⁵ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*, 8. For Mamdani, this results in the racialization of rural regions and the imposition of ethnic identity upon urban city dwellers, which are two vectors of bifurcation that the postcolonial state inherits.

³⁶ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 8.

³⁷ Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*, 8-11.

³⁸ Arrighi and Paul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*, 52.

³⁹ Hardt and Negri, “Empire, Twenty Years On,” 72.

The process of enclosure seeks to affix the broader regime of race to the discrete individual through the universalizing notion of a racial experience that regulates the Black condition. He writes that the aim of enclosure is to “sort population groups, to mark them simultaneously as ‘species,’ ‘classes,’ and ‘cases’ through a generalized calculation of risk, chance, and probability,” producing at once a universal category under racial auspices—the “species”—and simultaneously the singular and particular: “cases.”⁴⁰ But Blackness and the Black experience are not a common property shared by all Black people due to their race, but rather a structural logic that predetermines what possibilities exist for those who have been externally classified as Black. This classification ever-increasingly structures the horizon of possibility for much of the world detached from the specific racial regimes of their locality.

Mbembe’s provocation suggests then that the postcolonial and balkanized world shows the “developed” world its future and not vice versa. The universalizing logic of racialization, for Mbembe, is worked out through what he describes as historical “narratives,” such as race or ethnicity, that accrete onto the classifications of enclosure. The obsession with categorization is based upon the idea of the subject-object divide and made possible the kind of racial, ethnic and national classifications and categorizations enacted in the logic of balkanization in the late 19th century. Fanon articulates these competing systems of narrative as producing a “zone of occult instability”; in such conditions, often felt as apocalyptic, the African nation builders, like all who wish to capture the state apparatus with the legitimating story of ethnic and national cohesion were forced to plumb an arcane, esoteric history that in large part did not exist. Culture, therefore, becomes what Wole Soyinka describes as “the fulfilment of one of the social functions of literature: the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social direction.”⁴¹ To

⁴⁰ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 35.

⁴¹ Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, 106.

trace out the future-oriented aesthetic responses to balkanization, what became seen as culture's mandate to combat the forces of division, I turn to an investigation of the narrative time-space that the genres of the travelogue and chronicle construct.

The Aesthetic Horizons of Balkanization

The personal and social limits of balkanization are articulated and contested, I suggest, in the realm of genre, especially in those genres that orbit a formal constraint of either time or space introduced at the level of content by a history of balkanization. The search for alternatives to the narratives which empire bequeathed the world, for the excess that could never be fully subsumed into any imperial logic nor fully articulated by any national formation comprises the future-oriented politics of the literature of balkanization, which has produced a topography of interstitiality in the zone of partition where multiple empires, old and new, have crossed for millenia.

Genre is the scaffolding that gives structure to the journey's record and that organizes the narrative logic of the chronicle. The travelogue concerns the writer's movement across vast (cultural and literal) distances and how it relates to their home, and the chronicle concerns history's movement across vast spans of time and how it changes the writer's conception of home. Yet both, I suggest, register the history of balkanization as a preoccupation with the liminal space of the border or frontier which has been imposed, a cut in reality that draws both material and conceptual boundaries around something previously undelimited, part of the backdrop of environmental noise. These genres become heuristics for the texts to map out this new space-time of balkanization as a global chronotope that is bounded by division as well as its opposite impulses.

While the tradition of the sentimental "Grand Tour" continued into 20th century travel

writing, it was met by a counter-tradition that parodied and contested the exoticization and demure cultural chauvinism of the genre's most classic works. The romantic grandiloquence and self-seriousness of the travel writing canon, such as Gustave Flaubert's *Voyage en Égypte* (1881) and Lord Byron's effusive descriptions of Venetian delectations (1809-11), had their playful counterparts in such works as Laurence Stern's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) and Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1869). In the 20th century, the genre began to take on a more critical perspective on cross-cultural exchange. What's more, the infrastructural modernization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries resulted in more widespread access to mass modes of transit that democratized travel and made it the purview of the multitudes.

It is in this transition that the traveler/tourist dichotomy takes root, mapping class-based prejudices onto the distinction all while tourism becomes a critical economic lifeline in many nations who exploit their natural and historic resources to allure foreign visitors.⁴² Mass communication technologies proliferated with the expansion of critical transit systems, which meant that people far apart could stay in more regular contact, fostering new modes of connection and travel beyond the classical "Grand Tours," the new "tourist traps," and the travel of business and industry.⁴³ Yet simultaneously to this expansion of travel and communication, there is a parallel tendency of border militarization and enclosure that had the effect of ossifying cultural differences into harder disparities, that were perceived to have the same tangibility as race and were felt as similarly insurmountable.

Against this backdrop, the more critically thoughtful travelogue sought to distinguish itself from its anthropologically minded counterparts by evading the classificatory and exoticizing mechanisms they consistently reproduced. Conscious of the history of balkanization,

⁴² Kinsley, "Travelers and Tourists," 240.

⁴³ See Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 17 and Campbell, "Travel writing and its theory," 265.

travelers West and Davičo attempt to understand the history and culture of their host destination through the lens of their shared humanity, attempt to forge personal and not hierarchical or transactional ties with their hosts. This is often a rather messy process that elicits reflections on pure difference as well as universal human traits, dramatizing Jacques Derrida's premise of hospitality's im/possibility.⁴⁴

Engaging in the ancient tradition of hospitality, even on such shaky world historic grounds as pre-war Yugoslavia and newly independent West Africa, yields an irrepressible optimism which characterizes their works. In a sense, this is central to the progressive shifts in the genre itself. Akin to Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the ritual of carnival as suspension of "the authority of all hierarchical positions," the contortion of one's comfort and boundaries required by travel especially when one does not speak the language and wants to meet their host on equal ground, results in a balancing of power that attends the reciprocal exchange required by conventions of hospitality.⁴⁵ This facilitates the appearance of common ground, which is often more than enough to create actual common ground where communication, however falteringly, can be achieved. The more such common ground can be meaningfully sustained across continental distances because of advances in communication technology, the more political investments can be meaningfully fostered.

Whereas the travelogue celebrates the potentiality of cross-cultural exchange in yielding productive solutions to historic narratives of division, the chronicle thoroughly punctures this affective humanistic optimism. Chronicles point to the crystallization of history as permanent

⁴⁴ Derrida writes on the one hand, "It is as though hospitality were the im-possible: as though the law of hospitality defined this very impossibility," and on the other, "language is hospitality. Nevertheless, we have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address to the other." (*Of Hospitality*, 75, 135).

⁴⁵ Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 123.

devastation, which Walter Benjamin, arch-theorist of the genre, calls “one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage” propelling time ever forward into the future as “the pile of debris grows skyward.”⁴⁶ Borrowing from Laura Doyle’s “inter-imperial” approach which traces “the embedded legacies of successive empires *and* the pressures created by contemporaneous empires,”⁴⁷ the chronicles of balkanization register multiple imperial temporalities, the ways in which empires define and employ time, as “wreckage.” For Benjamin, the chronicle’s task is not to present this accretive register of history linearly, “as a chain of events” conceived as “a causal connection between various moments” which narrate a “sequence of events like the beads of a rosary.”⁴⁸ Instead, he posits the figuration of the “constellation,” in which a picture emerges from an array of disparate points in three-dimensional matrix that have no connection to each other but as composite elements of the larger representation.

The chronicle of balkanization thus offers one vector to track the various inter-imperial legacies left in both West Africa and Yugoslavia over “deep time,” which Wai Chee Dimock defined as the literary extension of the *longue durée*. Deep time tracks “nonstandard space and time. Against the official borders of the nation and against the fixed intervals of the clock, what flourishes here is irregular duration and extension, some extending for thousands of years or thousands of miles, each occasioned by a different tie and varying with that tie, and each loosening up the chronology and geography of the nation.”⁴⁹ The chronicle is particularly attuned to this extension and the way in which various imperial regimes meddle with time, compressing or extending it to suit their aims. Thus, as a genre the chronicle resists the tendency of imperial ideology to naturalize its chosen temporal regime, especially the history-effacing efficiency

⁴⁶ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 257-58.

⁴⁷ Doyle, “Inter-imperiality and Literary Studies in the Longer *Durée*,” 337.

⁴⁸ Benjamin, “Theses,” 257.

⁴⁹ Dimock, *Through Other Continents*, 3-4.

demanding by standard clock time and its corollary, the fiscal quarter, and seeks patterns which unfold within a limited locality over long stretches of time.

In the chronicle-novel, fiction takes the place of the absent historical record, absent because it was lost, destroyed, or simply neglected. Though fictional, the chronicle-novel seeks the real historic roots of the present conditions, constellating historical fact with creative invention for the specific purposes of unveiling the core of present divisive dispensations of the historical project of balkanization. I call this the chronicle-novel's etiological tendency: seeking an origin which it knows to be fictive in a historical record it fabricates. Because of its self-conscious artifice, it rejects standard etiology which is rooted in the notion of genesis or origin (*Entstehung*), adopting an attitude more akin to what Benjamin describes as the *Ursprung*, which is more like the original spring or source.⁵⁰ If, as Benjamin suggests, "the *Ursprung*, then, does not arise from the facts attested but concerns their fore- and after-history," then the chronicle-novel is not so much concerned with the facticity of an event, its accurate representation, but the reason it is seen as containing a fore- and after-history within its own narrative context, the reason it is perceived as an event in the first place, as worthy of recording at all.⁵¹ For the chronicle-novel, the future is the logical principle that legibly organizes the whole record, which renders the often radically disparate events recorded as decipherably connected in the first place.

As Gershom Scholem, distinguished scholar of mysticism and friend of Walter Benjamin notes, this etiological tendency often accompanies millenarian and apocalyptic traditions that aim to articulate the end of the world and of time itself.⁵² The chronicle-novel generically captures

⁵⁰ Benjamin, *Origin of German Trauerspiel*, 25.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² "If, however, the Absolute which the mystic seeks is not to be found in the varying occurrences of history, the conclusion suggests itself that It must either precede the course of mundane history or reveal itself at the end of time. In other words, knowledge both of the primary facts of creation and of its end, of eschatological salvation and bliss, can acquire a mystical significance" (Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 20).

these eschatological tones which come to dominate visions of the future because it is so concerned with re-producing the past *in terms of* the future, in its self-conscious extrapolation of a fictional origin of its actual historical context. Even more interestingly, this temporal concern in the chronicle of balkanization constantly orbits a territorial partition so that the genre which is perhaps best formally suited at capturing long cycles of history becomes constrained to recursive narrations of *spatial* division.

Likewise, the travelogue of balkanization attempts to travel outside of the bounds of Europe in order to gain some distance from the immediacy of its domestic crisis. In the reverse of the chronicle, the travelogue implements the action of crossing national borders as an analogue for temporal transversal. It seeks clarity in the national and local histories of the Other, seeking to not only imagine but witness the past as it exists in the present of their destination, in order to discern the trajectory of the future at home. While tourism has industrialized the commodification of the past as it contributes to the narrative of the national tourism board, typically balkanization accompanies “underdevelopment,” in which case the very landscape, divorced from the trappings of the “modern” world, retains (or is seen as retaining) a fabric of historicity that can be accessed through the voyage.⁵³

Thus, a curious chiasmus appears wherein the genre of spatial narration – the travelogue – recounts a temporal partition while the genre of temporal narration elaborates a spatial one. The rupture of balkanization produces a fundamental excess in the structure of reality itself such that each genre, which would ostensibly best afford the narrative scaffolding necessary to articulate its respective partition, reaches for the narrative mechanism of its counterpart in a bid

⁵³ I use this in the sense employed by Andre Gunder Frank to refer to the neocolonial methods of extraction which rely national politics in the spaces of balkanization to ensure a deflated economy and reserve army of more easily exploitable labor. See “The Development of Underdevelopment,” 17-31.

to represent the history of balkanization. But this excess, like the non-representable catastrophe of history, can only be approached negatively, which accounts for the lukewarm humanism of the travelogue that relies on interculturalism as the antidote to the current (dis)order of things. Therefore, despite its affective pessimism, it is in fact the chronicle's *negativity* which best articulates the horizon of futurity available in the wake of balkanization. So long as the chronicle does not either invoke or produce historical determinism, through teleological or recursive historiographies that totalize future potentiality in terms of endless progress or eternal cycles of return respectively, it can not only articulate the roots of the present but voice future possibilities as well.

Taking up Bhabha's provocation, "how newness enters the world"⁵⁴ is quite literally through negation, though not in the classically dialectical sense advanced by Hegel. In the Hegelian model, "the negation of the negation" achieves, through synthesis, some positive unity – identity – between subject and object, reality and experience. Theodore Adorno's critique of the Hegelian model posits that it enables the notion of history as limitless progress upon which rests capitalist development. The possibility for an alternative to the present conditions rests on the "nonidentical" excess of reality that evades representation and resists the demands of equivalence dictated by the economics of nonequivalent exchange.⁵⁵ This nonidentical excess can only be arrived at through "negative dialectics," which regards history not archaeologically or palimpsestically, metaphors which presuppose teleological development, but esoterically, seeking the submerged surplus in "constellations" that "crystallize time in themselves."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 212.

⁵⁵ Adorno suggests that the value form presupposes the equivalence of all commodities, in which nonequivalent commodities (human labor and the object of that labor, or even commodities with distinct uses) are rendered equivalent through the medium of universal exchange, money. This results in a fundamental aporia between representation and reality because of the knowledge of nonequivalence.

⁵⁶ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 52–53, and Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 92.

Narrative is one tool that attempts to negate identity and gesture at this nonidentity, drawing a “constellation” of historicity from the chaos of undifferentiated background, rendering a more legible image only in relation to other points within the assemblage, thus avoiding the totalizing impulse of identity.

Balkanization, therefore, is one such aesthetic constellation, encoded in genres that represent the spatio-temporal extension of territorial partition, which negatively contains a politics of future liberation within its matrix of conceptual and material praxes. Liberation, “newness,” lies in nonidentity, in a state of being unmediated by categories of identity. It concretely entails the ability or potentiality to radically alter the present historical conditions, to wrest newness from the undifferentiated background of “nature.” While it has not been the case that globalization “effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity,” theorists from Adorno to Ato Sekyi-Otu have affirmed its appearance as such.⁵⁷ This constellation interrupts the received notions of history as unintermittable, eternal progress culminating in a far-off rapturous redemption; instead it highlights the basis of partition upon which such narratives of unbounded expansiveness are predicated. If, as Adorno says, “[f]reedom turns concrete in the changing forms of repression, as resistance to repression,” balkanization seeks to name one mode of repression that has structured the world-map in order to limn a future resistance.⁵⁸ To complete the triangulation of politics, culture and history that I outline in this introduction, I will next elaborate on the concrete histories of the Berlin

⁵⁷ Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, xiv. Adorno describes this as a “spell” of the “permanence of catastrophe” of history and Sekyi-Otu as a “repressed discourse on temporality” (see Adorno, *Freedom and History*, 42 and Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, 21).

⁵⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 265. While this accords with Pheng Cheah’s suggestion that “an irreducible principle of real messianic hope is always structural to capitalist globalization,” I am not quite as optimistic as him in suggesting that “[a]s an enactment of the opening of worlds by the coming of time, world literature points to something that will always exceed and disrupt capital.” (Pheng Cheah and David Damrosch, “What is a World (Literature)?” 308).

conferences of the 19th century as well as their legacies and the lasting logics of sovereignty they enshrined at the geopolitical level.

Balkanization Histories and Berlin Conferences⁵⁹

Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, published in 1878, concludes with the despondent Count Vronsky abandoning his child with the now-dead Anna to her ex-husband and enlisting in the war in far-off Serbia to die for the cause of Pan-Slavism. The war in question was the Serbian "front" in the broader series of conflicts that has become lumped under the umbrella of the Russo-Turkish War (1877-78), more specifically the Serbian (and Montenegrin) war of independence from the Ottoman empire. Though the Ottomans had attempted a secular reform of the empire beginning in 1839, by 1876, the reforms had neither bolstered the moribund imperial structure through parastatal formation nor had eased recriminations of tyranny on behalf of the minoritized Christian populations.⁶⁰

After the Crimean War, immortalized in Alfred Lord Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854), which saw Russia humiliated at a significant cost to British and French forces, many of the Muslim inhabitants of the Caucuses that had been displaced were resettled in the Bulgarian region of the empire. When Bulgaria rose up in insurrection in spring of 1876, the Turkish army organized an irregular unit out of this population, the infamous *Bashi-bazouks*, who massacred tens of thousands of civilians in southern Bulgaria, spurring international outrage and inciting the Serbian and Montenegrin uprisings later that summer.⁶¹ This became a common

⁵⁹ Except where otherwise noted, to avoid excessive footnotes in this section, I have synthesized the historic data into a narrative from the following works: Glenny, *The Balkans*, 135-307; Mazower, *The Balkans*, 77-113; L.S. Stavrianos, *The Balkans Since 1453*, 215-513; Chamberlain, *The Scramble for Africa*, 40-94; Davidson, "The Magnificent African Cake," YouTube, January 6, 2016, <https://youtu.be/sTa5iDbZXu0>; and Craven, "Between Law and History," 31-59.

⁶⁰ See Edibe, *Turkey Faces West*, 50 and Boyar, *Ottomans, Turks and the Balkans*, 49-56.

⁶¹ Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 264.

technique of balkanization: the division and militarization of religious groups in times of crisis that were pitted against each other in competition for land and resources.

With this in mind, Russia's defeat of the Ottoman empire in 1878 resulted in a triumphant moment for the hopes of a Pan-Slavic empire of all Orthodox people. Accordingly, they extracted a hefty price for their earlier humiliation in Crimea upon the Ottoman surrender at San Stefano, just outside Istanbul. The initial Treaty of San Stefano (1878) dramatically expanded Russian influence in the Balkans, granting national independence to Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and autonomy within Ottoman suzerainty to an expansive "Greater Bulgaria," harkening back to its pre-Ottoman borders as the Bulgarian empire. This fantasy-turned-reality shocked the western European powers who immediately reacted to restrain Russia's westward encroachment into the Balkans. Though it shared linguistic, religious and ethnic ties with the Slavs in the Balkans and despite the humanitarian uproar in Christianized Europe over the mistreatment of the minoritized Christians, Russia was nevertheless seen as worse for western interests than the so-called "infidel" rule of the Islamic Ottoman empire. Three months after the Treaty of San Stefano, Bismarck convened the Congress of Berlin.

As mentioned above, Germany formed the Second Reich in the wake of its defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. In response, France deposed Emperor Napoleon III and established the Third Republic. Though seemingly divergent trajectories, the two notions of sovereignty demonstrated in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War became the normative bounds of national formation in the political strategy of the Great Powers, which they would seek to impose upon the Balkans in order to foster stability for the furtherance of their economic interests. Benjamin Disraeli made the "Eastern Question," as the problem of the Balkans came to be known, the lynchpin of his second term as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. After

purchasing a controlling interest in the Suez Canal in 1858, the UK had vested interests in retaining access to key transit lines that crossed over the railroads which were laid across the Balkans in the 1870s and had felt the Mediterranean basin was its hallowed sphere of influence. Thus, the prospect of a Greater Bulgaria, with access to the Black Sea and Mediterranean, along with the perception that Russia had incited the nationalist uprisings in the Ottoman empire's Balkan holdings became untenable for the foreign policies of the rest of the Great Powers.

Meeting from June until July in Bismarck's residence at the Reich Chancellery in Berlin, the Congress of Berlin convened the "Great Powers": Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, the Ottoman empire, Russia, and the UK. In addition, representatives from Greece, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia were invited to attend but no other Balkan delegates were included. Bismarck acted as host and emcee of the congress, hoping to mediate the archrivalry between the UK and Russia over influence in the Mediterranean, and claimed objectivity on the grounds that Germany allegedly had no vested interest in anything but stability. In order to retain peace in the European heartland, it was decided that the Balkans should be carved up and shared in order to cobble together a balance of power that represented the many overlapping European interests in that crucial crossroads.

Bismarck barred the Balkan representatives from attending any of the more significant meetings of the great powers where the fates of their nations were decided.⁶² While Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro were granted independence, the territories ascribed to them in the Treaty of San Stefano were significantly reduced without consideration for the political effects this would have on the ground. In an effort to curtail the rise of a Greater Bulgaria and thus risk

⁶² L.S. Stavrianos states that "an essential feature of the treaty was its disregard of ethnic and nationalist considerations...For the Balkan peoples, then the Treaty of Berlin meant frustration of nationalist aspirations and future wars" (*The Balkans. 1815-1914*, 70-71).

Russian incursion too close to the eastern border of the Austro-Hungarian empire, which would have granted it de facto control over the northern Mediterranean, Bulgaria became an autonomous administrative state within the Ottoman empire immensely reducing to the territory granted it by San Stefano. The entire region of now North Macedonia which it had been granted at San Stefano was remanded back to the Ottomans as a buffer zone to mediate Austrian, Ottoman and Russian influence.⁶³ Bosnia and Herzegovina were given to Austria-Hungary to administer after centuries of Ottoman authority, setting up further conflict between the Great Powers when they were inevitably annexed into the Hapsburg empire.

While this outcome was a feather in the cap of Bismarckian diplomacy, it was seen as huge concession back in Russia. It was seen as losing its dominant influence in the Balkan peninsula and perhaps in the entire Mediterranean basin overnight despite gaining moderate influence in the eyes of Bulgarian and Serbian nationalists. The European powers opted to consolidate power in the hands of the Hapsburg empire (which was seen as less of a threat than Russia), effecting a near permanent division between Germany and Russia. As a result, Germany grew far closer in its alliance with Austria-Hungary, further repressing the simmering nationalistic movements in the Yugoslavian territories who were likewise dissatisfied with the outcome of Berlin. However, the blow to the ideal of Pan-Slavic unity would be permanent, effectively enshrining political clientelism and violent competition for the favor of the Great Powers among the fledgling Balkan nations until after WWII when the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia would make further efforts than any previous formation in unifying the disparate

⁶³ This decision has been the source of much contemporary Bulgarian irredentism which holds territorial claims over Macedonia on the grounds of San Stefano and Bulgarian imperial expansionism from the 11th century, but as several (even nationalist) critics have shown, these claims are predicated on a notion of Russo-Bulgarian closeness that serves Russia's purposes in the Balkans more than it relates any historical Bulgarian claim over Macedonian national identity and territory. See Tzvetkov, "Санстефанските митове и българските комплекси," in *Светът на мегамитовите* ["San Stefano Myths and Bulgarian Complexes" in *World of the Megamyths*].

nations of the Southern Slavs.

Despite these mixed results, which would imminently incite the first Balkan Wars, Bismarck felt he had checked both British and Russian hegemony and piqued the German public's interest in imperial ambitions abroad. In this, Germany was not alone. In 1876, King Leopold II of Belgium had established the "International Association for the Exploration and Civilization of Central Africa" as a humanitarian and philanthropic front for the ivory and rubber extraction he hoped to monopolize in the heart of the Continent, not wanting "to risk ... losing a fine chance to secure for ourselves a slice of this magnificent African cake."⁶⁴ Because France, Portugal and England all began to clamor for unfettered priority over the rest, leading to saber-rattling among the European powers late in 1884, Bismarck once again convened the Great Powers and other national representatives at the Reich Chancellery for the purpose of partitioning Africa to quell competition and establish the "gentlemanly" contours of the ravaging of the Continent.

The "Scramble for Africa," as it was called, was initiated at the Conference's conclusion in early 1885 after the 15 national representatives (none of which were African) discussed how they would divide up the land in Africa to pursue their respective trade interests.⁶⁵ Disguised as a humanitarian public relations stunt to end slavery on the Continent, it was nothing more than an excuse to parcel out its land and establish colonies in order to extract its resources more freely. What it also offered was new space for European nations to wage bloody proxy wars and jostle for prominence and superiority without risking all-out war at home (which was soon to follow

⁶⁴ Davidson, *The Magnificent African Cake*.

⁶⁵ The participants were Austria-Hungary, Belgium (under the guise of Leopold II's now-renamed International Congo Society), Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Ottoman empire, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway, UK, and USA. As is its wont, the US was the sole representative to reserve the right to decline or accept the resolutions agreed upon though it did ultimately ratify them (Craven, "Between Law and History," 31).

regardless). Just as six years prior, colonial borders in Africa were drawn for their strategic significance rather than regard for the ethnic or linguistic compositions of the regions.

The primary outcome aside from the territorial partition and the implementation of free trade along the Congo and Niger river basins was the principle of “effective occupation” which forced these economic interests to be shored by the presence of colonial holdings of territorial claims, resulting in the subsequent colonial empires that may otherwise have strictly existed as chartered trade ventures. Because of this occupational mandate, the colonial enterprises often protected their holdings with ruthless force, resulting in innumerable indigenous uprisings against imperial rule and the brutal counter-responses of the colonial powers, some as early as 1904 when the German army perpetrated a genocide of the Herero people of present-day Namibia that resulted in over 100,000 African casualties. At the end of the conference, the 15 foreign nations partitioned Africa into 50 colonies, and Leopold II of Belgium mysteriously emerged the uncontested victor. Immediately following the Berlin Conference, on the pretense of the civilizational mandate, his philanthropic front reorganized into the Congo Free State, a privately owned, personal union with Belgium vested in his status as sovereign.

With both the Eastern and African Questions “resolved,” Europe saw a tenuous peace until 1908, when Austria-Hungary formally annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina, destroying all remaining diplomatic relations with the Balkans and Russia. The slow collapse of the Ottoman empire, which at a few points in the 16th and 17th centuries had camped at the very gates of Vienna, concluded with the First Balkan War (1912) in which Greece, Serbia, Montenegro and Bulgaria all simultaneously declared war, freeing the entire Balkan peninsula from 500 continuous years of Ottoman control. Although each of these nations had by that point declared their independence, they sought to free the rest of their Slavic counterparts from Ottoman

hegemony in those parts still under direct Turkish control, mostly in now North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Unsatisfied with the outcome of the First Balkan War, which had not reverted to Bulgaria what it felt was its rightful holdings over all of Macedonia to the Aegean Sea as promised in San Stefano, Bulgaria declared war on its former allies two weeks after the Ottomans surrendered and invaded Macedonia starting the Second Balkan War (1913).

The formerly allied nations of the so-called Balkan League which formed during the First Balkan War turned on each other who would claim the territory of Macedonia, each invading it in succession.⁶⁶ The aftermath of the Second Balkan War did little of consequence to change the borders set by the First while killing hundreds of thousands, displacing upwards of a million ethnic Turks who fled the Balkans to the Asian regions of the empire, and leading directly to the assassination of the Austrian archduke. Bulgaria, who was quickly defeated by Serbia and Romania, was returned to its boundaries under the original agreement established in 1913, and the Ottoman border was set to roughly the current Turkish state boundaries, only for these territorial conflicts to more violently emerge a few months later as WWI broke out. From there, the more familiar story of the inter-war and WWII periods picks up, whose outcome and historical trajectory I will return to in the second half of the dissertation.

Rationale of Texts and Chapter Outline

Balkanization is a historic process whose tendency is toward ever greater atomization and whose resistance takes nearly a century to articulate and organize in the spaces of partition. While the ethnic concept of the nation as a legitimizing basis of its sovereignty becomes the primary narrative of national belonging, patterns of conflict arise later when they “collect” on

⁶⁶ Each of the warring parties was guilty of civilian atrocities and ethnic cleansing, many of which would inspire the ethnic violence of the 1990s. See Biondich, "The Balkan Wars: Violence and Nation-building in the Balkans, 1912–13," 390.

this ethnic down payment in the middle of the 20th century. The nationalist fervor that sweeps Europe in the early 20th century reaches its logical endpoint in WWII, forcing a critical reevaluation of its historical narratives in light of mankind's most annihilative wars to date. My dissertation examines the century over which this process unfolds, beginning with the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and ending with the publication of Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* in 1973. But the literary focus does not begin until 1941, with the publication of Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

Three historic tendencies account for this gap. While there are earlier works that thematize partition or which somehow encode it generically within their form, these are often rather Eurocentric narratives that focus on the perspective or agency of the imperial powers rather than the site of partition itself, which is usually represented as some unidimensional exoticized stereotype; second, the mapping enacted in Berlin worked to some extent to quell the hawkish tendencies in Europe for a short time even if they exacerbated the nationalistic tendencies within the partitioned spaces themselves, and it was not until after WWII that the historiological view of unlimited progress on the back of unrestricted free trade and capitalism really came under attack from all sides of the ideological spectrum who saw in the teleology of European development nothing but catastrophe; and finally, because there emerged a generic schema that, as the world grew smaller through the opening of mass lines of travel and communication which partition itself ironically unlocks, balkanization became legible as it was experienced historically in these sites of partition.

To the first point, while there were quite a lot of popular texts that demonstrated a keen interest in the divisive intrigue of the imperial powers abroad, they often tended to valorize such exploits on the basis of Europe's civilizational enlightenment, even as they present interesting

moments in the changing tide of geopolitical thinking as registered in popular forms. The genre of spy fiction for instance owes its proliferation to this era of geopolitical intrigue conceptualized as a game. Early examples include the Ruritanian fiction of the late 19th century, notably exemplified in *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894),⁶⁷ a number of Sherlock Holmes stories (1893), and might even be found in the background of anarchist cells and secret police connivances in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons* (1872). Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) likewise features a clandestine sub-plot where the eponymous Kim moonlights as a British intelligence asset on the Indian front of the Anglo-Russian "Great Game." Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) would shortly follow, and after WWI the genre would exponentially grow. Especially in the 20th century, many of these works were written by players in the game itself, but it is not until later in the century that we see balkanization and the political intrigues that precipitated two world wars incorporated into the literature of balkanization proper.⁶⁸

These historically minded meditations on partition developed because new lines of travel emerged internationally due to the globalizing tendencies of the empire, which requires dramatic infrastructural development in order to transport the raw materials for its avaricious expansion. This opens the sites of balkanization more and more to more rapid cross-cultural influence while opening access to the vast libraries and educational holdings hoarded by the West to intellectuals from Yugoslavia and West Africa. And yet the same railroads that opened the world to travel

⁶⁷ These novels were highly fictionalized, deeply romantic accounts of sentimental kingdoms, of Slavic or Eastern European locale, that were in perpetual crisis until the intervention of an intriguing Western foreigner rights their paths. This strongly paternalistic view makes sense in light of the Hapsburg monarchs that literally ruled Croatia for much of its pre-Yugoslav existence, for instance.

⁶⁸ One of the writers I focus on, Ivo Andrić was a diplomat, and it is proposed, used his diplomatic cover as an intelligence officer as well, though this is only furtively hinted at in his fiction. Likewise, W. Somerset Maugham was recruited by British intelligence to put down a global anarchist ring located in Switzerland that sought to overthrow the British Raj, which he fictionalizes in his story "Giulia Lazzari" (See Spence, *Secret Agent* 666, 117). Graham Greene was yet another intelligence officer who had a rather shorter career than Ian Fleming, spy fiction's most well-known author and practitioner.

ultimately terminated in the death camps. Similarly, the internationalism spurred by Afro-Asian independence, seen as a model for future liberation that could obviate the inherited strictures of empire, arrives on the heels of yet another viciously violent imperial partition: the Partition of India into India and Pakistan in 1947, a result of the British withdrawal, led to yet more unprecedented loss of life and displacement.⁶⁹ Yet, not a decade later, both nations participated in the dramatic display of Afro-Asian solidarity of the Bandung Conference of 1955 and its successor, the Non-Aligned Movement (1961-present), which was inaugurated in the same year as the Berlin Wall was constructed. Such pendulum swings between optimism and pessimism, nationalism and internationalism, resonate throughout the 20th century and are the thematic core of this project.

Each of my chapters looks at this history of balkanization with the aim of articulating how the historical tendencies of territorial partition map onto psychological, social, philosophical and spiritual divisions in Yugoslavia and West Africa. Chapter one introduces the travelogue as the spatial form that captures the history and mechanism of balkanization, focusing on Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). West's travelogue emphasizes the notion of hospitality in which the Yugoslavian culture and spirit is preserved and in which West sees the antidote of the insidious will to death that drives the Nazi war machine. Her reflections focus on the heretical valences of Orthodoxy which resist the Augustinian principle of atonement to which she attributes the downfall of western civilization. Although she aims to write more than a colonially minded "Baedeker Guide" to the Balkans and is overtly critical of the imperial meddling which precipitated the First World War and set the stage for the Second, she is unable

⁶⁹ Bangladesh was split in half in the Mountbatten Plan, as India's partition came to be called, with half governed by India and half by Pakistan and it was not until 1971 that Bangladesh became independent, yet again at the cost of mass civilian casualties.

to disentangle her account from the political turmoil of the inter-war period which is entrenched in nationalist ideologies based largely on 19th century conceptions of race and blood and reinforced by imperial policies. I argue that West's account better expounds on the ways in which the balkanization of south-eastern Europe paved the way for World War II and the total redrawing of the European (and subsequently world) map than any other extant political or historical text. Though its optimism is subverted by the racialism upon which it is predicated, it points to a shifting tide in history in which international friendship becomes possible against a background of total alienation.

My second chapter introduces the temporal form of the chronicle-novel through Ivo Andrić's *Bridge on the Drina* (1945). Taking the form of a 400-year-long story of a bridge in a small town in eastern Bosnia, from the time it was built by the Ottoman Grand Vizier in the mid-16th century to when it was destroyed by the retreating Austrian imperial army in WWI, it tracks balkanization as a process of ethno-nationalist formation in Yugoslavia. In spite of the nascent socialist revolution which ostensibly trounced fascism, Andrić cannot foresee a way out of the repetition of violence and division on the imperial frontier that is small town Bosnia, situated between East and West. As a permanently contested zone, there is a spatial logic to these cycles legible to the chronicler-narrator that recognizes the ways in which each successive imperial partition of the land inevitably carries with it a new regime of time, but never a radically new regime. Thus, Andrić's outlook on the viability of the Yugoslav project remains quietly pessimistic. In so doing, his novels succumb to the divisive paradigm of balkanization which operates as a limit of possibility in Andrić's historic imagination as well as in the work. Andrić suggests that fiction functions as a *katechon* to delay the coming apocalypse, yet, I argue, this is

a fantasy of individualism, which fallaciously mistakes one's continued existence for proof that the apocalypse has not yet arrived.

The third chapter focuses on Oskar Davičo's travelogue *In Black and White* (1962) in which he journeys to Africa to cover a unity rally between Senegal, Guinea, and Ghana. Written at a time of rising "Third World" optimism, just a year after Josip Broz Tito's momentous (and resplendent) trip across Africa to promote African-Yugoslavian solidarity, this is one of the early texts that might form what could be called the "Non-Aligned Canon." Such a canon emerges from the formation of the international Non-Aligned Movement by a number of recently decolonized nations to outline an antidote to the saber-rattling of mutually assured destruction that had permeated Cold War politics in the form of the bifurcation between the NATO and Warsaw Pact blocs. Davičo self-consciously attempts to write an antiracist and anticolonial travelogue that evades either of the hegemonic bloc's epistemologies, citing a shared history of balkanization as one foundational basis for this international principle of Non-Alignment. Ultimately, I argue that while Davičo presents a compelling basis for Non-Alignment, the humanistic negation of race as a meaningful or signifying difference that accompanies Yugoslav socialist humanism limits its liberatory aims. Yugoslavia's subsequent collapse into ethnic cleansing suggests a more rigorous ethic of antiracist internationalism is needed if it is to overcome the entrenched divisions of a post-balkanized planet.

The last chapter looks at Ayi Kwei Armah's chronicle-novel *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), which opens with a prophecy of a thousand seasons of destruction and a thousand seasons of life, which a fictional West African people must survive. Taking the form of successive onslaughts of "white destroyers" who bring slavery and destruction to the Continent on the back of partition and religion, a secret history of resistance emerges, an initiation into a

tradition of resistance that can combat the crisis of individualism on the African continent as one of subverted *bildung*. With *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah realizes the need for a wider social ethic that escapes the narrow confines of political unity as received in the European tradition. In its place he substitutes an indigenous rite that is attuned to the history of destruction's ever-fluctuating outward appearance through communal creation whose aim is to transcend the limitations of an artificially induced partition of Africa and suggest a possible vision of regeneration that does not resort to a national, linguistic, or even blood-related unity.

Neither a proponent of *négritude* nor of Pan-Africanist socialism, Armah remains nevertheless politically committed beyond the scope of nationalism and analyzes the historical fissures that have been exploited to foment disunity among Africans through successive waves of colonizers. Yet the ethic of reciprocity that he reveals also allows for the potential for reconciliation under stringently decolonial conditions. Hence Armah develops not so much an apocalyptic vision of the end of the world, which stems from imperial religious ideologies, but instead, borrowing from his withering critique of religions of the Book, what I call a heretical apocatastasis: non-etiological and non-messianic regeneration as the horizon of futurity itself.

If there is a latent hostility towards history, and its steward historiography, in my approach to the literary expressions of balkanization, then perhaps I have taken the properly "ruthless" attitude toward "the fabric of the past" that Wole Soyinka exhorted in the passage from my epigraph. This admonishment reads two ways: in a sense, it suggests that national histories themselves are ruthless with the fabric of the past as a tactic of political formation. But it also suggests a similar underlying requirement of a liberatory politics which also must unrelentingly engage with the past, but in a manner which opens the future to possibility rather than its foreclosure.

The pernicious narrative of blood is one such ruthless narrative that has had lasting and devastating implications in world history, but this history accelerates in the co-mingling of blood narratives and state formation, which is the primary thematic of the following section of this dissertation. Ivo Andrić describes this moment occurring at the moment of the Ottoman empire's collapse, when the huddled Muslim men of Višegrad, formerly the privileged citizens of the town, suddenly experience a collapse of their world view when the "paper...curving lines" of the new border rip across the land. Seeing nothing in such divisions, they felt themselves biological owners of the actual and true "picture of the world" because "their geography was in their blood." After fascism seemed on the precipice of victory, guided and fueled by such malignant narratives, it became incumbent on those who lived under the auspices of balkanization to ask how such innocuous beliefs came to trigger such annihilative devastation.

In so doing, they discover that in the historical triages that seep through these legacies of partition and attempt to suture the scars of division, there is a glimmer of the excess which cannot be eradicated from the human spirit and the (un)conscious revolt against the present conditions. Yes, history is the ground of ruination, but it is not fallow; resistance grows in the ashes of its devastation. In the next chapter, Rebecca West investigates the emergent possibility of friendship and hospitality as cultural values that can re-animate resistance against the Nazi war machine and all it represents.

Chapter One: “What Makes Men Lust After Death”: History, Religion, and Nationalism
after Imperial Partition in Rebecca West’s Travelogue *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*

“Damn the partition! Paper, dark brown and stretched,
Flimsy and damned partition”

—Ezra Pound, “Canto VII”

“Good God,’ said my husband, ‘it is as if we went on
chewing over the Wars of the Roses. But I suppose we
might if we had been enslaved since and now had to
start afresh. Still, that makes it no less of a bore.”

—Rebecca West, *Black Lamb & Grey Falcon*

“In the difficult question of the East, entangled by so many cross-purposes and interests...” writes former Prime Minister William Gladstone, “we learn with astonishment and horror that, so far as appears, we have been involved, in some amount, at least, of moral complicity with the basest and blackest outrages upon record within the present century.”¹ Admonishing the British policy of appeasement of the Ottoman empire’s centuries-long grip of the Balkan peninsula, Gladstone’s pamphlet would become an overnight best-seller, launching his political comeback as leader of the Liberal Party and later guiding him to three more (non-consecutive) terms as British Prime Minister. His political pressure so roused the British public, who demanded a response to the humanitarian crisis in the east of Europe, it forced Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli to personally attend the Congress of Berlin in 1878 with his Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury to settle the matter once and for all.² The British affinity for Greece, to whom it claims direct cultural descent, is well known. Yet Gladstone’s liberal outcry against the Ottoman atrocities in the Slavic Balkans elicited something new, a moral fervor that would far outshine any of the other *causes célèbres* of the time.

¹ Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*, 12.

² Disraeli gave the opening remarks of the Congress, scandalizing the world by delivering his oration in English rather than French, which was the diplomatic *lingua franca* (not to put too fine a point on it) of the time (Aldous, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 284).

Inculcated in this dispensation of British liberalism was the public intellectual, militant feminist and socialist raconteur Rebecca West (1892-1983), whose political upbringing was steeped in the discourse of international humanitarian violations and revolution.³ West, who would commit much of her long writing career to identifying and pathologizing the political chaos that defined her times, says that “[n]o other cause espoused by liberals so completely swept them off their feet by its own violence. The problems of India and Africa never produced anything like the jungle of savage pamphlets that sprang up in the footsteps of the Liberals who visited Turkey in Europe under the inspiration of Gladstone.”⁴ This fascination with the Balkans, with the small tucked away corner of south-eastern Europe, is in no small part due to the way in which the region seemed to dictate the affairs of not only England or Europe but the whole world: “Since there proceeds steadily from that place a stream of events which are a source of danger to me, which indeed for four years threatened my safety and during that time deprived me for ever of many benefits, that is to say I know nothing of my own destiny” (22).

Born Cicily Isabel Fairfield, Dame Rebecca West took her stage name (and later pseudonym) from the rebellious heroine of Henrik Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm* in order to hide her acting, and later her early suffragist and feminist publications, from her mother. She soon became an essayist, book critic, and journalist of some repute in England, publishing a well-regarded modernist novel and a critical biography of Saint Augustine.⁵ By 1947, she was on the cover of *Time* magazine, hailed as “indisputably the world’s No. 1 woman writer.”⁶ She was

³ For West’s feminist stances, see Marcus, ed., *The Young Rebecca West*; Ferguson, “Feminist Manichaenism”; Fromm, “Rebecca West”; and Norton, *Paradoxical Feminism*. For discussions of West’s anti-imperialism and anti-communism, see Packer, *Rebecca West* and Rollyson, *The God That Failed*.

⁴ West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia*, 21; in the interest of reducing footnote clutter, further references will use the abbreviated title *BLGF* and will be cited parenthetically.

⁵ *Return of the Soldier* (1918) and *St. Augustine* (1933) respectively. She was also at times notorious, at times famous for being H.G. Wells’ longtime muse and mistress; he was the father of her only child, Anthony West, a writer and outspoken critic of his mother.

⁶ *Time*, “Circles of Perdition,” 116.

made Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1949, primarily for her contributions to the war effort through her writing and activism. She wrote and traveled until late in her life and was still active in the political, literary and journalistic scenes in the UK well into the 1980s, which makes her work difficult to neatly position in one literary movement or tradition.⁷

The most important of her work to our discussion of national partitions and global empires is her magnum opus, a travelogue through Yugoslavia on the eve of World War II, entitled *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). Based largely on the three trips to Yugoslavia West took, alone and with her husband, between 1936-1939, this was really the work that cemented her status as a writer of international repute; here, she produces a spirited attack on fascism, the depredations of empire, a world where most political decisions are made by men with men in mind, and the abandonment of a certain kind of spiritual value-system. Using her travels, conversations, and observations in Yugoslavia, and Yugoslavian history itself, as the backdrop, she identifies and diagnoses many of Europe's ills right as the most industrially mechanized, technologically advanced, and widespread conflagration in human history would imminently unfold leaving millions dead around the world. In the way Yugoslavia has retained a

⁷ Much of the scholarship on West's work is anxious to periodize her work or place her within a specific cultural movement. Given the time when she published most of her work, she is often seen as orbiting modernism but critics often go to great lengths to wedge her into this period considering the length of her career (see especially Farley, *Modernist Travel Writing*, 149) and especially Stetz, "Rebecca West's Criticism," Thomas, "Rebecca West's Second Thoughts on Feminism," and Pykett, "Writing Around Modernism" for the uneven application of modernism to West's *oeuvre*). Scholars have also discussed the seeming contradictions in West's political utterances that attend this difficulty in categorizing her work: socialist suffragette, anti-imperialist, staunch anti-communist, Thatcherite, anti-apartheid activist. Ultimately, I'm not quite convinced that this is all that contradictory a set of political programs for a 20th century British intellectual with a classically Liberal *weltanschauung*; West critic Albert Schweizer says is the "only ideological generalization that fits West with any degree of accuracy is that she was basically a Liberal (with a capital L). Many of her most explicit political statements are made in affirmation of individual freedom" (Schweizer, "Introduction," 30). For discussions of her Thatcherism and later activism, see Lassner, "Rebecca West's Shadowy Other," Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, Schweizer's *Rebecca West* and Stec, "Rebecca West in South Africa." West's own publications on these topics are "As a Briton Looks at McCarthyism" *US News and World Report* (May 22, 1953), "Memo from Rebecca West: More about McCarthyism" *US News and World Report* (July 3, 1953), "The Nemesis of Apartheid" *Sunday Times* (March 27, 1960), "In the Cauldron of Africa 1-4" *Sunday Times* (April 10-May 1, 1960), and "Margaret Thatcher: The Politician as Woman" *Vogue* (September, 1979).

sense of deep historicity into the present, and as trouble stirs in Berlin yet again, encroaching once more on freedom in the Balkans, Yugoslavia becomes the site where one can witness the death-drive that festers in Europe's heart put on dramatic display.

For West, travel and the travelogue become sites of reflection on the legacies of Berlin and the balkanization that was perpetrated there, becoming a platform to explore the history of partition, religion, and nationalism as they exist in the present. She believes that the kind of cross-cultural understanding that travel can facilitate has the potential to save Europe from demise because it enables the traveler, and by extension, the reader of the travelogue, to clearly witness the death-drive at the heart of *European* civilization on full display. In the European view, the essentially violent soul of the Southern Slav was imminently tied up in the racial *ressentiment* of subservience and irridentism that Slavic history was committed to cyclically re-enacting, preserved as though in amber in the primordial conditions of unmodernized Yugoslavia.⁸ But West knows this narrative is a façade of empire, used to cover its avaricious expansionism: “But I must have been wholly mistaken in my acceptance of the popular legend regarding the Balkans,” writes West, “for if the South Slavs had been truly violent they would not have been hated first by the Austrians, who worshipped violence in an imperialist form, and later by the Fascists, who worship violence in a totalitarian form” (21).

Inasmuch as West seeks to distance herself from the colonialist or exoticizing undertones of the travel narrative as a genre, and adroitly diagnoses the evils of colonialism and imperial meddling across the centuries into the present with Yugoslavia as the sample case, I argue that she is unable to disentangle her account from entrenched nationalist ideologies based largely on

⁸ “Violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans” West writes, “derived ... from memories of my earliest interest in Liberalism, of leaves fallen from this jungle of pamphlets...and later from the prejudices of the French, who use the word ‘*Balkan*’ as a term of abuse, meaning a *rastaquouère* type of barbarian” (21).

19th century conceptions of race and blood, reinforced by imperial ideology. The welcome West receives as a guest in Yugoslavia leads her to believe in the inherent decency of the Slavic people, their culture of hospitality, their tragic flaws and analytical sensibilities, as expressions of their Slavic blood; that is, she cannot help but reduce cultural expressions to manifestations of biology or physiology. I call this West's "spirited materialism" which undercuts its own aim as an anti-imperial or anti-colonial work in the fight against fascism, against the death drive at the heart of Europe. While she very capably inserted a wedge between the civilizing account of European empires and the actual effects that they have in the spaces of extraction that form their colonies or periphery, her vision is limited by a naturalization of partition on the basis of nationalism along spiritual and ethnic lines that resound with troublingly racialized implications.

The specter of 19th century Berlin, West suggests, still haunts the present; having brokered the political and economic dealings that turned Yugoslavia into the powder-keg that catalyzed the First World War, it had transformed into a rancorous world-swallowing machine in the interwar years. Published just as the Nazi-led Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia in 1941, three years after her final sojourn to Yugoslavia, West spent much of that period doing historical research and agonizing over the Epilogue, which composes a significant portion of the book's hefty 1100 pages.⁹ The Epilogue distills much of the insights across her travels, what she's seen firsthand in western Yugoslavia as the Nazi threat loomed, into a passionate, downright propagandistic appeal against fascism and the insidious technique of imperialism that incubated

⁹ The book was initially published in a fetching two-volume set during a wartime paper shortage. I will return to West's connection to state institutions below, but here it is worth noting that in an interview with West scholar Victoria Glendinning, West stated that she wrote her rousing Epilogue primarily at the behest of the Foreign Office (*Rebecca West*, 161). What's more, the British Council required a report of those they commissioned to travel on such lecture tours which West framed explicitly as an intelligence report (even though that was not requested of her), offering her "personal and political assessments of the various government officials she had met with special reference to their attitudes to Germany and Britain. This information was passed from the British Council to the Foreign Office" (*ibid*). Whether she submitted reports after her subsequent visits is not reported in Glendinning or elsewhere in biographic work on West's travels.

it: balkanization. Thus, *BLGF* is not written as colonially minded “Baedeker Guide” to the Balkans like many travelogues in the tradition, but instead as a guidebook to what West calls “the horrible nature of our human destiny” (148), an almost resignedly fatalistic sustained meditation on the manifold afterlives of empire and their curious protrusion into the present.

Ultimately, West’s narrative demonstrates her belief that traveling as a guest is a ritual available at that historic moment which helps to preserve a connection with the past in order to better fight off the death drive that she sees at the heart of modern culture, with the Nazi movement as its apotheosis. Her *Elegy* to D.H. Lawrence (1930) aptly sums up her deep investment in his work and the driving impetus of *BLGF*: “he [Lawrence] could know no peace till he had learned what makes men lust after death.”¹⁰ If West could uncover what she will later call “the process” by which history becomes the present, then perhaps she could uncover the mystery at the heart of this lust for death that governs European history.

Building on the exposition of balkanization in the Introduction to this dissertation, this chapter asks questions such as how does the travelogue written by a British woman both contain and disseminate the anxieties of the interwar period distilled through the legacies of the Berlin conferences? How does the travelogue as a genre thematize and articulate these concerns? What does the involvement of the British imperial state apparatus in funding West’s initial trip to Yugoslavia mean for a critical understanding of the anti-imperial travelogue? What is the connection between the sensorial effusion of historicity in the balkanized spaces of Yugoslavia and the future?

To begin by understanding the work as a guidebook to the future, I open my reading with a discussion of the travelogue tradition which West both participates in and strays from,

¹⁰ West, *Elegy*, 394.

meticulously constructing a travelogue according to her own criteria and specifications, intended from the outset to exceed the boundaries of the genre. Next, I discuss West's elaboration of a new type of journey-taker: she advances the guest as the mediator between tourist and traveler, the agent of hospitality who is better attuned to the rhythms of daily life by virtue of their host. A new take on the "native informant" trope in travel literature, West rather slyly positions herself as an innocent guest when she was in fact commissioned by the Foreign Office to visit Yugoslavia on a cultural lecture tour, which carries certain political ramifications for the work.

But at the farthest point of her journey, in the southernmost tip of Yugoslavia, West finds herself "going native," feeling herself at one with the contours of the landscape in Macedonia and its effects on the psyche. In Macedonia, and just outside it on the Plains of Kosovo where so much of Balkan history has been decided, West experiences two revelatory visions, alluded to in the title of the work, that encapsulate her experiences in Yugoslavia and how they speak to the rot at Europe's core. This remote region within the already faraway Balkan peninsula plays a rather central, rather than peripheral, role in European history and becomes the nexus of West's reflections on the future of the whole planet.

From there, I discuss the way history leads West invariably to considerations of religion and religious symbolism. Churches are some of the most visited sites in West's travelogue, and she recounts several experiences at significant sites that house relics of Yugoslavian historical figures. Here the analysis focuses especially on a spiritual partition, the iconostasis, which is a central feature of Eastern Orthodox churches separating the congregation from the holy altar, to illustrate some of what she sees as the heretic aspects of the Orthodox rite that she believes contains the seeds of the Slavic defiance of death that she observes as central to Yugoslav ethnic identity. In a place like the Balkans where every nation has its own officially vested and state-

recognized national church, it's inevitable that West's travels lead to reflections on nationalism and national difference.

In this final consideration, West's own personal viewpoints most strongly come into view. Her rather rigorous critique of European exceptionalism becomes clouded by certain ideologies of ethnicity, race and blood that were dominant from the 19th century onward. West's work touches on many other themes,¹¹ but tracing the ways she engages with history, religion, and nationalism in *BLGF* allows us to understand how the travelogue directly speaks to the conditions of Yugoslavia after the Berlin conferences and thereby opens the political, material, and social legacies of balkanization to cultural interpretation.

The Travelogue of Interrupted Return: Genre and Background

West begins *BLGF* with a description of the train ride through Austria, a country she finds exceedingly perverse, into Croatia. Zagreb, for West, lost any sense of its Slavic authenticity with Croatia's annexation by Austro-Hungary in the 18th century, and thus its features are too heavily inscribed by its imperial occupiers.¹² It is in Zagreb that West first begins to remark on the oppressive German quality that threatened to eradicate any trace of Slavic life forms, a theme that will continue through this long work. From Zagreb, West and her husband travel to the palimpsestic Dalmatian coast which gives her ample opportunity to reflect on the history of the region that has seen overlapping Roman, Catholic, and Venetian influences in its language, architecture, and culture. Such influences are still relatively familiar to West's British

¹¹ Chamberlain suggests that the book is essentially a memoir, reading *BLGF* through the lens of West's biography and tumultuous personal life. She has many biographical critics but none that are as blunt as Chamberlain who attributes the complexity of *BLGF* to her complexity of West's psychology ("Rebecca West in Yugoslavia," 264). Colquitt, Deakin, Fromm, Packer, and Schweizer all highlight West's abiding interest in all matters religious and spiritual, many emphasizing her fascination with Pelagianism and Manicheanism among other Christian heresies.

¹² During the war, Zagreb became the capital of the puppet state of Croatia, run by Croatian fascists in collaboration with the Nazis and Italians.

background, steeped as she was in the kind of Christian conflict for which England is famous.¹³

From these relatively familiar environs, they find themselves transported more and more completely into a remote past as they move into the parts of the Balkans that register the more foreign (to West) Byzantine, Ottoman and Slavic influence starting with Sarajevo. In Sarajevo, West offers an extended discourse into the history of the formation of the Yugoslavian kingdom by way of Sarajevo's role in the turmoil that sparked WWI. Her reflections on the relatively modern history of Bosnia, via the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo lead her to conclude that "I knew that the past has made the present, and I wanted to see how *the process works*" (54; emphasis added). It is here that we catch a glimpse of West's philosophy of history as a process, development with in-built regressions, dead ends, loops, and cycles, which becomes more radically dramatized in everyday life the further south she continues.

Writing a travelogue, West participates in a rich tradition of British men and women chronicling their travels to the Continent (and other locations within the vast reach of the British Empire and many times beyond it) in search of aesthetic stimulation, intrigue, trade opportunities, missionary work, adventure, a cosmopolitan polish to a sophisticated upbringing, a fascination with the "foreign" and the "Other," or a desire to see oneself better. Ultimately, many of these stories end on the same note: the traveler went out to meet the Other and found themselves close to home in ways they may or may not have expected. In that vein, *BLGF* articulates the palpable presence of history that West discerns in her journey through Yugoslavia and the curious way it continuously creeps into western Europe's present: "I was obliged to write a long and complicated history, and to swell that with an account of myself and the people who

¹³ West's father, whom she calls a "shabby Prospero" was an atheist Loyalist who would regularly invite anarchists, socialists, loyalist, Catholics, Anglicans and others across the political and religious spectrum to his small house for lively debates, which West witnessed from a young age (Gibb, *West's World*, 17-24).

went with me on my travels, since it was my aim to show the past side by side with the present it created” (1108). However, it was in the futurity West recognizes in Yugoslavia, the way her travelogue contains a picture of “the horrible fate of our human destiny,” that distinguishes it in the genre.

All travelogues are essentially composed of the outward journey and the return home. It is from one of the great pieces of travel literature, Homer’s *Odyssey*, that the term *nostos* has emerged to characterize the return journey which is one of the central features of the traditional travelogue. The word nostalgia, derived from *nostos*, describes an ache seeking resolution in a return to old times. Capturing the narrative of return from the metropolitan core to the less modern exterior and back as a trip backwards through time,¹⁴ the travelogue is an inherently nostalgic, though versatile, genre. It can be historically or anthropologically motivated, seeking to pin the native as dastardly and totally Other, preserving the inviolate sanctity of “Home” through the absolutism of stereotyping. Or else the traveler can so exoticize their destination as to valorize it over their home, “going native” because the domestic contradictions are so overpowering and the allure of the Other so intoxicating. But the price of such knowledge is always exiting the comfort of the domestic.

At once a verbal map, a diary, and record of a historical time and place, the British travelogues of the 18th and 19th century tended to represent the physical and conceptual delimitations of empire at the height of its expansive energy.¹⁵ Thus James Cook’s “Voyages

¹⁴ Until later in the 20th century when more narratives of intellectuals traveling from outside the imperial metropole to the core and “writing back” begin to emerge. For instance, Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s *Passage to England* (1960) is a very effective travelogue which playfully turns the exoticizing tradition back on London, or fictional accounts like Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) which is typical of many African novels’ account of the journey abroad for education.

¹⁵ Carr’s work traces the travelogue’s transition from didactic, moralizing literature to a literary genre in its own right as tracking the emergence of subjective form (“Modernism and Travel,” 74). Lawrence describes travel literature’s mandate to explore “the tension between the thrilling possibilities of the unknown and the weight of the familiar, between a desire for escape and a sense that one can never be outside a binding cultural network”

Round the World" (1777) finds its later counterpart in Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle* (1839), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Turkish Embassy Letters 1716-18* (published 1763) exchanged during the first century of Anglo-Ottoman diplomacy evolve into the borderline travel guides of Mariana Starke at the turn of the 19th century, fueled by Thomas Cook's creation of a tourist industry as travel goes public. By the 20th century, travelogues inexorably unfold in the shadow of this pinnacle of British imperialism, whether nostalgically or critically.

The travelogue is, in Rebecca Walkowitz's words "born translated," invoking the Latin root of translation meaning to "carry across" while also quite literally requiring the mediation of linguistic translation for its creation.¹⁶ Most often, this translation is done at the site itself, either by translator guides or plaques marking the relevant dimensions of the location. Jonathan Culler's spirited defense of the tourist in his seminal essay "The Semiotics of Travel" deconstructs the opposition between traveler, as valued sojourner with special access to authentic local insights and spaces, and tourist, as noisy, obnoxious and obsessed with taking photos of inauthentic "tourist traps."¹⁷ Quickly abandoning the traveler as the semiotically over-burdened (typically more-valorized) term, he emphasizes the impact which the usually belittled tourist has on the legibility of "foreign spaces," not only for the home audiences of travel writing but also on the spaces and sights themselves, suggesting that the tourist, perhaps more than the more

(*Penelope Voyages*, 19) whereas Pratt highlights the ways in which the genre reinforced British imperialism by more firmly delineating the boundaries between Home and Abroad (*Imperial Eyes*, 3). Farley writes that "the travel narrative is a screen onto which the beauty of the world is testified to, even as the chaotic present is guided by the unseen forces of the past" (*Modernist Travel Writing*, 16). Campbell traces the imbrication of ethnography and travel literature in "Travel Writing and its theory." Said's *Orientalism* brought attention to the way in which the foreign Other is discursively racialized for the benefit of the imperial core, a work Culbert argues is a field-defining text in travel writing studies ("Theory and the limits of travel," 347). While Joseph Conrad's Kurtz is the most striking literary instance of the "going native" trope, Conrad based his depiction on 19th century ethnographic travelogues' representations of cannibalism and other exotic rituals (Brantlinger, *Taming Cannibals*, 65-85).

¹⁶ Walkowitz, *Born Translated*.

¹⁷ Culler, "Semiotics of Tourism," 153.

erudite traveler, is responsible for making certain sites visible or legible to both their readership (in cases of written accounts) and to the local populations.

Mary Louise Pratt's field defining work *Imperial Eyes* extends Culler's treatment of the tourist and argues that not only do such signs entertain and give a sense of the material reality of history to home audiences, but the travel writing economy that emerges in the late 18th century in fact also participates in the creation of the sense of *home* in the imperial centers of Europe. Travel writing gave "European reading publics a sense of ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized," but it also created an image of an externality, an outside to the "domestic" sphere of Europe that "created a sense of curiosity, excitement, adventure, and even moral fervor about European expansionism. They were one of the key instruments that made people 'at home' in Europe feel part of a planetary project."¹⁸ West's travelogue attempts to self-consciously push past this historical tendency of colonization that was tied to the genre, and she depicts what it is like to feel external to the familiar setting of Europe, and in fact, "at home" abroad.

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon is West's attempt to steer the British travelogue tradition in a new direction with a new politically critical vocation. It both participates in many of the hallmarks of the genre and attempts to push it past its anthropological and sentimental bounds as a critique of empire and its technique of balkanization. Even when West does invoke some of the more traditional elements of the genre, something about the historic rupture facing the world has obviated the nostalgia that characterizes its literary history. The narratives of "blood and soil" that had dictated so much of Yugoslavia's history in the Balkan Wars preceding WWI, had by now triumphed in the Nazis. Upon West's return home, while she was writing the Epilogue, the

¹⁸ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 3.

Nazis began the Blitz, dropping tens of thousands of tons of artillery on London. There was no possibility of a neat return, *nostos* was permanently interrupted.¹⁹ West's approach to the presence and present-ness of history in Yugoslavia, then, precipitates a necessarily cautious approach to national histories and their narratives, and a more expansive historical approach in general, because the future is all that exists and it is ever so delicate.

The narrative of *BLGF* does take the form of the trip out and back and in other ways participates in the traditional motivations that structure the travelogue genre; but West's travelogue tracks outward travel and inscribes it in the language of the inward journey in which she comes into deeper wells of self-knowledge and understanding. Reflecting on all of her journeys, she writes: "Nothing in my life had affected me more deeply than this journey through Yugoslavia. This was in part because there is a coincidence between the natural forms and colours of the western and southern parts of Yugoslavia and the innate forms and colours of my imagination" (1088). Under the surface of commentary about natural beauty and psychological discovery, it is the political and social situation in the region which impacts West most profoundly, rather than some sublime nature or untouched anthropological spectacle.

West's first trip to Yugoslavia took place in 1936 and was actually a lecture tour organized by the British Council, which had sponsored West's travels and lectures in Finland a year prior.²⁰ It is on this visit that West was introduced to her guide, Constantine, who she only half-innocuously describes as "short and fat, with a head like the best-known satyr in the Louvre" (41). West later reported that she had to repeatedly reject his sexual advances during

¹⁹ West scholar Motley Deakin characterizes her journey, for instance, as "a movement from the familiar to the unfamiliar and back, from the present into the past and back into an even more contemporary present" (*Rebecca West*, 97). I cannot help but think this is true of every journey, however, as I cannot think of a way one could return to a less contemporary present? In any case, I suggest that she does *not* return to her familiar home but has had her very sense of familiarity uprooted by her time in Yugoslavia and the conditions upon her final return.

²⁰ Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 153.

that trip,²¹ but this is not alluded to in her text, where he takes on a decidedly melancholic, romantic and bemused tone in opposition to the caustic behavior of his German wife, Gerda. Despite this, West's initial visit obviously had a remarkable impact on her, seeing as she returned again in 1937 and 1939, even as the inevitability of war with Germany was becoming more and more apparent to even the staunchest pacifists and isolationists in England.

In 1937, West was joined on her second trip to Yugoslavia by her husband, Henry Maxwell Andrews, a banker who used his business connections to help Jews flee Nazi Germany and later to sit on a committee for the post-war recovery of Yugoslavia through the Ministry of Economic Warfare of the FO.²² In *BLGF*, Andrews serves as a mouthpiece for a more sophisticated, though indelibly masculine, western European mind, often spouting reams of factual data about material resources in the Balkans or some piece of anthropological insight into the practices they're witnessing, to the tickled delight of West's narrator. But even as West dabbles in this kind of stereotypically gendered *tete-a-tete*, she equally frames Andrews as the face of British delusion, the bumbling Western traveler who cannot help but be out of place abroad, in spite of the genteel noblesse that his station requires he exude. West's final trip, taken in 1939, was another solo journey and her last trip to the country for the rest of her life.

More often than not, the reader finds these characters exceeding their roles as providers of cultural context, becoming "types" representing European ideas and movements, even entire nations. West uses her travelogue to stage an allegory, of sorts, for the state of Europe itself just prior to WWII. Constantine provides a witty, poetic, and deeply romantic sounding-board for

²¹ Ibid., 155. West's journals were bequeathed to the Beinecke Library at Yale on the condition that they be sealed until the death of her husband and son.

²² Ibid., 161. West and Andrews were staunch supporters of the Yugoslavian monarchy and used their political and economic connections to support the loyalist cause, ultimately meeting with the exiled monarch King Paul in London after the Nazi invasion and subsequent communist partisan victory.

West's reflections on the Slavic mind and spirit, while also functioning as a foil to his wife, Gerda, who espouses Aryan supremacy and the worst excesses of Nazi ideology throughout the journey. Milica, another intellectual and writer, is West's intellectual equal and peer, who exposes West to the sacrificial ritual of the black lamb, which is alluded to in the title. This typification in turn, I show, rests on a certain notion of ethnic essentialism that West adopts in an effort to valorize cultural difference in support of the cause of Yugoslav self-governance, often flying in the face of the anti-fascist tone she projects.

Gone "Guesting": Beyond Tourist and Traveler²³

West's wariness of the excesses of nationalism's historical narratives ultimately leads her to position travel and the intercultural connections it fosters as an antidote to the process of balkanization that foments ever greater divisiveness and violence. This is in part because her travelogue is not motivated by an attitude of cultural superiority and domination but of friendship and belonging. Her critique of imperialism requires a non-sentimental, non-colonial record that is premised in something beyond transactional exchange. In so doing, she evokes a figure which is sacred in cultures that value hospitality like those she encounters in Yugoslavia: the guest. I read the guest as depicting a traveling figure that mediates the traveler and tourist binary that dominates much of travel literature and its criticism. As a guest, West depicts herself as neither agent of empire, fortune-seeker, nor tourist-on-Thomas-Cooke-holiday during three her journeys through Yugoslavia, which is to say she does not fit squarely into the two most prevalent peripatetic roles identified in the travelogue tradition: the traveler and the tourist.²⁴

²³ In the Yugoslav languages, there is a phrase that actively describes the act of going visiting in terms of being hosted – на гости. The word for "guest" (гости) forms the root word for the word "God" or "Lord" (господ/господар) in Slavic languages. This word means Lord of Strangers/Guests, suggesting the sacred place that the visitor has historically had in the Slavic linguistic (and cultural) system. Interestingly, these words are etymologically related to the root for ghost/host in English as well.

²⁴ For further discussion of these two figures central to the modern travel genre, see Feifer, *Going Places*, Fussell, *Abroad*, MacCannell, *The Tourist* and Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. Each of these analyses elaborate to a large extent

BLGF interrupts the binary of traveler/tourist by introducing an impetus to movement that had not yet cropped up in much of the travel literature prior: hospitality or going visiting. This common kind of travel is not entirely foreign or unrepresented in British literary history, of course. One need only read a Jane Austen novel to see that this was how the British aristocracy spent much of their leisure time: bouncing between big houses with a greater or lesser degree of boredom. But bourgeois leisure-visiting was different from the kinds of personal connection West forges in Yugoslavia: her connections are not mediated (as much) by class or blood – she is not visiting relatives or British administrators but in fact local people whom she encountered on her previous trip(s), staying with her hosts rather than in arranged accommodations where she could. Further, West’s narrative can be read as conveying the historical moment when such hospitality-based travel becomes possible at a global level – when the reading public could begin to imagine not only exotic adventures in the wild yonder, but *friendships*.

The guest is a figure which is given from history, sacred in many cultures that value and standardize hospitality, especially between strangers, and reemerges in *BLGF* as an optimistic figure in traveling literature, looking forward to a time when national differences would not be the cause of violence but the grounds for relations. In West’s somewhat idealistic view, the guest is given access to places and sites that the tourist and the traveler cannot have; they have access to years of lived experiences through their hosts, the backstory of the place, the “true” narrative that can only be elicited after one has lived in a place for a long time. In the eyes of the guest, all sites can be unified into a narrative that tourist attractions cannot convey.

West’s epic travelogue insists on this kind of vision, which mediates the tourist and traveler and privileges the authenticity granted by one’s hosts in producing a narrative of not

on the tourist/traveler dichotomy as central to understanding of the modern travelogue, though none so explicitly as Culler above.

personal, but national, development. The guest is given insight into navigating history and extracting “truth” from it, rather than being misled by attractions and narratives that serve certain political and economic agendas. The guest is capable of critical observations in ways that the tourist and traveler are not because their observations are invited rather than foisted upon, their insights seen as coming from a place of reciprocity rather than imbalanced power relations between host and visitor.

West integrates both poles of the tourist/traveler dichotomy in her narrative at various times and through various mouthpieces in order to show that there is an alternative way to travel that history has made possible, but that this possibility is threatened at every side by the rhetoric and looming violence in Europe. She is keenly aware of the fragility of the past, of authenticity’s gossamer nature, especially in light of Nazi myth-making as well as, much to her horror, Croatian collaborationists and figures like her guide, Constantine, who she sees as slowly eroding his national and racial pride in the face of European predation, as figured in Gerda.

Gerda’s lack of hospitality when West and Andrews are guests in her home further cements West’s dislike of the imperious German and her disdain for Slavic cultural practices: “Contemptuously she told us that when a Serbian family expected guests to tea, the housewife would put herself about to bake cakes and biscuits; but, as we would see, she said with a shrug of the shoulders, indicating the food on her table, which had been obviously bought from a shop, she was not so. Her cool tone drew a picture of how she would like to dispense hospitality” (625). The primary reasons that West and Andrews come to despise Gerda is that her lack of hospitality betrays a deeper rot in her soul. In order to understand Gerda, and how her attitude became so prevalent in Europe at that time, West suggests that history will offer the context and

insight into this development, what she will come to understand as the “death drive” that moves European history.

To this effect, the pole of the tourist takes on a decidedly German posture in her writings, an indication that West had adopted the pejorative view of tourists of the time. Gerda thus becomes the stereotypical tourist, sneering, loud, obnoxious and unapologetic. In opposition to this German tourist that *exploits*, the benign British traveler, someone like her husband for instance, *explains*. West shows that the figure of the traveler, while certainly a better traveling companion than Gerda’s rude tourist, also has its limitations: since Andrews acts as though he has already been to Yugoslavia and knows what can be found there, his observations are never presented as especially incisive, merely informative. His education and background knowledge, and his economic eye for industry, means that the possibilities of his experience there are limited in ways that West’s are not because it is as if there is nothing left to see which he did not already know. At the same time, Andrews serves to sharpen West’s observations, often challenging her romantic interpretations of individual’s psychology and the land’s history.

West’s ability to be hosted as a guest largely arises because of the personal connections she forged when she was introduced to several official political and cultural figures on her first visit, a lecture tour on the culture of England. As a result of their immediate connection during that time, Constantine and Milica extend their personal invitations to West, lending a certain authority to her voice, as her observations are elicited by her local connections, her friends. She becomes an “Insider” by virtue of her access to local networks of knowledge and culture who view her as more than a tourist or an agent representing some financial interest. What’s more, these figures become crucial to her deep and profound affinity for Yugoslavia, offering her context, and giving her a more curated and culturally insightful visit than what she might hope

for if she was a tourist or there on business.

But as I mentioned above, West's lecture tour was commissioned by the British Council, the cultural arm of the Foreign Office. Constantine and Milica are more than just Serbian intelligentsia, more than her guides, translators, and ultimately friends; Constantine was West's pseudonym for avant-garde poet and chief press officer of the Yugoslav Council of Ministers, Stanislav Vinaver; Milica is in fact, well-known Serbian writer, professor and cultural figure, Anica Savić-Rebac. Though West made no secret of the fact that her first trip to Yugoslavia was funded through the British Council, a cultural arm of the Foreign Office (FO), none of this is disclosed in *BLGF* itself. As with all lecture tours funded by the British Council, she was required to compose a report upon returning, which she took as an opportunity to write an intelligence report in which she offers her "personal and political assessments of the various government officials she had met with special reference to their attitudes to Germany and Britain" which was passed from the British Council to the Foreign Office.²⁵

What's more, it took West two years upon returning from her last trip to Yugoslavia in 1939 to publish *BLGF*, a process she described as excruciating in large part because of the exhaustion produced in writing the rousing and propagandistic epilogue, which she wrote exclusively at the behest of the Ministry of Information.²⁶ Initially, West thought *BLGF* might be useful in mobilizing public support against the isolationism and appeasement that was paralyzing British Parliament. Hitler's 1939 invasion of Poland and the subsequent rousing of the British Prime Minister made that motivation obsolete.²⁷ However, West still felt that her observations in

²⁵ Glendinning, *Rebecca West*, 153.

²⁶ Ibid., 161. Colquitt, for instance, calls West a "propagandist of genius" ("A Call to Arms," 78). Further, West says that almost all of her information about the Balkans from the time of her final visit in 1939 until the publication of the book (though likely much later), came from the Foreign Office.

²⁷ In her characteristic wit, West writes, "The instrument of our suicidal impetus, Neville Chamberlain, who had seemed as firmly entrenched in our Government as sugar in the kidneys of a diabetic patient, all at once was gone" (1125).

Yugoslavia had value to the British war effort, accounting for the propagandistic tone.

On the one hand, this sponsorship allowed West to get in touch with a wider network of antifascist and anti-Nazi thinkers²⁸ and to make lasting friendships in the country, which in turn enabled the work to be more politically penetrative and nuanced than if she had to rely on her own network for travel arrangements. On the other, this official state sponsorship could not but cloud her observations, seeing as it mediates both sides of the cultural exchange she holds so dear. She is sent by the wing of British government responsible for the oversight of its vast foreign interests; her hosts are national representatives of a monarchy that was actively repressing communist and nationalist uprisings of certain of its ethnic minorities (and which would almost immediately capitulate to the Nazis in 1940). West does not speak the language but requires the mediation of these figures, both linguistically and culturally, to understand what she sees. The lack of Slavic self-representation in no small part contributes to her rather problematic dismissal of the religious piety of Muslim Serbs and a repudiation of the Ottoman empire on similarly culturalist grounds.

Complicating matters even further, however, is the fact that West's "native informant" is a Jewish Serb, an insider and outsider at once. Constantine comes to take on a central role in the narrative of *BLGF*, perhaps larger than Andrews' role as consort, seeing as how West finds a deep spiritual affinity between herself and the Yugoslavian Jewish poet. As a Jewish Serb, he carries certain cosmopolitan resonances in himself that West sees as indicative of the apotheosis of the Yugoslavian project as an expression of the Slavic spirit. His identity becomes a vessel of history for West, as he can speak to the conditions of Europe's impending doom from the most perspicacious perspective; this is an important point to note, as West is quite the critical

²⁸ Perhaps even intelligence agents: "It is said that Belgrade is the centre of the European spy system, and it may be that some of these people are spies" (*BLGF*, 472).

observer. She is not an avid cultural relativist, in spite of her sympathies for Yugoslavian lifeways and people. There are things that West sees that horrify her, including the violent sacrifices alluded to in her title, which I return to below. But Constantine is not presented as a national chauvinist, uncritically assured of Yugoslavian domination – in the strange concoction of Yugoslavian ethnic policies/politics during the time of the monarchy and worker-managed socialism that would follow, to be a religious minority was to experience national minority status as well.

For West, Constantine is the perfect “native informant” because of this curious status of “insiderism” in spite of the ways that state institutions attempt to externalize and mark him as a “foreigner” serving “foreign interests,” which was one of the antisemitic narratives that proliferated in Yugoslavia prior to the Holocaust. Likewise, Constantine supports the central government in Belgrade, a position that holds no small influence on West, arguing that Serbs hew more closely to the interests of all of the southern Slavs than the Croats, due to the Croats’ broader sympathies with the Germans and Austrians as a result of Austro-Hungarian imperial influence during the late 19th century. Through Constantine, West finds that her ideals align most closely with Belgrade’s view of a federated kingdom of disparate but united nationalities, much like those back home in the United Kingdom. Yet in spite of these sympathies, West is equally repulsed by Constantine because of his intellectually hollow rebuttals to Gerda’s avowal of German and Aryan supremacy and his ineffectual responses to the glee she exudes at the horror that such views provoke in West and Andrews.²⁹ Such contradictory figures populate much of

²⁹ West’s attraction and disgust, rejection and exoticization of Constantine, mirrors what George Mosse identifies as the discourse surrounding Jewish masculinity. Jewish men were seen as incapable of living up to the ideals of virile manliness that had developed in European society and were viewed as a threat to the moral (sexual) fiber of society as vectors of decadence and degeneracy. West tokenizes and villainizes Constantine on the basis of many of the same acts. See Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 79-80.

BLGF, so that even when West's reflections might ring as dated and limited in perspective, she often manages to wrestle a meaningful observation out of them. It is in such assiduous psychological and social observations of such incongruous figures that the text's sympathies are largely advanced.

Macedonia: Europe's Past and Nexus of Its Future

One such site of contradiction is the region of Macedonia, to which West devotes a large portion of her narrative and her affection. It is as though the further south and east she goes, the more remote and "primitive" the locale, the more she finds herself feeling at home. In essence, West flips the typical conclusion of the travelogue on its head: her travels to Europe's periphery, concomitant with her profound investigations of its history, results in her realization that this supposedly backwards, barbarous zone is a picture of Europe's *future*, not its past. She writes, "Europe is in her soul Macedonia" (805), later adding: "is the country I have always seen between sleeping and waking" (1088). But it is not only the site of such oneiric liminality, mediating the id and ego of European society, where the future of the European continent is decided and displayed.³⁰ After being one of the last Ottoman holdings relinquished by Istanbul, it continued to remain a site of perpetual interstitiality and source of much jingoism and irredentism in the Balkans. Their tour through the region which was then administered by Serbia led Andrews to remark, "No wonder that when you came to Macedonia you were fascinated. You were looking in the magic crystal and seeing our future" (805).

As a result of her personal connections to Macedonia, West positions herself as more native to Yugoslavia than Gerda who lives there but despises it: "That she invited herself to be

³⁰ Continuing the thread of historical synchronicity I've been tracing out, it's incumbent upon me to point out that Freud gained a great deal of insight into the unconscious structure of the psyche during a visit to famous karstic caves in Slovenia, so it should be no surprise that the psychoanalytic model of history that West advances here finds such fertile ground in the Balkans (Bjelić, "Balkan Geography and the De-Orientalization of Freud," 30-32).

our guest and then continuously insulted us is not a proposition acceptable to the mind” (800; emphasis added). West feels so at home in Macedonia, it is as though she is (begrudgingly) hosting Gerda through the country. Though she is married to a Slav and lives in Belgrade, Gerda is incapable of understanding the value of her environment, her inborn superiority automatically superseding any sympathies she might have grown for her surroundings. “Gerda’s Empire” as West calls it, represents this hostile ownership that sees the value and customs of the Slavic people as inherently backwards rather than as preserving some worthwhile element of culture and community. And “Gerda’s Empire” threatened to eradicate all such cultures that did not fall into line with its world-shaping vision.

Therefore, for West to understand the roots of that terrible present, she feels she must travel to the site of the “process” of history itself and witness its operations in practice. Such history is not inert, like lost ruins unexcavated by archaeologists but rendered in living people, impressions of places, and testimonies of arcane rituals. It is on living display in Yugoslavia, not buried beneath strata of earth and the cast-off garbage of mundane existence; people wear it on their faces; they perform it in the streets and shout it from the rooftops. Reflecting on the Austrian occupation of Zagreb in starting in the late 18th century, West writes “I had come to Yugoslavia to see what history meant in flesh and blood. I learned now that it might follow, because an empire passed, that a world full of strong men and women and rich food and heady wine might nevertheless seem like a shadow-show” (103). The process of history in Yugoslavia, cast in “flesh and blood,” has turned the nation into a “shadow-show,” a result of the machinations of empire and balkanization.

This “process” is inscribed on the very faces of some ailing women she sees very early on in her narrative after disembarking at Korchula on the Dalmatian coast: “here in Yugoslavia I did

not have to poke about among the detritus of commonplace life to find allusions to this process [of history]: an old woman and a young girl came out into the street and gave a dramatic rendering of it in the presence of the people. It is that quality of visibility that makes the Balkans so specially enchanting,” (202). West is shocked to see two women being carried on stretchers by four men apiece, loaded onto a modern steamship in order to be taken to a larger city for care. Loudly moaning, the crowds on the quay give way to these two figures whisked seemingly out of history itself into the steam-driven future; West believes this is a typical event in Yugoslavia by virtue of having seen it so publicly.³¹ Most importantly, West is amazed to see that this strange public display of illness, typically hidden from sight back home except in cases of intimate family or friends, requires a certain unabashed thirst for life.

In the Prologue, West discusses the interconnectedness of disparate and seemingly unrelated events and the way that they change history in unexpected ways. She remembers learning of the 1934 assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia in Marseilles, the first modern assassination, so called because it was captured on video and photograph and widely disseminated by news media across the world, as the inciting incident that draws her attention to Yugoslavia, reminding her that Europe’s “Great War” was provoked by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. She returns to both events in detail while she explores

³¹ She writes, “But it also seemed typical of life in Yugoslavia, in the Balkans, *because I had been able to see it*. In Western Europe or in America it would have been highly unlikely that I would see an old woman or a young girl who were desperately ill, unless they were my relatives or close friends, and then my interest in them as individuals would distract my attention from their general characteristics” (203; emphasis added). The logic of the opening sentence is shaky at best, since that would mean that anything she saw on her travels would necessarily be typical of life in Yugoslavia, by virtue of her having seen it in Yugoslavia. Regardless, West again is invested in understanding Yugoslavians as “types” which allow her to cast European affairs in terms of interpersonal dealings. It is curious that she relies on her insider access to Yugoslavian culture when it suits her purposes and then when it does not, she relies on her foreign status, as when she makes the typifications we see here. The two ill women become typical of certain Yugoslavian cultural patterns *because* she is not distracted by their individuality which would serve only to obscure their broader social significance as types.

Sarajevo and Belgrade, wandering the very streets where the Archduke was killed for example.³²

Such events are part of her understanding of history as process because they mark moments that produce recognizable shifts in the way that people lived: for instance, in Herzegovina, West is appalled by the legacy of Turkish rule in the province which left the beautiful region depleted. The once bustling market of Trebinje is filled with junk and not even the Muslim population that remains anymore is respectable in her eyes: “Nearly all the Moslems in Yugoslavia except in the extreme south, in Macedonia, are Slavs whose ancestors were converted by the Turks, sometimes in order to keep their properties, sometimes because they were Bogomil heretics and wanted defence against Roman Catholic persecution” (275). West regards this as a cowardly act, and the result of an excessively oppressive colonial regime that now left even its finest citizens in ruins; she asserts “I hate the corpses of empires, they stink as nothing else” (280). Much of her impression of the presence of history and the mechanisms that form this “process” in Yugoslavia are based on vestiges of Byzantine and Ottoman influence that she witnesses more and more as she travels further south and east.

Yet the process also contains its opposite impulses, nowhere better put on display than in Macedonia. West ascertains a vitalist core in the stubborn insistence on living of the Macedonian peasant that defangs the history of balkanization and oppression that rings throughout Yugoslav history and serves as an antidote to the death-spiral of Europe’s present condition. “I was standing opposite a peasant woman sitting on a window ledge who was the very essence of Macedonia, who was exactly what I had come back to see... This woman had suffered more than

³² King Alexander, and the French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou, were killed by Vlado Chernozemski, a fascist sympathizer with ties to Bulgarian nationalist movements and Macedonian separatist movements, though staunchly anti-communist in his affiliations. The murder was naturally politically motivated, but like that of the Archduke’s (under strangely similar conditions, by similarly motivated southern Yugoslavian assassins) is still murkily understood.

most other human beings, she and her forebears...” she writes, listing a series of hypothetical misfortunes scrawled on this woman’s face. “But she had two possessions which any Western woman might envy. She had strength, the terrible stony strength of Macedonia... And cupped in her destitution as in the hollow of a boulder there are the last drops of the Byzantine tradition” (630). All the extirpations of empire that historically set the constitutive ethnic groups against one another in the 19th century balkanization and all its later consequences could not quench the desperate clinging to life that West finds so admirable and inspiring about daily life in Yugoslavia, nurtured by what West sees as the magical rite of the Orthodox ritual, which I will discuss more below.

The way that history is dramatized as a process in Macedonia in this peasant woman’s face is finalized in two subsequent rituals that West witnesses on her way out of the country and back toward home regarding the process of history creating the present. These also are the two central images of the books title: the black lamb, whose ritual sacrifice she watches in horror just outside Skopje; and the grey falcon, a metaphor of sacrifice that comes from an old Serbian poem that Constantine recited to West on the site of the decisive battle for Kosovo that ushered in centuries of Ottoman control. These visions illustrate West’s philosophical views, especially her critique of the Christian worldview that governs so much of European affairs, but immediately bleed into her political views on spiritual partition and nationalism.

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: St. Augustine and the Fallacy of Atonement

The black lamb and the grey falcon are two metaphorical images which capture the processual flow of history, propelled by two tendencies, inherent to human nature but exacerbated by religious ideas that are central tenets of Christianity. West had a profound and abiding interest in St. Augustine, who was the topic of a book-length “psycho-biography” she

published in 1933, that examined his medieval intervention in catholic dogma. In *BLGF*, West expounds at great length on the Augustinian logical intervention that set a course for the death-drive she sees exemplified by the fascist movements of Europe.

These two animals appear in succession in the climax of the travelogue, though West encounters black lambs a number of times in *BLGF*. The creature's first appearance is rather innocent; West watches as a peasant, described as a "Byzantine king" enters her hotel, cradling a writhing lamb in his arms. She sees its eyes "catching the light as it turned and shining like small luminous plates" (483), alluding to the enlightening vision that West will have as she watches this mystical light extinguished in a ritual sacrifice in Macedonia some 400 pages later. West is conveyed to a site north of Skopje, where Muslim Roma families would conduct fertility rites at a sacred rock, dashing animals against it and smearing their blood on the rock and their children.

She describes the "purely shameful" (826) ritual in grisly detail and has a revelation: the horrific sacrifice of the lamb represents a particular way of thinking, not unique to Yugoslavia at all. In fact, West writes, "I knew this rock well. I had lived under the shadow of it all my life. All our Western thought is founded on this repulsive pretence that pain is the proper price of any good thing" (827). She goes on to state that the message of Christianity, the sacrificial atonement of the crucified Christ, represents a "ruse" perpetuated by church doctrine from St. Paul through Augustine and Martin Luther, in order to rationalize this soteriological fallacy.³³ West sees the central tenet of Christianity, that Christ's sacrifice was necessary to abate the wrath of God toward humanity, or if not God's fury, then the contract that mankind had penned with the devil, as stemming from this more ancient and primitive belief of atonement, seeing it as present in the ritual at the rock, rather than as standing against it.

³³ In fact, she attributes Augustine's avowal of this doctrine of cruelty as anger at God for the death of his mother, one way in which individual psychology comes to the aid of liberal idealism of West's kind.

The grey falcon refers to a famous Serbian national folk poem, which Constantine recites to West and Andrews on the site of the Battle of Kosovo, a large battlefield where the Ottoman empire's decisive victory in the Balkans took place in 1389, ushering in centuries of colonial administration in the region.³⁴ In the poem, a grey falcon alights before Tsar Lazar, the Serbian ruler tasked with defending his kingdom, as the Ottoman invasion approaches. The falcon presents the prince with two choices: "Of what kind will you have your kingdom? / Do you want a heavenly kingdom? / Do you want an earthly kingdom?" (910). Rather than rallying his troops to defend his nation, Tsar Lazar opts for a heavenly kingdom and follows the falcon's instructions to build a church on the site and administer the eucharist to the entire army.

The Ottoman army rushes in shortly after the communion ritual is administered, and while victory at one point appears within reach, ultimately the Serbs are betrayed by Vuk Brankovic, Tsar Lazar's second in command, who becomes the governor of much of Yugoslavia's territory under Turkish rule. West's analysis of the poem is conflicted, though she is resolute that the king made a crucial error:

Lazar was wrong,' I said to myself, 'he saved his soul and there followed five hundred years when no man on these plains, nor anywhere else in Europe for hundreds of miles in any direction, was allowed to keep his soul. He should have chosen damnation for their sake. No, what am I saying? I am putting the state above the individual, and I believe that there are certain ultimate human rights that must have precedence over all others. What I mean is rather that I do not believe in the thesis of the poem. I do not believe that any man can procure his own salvation by refusing to save millions of people from miserable slavery (911).

West's vacillation between the priority of the rights of the individual versus those of the society (envisioned as a national entity here) is illuminating, though I will return to this more below. Her

³⁴ This field is called Gazimestan and is central to the dispute between Serbia and Kosovo. This is the site of Slobodan Milosević's famous ethnonationalist address in 1989, claiming that the battlefield will always belong to Serbia as the core of Serb identity precisely because of the Battle of 1389. Milosević's speech inflamed ethnic and national tensions throughout Yugoslavia, contributing to the collapse of the socialist federation of Yugoslav republics in 1990.

inability to understand the poem's thesis stems from the decisive nature of the history which follows the battle, a history which happens "too completely" for West to place herself in Lazar's position and come away with the same decision, for West to even imagine the battle of Kosovo with the same level of graphic detail as she uses to recount the slaughter of the black lamb.

While there might be ways to end the sacrifice of innocents exemplified in the ritual which so disgusts Wests, there is no way to turn back history to revise what West sees as perhaps the more significant betrayal: Prince Lazar's belief that his sacrificial death will actuate meaningful redemption for his people. West sees how the doctrine of atonement might be rational to the extent that performing a ritual of sacrifice has historically been seen as operating causally with whatever desired effect, in this case a fertility rite. But for the *individual* to be driven by this impulse, to strive for a symbolic death at the expense of a catastrophic material loss, is too irrational for West to comprehend. But this is not simply the domain of this backwards and hapless Slavic kingdom tucked away in the dustbin of history, away from where it can do real harm. No, this is the future that awaits West's beloved Europe in the light of fascist depredation. In fact, her first response to hearing Constantine recite Prince Lazar's poem is to wryly reply: "So that was what happened, Lazar was a member of the Peace Pledge Union" (ibid).

History has endless lessons for the present if one is equipped to see and understand them. Privileged by her access to this poet of certain national regard (and certainly nationalistic feeling), West is able to watch history unfold as a result of this one decision. The process, we see, is driven by the will of certain individuals; if, in this view, the individual must take priority over the state, the function of the state becomes to present the means, usually humanistic or creative, to inculcate the individual in the values of the national culture in order to better serve

the will of the people. But West sees this process going awry as egoism and ideology hurtle Europe toward a violent future.

The violent process of history that West sees working itself out in Yugoslavia is ironically what also makes the land so enchanting and optimistic to her. “Yugoslavia is always telling me about one death or another,” she thinks to herself while recounting the violent deaths experienced by one public figure after another. Yet, she continues, “this country is full of life. I feel that we Westerners should come here to learn to live. But perhaps we are ignorant about life in the West because we avoid thinking about death” (917). The veneer of bourgeois respectability prevents the western world from discussing death, much as it prevents frank presentations of illness and malaise like West suggests on the quay in Korchula. In Yugoslavia, one is confronted with such realities of life every day, so it becomes impossible to ignore death and the lust for death that structures so much of daily life.

West is conscious to attribute much of this sort of violence to European political intrigue, indeed to the meddling of the Great Powers in Berlin, which she saw as Europe ceding the Balkans, the “soul” of Europe, to continued subjugation by the Ottoman empire. “The great powers had perpetuated Balkan misery by the Treaty of Berlin. They had been responsible for many ugly deaths” (613).³⁵ In other words, the partition enacted in Berlin in the late 19th century speaks to the present conditions that Yugoslavs live under and persevere through. Mundane existence in Yugoslavia becomes a conscious rebellion against this lust for death which is ubiquitous, imposed externally and internally. And yet, even as she sees signs of this death-drive everywhere, they contain seeds for the opposite drives, life and friendship, because they force

³⁵ However, she suggests that the great powers had a certain moral grounding that limited their worst depredations: “But at least they knew when they had sinned that there was sin, at least they were aware that there was good and there was evil. But this the new rulers of the world did not know” (613). Here is not the first time that West’s nostalgia for an older, Westphalian order stubbornly bleeds through her narrative.

people to face these threats daily and to set themselves resolutely against them; they inculcate a culture of resistance.

It is not until the Epilogue that the full legacy of Prince Lazar's decision is unveiled, "its hidden meaning pulses with life" (1145). Written during the invasion of Yugoslavia by Axis powers in 1941, West uses the Epilogue to reflect on the heroic resistance of the Yugoslavs against the Nazis, even in the face of certain defeat. The Yugoslavs rally around their great poem about the sacrifice of Lazar, this time not because they were enamored with the doctrine of atonement and a death-lust as in the time of the Turkish invasion, but, on the contrary, because of their "love of life" (ibid). "The stock cannot survive save by the mutual kindness of men and women, of old and young, of state and individual...The Yugoslavs, who have often been constrained to sin by history, are nevertheless well aware of the difference between good and evil" (ibid). There is a moral core to Yugoslavia which resists death, even if it is inculcated in it, culturally and politically. West, we shall see attributes this resistance to something inherent to the psyche of the Slav, just as certain historic and political tendencies exacerbated the inherent aggressiveness of the German.

Augustine is, for West, a great provocation because his doctrine resounded so strongly with the horrible thirst for death that she saw acted out by great pompous, deranged men in the political sphere in Europe at the time.³⁶ West, aesthetic idealist that she was, sees in Augustine

³⁶ Harold Orel argues that West's 1933 monograph on the life of Saint Augustine, marked "a turning-point in her career, for it identifies, for the first time, clearly and without possibility of mistake, a religious centre to her consciousness" (*Literary Achievements*, 71). In the Epilogue, West attributes the apocalyptic undertones of *BLGF* to her work on Augustine, which she says she wrote "to find out why every phrase I read of his sounds in my ears like the sentence of my doom and the doom of my age" (1054). Death itself is fairly central to Augustinian thought. In his *Confessions*, Augustine asks how the past could be discerned *as the past* if nothing ever died? We know the past has passed because it is dead, or at the very least, contains evidence of the dead and thus of a time that came before. Time, for Augustine, prefigures the rite of sacrifice, its continuous entombment meticulously enforced by historians and theologians, so that the danger it poses to the present loses its edge. The past must continually be put to death by the inexorable present for the soteriological benefit of mankind – the past being too reprehensibly pagan, Manichaean, or otherwise heretical (and thus, for Augustine, seductive) to otherwise be let to

the great flaw of the 20th century as perfectly dramatized in the Balkans by the aforementioned sacrifice of the lamb at the Sheep's Field in Kosovo and her vision of the falcon over Gazimestan, with Prince Lazar's fateful poem resounding apocalyptically over the whole display. Augustine was too keen on "draw[ing] the knife across the lamb's throat" and is responsible for enshrining the "repulsive pretence that pain is the proper price of any good thing" in Europe (828-9). West's reference to Augustine at this dramatic apex of her entire narrative demonstrates her view of the central role his theory of Atonement has on the historical development of Protestant and Roman Catholic Europe.

More importantly, this theory is mirrored in the sacrificial darkness at the core of Yugoslav identity, a hidden identity exposed in the performance of this ritual; thus, Yugoslavia becomes a way to scale from the particular to the universal, since even those whose faith emerges from an entirely different epistemological paradigm from Augustine, such as the Muslim Roma family at the sacrificial rock, carry with them this "repulsive pretence." And yet, as a nation composed of even smaller nations constantly jostling for primacy, Yugoslavia offers the potential that differences can be functionally channeled toward the ends of unity, towards life and not death, when nations are left to their own devices. Blood, for West, is useful when it is intent on uniting (nations) but cannot be the basis of salvation; nationalism, however, grounded on the basis of ethnic (blood) belonging which is seen to express the nation's essence, comes to replace the age-old demand of blood sacrifice.

Thus, Augustine and the ritual sacrifices West witnesses in the Balkans form an image of the universal truth West hopes to advance: the fundamental partition threatening humanity is

develop "on its own" as it were. This, we will see, primes Augustine as emblematic of a dogmatic Christianity that West opposes, seeing a way out through heresy, or what she views as a heretical strain in the Eastern Orthodox liturgy.

spiritual, and all other partitions, from literal territory to the division of the sexes, follow from it. If the sphere of politics is both the domain of masculine power and a mad dash toward death, then it follows that the death drive of European politics issues from this soteriological heresy, which has been adopted as dogma by all of the world's major religions. Thus, heretical traditions, as they have been conceived by these institutions, hold certain promise for West.

West stops short of offering a full critique of Christianity and in fact valorizes Yugoslavia as a stronghold of it: "the last to accept Christianity are the last to preserve it in the morning strength of its magic" (1149). Neither does she suggest that there is some connection between the various religious frameworks of atonement as ideological underpinnings of power and capitalism, which might be one of the primary engines of these "immoral" empires that she cannot address, though it propped up both the Nazi Reich and the globe-spanning British empire. But she does see religious heterodox tendencies, tendencies which are still very much alive in the Yugoslavia of her time, as avenues for such possibilities as unity and friendship, possibilities which she herself experiences as a result of the hospitality she receives.

Manichaeism, Iconostasis, and the "Speculative" Soul of the Southern Slav

The gnostic heresy of Manichaeism "seduced" Augustine prior to his conversion to Christianity, and he carried its deep loathing for the material world into his confessions and treatises which would one day ossify into church doctrine. Yugoslavia, like the dead language of Latin, offers a glimpse, for West, of "what European culture was like before it was injected with the ideas of St. Augustine" (164). Thus, we see the seductive nature of heresy turned on its head: Christianity and Manichaeism, whose histories are themselves intertwined in the Balkans, form a two-headed eagle (not the first time this symbol has been present in the Balkans) by which the material world is condemned as evil and the spiritual as good. The necessity of

mortifying the flesh, of punishing the physical body for the glorification of the spiritual arose not necessarily out of the teachings of Mani (second century CE) or Christ, two sages and gentle souls in West's thinking, but were ultimately "handicapped by the strictly literal mind of the founder and his followers" (172). Original sin then, *pace* Augustine, is not the quality of fallenness which makes individuals prone to error and bound for hell, but rather is the impulse to punish and to substitute a blameless sacrifice to mask the stench of a collective failure. Such "heresies" abound in the Balkans as evidenced by the black lamb and grey falcon.³⁷

In tracing out this Manichean history, West indicates that the Gnosticism that has infiltrated even Western Christian rites (think for example of the mandated celibacy of priests in Roman Catholicism – something not practiced by the Orthodox clergy) may have historical roots in the Balkans, and thus, Augustine never escaped his Manichaean heresy, but merely folded it into the dogma of the church itself, in West's version of the return of the repressed. But by this tautology, the death drive of the Western world is a genealogical offshoot of this scion of Balkan heresy; therefore, it is perhaps not that Augustine's theory of Atonement has determined the future of the Western world and thus that the Balkans shows an alternative, but rather that the Balkans birthed a syncretism of Christianity and popular notions regarding the dichotomy of good and evil which was so powerful that "the whole of modern history could be deduced from the popularity of this heresy in Western Europe" (173).

Thus, for West, Augustine is where the trajectory between East and West in fact diverges.

³⁷ West expounds at length on the historical basis of this: as the Bogumils and later Bektashi (dervish Sufi) sects in Bosnia attest, Manichaeism has existed in the region for centuries. As West indicates in her exposition on these heretical movements, "For over this coast there was to spread from the hinterland of the Balkan Peninsula the Puritan heresy known as Paulicianism or Patarenism or Bogomilism or Catharism, knowing certain local and temporal variations under these names, but all impassioned over the necessity of disentangling the human spirit from the evilness of matter and convinced that this was immensely facilitated by the practice of virginity" (168). The Cathar and Albigensian movements of 12-13th century France, for instance, are theorized to have migrated to Western Europe from the Balkans via Bogumilism.

After the persecution of the Cathars and Albigensians in the 13th century, Gnosticism went underground in Western Europe. However, given the incursion of the Ottoman Empire, it simply changed form in the Balkans. For West, the Slavic psyche (or spirit, her metaphysical disambiguations notwithstanding) still bears the imprint of a Manichaeian substrate, which Western Europe tried to expurgate altogether. This was not entirely possible even in Western Europe as the late 19th and early 20th century resurgence of occultism evinces,³⁸ but because of the central position of the Balkans as a crossroads between East and West, such strategies never prevailed, and this substrate was left in solution to co-mingle with the rest of the religious, cultural, political and social ideas in the region.

Thus, for West there is something like a sympathetic resemblance between Manichaeism and what she calls “Slavism” or the “essentially speculative [nature of the] Slav” (351), something like the Hegelian *geist* of the Slavic people,³⁹ in which, “there is the seeming paradox of a fierce campaign against evil combined with a tolerance of its nature. We cannot understand this in the West, where we assume that sincere hostility to sin must be accompanied by a reluctance to contemplate it and a desire to annihilate it. But according to the Manichæan faith there was no need to take action against darkness except when it enmeshed the light” (175). It is this tolerance of evil that West really sees at the core of Prince Lazar’s fatalist poem in which he surrenders his earthly kingdom for a heavenly abode for the Slavic people.

³⁸ The Nazis themselves thought that the Cathar stronghold of Montsegur in southern France was the final resting place of the Holy Grail, for instance, and performed many archaeological (and psychic) excavations of the site seeking it, at the behest of Himmler and his occult research arm of the SS, the Ahnenerbe. The legend of the Cathar grail predates the Nazi movement, however, and likely emerges in the weird admixture of orientalism, occultism and Free-Masonry that characterized many secret societies with interest in magic and history in fin de siècle Europe. See Levenda, *Unholy Alliance*.

³⁹ A people that had no history of their own, and thus contributed next to nothing to the world spirit, per Hegel’s racial definition in *Philosophy of History*. West’s preferred essentialism here – “speculative” and elsewhere “analytical” – is a bit kinder, but no less strange.

Lazar sacrifices the Slavic homeland to keep something which West asserts could never be taken in the first place, because the salvation of the Slavs was never in question: “I do not believe that any man can procure his own salvation by refusing to save millions of people from miserable slavery. That it was a question of fighting does not matter, because in actual fact fighting is not much more disgusting, though probably slightly so, than many things people have to do in order that the race may triumph over certain assaults” (911). Salvation is self-determination; it is land and the culture that occupies it – under the sign of “nation”; the “infatuation with sacrifice which had caused Kossovo” warns West, threatens “if it were not checked, [to] abort all human increase” (917). In Macedonia, among the “corpses of empires” (280) in the “noisome stench” of history (492), West sees an image of the antidote to this infatuation in the “dark magic of the Orthodox rite” (491).

One of the central features of the Orthodox church is the concealment of the sanctuary, where the reliquary altar is, by a large iconostasis (see Figure 1 below). The division reflects humanity’s separation from God, whom they can only approach through the Eucharistic elements brought through the gates of the iconostasis by the priest and his attendant. For West, this iconostasis becomes overburdened with meaning, and at an Easter service in Skopje, serves as a metaphor that reveals the core of her political vision. West opens with a wry apocalyptic remark that a temper tantrum of Gerda’s might “annul” Easter, but the visibility of the iconostasis alerts West to the manifest reality to which the ritual of the liturgy alludes. This passage is worth quoting at length:

The iconostasis, which is the characteristic architectural feature of the Eastern Church, the screen before the altar, is here a wall surmounted by a cross, a fortification defending the ever-threatened holy things; its height, made gorgeous by icons and gilt carvings, was in this dusk a shadowy richness. The silver plates that are laid over the haloes and hands of the people represented in the icons glimmered like moonlight. Here and there a lamp burned dimly in the chandeliers that hung low from the roof; and a weak light came from

the candles on the table in the middle of the church, where the dead Christ lay in the likeness of an embroidered cloth. Most of the people had already paid their respects to this symbol, and were standing still in their places, the men to the right, the women to the left, so far as the elders were concerned, though the younger people often broke this rule (635).

The iconostasis is more than a collection of holy images, it is a fortification of “ever-threatened holy things.” Not only does it cut off the congregation from the holiest space of the church, it enforces a separation in their midst, though for perhaps the first time in history, a generational division upsets the gendered one.

The role of the iconostasis is two-fold: it partitions the church itself, along with the congregation, but it also serves as a visual display on which worshippers are meant to fix their attention. It is thus both a window into history and into the present as it contains various historical narratives as visual spectacles that explain certain cultural priorities of the congregants while also serving as a metaphor for the complexity of the present, capturing one aspect of the spiritual mysteries in its function as a portal for the priests to the church’s holiest space. The images on the iconostasis capture the “dead...likeness” of times and people long past, a reminder of the ephemeral nature of the present embedded in the monolithic quality of the iconostasis; history becomes a collection of such visuals, cloaked in a “shadowy richness” that the congregants must attend to, prostrate themselves in front of, and otherwise “pay respect to,” often by offering money, candles or kisses to specific icons and images.

The comportment toward the static images of the iconostasis, as well as to the dynamic movement that it facilitates in the crowning act of the liturgical mass – the presentation of the Eucharist to the congregation – becomes for West a “medium” (644) in which the Yugoslavian masses exist, which in fact preserves “their most treasured immaterial possession, their racial identity” (642). Thus, not only does the iconostasis “fortify” the material elements of the mass –

the “holy things” – separating them from the profane spaces of the masses “lest the people look at it so long that they forget its nature” (505), more importantly, it functions as a preservative of racial integrity, the holiest (etymologically: most integral, whole, total) of West’s spiritual concepts.

Thus, the iconostasis divides the people from themselves in order to better serve them, in order to procure the means for their salvation *as a race*. As West’s husband muses at Prince Lazar’s tomb, in front of yet another important iconostasis, this one a “veritable encyclopedia of medieval Serbian art”: “Those frescoes say to his people, ‘This is what you were, so this is what you are’” (493-94). Yet one more instance of history as process, this time in its cultural aspect. The iconostasis forms a barrier not only to the most sacred spaces of Orthodox Christianity, it becomes the veil of history itself, firmly marking off the present from the past. The priests are free to pass between these representations of time with relative ease, perhaps because they practice “a faith which has never exacted celibacy from its priests nor pacifism from its congregations,” (636). West sees a certain grace in such a dogma because it eschews “innovation,” what she calls “modernity” not a sentence later, in favor of “a continuance of the ancient tradition of the Church” – a historical heresy of sorts, at least to those traditions accustomed to pastoral chastity (640).

As a result of this partitive influence of the iconostasis, West discerns a “real spiritual process” (638) at work in the Orthodox liturgy, one that mirrors the process of history in its synthesis of spirituality and politics, since West notes “the Byzantines were able to live in dignity and decency for four centuries in the knowledge that they were doomed, that one day they would be destroyed root and branch by the merciless Turks” (ibid). As the political and

imperial exigencies of the Ottoman incursion drove the church underground, literally and figuratively,⁴⁰ the church was forced to adapt its role as a distinctly political dispensation.

These historical developments serve to explain why the administrative unit of Orthodoxy is the nation, as opposed to the diocesan model of Catholicism, for instance. West attributes this to the exigencies of history in the Byzantine world versus the Roman Catholic world of western Europe: “Now life in Europe has never been orderly for more than a few years at a time and in a limited area; but in the West it has been orderly enough, if only in the homogeneity of its disorder, to allow clever men to lay down principles that they could safely claim to be eternal...In the East of Europe it has not been so. Continual and astonishing were its historical convulsions” (640).

This historical context is enough to assure West of the genius of the church in preserving not the moral character of its adherents, through a rigorously encoded catechism or dogma, but their spirit, by turning away “from speculative thought to art” (641). The artful quality of church design and the liturgy itself “conceived, and still conceives, that its chief business is magic” (640), and magic is one of the most straightforwardly political forces known to man. Thus, the evocation of the iconostasis literally and figuratively gives way to the metropolitan’s explicitly political Easter message: “he uttered a prayer or repeated a passage from the Gospels, I was not sure which, and went on to deliver an address which compared the resurrection of Christ and the liberation of Christian Macedonia from the Turks by Serbia twenty-five years before. It was, in fact, straight Yugoslavian propaganda, and most of it could have easily been delivered from a

⁴⁰ West says the following of the Ottoman law that required Christian churches to not be built taller than any edifice of Islamic or Ottoman significance: “It is sunk deeply in the earth, because it was built in the days of Moslem fanaticism, when all churches must be set underground. That ordinance had been the fine flower of Turkish spite, for the Turk loves light and makes his mosque a setting for it, but it wholly missed its mark, for the Christians liked their churches dark, as good hatching-places for magic” (654).

political platform” (639-40). Just as the priest passes through the doors of death (the gate of the iconostasis) to the pulpit carrying the body of God in the form of the Eucharistic host, the Yugoslav nation has maintained its integrity in the face of empire and partition by adhering to its spiritual calling.

West’s posits a “spirited materialism” in which politics is activated by certain metaphysical concepts, art included. By refusing to succumb to the worst aspects of their collective histories, the occupations that deprived them of the tools for developing a thriving national culture, the many peoples of Yugoslavia demonstrate their thirst for life and stand as a bold example in the face of encroaching fascism. The iconostasis evokes the notion that the work of God remains unfinished on the earth; were it not so, the sanctuary would be unveiled and access to all unfettered by the strict hierarchies of the clerical class. As it stands, the partition is a reminder of the inherently political nature of faith and spirituality, contrary to the separations that were imagined between church and state by Western nations. The partition which looms over the head of the priest as he delivers his homily authorizes his speech which sets spiritual regeneration beside national liberation. The congregation is only implicitly aware of this, knowing nothing else but the turmoil of the “historical convulsions” that have swept the Balkans for their melancholy history.

It is therefore significant that West elides a fairly crucial political point in her description of the metropolitan’s speech. It was not actually *straight* Yugoslavian propaganda – it was in fact Serbian propaganda! West’s sympathies for the Serbs are most pronounced in such aporias, though she often rhapsodizes about their particular brand of national masculinity which lost them the Balkans but saved Europe (from the Ottomans). She will at times extol and beatify the strengths of the Macedonian spirit that has withstood centuries of attacks on its very existence,

including the incursion by the Serbs to “liberate” Macedonia from Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars of 1912-14 when they renamed the Macedonian people en masse, and then forget that it happened in the next sentence. Indeed, she uses the Serbian word “Skoplje” instead of the Macedonian name “Skopje,” for what would become the capital of Macedonia after WWII, since the region was still under Serbian administration at that time.

In fact, while in Macedonia, West admonishes the Serbs for their territorial pretensions based on what she views as obsolete history:

The Serbs are ... irritating when they regard their Tsar Dushan not only as an inspiration but as a map-maker, for his empire had fallen to pieces in the thirty-five years between his death and the defeat at Kosovo. The only considerations which should determine the drawing of Balkan frontiers are the rights of the peoples to self-government and the modifications of that right to which they must submit in order to keep the peninsula as a whole free from the banditry of the great powers. But the historical approach gratifies the pedantic side of the Slav, and so it has never been abandoned (791).

When it comes to Macedonia, even “small nations” like Serbia acquire imperial ambitions.⁴¹ History is insufficient enough an explanation to account for Serbia’s revanchism; the Serbian map-maker’s own empire did not survive him, so how, West argues, could the Serbs hope to claim Macedonia as their own on such grounds. The historical record, we see, can check nationalism’s worst excesses in the light of the “banditry” of partition, but it can just as much exacerbate them; it merely depends on one’s interpretation of historical events and the political goals one wishes to accomplish with their interpretations.

However, West viewed the recent history of the Balkans with great promise for a number of reasons: “For the old Turkey had gone and its successor had no interest in Empire, and Russia was a Union of Soviet Republics, and the Habsburgs were fallen; and the treaties of Versailles

⁴¹ West attributes this to the fact that “Macedonia was important to all Europe, because a power that got a foothold there had a chance of falling heir, by actual occupation or by economic influence, to the territories of the dying Ottoman Empire” (476).

and Trianon and St. Germain had set the small peoples free. Freedom was for these people an ecstasy” (1100). The deaths of these empires are a welcome notion to West who was critical of the British empire for much of her writing career as a journalist and critic. But she cannot help but be nostalgic for its perceived benignity, it in the shadow of the looming Reich. In fact, aside from an “insensible” habituation of conquest, she says: “Never at any time was I fool enough to condemn man for conceiving the imperial theory, or to deny that it had often proved magnificent in practice” (1089).

A series of caveats about the depredations of even the benign British empire notwithstanding, West ultimately feels that the imperial mode of global politics was necessary to check some of the worst excesses of civilizations that had no regard for the inherent rights of man, as an individual. But even this noble imperial mandate in danger of being lost unless certain action is taken in the immediate present. She reminds her reader:

Remember it will not be to anybody’s advantage to keep Gerda’s empire in existence. Turkey in Europe was an advantage to England, who wanted a weak power at that end of the Mediterranean to keep out any strong power that might have inconvenient ambitions; it held back the Austrian Empire on its way to the Black Sea, and the Russian Empire from its Pan-Slavist dream and its itch for Constantinople. But Gerda’s empire will serve no such purpose. It will be an object of fear and nothing else (804).

The old empires did more wrong than not, she admits, but they will seem like a dress rehearsal compared to what “Gerda’s Empire” has in store. The problem with this view is two-fold: first, she sees history-in-process in Yugoslavia and attributes some of the nation’s worst qualities to the processual flow of time in which the nation is enmired – the vagaries of empire and so forth – but sees Nazism as emerging from a wholly different root, something utterly alien to Europe. Second, the language of race, blood, and religion as the basis for national unity is precisely the language of “Gerda’s Empire” pushed to its logical conclusion. Prophetic as she sounded about

the depredations of Nazism, her guarded optimism about the validity of such concepts for the Yugoslavian project seems patently absurd in the light of the 1990s.

Slav Blood, Culture, and Nationalism: The Travelogue as Political Tract

In writing the travelogue, West presents the ritual of travel to her readers in this decidedly historical and literary fashion in order to underscore the importance of culture in shoring up the humanistic ideals that another global war threatens. Realizing that culture – Art, as she understands it – is not sufficient to combat fascism on its own, she presents an argument whereby she suggests that art nurtures national identity, which in turn nurtures the values of self-determination that make possible the freedom of the individual. These more fundamental freedoms of self-governance and self-determination which undergird the political possibility of individual autonomy are most directly threatened by the Nazi assault; in West's understanding, the life-affirming virtues that art fosters in the individual who is thoroughly immersed in an enlightened and properly mature national culture will not be possible under a Nazi regime. Culture, then, becomes the moral barometer of the nation.

While this might seem like relatively standard fare of 20th century political philosophy in support of the burgeoning nationalisms that emerged in the aftermath of the redrawing of the world map post-WWI (though to her credit, she cultivates such views relatively early for a British public intellectual and later admirably carries them over to the cause of African independence and anti-apartheid activism),⁴² West injects a core of racial essentialism in order to navigate the contradictions of nationalism in theory and its practical application in Yugoslavia (and elsewhere). Staging national and racial characteristics as though they were on par with the interpersonal neuroses, she writes, "They were racially unrelated: the Hungarians or Magyars are

⁴² See Stec, 65.

a people of far Asiatic origin, akin to the Finns, the Bulgars, and the Turks, and the Croats are Slav, akin to the Serbs, the Russians, the Poles, and the Czechs. Neither is meek; each is passionately attached to his own language; and the Hungarians are fierce and warlike romantics whereas the Croats are fierce and warlike intellectuals” (49). When confronted with a Viennese student who is ethnically Slavic but was raised in the imperial core, and who has adopted the discourse of cultural superiority that such “enlightened” empires dispense, West accuses her of betraying her blood – she is seen as violating her racial identity in favor of a cultural one.

In so doing, West’s penetrative and incisive travelogue somewhat ironically falls short of offering a diagnosis of WWII as a successor to WWI, itself an inheritance of the partitions enacted at Berlin, that is, as a *nationalistic* conflict intent on shaping national boundaries of the world-map. Nationalism, argues West, will save Europe from itself. It is obvious why at this historical moment, as the moribund European empires totter into oblivion, one might be tempted to adopt the belief that the nation-form is the most modern and desirable political formation available. But the history of empire is insufficient to make this case. Above West reduces the evils of the historic European empires to moral equivalencies based on her relatively subjective and surprisingly ahistorical criteria: the Nazi Reich is seen merely as a new spin on the Ottoman empire which is understood as evil *prima facie*, whereas the great powers of Europe merely bungled their noble civilizing mission by getting a bit too greedy (the impish chaps!).

And yet, even as Yugoslavia might testify to some of the worst excesses of imperial overstepping – “In contemplating Yugoslavia these disadvantages [!] of Empire are manifest” (1092) – it is only because these powers enabled and perhaps encouraged the proliferation of death-driven ideologies, which inherently oppose the “true” values of the native peoples: “The poverty of all Bosnians and Herzegovinians, *except the Moslems and the Jews*, is as ghastly an

indictment of both the Turks and their successors, the Austrians” (ibid; emphasis added). It goes without saying that the prosperity of the “Moslems and Jews” is a fundamental part of this indictment.⁴³ Accordingly, the failures of these empires stem from “the inability of empires to produce men who are able both to conquer territory and to administer it” (ibid), which is more of a pragmatic than moral failing anyways.

Even though, based on West’s own observations, the Ottomans were able to sustainably (if brutally) administer the Balkans for 600 continuous years, this does not satisfy her requirements for a successfully administered empire because of the “sluttish disorder, poverty, disease, and ignorance” that characterized Ottoman rule, whose brutalities were only tempered by “the only foreign missionary which has ever benefited the Balkans: the Oriental love of pleasure” (ibid). By framing political conflict at the global scale in the spiritualized, moralistic and racialized terms she does above, she fails to see the way that any division of the map based on ethnic characterizations of national belonging (and the territory that it is imagined to correspond to that sense of belonging) is doomed from the outset to result in the very violence she abhors, rather than to rectify it, much in the way imperialism continuously slips into oppression regardless of its intent and civil mindedness.

West’s criticism of the Augustinian strain of atonement in Christianity notwithstanding, she can be read, especially in the Epilogue, as a defender of Christendom, with the Nazis as the apotheosis of the doctrine of atonement and death-lust of which the Ottomans were merely a shadow picture. It’s all paganism, in other words. Once again, for West, Yugoslavia stands in the way of the death of Christian civilization itself. In one way, we see the limits of West’s liberal

⁴³ West’s quietly derisive barb at the success of Jewish enterprise in Sarajevo leaves an especially bitter taste when one considers that the Jewish population of Sarajevo was reduced from 13,000 in 1940 to just 70 in 1945, an indescribable loss.

humanism here: how does one defend the individual against the depredations of collectivism (that is, rejecting the doctrine of atonement which submits the individual to the punitive will of the social body) while also rejecting the violent antisocial tendencies that often accompany the struggle for individual self-determination (that is, fight against the death-drive she sees symbolized in Prince Lazar's poem that subjects the social body to immiseration and death for the sake of individual salvation)?

West might answer that hospitality shows us the way, but as the book's dedication alludes, a culture of hospitality is no match for the brute savagery of the Nazi war machine – friendship gives way to the apocalyptic dread that permeates much of the text: "To My Friends in Yugoslavia, Who are Now All Dead or Enslaved. Grant to them the Fatherland of their desire, and make them again citizens of Paradise" (vi). We see even from the outset, then, that for West friendship *must* give way to nationalism. And nationalism must be fiercely defended, especially the new nationalisms that emerged from the fog of war to struggle for their self-governance and autonomy and who were now in danger of succumbing to fascism.

In the Balkans, West sees history as the vehicle that makes possible the identification of difference without its weaponization; she sees difference as the very basis of co-identification because the universal fact which unites all of humanity across historical and cultural boundaries are the wills to life and death that govern every individual regardless of how different their cultural backgrounds. West writes, "Nationalism is simply the determination of a people to cultivate *its own soul*, to follow the customs bequeathed to it by its ancestors, to develop its traditions according to its own *instincts*. It is the national equivalent of the individual's determination not to be a slave" (1101; emphasis added).

And yet, history is not always a wholly satisfactory mediation of difference, what she elsewhere encounters as “Another proof of the impossibility of history” (785). In fact, above West chastised a certain interpretation of Serbian history which promotes territorial aspirations that are not supported by actually existing expressions of national culture in Macedonia.⁴⁴ History can be misleading, especially in the hands of corrupt or morally weak leaders, and while a Serbian interpretation of history might support territorial ambitions in the region, West states that the people express themselves as Macedonians because of their deep connection to the land which is passed down generationally. Therefore, more than history, certain “instincts” are required to shape a nation’s tradition and culture. This cannot but beg the question where these “instincts” originate, and West seems to believe they arise from the “soul” of a people in a way that expresses their natural-born tendencies; she refers to the “Slavic soul” over a dozen times in the work, usually referring to the way in which some political travesty marred it in one way or another.⁴⁵

In an article called “Differences that Divide and Bind,” published a year after the release of *BLGF*, West reflects on the P.E.N. luncheon hosted in London to support the war efforts of the Yugoslavs, Poles, and Czechs, and doubles down on the importance of national divisions, writing, “not only do we get a positive proof of the existence of national wisdom *from art and from such words*; we get a negative proof in the different impressions we get from people who have kept to their national tradition and those who have renounced it.”⁴⁶ This is what makes

⁴⁴ I refer to West’s point discussed above about how the Serbian king Dushan’s 13th century map of the Balkans was used to justify the Serbian invasion of Macedonia, which West regards as violent idiocy.

⁴⁵ For instance, “the Slovenes no longer enjoy the right, which they prized highly, of using the Slovene liturgy in the churches. The Slav so loves his language that this was a gesture of hostility to the Slav soul” (99); or “the struggle of the Croat soul between its Slav self and its Western education” (972); or “Skoplje reveals a difference between the Slav and the Turk, the European and the Asiatic” (654). Instances abound.

⁴⁶ West, “Differences,” 563; emphasis added. West seems to be arguing that art provides the horizon of limitation of the nation-state and not the opposite, as Frederic Jameson has suggested in his controversial claim that all fiction

Yugoslavia such a crucial battleground for the “soul” of Europe: the Yugoslavian project is, for West, a world historical attempt at self-determination in the aftermath of imperial partition. This in turn provokes three more questions: first, what is the nation’s role in cultivating self-determination and individualism? Second, why does West need to correlate individualism with art? Last, what does that imply is the relationship between art and self-determination?

Earlier in the same article, West muses on the gathering as a place to mingle with those who are rather unlike her: “Often it simply seems an evil that there are so many different peoples in the world, each with its own language and its own culture. How can humanity, divided into so many parts, ever become unified and be at peace with itself? But I had an experience a fortnight ago which showed me that this division is not so dangerous as might be thought.”⁴⁷ Naturally, what defangs this division is the mutual devotion to art shared by the attendees of the P.E.N. event. She concludes the article by proclaiming that “we know that the nations, by pursuing their own destinies, were saving the world; for when all human beings and all nations are fully self-conscious, then their self-consciousness will be a mirror of the mind of the Maker of Heaven and Earth.”⁴⁸

West sees national development as following from individual enlightenment, linking self-consciousness to morality, and, ever the aesthete, morality to “Art.”⁴⁹ The nation comes to self-

from the “Third World” is inevitably subsumed by the project of national *bildung* and must be read as such. See Frederic Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.”

⁴⁷ West, “Differences,” 562.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 563.

⁴⁹ Here, I use “Art” to refer to modern bourgeois notions of a high art canon of masters that dominated the British Oxbridge system, which West was immersed in as a student and literary critic, but also to West’s own self-formed canon that she elicits through conversations with her hosts. As we see below (and as one might expect by now), she much prefers the French tradition to the German and the British Romantic poetic tradition above all, but is nevertheless “not averse” to reading American literature either, claiming Mark Twain as her first literary idol whom she sought to emulate as a young writer (*BLGF*, 1084). West, ever the aesthete, suggests that “Art is not a plaything, but a necessity, and its essence, form, is not a decorative adjustment, but a cup into which life can be poured and lifted to the lips and be tasted” (*BLGF*, 55).

consciousness, much like the individual, through encounters with itself and the Other as mediated by culture, of which “Art” is the highest expression. By modeling self-consciousness for the masses and making the means to enlighten oneself possible through national culture, Art becomes a way to both validate the existence of national character and nurture its development. Art is thus, for West, inherently life-avowing if allowed to guide the cultural development of a nation – art is a way to plumb a people’s “instincts” in order to guide the formation of their traditions.

Here, West highlights the incongruity of cultures, their “uneven development,” as a difference which *must* be maintained if anything like liberty for the individual will ever be possible: “we forget that if an individual wants to work or study or think deeply he must be alone, and if a nation wishes to develop its faculties it too must be alone. It must shut itself up within its frontiers and concentrate upon what is within its experience. That is true nationalism, and many of us English realise that true nationalism is necessary if humanity is to rise above its present level.”⁵⁰ We can read this as an admonition of Aryan conformism: the fascist drive to remove difference in order to lubricate social cohesion. But more than that, the national differences represented in the Yugoslavian project is what is in fact so attractive to her about the nation: as a federal kingdom with (theoretically) equal investment and representation for all of the ethnic nations it represents, it is its own United Kingdom of the Balkans. The Croat, Serb, and Slovene may all have different *national* expressions, but they are united by virtue of their Slavic souls, certain Slavic instincts which guide and develop their individual national cultures in harmony with one another.

⁵⁰ West, “Differences,” 562. West’s deployment of the No-True-Scotsman fallacy here is rather typical of this period of upheaval. One sees the same impulse in Ayn Rand’s *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* (1966) which makes similar sophomoric claims about how “real” capitalism has never yet been tried.

Going further, she says we know about the very existence of a national character *because of art*. That is, national expression which is voiced in art is seen as valid and good; national culture which is expressed in violence and exclusion is seen as a betrayal of true national identity and bad or evil. All nations face this Manichean divide in the heart of their culture; Christian ones, for West, seem better equipped to be moral, though ironically, only if they have not thoroughly exorcised the heretical tendencies therein; however, such heretical expressions are often deemed as immoral and persecuted by the clergy and those in power.

Nowhere does she develop this more than in her above avowal of imperialism as insensibly habituated to conquest, though ultimately a rational system with inbuilt mechanisms to promote its milder and more civilizing aspects: “The theory of the British Empire that it existed to bring order into the disordered parts of the earth was more than half humbug, but it inspired to action those in whose love of action there was nothing humbugging” (1092). Again, for West the dialectics of imperialism entail resistance against its worst excesses which is more than enough to justify its existence from a historical perspective, because it helps inculcate self-consciousness of national identity in a people, which is the surest safeguard of individual liberty.

Unfortunately, West’s culturalist foundation for nationalism is not the actual basis of national belonging that she advances – as we have seen in her rhetoric of “instinct,” it is not quite that art is the basis for the creation of a national sense of belonging, but rather that she sees art as emerging from certain immutable racial qualities that characterize artistic expressions as expressions of a national group. Nationalism is the logical conclusion of centuries of imperialism and indeed redeems the wickedness of imperial history in the creation of cultural works that give voice to the soul of the nation: “Nothing so fair has happened in all history as this liberation of peoples who, during centuries of oppression, had never forgotten their own souls, and by long

brooding on their national lives had changed them from transitory experience to lasting and inspiring works of art” (1100). The way in which the Yugoslav peoples cling to their national identities walks the narrow line between the doomed “lust for death” at the heart of the European worldview and the admirable “lechery for life” (706) which characterizes the Slavic soul. West doubtless views the idea of the Slavic “instinct” as lecherously vitalistic as something of a compliment, comingling psychoanalytic and national-type characterizations in that quintessentially British way, but her musings on the importance of national instincts are not able to account for the moments when Slavs fail to perform their national script correctly.

In fact, when meeting a golden-haired, Viennese graduate student who wishes to write her dissertation on West’s *oeuvre*, West is offended by the student’s attempts to “to pigeon-hole [her] into a recognized school, and demand[ing] to know what writers had influenced [her]” (1054). West comes to discover, to her amazement, that this student is a closeted Slav! “Are you not at all proud of having Slav blood in you?” West asks the student, who replies: “Why should I be? What is there to be proud about in being a Slav?” West’s analysis of this interaction is worth citing at length as it distills much of her notions of these national types as extensions of her romantic views of art. The Germans may present problematic social policies, sure, suggests West, but what of their profound cultural inferiority?

Such is the influence that Central Europe exerts on its surroundings. It cut off this girl from pride in her own race, which would have been a pity had her race had much less to be proud of than the superb achievement of defending European civilization from extinction by the Turks. It cut her off from enlightenment by that French culture which has the advantage over all others of having begun earlier, branching straight from the Roman stem, and having developed most continuously. What it offered her instead was sparse, was recent. It might fairly be defined as Frederick the Great and Goethe...It had left this girl flimsy as a jerry-built house with no foundation deeper than the nineteenth century, when loyalty to her Slav blood and adherence to the main current of European culture would have made her heiress to the immense fortune left by the Western and Eastern Roman Empires (1085).

West's concluding thesis here is not negligible; that is, that the cultural crossroads of the Balkans have produced a remarkable synthesis of practices, foods, life ways, and ideas that are extremely rich in variety and scope and that stand in stark opposition to the alleged superiority of western Europe. But why this need to root such cultural superiority to the student's blood?

West wants so badly to make the culturalist argument for Slavic superiority, but she cannot help but constantly return to this notion of blood allegiance; the Viennese student is betraying her *blood* not her culture. Even when she does make claims about the cultural continuity of the French, whom she holds in high regard for just this reason, she echoes rhetoric which is still used to justify all manner of ethnic and religious phobias, assuming that Rome, as successor state to the Greeks, also holds a central place in world history as a bastion of civilization against barbarism. She further assumes that there is nothing of cultural value left behind by the Ottomans, regardless of the hundreds of pages she had spent extolling south-eastern Yugoslavia for qualities which are often indelibly Ottoman in influence, even if such practices have been adopted to "Slavic purposes," whatever those might be. These are not merely coded, but outright racialized, arguments.

This registers a profound contradiction: West attributes most of the problems of Yugoslavian history to imperial meddling and partition, but her recourse is to adopt the political position of nationalism predicated on racialized grounds of ethnic claims to historic territories. In so doing, she adopts the ideological underpinning of partition in the first place, which was to try to create a world-map that represents national territorial claims on the basis of racialized notions of ethnicity!

Her travelogue is a resoundingly useful document to understand the historical developments of such ideas of nationalism, ethnicity and the way they are intertwined with

language and religious identity. In this case, its value lies precisely in the limitations imposed on West's conception of world order by empire and the legacy of partition which was inherited by the entire world as a result of the Berlin conferences of 1878 and 1884. If Yugoslavia really does reveal "the horrible nature of our human destiny," it is because the contradictions of nationalism are so visible there, both historically and into the present. But by revealing how these contradictions operate in Yugoslavia, even if she herself is not above reproducing them in her analysis, West demonstrates that these are not only problems for the spaces that underwent literal partition, but in fact crises that threaten the historical empires and the entire world order.⁵¹

Conclusion

In Ezra Pound's "Canto VII," the epigraph to this discussion of West's travelogue, he curses the condition of the modern world, built upon ruins whose value society is all too ignorant to properly valorize, and filled with innumerable contradictions and absurdities. Published in 1919, just after the total tumult of WWI had utterly reorganized the European map, Pound laments "flimsy and damned partition" of Europe's new map, as it only serves to reify the contemporary distance from the epic past of the heroic age of myth. Pound mourns the decline of culture which attends this "stretched" partition as one that once produced epics and is now obliged to craft tales full of excruciatingly banal sensory data. Later in the poem, the artless "Contemporary" is filled with "rooms, against chronicles." Like West, Pound suggests that the contemporary moment lives "*sous le barometer*" of culture, of Art, and the active disinterest in

⁵¹ Was Brexit not a recent litigation of European borders in the same spectrum as Russia's invasion of Ukraine? What of the Russian invasion of Ukraine? Serbia continues to refuse to acknowledge Kosovo as a legitimate nation, seeing it as a separatist region awaiting reintegration. Macedonia recently changed its name to North Macedonia in order to facilitate its acceptance into the European Union because Greece felt that the old name voiced territorial ambitions to the region called Macedonia in northern Greece. When Greece finally voted to accept North Macedonia into the EU, Bulgaria vetoed on the grounds that (North) Macedonia is not a legitimate state, in fact a Bulgarian region that was unjustly taken from it at the Congress of Berlin (1878), and that Macedonians are actually Bulgarians pushing an ethnonationalist and revisionist agenda at the detriment of Bulgarian territorial (and cultural) integrity. Talks to resolve these issues are undergoing.

history will serve to undo any of the markers of development that predicates a belief in history's limitless progress.

And yet, as West's perceptive if stunningly British husband remarks in the second epigraph, the constant litigation of history can be rather boring and repetitive: "it is as if we went on chewing over the War of Roses," says Andrews, offering the useful caveat, "But I suppose we might if we had been enslaved since and now had to start afresh. Still, that makes it no less of a bore." No less true (nor boring) than the new era of British *ressentiment* over its lost empire. What's more, the constant litigation over who is rightful owner of what territory is unfortunately more than a boring feature of Slavic history that stubbornly clings to the bootheel of progress. It is the birthright of the present emerging from the history of partition that Yugoslavia, with brief reprieve, is forced to relive. But history is the theater that shows the mettle of humanity, if the Balkans is any proof of the matter. And history is always in the process of being written.

Though West revels in the possibility of a post-imperial world where national differences, and the stories that serve them, can function to unite rather than to divide, I have shown the way that her perspective is in many ways delimited by a naturalization of imperialism and the techniques of balkanization it implemented in Yugoslavia and beyond. Her liberal critique of empire does gesture toward the later more radical critique of postcolonialism, given the similarly self-determinationist political rhetoric of African independence movements as what West advances in *BLGF*. This will become even clearer in the third chapter, looking at Oskar Davičo's travels through Western Africa in 1961 which asks if it is possible to avoid such recriminations, if the cross-continental, cross-racial, and cross-cultural economic cooperation that characterized the Non-Aligned Movement could make possible a truly anti-colonial and anti-racist travelogue.

In the next chapter, Ivo Andrić will rebut Pound's grievance that contemporary art consists solely of "rooms, against chronicles," reaching back 400 years to chronicle the history of a bridge in the small eastern frontier of Bosnia, from its construction by the Ottoman empire to its destruction by the Austrian. Whereas West naturalized ethnicity as the basis of nationalism, Andrić shows how such narratives accelerate the possibility of apocalyptic ends, positing polyglossia and storytelling itself as the antidote to the balkanizing recriminations of multiple overlapping imperial powers.



***Figure 1:** An iconostasis from a Macedonian Orthodox church. It is a richly decorated partition usually carved from wood, emblazoned with icons of the patron saint of the church, Christ, and Mary and features a gate in the middle where the priest passes through with the eucharistic elements.*

Chapter Two: From Blood Tax to Blood Ties: The Eschatological Impulse of Ethnic

Partition in Ivo Andrić's Chronicle-Novel *Bridge on the Drina*

The Northern powers are more like administrators, who manipulate other people's history but produce none of their own. They are the stock-jobbers of history, lives are their units of exchange...everything that has been passing down here forever, is real history.

—Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day*

These are the people of the border, of the spiritual and physical divide, of the black and bloody line that was drawn between them due to some terrible and absurd misunderstanding, God's creatures between whom there should not and must not be borders.

—Ivo Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*

Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* was published on the first day of 1941, and by April of that year, her worst fears were realized as the Axis war machine advanced on the Balkans, resulting in yet another partition and occupation of Yugoslavia. The Nazis controlled much of Serbia, while Croatia was converted into a puppet state run by the fascist *ustashe*; Bulgaria once again realized its irredentist fantasy when it was given Macedonia to occupy in exchange for its collaboration. Two factions immediately sprang up in Yugoslavia to wage guerilla war on the occupying fascist armies: one led by Draža Mihailovic, who was a high-ranking officer in the royal army, supported by the exiled Yugoslav King Petar from London. The other faction was the Partisans led by Josip Broz Tito, general secretary of the Yugoslav Communist Party, though relatively unknown outside its borders. Still, Tito had an odd way of finding himself in felicitous or odd situations. In 1913, for instance, he lived in Vienna a short distance away from the likes of Leon Trotsky, Joseph Stalin, Adolf Hitler, and Sigmund Freud, before being conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army at the start of the First World War.

Like Tito, Ivo Andrić (1892-1975) had a curious penchant for finding himself in the center of things. In July of 1914, a politically energetic young Andrić happened to be in

Sarajevo, where his good friend Gavrilo Princip became internationally infamous for killing the Archduke of Austria-Hungary, starting Europe's Great War. By early 1939, Andrić was appointed Yugoslavia's ambassador to Germany, returning home when Hitler declared war and subsequently invaded. Andrić spent most of the way under house arrest in Belgrade and refused to leave even during the intense Allied bombardment of Belgrade in 1944, furiously writing while bombs flew overhead landing nearby. When the Partisan and Red Armies triumphantly marched on Belgrade in 1944, and Tito declared himself ruler of a new communist Yugoslavia, Andrić reluctantly returned to public service. Publishing a sweep of novels immediately upon Belgrade's liberation, he cemented his stature as the single most dominant figure in Yugoslavian literature. When he won the 1961 Nobel Prize, as still the only (ex-)Yugoslavian writer to have done so, he attained legendary status but never enjoyed the attention that literary fame and diplomatic adventure brought, much preferring the quiet, humble settings of his most abiding works.

One of the novels Andrić wrote during the bombing of Belgrade was his undisputed masterpiece and opus, *Bridge on the Drina* [*Na drini čuprija*] (1945), which tells the history of the famous Mehmed Pasha Sokolović bridge in Višegrad, a small village in eastern Bosnian very near the Serbian border where Andrić spent much of his childhood.¹ The bridge was a marvel of Ottoman engineering, commissioned by the Ottoman Grand Vizier in the late 16th century as tribute to his home village from which he was taken as a 10 year old boy as a *devshirme*, or blood tax, before rising through the ranks of the Ottoman imperial bureaucracy.² The bridge was

¹ In the interest of reducing footnote clutter, further references will use the abbreviated title *Drina* and will be cited parenthetically. NB: Višegrad means "high city" or acropolis.

² Grand Vizier was the title of the second in command of the Ottoman empire, effectively the head of government who could convene the council of viziers and who carried the seal of the empire. From the mid-16th century onwards, the Grand Vizier was usually selected from the non-Muslim population rather than from Ottoman nobility for purposes of control and loyalty (Agoston, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, 236). The bridge was re-built after it was partially destroyed in WWI and has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2007.

considered indestructible, built to withstand any natural and human force including vast swaths of time, a monument to the lasting influence and power of the Ottoman empire until its destruction by Austrian troops in World War I.

Built at the intersection of the Ottoman empire's vast eastern and western domains, it served to link the two at this crucial geographical bottleneck while also connecting the Christian and Muslim banks of the river to each other. The bridge stands as silent watcher at the crossroads of history as successive imperial administrators sweep through the region over the course of the centuries and attempt to govern its multiethnic and multireligious townspeople by introducing new rules, settlers, and customs. The way that each passing empire administers the bridge – as a social gathering space, liminal crossing point, and strategic border – demonstrates the priorities of its accumulative engine. Over the course of the novel's 400 years, the silent bridge assumes the role of protagonist, utterly passive yet responsible for fostering the shifting social conditions of the town as link to the outside world and site of community and gathering on its *kapia*, the middle portion of the bridge designated to serve as the gathering point and center of Višegrad's social life.³

I read the partition of the Balkans enacted at the Congress of Berlin as the absent core of *Drina*. From the very first pages, this decision seeds the bridge's destruction and in which Andrić sees a momentous shift in the nature of global affairs down to the smallest pockets of society. Just as the bridge links Višegrad to the wider world, it links the village to history itself. The villagers of Višegrad themselves have no real need for history and for the historical

³ *Kapia* remains untranslated from the Turkish in the Serbo-Croatian of the novel. It refers to the middle portion of the bridge featuring “two completely equal terraces placed symmetrically on either side of the roadway and making it twice its normal width” where “[t]wo buttresses had been built on each side of the central pier which had been splayed out towards the top, so that to right and left of the roadway there were two terraces daringly and harmoniously projecting outwards from the straight line of the bridge over the noisy green waters far below” (14-15).

identities it animates until the bridge is built. Once it has connected them to the outside world, history comes rushing in when it asks them “who are you?” As a result of Berlin, they find themselves reaching for historic narratives of ethnicity and nationalism to answer. My reading connects the *kapia*, as the center point of the bridge, to its early association with partition of Berlin as the historical center point of this chronicle, symbolically linking the space of gathering to the remapping of the Balkans and its outcome.

In what is the first actual date specifically mentioned in this obsessively historical chronicle, the prominence of the bridge’s *kapia* as Višegrad’s gathering space is identified with the momentous shift initiated at Berlin: “There, on great occasions or times of change, were printed proclamations and public notices [...] but there too, right up to 1878, hung or were exposed on stakes the heads of all those who for whatever reason had been executed, and executions in that frontier town, especially in years of unrest, were frequent and in some years, as we shall see, almost of daily occurrence” (19). Thus, when the *kapia* is destroyed at the end of the novel, it represents not only a spatial rupture, nor just a historical rupture, but a literal breach in the social life of Višegrad itself.

If the Berlin Congress is the absent-presence of the novel, then the shifting temporal regimes which accompany partition reveal the present-absence of the novel as the historic process of Yugoslav national formation. Present, because this narrative is given symbolic representation in the “personhood” of the bridge, whose *bildung* is almost mythic in its *hamartia* – absent, because such narratives are overdetermined and overengineered from the start to fail to represent the Yugoslav national unity at the very cusp of revolution, fated to overshoot the mark, to overpromise unity.⁴ As the imperial powers decide on the borders of the Balkans with little

⁴ Wachtel, “Historical Archeology,” 91.

regard for or input from the people living there, the material repercussions of these decisions come to have lasting implications not only for the small town of Višegrad but the entire world.

I argue that *Drina* demonstrates Andrić's view of the way in which nationalist formation relies on the internalization of the exterior borders of the state as internal borders of identity, a far more abyssal division than prior empires carried which were predicated *mainly* on religious divisions. Prior to 1878, religious affiliation was the primary marker of identity in the social life of Višegrad, determining not only who received priority in the Ottoman stratification of society along religious lines but also the way in which the villagers imagined themselves cohering and conflicting as a town and individuals. But after the partition of the Balkans in 1878, and the subsequent ossification of imperial frontiers into state borders, the primary marker of identity shifts almost overnight to reflect national or ethnic character, what Etienne Balibar described as the internalization of "the 'external frontiers' of the state...imagined constantly as a protection of an internal collective personality."⁵ As various groups compete for "historical claims to historic homelands and sacred sites" to support their narratives of ethnic identity, their claims require more and more violent expressions of ethnic autochthony and territorial possession.⁶

The territorial partition of the Balkans, which happens off-stage so to speak in *Drina*, marks a decisive shift in the attitude toward time and its management. The temporal regime of the Austrian empire is felt in the small frontier town of Višegrad as a rapid acceleration of time, a future expansiveness predicated on a present contraction of time's durational feeling, as opposed to the slow pastoral quality of time that was present during the Ottoman reign. Due to the uncanny speed with which such historic events are adopted and internalized by the townspeople for whom such events are far-away, and the way in which the novel suggests that

⁵ Balibar and Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, 95.

⁶ Smith, "Culture, Community and Territory: The Politics of Ethnicity and Nationalism," 445.

narratives of ethnicity and nationalism accelerate time itself, Andrić does not envision this process as one in which national liberation is the teleological end of the historic formation of the Yugoslav peoples under imperialism. Instead, he views the process of the formation of national consciousness as the space where new narratives of ethnicity fail to subsume the prior religious divisions that predicated them resulting in abyssal ruptures.

The premise of this chapter is that in *Drina*, Andrić devises the figure of the chronicler-narrator, fusing the protracted historical view of the chronicle with the fictitious artifice of the novelist, to piece together the historical origins of his present conditions. Because of the accelerated experience of time under the auspices of national formation, the chaotic swirl of momentous events in the aftermath of Berlin's partition is compressed into a much shorter temporality than the rhythms of temporality under the Ottoman empire. The hastening of time that Andrić identified in the changing of the imperial guard and the implementation of new temporal regimes produces certain apocalyptic conditions that I suggest are responsible for the text's eerie prescience and the prophetic tone it began to assume toward the end of the 20th century into the present. The chronicler-narrator suggests that the bridge links the village to the world, to history itself, but the cargo that arrives over its majestic arches is devastating, dialectically carrying the very germs of its own destruction with the arrival of the final empire and its obsessive drive to partition and division.

Often read as a symbol for the Yugoslav peoples and the multiethnic and multicreedal nation they built out of these scattered and imperially beleaguered groups, *Drina* has taken on significant shifts in resonance given the violent collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.⁷ The most

⁷ While the causes of the Yugoslav civil war are too numerous to detail here, the timeline of the Yugoslav Federation's collapse essentially follows the first multiparty elections in January of 1990 when communists failed to win re-election in every constituent federation of Yugoslavia except Serbia. The ethno-nationalist tensions in each respective country had been simmering for some time and the subsequent declarations of independence by

remarkable quality of the work for my purposes is the way in which it shows how life in this tiny corner on the frontier of multiple empires registers and contributes to the turmoil in the imperial centers, how history comes into being in these peripheries, and how the machinations of imperial partition are internalized in the cultures of such Balkanized spaces, especially as they entered the 20th century. Andrić's cosmopolitan vision has been well documented, but it is worth reflecting on the way that a very small town in what no one would consider a "global," and certainly not a "metropolitan" site, both Europe and not-Europe, emerges as the site of these world-shaping clashes and universal ethical dilemmas.⁸

This chapter attempts to peel back another layer of the techniques of balkanization in the mid-century, asking: what are the ways that balkanization is registered as a historical process of empire by those within the spaces partitioned at Berlin in 1878? What is the connection between balkanization as an imperial process, ethnic atavism as a national process and the historical genre of the chronicle? How does the chronicle, as a temporally oriented genre, represent the changes inaugurated by balkanization as orbiting the compression or extension of time's felt duration? What models of time predate the successive waves of imperial occupiers at the Bosnian frontier and what models replace them? How does Andrić connect the chronicle's historical obsessiveness with the apocalyptic dread of an impending end of time?

Croatia, Slovenia, and Macedonia prompted Serbia to mobilize the army and militarize the borders triggering the Yugoslav wars of 1991-92, which saw ethnic cleansing and genocide campaigns across Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia, followed by the Kosovo war of 1996-99, which ended with the NATO bombing of Belgrade. The topic is nigh unavoidable for critical work on *Drina* published in the last 25 years, for good reason, though at times critics are at pains to reconcile their readings with the historical atrocities precipitated by the civil war. See Jović, *Yugoslavia*, 15–18 for a further account of the Yugoslav wars. For the critical works focusing on the post-colonial valences and changes in reader responses to *Drina* as a result of the ethnic violence of the 1990s, see Lameborshi, "The Ottoman Empire, Southeastern European Literature, and Postcolonial Theory," 380; for connections to world literature and ethnic violence, see Vedran Catovic, "Small-Town Globalism," 396; for an especially strained connection between the relation of the ethnic violence to the novel's current uptake in the liberal premise of EU acceptance, see Annabel Patterson, *The International Novel*, 44.

⁸ See Guido Snel, "Andrić and the Bridge: Dispossessed Writers and the Novel as a Site of Enduring Homelessness," 117 and Vedran Čatović, "Small-Town Globalism," 401, for discussions of Andrić's cosmopolitan influences and ambitions.

I open my analysis of *Bridge on the Drina* with Višegrad's vain schoolmaster and his ersatz chronicle to better flesh out what Andrić sees as the mandate of his own chronicle-narrator, taking up the tradition of the 19th century historical novel but to dramatically different ends and with a significantly expanded chronological scale in mind. From there I will expand on the two logics of partition that are employed by the successive empires in *Drina*, starting with the Ottoman practice of *devshirme*, or blood tax, which in spite of its name, was a means of religious and not ethnic control of the Christian population of the Balkans. Then, following the shift in imperial structure marked by Berlin Congress of 1878, the chronicler-narrator explores the ways in which ethnicity begins to congeal as the primary means of self-identification in the town.

I conclude with the way in which Andrić uses the machinations of the Austro-Hungarian empire to presage the destructive and apocalyptic Nazi war engine which informs the background of the novel's composition during the height of World War II. While Andrić values the eschatological potential of historical narratives, *Drina* shows that there are some narratives which are so insidious in their divisiveness that they become perceived as totalizing in scope and capable of affording nothing but destruction. Once such narrative – the centrality of the individual as a coherent unit of epistemological and phenomenological experience – is programmatically eschewed in the chronicle form of *Drina*, but as I show, ultimately returns in the figure of Alihodja who carries a special fondness for the chronicler-narrator as an “exceptional individual” (136).

The Chronicle-Novel: Regimes of Time in Three Historical Eras of the Bridge

The chronicle-novel probes the vector of balkanization which concerns the partitioning of time – and not merely space – at the frontier of overlapping empires. This technique of empire

does not occur over one generation but over successive, taking even longer to register in the hearts and minds of the people who experienced it.⁹ The partitions of time, which I will explore below in terms of successive imperial “regimes” of time, were instituted by the fluctuating empires in the Balkans in order to meet their own material needs and subdue local populations by integrating them into the imperial economy and culture to whatever capacity they were able. *Drina* marks this in three epochs of the bridge, from its construction through the partition crisis to its ultimate destruction by retreating Austrian troops.

As opposed to the travelogue which is characterized by the travel or migration of its writer, the chronicle-novel tracks the arrival of history, as it were, on the doorstep of the local under the auspices of changes in imperial structure. The stories that compose the narrative in *Drina* are often presented as the idle chatter of village gossip which, half-truth, half-exaggeration, can come to take on mythic proportions as successive generations repeat and repurpose them on the *kapia*, during later eras of storytelling on the bridge. This polyglossic chatter, laden with rumor and innuendo, may take the form of simple stories, but the messages such stories convey articulate profound moral complexity. Vedran Ćatović argues that Andrić’s stories in *Drina* tend to naturalize the injustice of the world, but I think that *Bridge on the Drina* demonstrates that this is a historical process too – that when injustices do occur, the townspeople are not blind to their structural causes even if they are sometimes powerless in their ability to contend with them.¹⁰ They may naturally succumb to mystifications of one kind or another, but

⁹ Here I draw on Laura Doyle’s conception of inter-imperiality which denotes “a political and historical set of conditions created by the violent histories of plural interacting empires and by interacting persons moving between and against empires” who “continually circle back to shape relations among multiple imperial states” (Doyle, “Inter-Imperiality,” 162, 182). The Balkans is the site *par excellence* of inter-imperiality in the 20th century.

¹⁰ Ćatović, “Small-Town Globalism,” 401.

that is how ideology operates in all societies and not only in the provincial space of the Bosnian frontier.

Andrić's desire to depict the *longue durée* of history in small-town Bosnian life allows him to fuse the historical novel with the chronicle form [*hronika*], a genre which recurrently appears in much of his fiction besides *Bridge on the Drina*; thus, despite other works such as *Bosnian Chronicle* (1945)¹¹ containing "chronicle" in their title, they were less formally similar to the *historiographic* form of the chronicle than they were to historical novels.¹² Furthermore, each character in *Bosnian Chronicle* comes to represent a point of view circulating during the time of the Napoleonic wars depending on their religious and national backgrounds; the "clash of cultures" which is often attributed to the novel is achieved allegorically through voiced and interior perspective of these figures.¹³ *Drina* replaces the typical *bildung* of psychological subjectivity that characterizes the historical novel-form with the development of a historical process itself: in this case, the process of national formation under the auspices of territorial partition.

That is not to say that Andrić does not deploy the commonly understood techniques of the traditional 19th century historical novel in *Drina* but necessarily arranges them differently from what Georg Lukács defined as the quintessential parameters of the 19th century historical novel. Lukács suggests that allegorized the ideology of the European bourgeoisie in their period

¹¹ The Serbo-Croatian title *Travnička hronika* should more accurately be translated as *Chronicle of Travnik* – which is the larger town that is the capital of the municipal region containing Višegrad and many of the other Eastern Bosnian settings of Andrić's fiction.

¹² Franco Moretti often cites Fernand Braudel of the Annales School who divides the study of history into three parts: the immediate time of the individual and the event, the middle time of the historical cycle or era, and the long, slow time of the *longue durée* which operates in centuries and reveals the underlying principles which uphold, sustain and reproduce the trends of cyclical time, which is often the topic of academic histories (*Graphs, Maps, Trees*, 13-14).

¹³ See Matynia, "Tribute to a Bridge," 361-368; Stefanović and Stanisavljević *Survey of Yugoslav Literature*; Alan Ferguson, *Public Private Worlds*, 830; and Milutinović, "Misunderstanding is a Rule," 450; and Dimić, "Ivo Andrić and World Literature," 271.

of ascendance to power as a historical process through which the old feudal-aristocratic order was replaced by the new ruling class of Europe. By the mid-nineteenth century, Lukács pinpoints this to the failed revolutions of 1848, the “crisis of bourgeois realism” was in full decline as a “crisis of national history.”¹⁴ In the countries which experienced their national revolutions after this crisis, there arises an oppositional quality of their historical fiction, which grapples with the historical claims that sought narrative expression in the classical era of imperial expansionism and the 19th century historical novel.

Thus, *Drina* and *Bosnian Chronicle* take up the question of history in the novel in diverging ways: the fable-like character arcs of *Drina* differ starkly from the historical typifications of *Bosnian Chronicle*, despite the fact that in both instances feature a pre-given historical “plot” set with its stage of characters that unfold marginally to the “central” historical event or figures.¹⁵ By focusing on a more expansive historical scope of time than the single human lifetime, the chronicle-novel of *Drina* tracks the historical shifts in culture that a synchronic account chronicled in the moment could not. More specifically, it is able to show tendencies and patterns of imperial control as they unfold in various historical moments and inaugurate certain eras of life on the banks of the Drina, bringing with them certain regimes of time that suit their strategic ends.

Over the span of the four centuries during which the novel unfolds, there are three eras of the bridge which accord certain shifts in the “forms of life” that are experienced by Višegrad: the first era concerns its construction in the 16th century and the way in which this critical piece of

¹⁴ Lukács, *Historical Novel*, 93, 70.

¹⁵ Perry Anderson summarizes this quality of the 19th century historical novel as a genre where “[f]amous historical figures will feature among the dramatis personae, but their roles in the tale will be oblique or marginal. Narratives will centre instead on middling characters, of no great distinction, whose function is to offer an individual focus for the dramatic collision of opposing extremes between whom they stand, or more often waver,” Anderson, “From Progress to Catastrophe.”

infrastructure, “a rare structure of unique beauty” becomes an “indispensible link on the road between Bosnia and Serbia and further, beyond Serbia, with other parts of the Turkish Empire, all the way to Stambul” (13). Connecting the village of Višegrad to its wider surroundings, it changes the social relations in the town becoming an “imperishable root” to which the town owed its entire existence, as one of those “settlements which always and inevitably grow up around an important centre of communications and on either side of great and important bridges” (14) and is seen to permanently join the Christian left bank of Višegrad with the Muslim right bank as well as the eastern core of the Ottoman empire centered in Istanbul with its western-most periphery (for much of imperial history) here in Bosnia.

Once constructed, the bridge’s *kapia* becomes the central gathering place for the Muslim townsfolk and landowners (*begs*), who sit on the stone benches of the *sofa* constructed into the right terrace of the bridge, across from the stone pile that bore “a plaque of white marble with a rich Turkish inscription, a *tarih*, with a carved chronogram which told in thirteen verses the name of the man who built the bridge and the year in which it was built” (15). Beneath this inscription, as though an avatar of the empire which bequeathed the bridge to Višegrad, was a fountain trickling water to all passers-by where “a coffee-maker had installed himself with his copper vessels and Turkish cups and ever-lighted charcoal brazier, and an apprentice who took the coffee over the way to the guests on the sofa” (ibid). This figure becomes as permanent a fixture as the stone *tarih*, more of an office or mantle of “coffee-maker” rather than personhood.¹⁶ Serving coffee to the all the townsfolk of Višegrad, even the non-Muslim serfs

¹⁶ *Tarih* means “history” or “date of an event” in Turkish, further reinforcing my reading that the *kapia* represents not only the social life of the village but symbolizes the middle-ground of the bridge’s history from creation to destruction. The *tarih*, engraved in stone on the bridge itself, is papered over by the proclamations of the Austrian empire, first declaring administrative priority over Bosnia and then in 1908, claiming territorial sovereignty. The stone *tarih* is one of the features of the *kapia* destroyed by the Austrian army at the novel’s end.

(*rayah*) who are left to congregate on the *kapia* for their purposes in the less desirable hours of the day, the coffee-maker becomes a fixture of the *kapia* and a symbol of Ottoman commerce and priorities in Višegrad.

The *kapia* becomes a symbol of Višegrad's hospitality and social life: "as a Turkish traveler, to whom the people of Višegrad had been very hospitable, wrote in his account of his travels: 'their *kapia* is the heart of the bridge, which is the heart of the town, which must remain in everyone's heart'" (19). In Turkish, *kapia* means door or gate, as in a liminal crossing point or opening, and became the word for gathering spaces at such intersections or thresholds like the bridge, suggesting the openness and porosity of borders during Ottoman administration rather than the militarized, impassable boundaries they would come to embody during the successive administration by the Austrians. On the bridge, the *kapia* serves a very similar role: it is the halfway point between the Christian and Muslim sides of town, the threshold of each side of the Drina's religious domain and provides a large terrace upon which the villagers of all religious creeds gather and socialize. It becomes the vessel for village social life, a sort of *dais* upon which the drama of the historical process of formation and rupture that we are discussing is staged.

This era is not all-together innocent but is characterized by the brutal enslavement of the Christian populace by the Ottomans and their conscription to forced labor building the bridge.¹⁷

¹⁷ I am not sure that Andrić (or his chronicler-narrator) would agree with Ćatović's characterization that "The Ottoman hegemony tastes differently in Andrić's Bosnia, and Ottoman expansionism, violent though it was, created at its best a tolerant, diverse and cosmopolitan empire. Istanbul in particular, but also other parts and provinces such as Bosnia, embodied a world that cannot be flatly assimilated to the "classical" and exploitative colonial model of, say, the French Empire. If anything, in Andrić's understanding there was a certain cosmopolitan, co-existential impulse in the Bosnian life under the Ottomans." (Ćatović, "Small-Town Globalism," 401). As I will show, Andrić fostered no such naïve illusions as to the tolerance or beneficent cosmopolitanism of the Ottoman empire. See for instance the extremely graphic description of Rade the Mason's brutal impalement in Chapter III of *Drina*. Aside from Alihodža's aural crucifixion, which he survives, there is nothing nearly so violent that occurs in the novel after the point of Ottoman withdrawal. Should we read this as Andrić's de facto support for European imperialism which tempered the open violence of the Ottoman empire and replaced it with the "spiritual" virus of ethno-nationalism? Surely not! Rather than adopt this naïve ethical binarism in which the Ottoman empire is simply perceived as less bad than its European counterparts, I suggest that Andrić rather unsurprisingly views both systems as irretrievably violent and predicated on the separation and division of people

One of the early rebellions fomented by the *rayah* is quashed by the ruthless public impalement of its leader on the parapet of the bridge whose legend later becomes a nationalist flashpoint. In this era, which begins roughly in the early half of the 19th century, with rumblings of far-off revolutions in Serbia and Montenegro, followed by murmurs of Ottoman imperial reforms which grants the formerly minoritized (though the numerical majority) Christian, Roma, Jewish and non-Muslim populations more of the freedoms accorded to their Muslim counterparts.

This period is capped off by the Congress of Berlin in 1878 which granted Serbia and Montenegro (and Romania) independence and granted a military occupation of Bosnia, though not governance, to the Austro-Hungarian empire effectively militarizing the once porous imperial border and calcifying it into a non-permeable state border: “the border between the two *pashaluks* of Bosnia and Belgrade, which passed just above the town, began in those years to become ever more sharply defined and to take on the appearance and significance of a state frontier. That changed the conditions of life for the whole district and for the town also, influenced trade and communications, and the mutual relations of Turks and Serbs” (94).

In addition to engendering a shift in social relations, this new structure of imperial control marks a significant departure from the mode of imperial control before it; from this moment on, as the Ottoman empire’s control of the region surrounding Višegrad falters and eventually gives way to its administration by Austria-Hungary, the bridge’s symbolic function as a link begins to degrade, the inscription of the Turkish plaque covered over by a series of imperial proclamations as the *kapia* assumes a new role as a militarized border-crossing. These proclamations are

that ultimately have rather much in common – therefore, he is not commenting on the relativistic *character* of each empire comparatively within the global system of imperialism but on the systemic structures that empire itself relies on for its own reproduction as an economic, political, and cultural system at that global level. Both imperial models are violent while pretending at tolerance – the European system was simply more tactical in hiding and outsourcing its violent engine so that it was less dramatically discernible than a public impaling.

witnessed as a symbolic partition – “the white paper of the proclamation had cut [the bridge] in half like a silent explosion and that there was now a great abyss” (123) – that foreshadows the literal rupture of the bridge during World War I.

This final era of the bridge begins with the Austrian Annexation Crisis of 1908, when the Austro-Hungarian empire formally annexed Bosnia with the stated aim of freeing it from the yoke of Ottoman oppression through a beneficent decision to finally “grant constitutional institutions – such as will answer to their pre-sent conditions and their common interests – to both [Bosnia and Herzegovina] and to give in this manner a legal basis for the representation of their wishes and interests” promising “[t]he supreme conception of the equality of all before the law, the participation in the making of laws and the administration of the country, an equal protection afforded to all faiths. languages and national characteristics” (218-19). Just after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo (1914), when the retreating Austrian empire dynamites the bridge to prevent the Serbian army from following across the river, it fully encapsulates its new symbolic significance as pure rupture – a “yawning gulf between two roughly broken arches” (312).

Through Andrić’s ironic use of the indolent part-time chronicler of Višegrad during the height of the partition crisis and the transition from Ottoman to Austrian administration, more on whom below, he explores the introduction of a new imperial regime of time by each wave of empire that passes over the bridge. The town’s navel-gazing schoolmaster, mired in the close network of social relations of the village and his standing in them, is unable to recognize the significance of the middle era as a properly historical event, one quite worthy of entry into his chronicle which he fails to record. More caricature than character, Andrić develops such typologies in contrast to his chronicler-narrator who, in the language of Walter Benjamin and

Theodore Adorno, is better suited to “constellate” these events into a revelatory narrative, as mediator between the viewpoint of the chronicler, limited to one human lifetime, and the fiction of the novelist, limited by the restraints on imagination and ideation of any given historical era’s social and material context.¹⁸ The primary concerns of psychological subjectivity in *Bosnian Chronicle* were set aside for the broader sociological concerns of *Drina* by exploring the shift in social relations that can be fostered upon and symbolized by the bridge over the course of centuries.

Drina leaves no doubt that the Berlin Congress of 1878 was responsible for the marked and sudden shift away from an obsolete regime of time, which like its imperial border, was naturalized as permeable, non-standard, and organic especially in the waning years of Ottoman hegemony, to a new hyper-efficient data-driven regime instituted by the Austro-Hungarian empire that centered on the standardized calendar and clock-time of the working week and the attendant surveillance and control mechanisms which buttress such a system. This shift in imperial regimes of time accompanies the birth of national consciousness, which is introduced structurally in *Drina* through fits and starts around 1878, the year of the Berlin Congress, because of the enclosure of imperial frontiers into state borders through the partition enacted at Berlin.

Prior to 1878, the novel refuses any meaningful and stable ethnic division in the countryside, the villagers are primarily divided along religious lines and then regionally, though rarely in any systematic way.¹⁹ The roots of this internalization of division are in the moribund

¹⁸ While I am not the first to discuss Bridge on the Drina as a chronicle novel nor highlight Andrić’s carefully curated authorial self-concept as bard-chronicler (see Džadžić, “Ivo Andrić, the Bard of Bosnia,” 25; Minderovic, “Ivo Andric: The Chronicler of Bosnia,” 31 for two of the earlier English language analyses of *Drina*), I am not so interested in making claims about Andrić’s personal status or his presence in the text, as I am in narrowing the responsibility given to the narrator of *Drina* in weaving such a vast, complex story out of such menial parts.

¹⁹ Mark Mazower attributes the slow rise of ethnic nationalism in Yugoslavia to the failed Tanzimat reforms of the Ottoman empire, initiated in 1839, which were neither able to shore up the empire’s borders at its frontiers as it

Ottoman form of empire whose slow decay produces the possibility for new divisions to multiply and take root. Starting with the “slow fever” which consumed the Turkish empire in the mid-19th century, when “the border between the two pashaluks” took on the “appearance and significance of a state frontier,” (94) it becomes clear to the Višegrad villagers that the tides were shifting toward a new model of power. The framework of power until that point was still tied to localized forms of economic status and systems of feudal dominance. While the violence of the beheadings, impalings and other overt exercises of Ottoman imperial control were quite capable at instituting arbitrary and unjust social divisions between the people of Visegrad, in 1878, the text introduces a division of political power that cleaves to a more volatile symbol of belonging, which potentiates even more violence than the religious stratification imposed by the Ottomans: blood.

Because it is not a center of accumulation, Višegrad is a bit like a buoy bobbing on the surface of a vast imperial frontier. It always feels the effects of modernization in mediated and often delayed ways, and even then, as “echoes” that succeed in successfully smuggling themselves into the forms of life and manners of social relations already established in the village. Though the times are uncertain, the conditions for change must arise from the material conditions of life in the town, which follow certain rhythms and patterns established over the course of many generations. Further, in the lives of individuals, the changes in mindset and in perspective proceed within the limits of what the townspeople can conceivably afford to change, such as styles of dress or appetites for new imported food and alcohol, with the caveat that only in “exceptional individuals,” those figures operating as conservative holdouts, embodied in the figure of the stubborn and longsuffering Alihodja or the schoolmaster Husseinaga, “was there

attempted to undergo statal formation nor ease the mistreatment of its religious minorities at the hands of local landlords (*The Balkans*, 88-90).

played out a deeper, truer drama of the struggle between old and new. For them, the forms of life were inextricable from life itself” (136).

Throughout each of the historical eras of *Drina*, Andrić demonstrates a keen regard for the history of ordinary people far removed from the grand arenas of power that are the foci of Eurocentric historiography and shows how the seeds of division, and the distant possibility of unity, are contained in such simple life ways. By way of answering, Andrić offers Višegrad’s schoolmaster, Husseinaga, the kind of chronicler that is the bane of the historian. Were he less self-important, more attuned to the shifting rhythms of daily life on the Drina, and more diligent in his chronicling duties, a novel like *Drina* would not even be necessary, as the changes which occurred through this time of shifting imperial control would already be a matter of historical record.

The Erstwhile Chronicler of Višegrad and the Chronicler-Narrator of *Drina*

The schoolmaster of Višegrad, who drifts in and out of the narrative of the bridge over the course of the greater part of the tale, is described as a pompous, self-important and mean man who holds himself in such high regard because he owned the largest library in town: “a bound chest full of books kept carefully locked, which had been bequeathed him by his teacher the celebrated Arap-hodja, and which he not only conscientiously preserved from dust and moth but even on rare occasions read” (127-28). The ethos granted by his meager library instills in him a false sense of authority over the town’s history and legitimates his ambition to be its chronicler; in the eyes of the villagers, this “gave him the fame of a learned and exceptional man,” because he was somehow seen to wield “the fate of the town and of every individual in it” (128). But in reality, Husseinaga’s chronicle of “the most important events in the history of the town” was “neither extensive nor dangerous. In the last five or six years, since the schoolmaster had first

begun this work, only four pages of a small exercise book had been filled. For the greater number of the town's events were not considered by the schoolmaster as of sufficient importance to warrant entry into his chronicle” (ibid).

While the schoolmaster is eager to prove himself wise and adept at diagnosing the tribulations which face the town, he is irreversibly hampered by his ego and the small-town provincialism that conditioned it. The fact that he took on the town chronicle’s composition is proof-positive of his *authority* to compose it in the first place, even if nothing manages to satisfy the impossibly (and ridiculously) high criteria for inclusion which the schoolmaster has set for his record: “It may be said in passing that the case of books on which his reputation as a learned man rested to a great extent was still largely unread, and his chronicle of the town had grown in these twenty years by four pages only, for the older the schoolmaster grew he esteemed himself and his chronicle more and more and the events around him less and less” (202).

When the Austrian army formally announces the annexation of Bosnia into the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1908, triggering what’s referred to as the Annexation Crisis,²⁰ some 30 years have passed since he was first introduced. And yet, the novel devotes more than 70 pages to what Husseinaga sees fit to record in four. It is as though the gravitas of the genre – to affix for all posterity the idiosyncrasies of the rich *tableau vivant* of village life – paralyzes his pen, making impossible the very act of chronicling for the schoolmaster, as he has no real historical or social context against which to understand the changes that are elapsing under his very nose.

Unable to recognize the significance of the events which are transpiring daily around

²⁰ Since 1878, though technically under Ottoman sovereignty, Bosnia was administered by Austria-Hungary, who declared their intent to annex the territory formally in late 1908. Once national consciousness had begun to gain momentum, the Habsburg empire was able to opportunistically claim administrative control easily over the Bosnian territory on the basis of Christendom, though its interests were primarily in waylaying the various territorial encroachments of Russia and England.

him, he cannot arrange the necessary constellation of historic facts to properly include and record them. The schoolmaster collapses the record and the event into one, thus blundering through the chaotic swirl of history that faces the town, unable to distill any clarity of meaning from them regarding the larger trends any given happening portends. The purpose of his record, to preserve for posterity the swells of change that characterize history on the frontier, fails to register anything but his own magnanimity. But rather than writing chronicle that could produce a vantage point from which the village could reflect on itself and the changes that occurred almost imperceptibly, the schoolmaster “loved to talk and have an audience [...] when speaking he behaved as if he were in front of a mirror” (127). Arrested in the “mirror phase” of psychological development, the schoolmaster writes for an audience of one – himself – and with the egotism of an infant imagines himself as coterminous with the social life of Višegrad. In part due to his self-importance, and in part, because of the bucolic pace of village life for a member of the “learned elite” in the far corners of the Ottoman empire, Husseinaga’s psychology leads him to fail to identify the import of what he witnesses as a marked departure from the past.

The imposing, monolithic quality of the bridge and the imperial regime which had built it regulated the tempo of daily life leading to this aporia in the schoolmaster: like the bridge itself, “[t]he foundations of the world and the bases of life and human relationships in it have been fixed for centuries. That does not mean that they do not change, but measured by the length of human existence they appear eternal” (246). The reader is never clued into what the schoolmaster actually writes, but given his narcissistic portrayal, one imagines it is more of an abortive diary than a proper chronicle of the town’s history. And yet, the chronicle-novel may absolve the schoolmaster of his ignorance because of the way that the Ottoman empire organized time, preventing the historic event of Austria’s annexation of Bosnia from registering as an event

at all. Because he had no way of knowing how interpersonal relations in Višegrad would change given the slow pace of life under the prior regime, the schoolmaster has no way of comprehending the changes that such symbolic declarations held. He therefore has no system for differentiating between event, that is, history, and nature, rendering any record he attempts to compile useless.

The “learned” schoolmaster has essentially the same grasp on the almost-imperceptible changes taking place in the town and its surrounding environs (including all of Europe) as the regular townsfolk, whose historiography is described by the chronicler-narrator as folkloric, nearly animist: “they remember and tell of what they are able to grasp and what they are able to transform into legend. Anything else passes them by without deeper trace, with the dumb indifference of nameless natural phenomena, which do not touch the imagination or remain in the memory” (27). The inchoate form of historiological understanding, which preceded the construction of the bridge, is simply that which is retained in collective memory or that which has no schema to attach itself and thus passes by as “nameless natural phenomena.” With the bridge, history arrives in Višegrad, but not necessarily the apparatus to understand its movements. It would not be until the arrival of the Austrian empire and their obsessive classificatory drive that such “nameless phenomena” are incorporated through scientific reasoning into popular understanding. In this way, history was seen as abandoning the village, leaving the townsfolk to their own devices until it came crashing down on them with a suddenness they could hardly fathom.

Because of the length of the Ottoman empire’s reign and the relative autonomy and priority that the Muslim townsfolk experienced under it, the schoolmaster believed that neither the events of everyday life nor the more significant political happenings that occur on the bridge

are notable departures from the old ways, therefore that they carry with them their own resolution and are undeserving of recording in his narrative where nothing much ever changes. Thus, even the initial arrival of the Austrian army as a result of the Berlin Congress, the first administrative transfer of empires that the village has seen in centuries does not merit inclusion in the schoolmaster's chronicle: "Now that [the Austrian commandant's arrival] had passed so unexpectedly well and easily, though harshly and unpleasantly enough, it seemed to him quite clear that there had never been any real reason for panic" (132). Wondering how many lines to devote to the arrival in his chronicle, the schoolmaster whittles down the space he would give to the events until it barely seemed necessary to record them at all: "With every line spared it seemed to him that he saw all around him diminished in importance while he, the schoolmaster, became greater and more important in his own eyes" (133). As he himself was neither harmed nor truthfully very inconvenienced by the changing of the guard, he could not see the wider significance of this truly historic event which would slowly change the entire form of life in Višegrad.

In contrast, the chronicler-narrator's role is to uncover the seeds of this sudden, rapid modernization, the acceleration of time and history itself, in the discarded, disconnected minutia of the past, to reveal the historic origins of the present conditions by constellating events that otherwise pass as "nameless phenomena" into a narrative. Thus, such events as the withdrawal of the Ottoman army from Bosnia certainly did not pass "without reason for panic" for pious Alihodja, who was nailed to the bridge by his ear for offending the retreating Turkish commander. Descendent of the first *mutevelia* Dauthodja,²¹ in Alihodja the chronicler-narrator

²¹ The honorific *hodja* means "wise one" or "teacher." This is an earned and not inherited title; however, the position of *mutevelia*, keeper of the stone caravanserai that was built with the bridge, was inherited and was passed down to the oldest son of the line. With time and the loss of land rent in Hungary, this position became largely honorary but was retained as an occupational surname – "so there remained for the Muteveliés only their family

describes a counterpoint to Husseinaga's immature self-aggrandizement which cannot allow him to see past the tip of his nose. Alihodja actually *does* represent the social life of the village, more specifically of the bridge itself, as a result of his curious crucifixion which leaves him with something like a psychic connection to it. While certainly more sensitive to the historic changes facing Višegrad than the schoolmaster, he is also unable to pen a proper "record" of events, merely embodying them for as long as he lives. Alihodja's wary regard for the real changes occurring in Višegrad, not the superficial trappings of modernization but their underlying causes and what the Austrian empire hopes to gain from them, positions his philosophy most closely with the voice of the chronicler-narrator.

Both Husseinaga and Alihodja are named as some of the town's "exceptional individuals" (136), in whom the deeper strand of historic meaning is constellated against the background of imperial affairs taking place "off-stage." These are not history's "Great Men," a historiographic invention of empire to justify its worst excesses as genius's necessary collateral damage, but rather those individuals in whom the process of historic formation, in this case of the ethno-nationalist vision of national belonging, is most symbolically present – either dramatized in their behavior and thoughts or set as a conflict within themselves and their society that they must somehow be overcome. Instead, these characters are the content of historic chronicles, who, fable-like, populate the timeline of Višegrad's record with poignant moments that elaborate the birth of national consciousness rather than the vicissitudes of psychological subjectivity in village life.

name as a proud memorial of the calling which they had honourably carried out for so many years" (113) – it still accorded him and his family significant status in the town, to which he added his wit and common sense as a *hodja*.

Though the chronicler-narrator eschews the use of the word “chronicle” with respect to the record of events in *Drina* until the very last chapter of the book – “It is now 1914, the last year in the chronicle of the bridge on the Drina” (265) – it is nevertheless structured as a metafictional chronicle of Višegrad offered contrapuntally to the “official” chronicle penned, quite lazily, by Husseinaga. Unlike the indolent school master, the narrator-chronicler of *Drina* stands above all petty ethnic and religious divisions, to mediate the meaning immanent to the various historic periods whose importance is not always self-explanatory or self-evident. Those who are most emblematic of a synthesis of Yugoslavian identities, and are thus most able to reconcile the many entrenched positions which they represent, are most likely to be left behind in the legacy of the bridge’s destruction. Alihodja’s reluctance to avow the cause of nationalism, religious or otherwise, suggests a wariness of this new technology of the state which would serve only to introduce more divisions between people than what existed “naturally” between them as a result of religious difference.

Therefore, the “true chronicle” as opposed to Husseinaga’s ineffectual one, must be an *aesthetic* creation which is not swayed by trends in the rigid science of causality that accompany the modern empires that invade Bosnia: “As in so many other things, here too it is not easy to determine what is cause and what effect. Has the *kapia* made them what they are, or on the contrary was it imagined in their souls and understandings and built for them according to their needs and customs?” (21). Instead, it seeks to constellate certain patterns or tendencies in history that betray the ways in which the present moment is not a static, fixed point in time, but extends into both the past and future: the magnitude of this extension, as it is felt and understood by those who experience such turbulent historic times, is in large part determined by the vision of history which accompanies the shifting regime of time and space incurred with each successive imperial

administrator. The bridge formed the very background of existence for Višegrad – in this case, a picturesque scene with a powerful, gleaming stone bridge in the middle of it – which gave life the illusion of permanence and stagnation. It is not until that background begins to change, first subtly and then dramatically with the destruction of the bridge, that the villagers begin to ask themselves how they got to that place. The answer to this question is the work of the chronicler-narrator.

To capture these eras, which span many centuries, Andrić turns to a genre that was very familiar to him from his Ph.D. research in history: the chronicle. Ever the consummate historian, he was consumed with the history of this eastern region of Bosnia, where he spent the majority of his childhood, which was the focus of his doctoral dissertation in history as well as the subject of a good portion of his literary work.²² *Bridge on the Drina* is almost obsessively historical in its articulation of the ebbs and flows of Bosnian life on the fringes of these multiple empires, a well explicated feature of Andrić's *oeuvre* in English.²³ This quality of historical obsessiveness manifests in numerous narrative techniques which Andrić deploys to avoid the typical time constraints of the human lifetime or those afforded by the family epic typically employed by the historical novel in order to produce something more formally akin to the chronicles that composed his doctoral research but which better explicated the chaos that characterized WWII.²⁴

²² In 1923, Andrić was transferred to Yugoslavia's embassy in Graz and began his doctoral degree in Slavic Studies at the University of Graz. Because of his extensive body of pre-existing research and due to political pressures created by the professionalization of the diplomatic corps, he was able to finish his degree in 1924 (!), with the title "The Development of Spiritual Life in Bosnia Under the Influence of Turkish Rule." His thesis was that the "yoke" of Turkish rule was "absolutely negative. The Turks could bring no cultural content or sense of higher mission, even to those South Slavs who accepted Islam" (Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 100). Shortly after completing his PhD, Andrić returned to Belgrade and was subsequently posted all over Western Europe; in Paris, Andrić spent most of his time in the archives of the national libraries studying the reports from the French consulate in Travnik during the Napoleonic Wars. These materials would form the historical background for his novel, *Bosnian Chronicle* (1945).

²³ Andrew Wachtel suggests that Andrić employs an archaeological metaphor for history and that Yugoslavia is the site of vertical excavation whereas Dragan Kujunžić suggests that the bridge is Andrić's metaphor for the "Great Man" theory of history and its alternatives (*Historical Archeology*, 88).

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Immanentizing the Katechon: *Pričanju* and the End of Time

In his 1961 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Andrić characterized *pričanju* – storytelling and the stories it produces – as being one of the universal human impulses, so universal a drive across time and space that it is as though humanity is telling itself the same story over and over, “like those tales told by the legendary Scheherazade, to trick the executioner, to postpone the inevitability of the tragic destiny that menaces us, to lengthen the illusion of life and existence.”²⁵ If the storytelling never stops, if the *kapia* can remain a space of polyglossia and incessant discourse, the people of Višegrad will have the space to resist the developing narrative of national identity that is shaped by immutable blood ties and temper the worst excesses of the myth of ethnic identity through the audacious plurivocality of stories.

Given the apocalyptic overtones of the novel’s end, with the destruction of the bridge signaling a much wider horror that was being lived under the Nazi boot and the near total destruction of the vibrant Jewish community of Bosnia in the Holocaust, Andrić sees the granularity of the storyteller’s historical vision – it’s keen eye for the diverse charms of small-town life that must be preserved at all costs – in eschatological terms, as a *katechon*, a way to withhold or delay the apocalypses that constantly threaten to cross the horizon of our collective history, such as those occurring during the composition of *Drina*, or thirty years ago, or yesterday.²⁶ Andrić’s conception of storytelling’s *katechontic* mandate is strictly secular, as it is

²⁵ "O Priči i Pričanju – Transcript of Ivo Andrić's 1961 Nobel Acceptance Speech," Wikizvor, https://hr.wikisource.org/wiki/O_pri%C4%8Di_i_pri%C4%8Danju.

²⁶ The word *katechon*, from the Greek meaning “withholder,” is used eschatologically by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:6–7 to refer to the coming of the “lawless one” who will bring chaos and misery before being overthrow by the messiah and in the act of final redemption: “And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed.” There are essentially two schools of thought on Paul’s meaning of *katechon* here: one views it as a restrainer of the antichrist and the other as the impeder of redemption. Nazi philosopher Carl Schmitt naturally viewed it as the former, as a justification of the totalitarian state for the benefit of maintaining order whereas Paolo Virno saw it as the latter, the social obstacles that impede human connection which are at every turn attempting to be transcended through the work of language. See Schmitt, *The Nomos of*

clear that the description of the bridge's destruction signals the ascendance of the new imperial regime of time which will rapidly wipe out the old while still retaining its prejudicial hierarchical pettiness; there is no heavenly kingdom coming to save humanity, since no Grand Vizier and no "deus ex ponte" could reconcile the many differences between the villagers anyways. Under this new system, every society is forced to reckon with judgment day, as it were, every day.

I invoke the ideas of Walter Benjamin because he is Andrić's closest peer in respect to their philosophies of history.²⁷ Benjamin ties concepts from Jewish mysticism to aphorisms and parables about history, historical materialism, and theology and produces a dialectical notion of history as simultaneously ruinous and redemptive; on the one hand Benjamin famously claimed that "There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" and the past is "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage...skyward"²⁸ and on the other conceives of "the present as the *jetztzeit* [now-time] which is shot through with chips of Messianic time," retaining an echo of the mystical Jewish belief that "every second of time was the strait gate through which Messiah might enter."²⁹ Within the framework of historical materialism, the "now-time" of the present is not about the arrival of a literal salvific messiah but about the possibility for revolution to produce an "interruption" in historical progress.³⁰ This is simply the negative view of the *katechon*, which regards the cessation of history as apocalypse rather than as redemption!

the Earth, 59–60, and Virno, *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation*, 60, for further investigations of the term's many valences in political and religious theory.

²⁷ Though as Hawkesworth attests, Andrić says he was unaware of his work while composing *Drina* (Hawkesworth, *Ivo Andrić: Bridge Between East and West*, 144). Elif Shafak makes a similar claim in "Why the novel matters in the age of anger."

²⁸ Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 256, 257.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 264.

³⁰ Benjamin: "Classless society is not the final goal of historical progress but its frequently miscarried, ultimately achieved interruption" (Benjamin, *Selected Writings* 4, 402).

The problem, we see, is that for Andrić the destruction of the bridge, an act which stems from the partition at Berlin, is not met with an equally compelling counternarrative to combat the insidious partition it introduces to the “inner boundaries” that separate the townspeople from one another. Despite attempt to unify people of religious and ethnic differences, Andrić showed the way that such differences became the foundational myths for the self-understanding of the ethnic groups of Yugoslavia as a result of partition. The book narrates those historical forces that faced Yugoslavia to show what it has overcome, but it remains pessimistic about the durability of such a history to sustain itself in the future. Something more rigid is required. Where Andrić most differs from Benjamin is in what the proper narrative ascribed to history can accomplish: for Andrić, it is a way of holding out against the end whereas for Benjamin it is a way of beckoning it.

Both seem to agree that the work of the chronicler is, in the language of Benjamin and Adorno, to see the fragments of daily life as sharing in a vaster constellation of history in which they are points that stand as representative of the whole they compose, a whole which is beyond the ken of our understanding until the work of narrative uncovers the historical origin of our present conditions. By origin, Benjamin does not mean “the coming-to-be of what has originated but rather what originates in the becoming and passing away.... On one hand, [origin] demands to be recognized as restoration, restitution, and on the other hand—and precisely on account of this—as something incomplete and unclosed.”³¹ For Benjamin, the possibility of revolution is what imbues the chronicler’s constellation with power to organize the incipient potential in the rubble of history into a future through an act like interpretation: “the coming-to-be of what has originated ” cannot be recognized in “the naked, manifest existence of the factual” nor on the

³¹ Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, 24.

purely mythic or fictional.³²

There are no “naked” facts when it comes to political ideologies such as national identity anyways, and discovering the “historical origin” of something like the mythical wellspring of Slavic nationalism is not possible in the existing record, as Andrić discovered (or else he would not have felt it necessary to amend the existing record with a narrative). But just as Benjamin says that “A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history,” Andrić shows how the accumulation of the minor and major events in the history of Višegrad becomes a microcosm for the mythogenesis of the Yugoslav self-conception, a process achieved through the repetition and repurposing of stories passed down over generations.³³

The villagers of Višegrad are tricked into thinking that the arrival of “politics,” meaning national politics, means that the borders of the world have expanded: “In short, it seemed to them, in this matter also, that their life had become more expansive and richer, that the frontiers of the impermissible and the impossible had moved back and that there opened before them prospects and possibilities such as had never before existed” (216). In the quintessential irony of national formation, the enclosure of borders entails this feeling of expansiveness and openness, as though by finally drawing the line on the map, the nation is able to rise to meet the other nations on the geopolitical level as equals. At the time the bridge was built, the villagers began to understand how “the affairs of the world were in such dependence upon one another and were linked together across so great a distance” (73), yet even as these new possibilities opened up before them, they offered them no advantage, no insights, and no security: “even now they had

³² Ibid.

³³ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 256.

nothing new nor were they able to see anything better, but they were able to look beyond the everyday life of the town, and that gave them the exciting illusion of space and power” (216).

This “illusion of space and power” is a mirage; in fact their worlds have somehow shrunk. The cost of admission to the world stage is not only the drawing of external borders, but their internalization as borders which separate people who otherwise share much in common in unbreachable ways: granted legitimacy by scientific rhetoric and political exigency, the ethnic basis of nationalism becomes the *de facto* image of national belonging in these regions, while never fully abandoning religious divisions as well. These partitions are enforced at first by a gentle sense of progress and modernization, which lull the villagers, especially the younger ones, into a false sense of security and faith in the limitless expanse of the future.

This ultimately undermines the notion of development itself as the changes that occur between generations are not the result of modernization, since Andrić keenly emphasizes the relative stability and unchangeability of the Bosnian countryside during the centuries of Ottoman imperialism that they experience. Instead, the most lasting and fundamental shifts arise from partition. The slow death and retreat of the Ottoman empire inaugurated:

three decades of relative prosperity and apparent peace in the Franz-Josef manner, when many Europeans thought that there was some infallible formula for the realization of a centuries-old dream of full and happy development of individuality in freedom and in progress, when the nineteenth century spread out before the eyes of millions of men its many-sided and deceptive prosperity and created its *fata morgana* of comfort, security and happiness for all and everyone at reasonable prices and even on credit terms (173).

The sardonic reference to credit is a nod of course to the financialization of the Western empires which caused so much economic chaos and had no small part in the global conflicts of the 20th century; the introduction of a system of credit backed by banks in Višegrad brings many foreigners from the empire with their businesses, most notably the hotel run by Lotte, which for a

time comes to replace the *kapia* as the focal point of social life in town, and with it a temporary feeling of progress and optimism – modern life had arrived in Višegrad, and it had the town's young people clamoring for excitement and action.³⁴

What awareness is denied the villagers by virtue of the chaotic, unprecedented nature of the times becomes manifest to them with the ultimate demise of the Turkish empire in the aftermath of the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, wars fought over the lines drawn at Berlin in 1878, when overnight “the Turkish frontier which only the day before had been about nine miles from the town was suddenly withdrawn more than 600 miles, somewhere far beyond Jedrene (Adrianople)” (228). This sudden shift in borders – “so many and such important changes” – “shook the town to its foundations” and took time for the villagers to process, since “Not even in dreams did frontiers change so quickly or go so far away” (229). They awakened to the fact that “Now the bridge in reality no longer linked anything save the two parts of the town and those dozen or so villages on one or the other side of the Drina...the Vezir's bequest suddenly found itself abandoned and, as if by some magic spell, outside the main stream of life” (228). This feeling of abandonment, of the death of the old empire and the sudden collapse of expansiveness that accompanied the realization that bridge no longer linked them to anything but the nearby region, produces a marked shift in the subjectivity of Višegrad's villagers: “All that had lain quiescent in men, as ancient as that bridge and equally dumb and motionless, now suddenly

³⁴ This is marked by a shift in the tradition of taking coffee on the *kapia*, which becomes vested with all manner of political significance after the arrival of nationalism: “The coffee merchant obtained a gramophone. a clumsy wooden box with a big tin trumpet in the shape of a bright blue flower. His son changed the records and the needles and was continually winding this raucous contraption which echoed from both banks and made the *kapia* quiver. He had been forced to get it in order not to be left behind by his competitors, for now gramophones could be heard not only at meetings and in the reading rooms but even in the humblest cafes where the guests sat under a lime tree, on the grass or on brightly-lit balconies, and talked with few words and in low voices. Everywhere the gramophone ground and churned out Turkish marches, Serbian patriotic songs or arias from Viennese operettas, according to the tastes of the guests for whom it played” (225-26).

came alive and began to influence their everyday life, their general mood and the personal fate of every individual“ (229).

From Blood Tax to Blood Ties: The “Slow Fever” of the Ottoman Empire

Despite the global fame that the Nobel brought him, Andrić was a modest and even reclusive public figure. While his diplomatic and literary career involved him in some of the grander historic events in 20th century European history, he never stopped longing for his “real home” – Višegrad.³⁵ Like the French consul in *Bosnian Chronicle*, he felt himself “one of those men who are predestined victims of great historical changes, as forceful and exceptional individuals do, they neither know how to withstand these changes nor know how to come to terms with them.”³⁶ The town, and the separation from his family that it came to represent at such a young age, left an indelible impact on his imagination and literary output forcing him to reckon with these great changes as best he could – with stories.

As Annabel Patterson points out, the *kapia* was the site of storytelling where the young Andrić heard many of the folktales and stories that he would eventually weave into his *oeuvre*.³⁷ When his desperate mother left the young Ivo with her sister to raise in Višegrad, they lived on the banks of the Drina in visible proximity to Mehmed Pasha Sokolović bridge.³⁸ Dragan Kujundžić suggests that Andrić’s immediacy to the bridge during this early separation from his mother loaded the bridge with the mixed feelings that it would come to bear in *Drina*. Therefore, while Andrić spent his childhood playing on the bridge and banks of the Drina, it also came to symbolize “the source of separation and pain, binding him with the point of rupture and

³⁵ Juričić, *The Man and the Artist*, 2.

³⁶ Andrić, *Bosnian Chronicle*, 93.

³⁷ Patterson, “Andrić Bridge,” 41.

³⁸ Kujundžić, “Sarcophagus of History,” 112.

suffering.”³⁹ Andrić opens the narrative of *Drina* with just such a scene of heartache and separation, that of the one-day Grand Vizier Mehmed Pasha Sokolović, as he was abducted from his village Sokolovici in the Travnik region, as a *devshirme*.

Devshirme was the Ottoman “blood tax,” a practice which kidnapped young boys from Christian towns and villages and forcibly converted them to Islam, committing them in most cases to a life of service to the sultan as a Janissary, a member of the sultan’s personal guard and standing army; this Janissary corps became an elite body that was deeply loyal and devoted to the sultan. Just as Mehmed Pasha Sokolović was the Sultan’s most trusted advisor (actually to three successive sultans) and administrated the entire Ottoman empire, the Janissaries, the Sultan’s most elite guard, was entirely composed of *devshirme*.

Prior to advancing his career through the web of the Ottoman court until he was second in the empire, he was just a small boy taken from his mother: “somewhere within himself he felt a sharp stabbing pain which from time to time seemed suddenly to cut his chest in two and hurt terribly, which was always associated with the memory of that place where the road broke off,” (25). Like Andrić, the young Vizier’s heart was split by the road which was only passable by ferry before he undertook his grand architectural project as Grand Vizier to Sultan Murad III. This “particularly painful spot” (ibid) nags at him for his whole long career, according to the chronicler-narrator, driving his decision to link his home village and the east, his new home when he had risen to his station of power as vizier. And despite the negativity toward the Ottoman empire evidenced in Andrić’s doctoral work, his literary work acknowledges the lasting impact which this decision would have in linking, and not separating, this critical crossroads.

³⁹ Ibid., 117.

I suggest that Andrić opens with the *devshirme* of the one-day Grand Vizier to showcase the shift that occurs in the nature of empire and power before and after the Congress of Berlin in 1878. The Ottoman Empire instituted a social hierarchy on the basis of religion to order the vast imperial holdings – very few of the Muslim characters in the novel are Turkish but are Slavic converts to Islam. Even as converts, they received priority and privileges, especially with regards to lower taxes and land ownership, denied to the non-Islamic subjects of the empire. *Devshirme* emerges in the feudal period of the Ottoman Empire for the purposes of governing, as one tool used to compel obedience and quell revolutionary murmurs in disobedient villages.⁴⁰

Once the Ottoman Empire began to restructure into more of a modern state structure with the Tanzimat reforms of the mid-19th century, the subsequent religious stratification begin to give rise to a new national consciousness on the basis of ethnicity. This is firmly solidified after 1878, especially since neighboring Serbia was granted independence while Bosnia was not, and from then on, the language of nationalism and ethnicity becomes the dominant identifier of the people who pass through Višegrad, Slav or otherwise. The shift in the priority of identity is accompanied by a change in the nature of imperial administration by the Western empires as opposed to the way of life under Ottoman rule; as we will see, the Western empires are obsessed with a level of resource management and data harvesting that the Ottomans could not have dreamed of.

Andrić's deployment of *devshirme* here shows that in the global system of sovereignty located in the Balkans, at the nexus of the Western and Eastern Empires, religion was the decisive factor in the distribution of power for much of Ottoman history in the Balkans. The Sultan recognized that a strong education and careful, rigorous training in Ottoman beliefs and

⁴⁰ Nicolle, "Devshirme System," 273.

especially in the Islamic faith, far overpowers any notion of blood or ethnicity; thus, there was no threat in giving the second highest authority in the land to one who came from its most provincial and backwater *pashaluks*⁴¹ because the power of Ottoman cultural superiority through rigid Islamic training was seen as capable of trumping any past affiliations and identifications, especially those of childhood. In any case, the novel strictly addresses that religion was the main articulant of belonging in the Ottoman imperial system, especially in the feudalistic periphery: access to power was not based on fixed identities but hinged in many times on a religious choice.

This meant that in times of natural crises, such as the great floods that on occasion swept through the town, such divisions were not sufficient to keep the Christian priest, the imam, and the rabbi from huddling together with warmed *rakija* sharing jokes, as “Turks, Christians and Jews mingled together. The force of the elements and the weight of common misfortune brought all the men together and bridged, at least for this one evening, the gulf that divided one faith from the other and, especially, the rayah from the Turks” (77). The bridge during Ottoman times represents this liminal, analgesic space where the burden of the social divisions of religion could be temporarily alleviated during times of exceptional crisis which could only be overcome through such displays of religious unity.

Such natural events also become markers of time’s passage during this era of imperial control over Višegrad; in fact, we are told time was often measured in “irregular intervals of between twenty and thirty years [when] came great floods which were afterwards remembered as one remembers insurrections or wars and were long used as a date from which to reckon time, to calculate the ages of citizens or the term of men's lives” (76). But gradually, these natural crises begin to give way to social and political problems that prove more difficult to overcome, just as,

⁴¹ The administrative territory of a *pasha* – Ottoman nobility similar to British peerage.

we are told, “the buildings would have lasted unchanged,” time’s slow passage marked only by “changes of seasons and human generations” but for the “unstable and unpredictable influence of faraway affairs” (72).

However powerful the Ottoman cultural machine, the chronicler-narrator suggests that such a forcible conversion cannot totally erase the memory of one’s roots, one’s “true home,” in a sense naturalizing the historic shift that is occurring, pre-figuring the irrepressible evidence of blood belonging even in the previous imperial regime. Though the Slavic once-Christian boy from Sokolovići was raised to the highest authority in the land possible, he was never able to rid himself of the pain in his chest caused by the memory of his abduction, that primal trauma of oedipal separation felt as a partition of the soul. Only when he has completed construction of the bridge, linking the two lobes of the vast empire under his administration, did he exorcise “that strange pain which the Vezir in his childhood had brought from Bosnia, from the Višegrad ferry; those dark shooting pains which from time to time had seemed to cut his breast in two,” (69) and then only briefly.

As he lies bleeding to death under the knife of the deranged dervish assassin a short while later, the Vezir “looked more like an ageing and battered peasant of Sokolovići than the dignitary who until a short time before had administered the Turkish Empire” (70). Despite being killed by a fanatical “coreligionist,” in death, no matter how grand his achievements in life, he reverted to his provincial and not his assumed identity. While the townspeople of Višegrad had the collective belief that “this new man that he had become in a foreign world where we could not follow even in our thoughts, must have forgotten all that he had left behind in the country whence they had once brought him,” his violent death is seen as a marker of his past, a virtual return of the repressed literally rupturing his heart.

Though the Turkish Empire never recovers from its heights under this Vizier, at least from the perspective of the Višegrad townsfolk, his death does not signal the practical end of the “Pax Ottomana” to them: “the two fine buildings on the Drina had already begun to exercise their influence on trade and communications, on the town of Višegrad, and the whole country around, and they went on doing so without regard for the living or the dead, for those who were rising or those who were falling” (ibid). Due to the nature of Ottoman administration, the morbidity of the Turkish Empire had a much slower onset than the later Western empires that would march through Višegrad across the bridge. This is reflected in the pace of life at the imperial periphery, which despite the sturdy bridge over the Drina and the commerce it facilitates, remains laconic and perceived as never changing: “Thus the generations renewed themselves beside the bridge and the bridge shook from itself, like dust, all the traces which transient human events had left on it and remained, when all was over, unchanged and unchangeable” (93).

As though a barometer of this imperial morbidity, along with the bridge the Vizier left a caravanserai, the stone *an*, which was to be funded and maintained by taxes on the empire’s expansion into Hungary in 1541, acquired under the now-deceased Grand Vezier. One hundred years after his death, the Hungarian nobles united and pushed out the Ottoman empire: “with the Turkish retreat from Hungary, there remained outside the frontiers of the Empire also those properties of the *vakuf* (the religious endowment) from the revenues of which the caravanserai at Višegrad was maintained.” (72). The loss of these taxed territories is encoded in the slow decay of the caravanserai rather than the consciousness of the villagers of Višegrad; despite the efforts of the *mutevelia*, the innkeeper named Dauthodja whose family was granted the hereditary task of the stone *an*’s management, it is neglected and left to ruin by later imperial administrators

while the bridge flourishes as a space of plurivocality and multi-cultural exchange. Dauthodja's descendent, Alihodja, was the last in the line of caretakers of the stone *an*, which while relegated to a merely symbolic role with the loss of the Hungarian *vakuf*, nevertheless relegated him a measure of respect until this too was shelled by Austrian artillery at the end of the book.

The period of imperial contraction marked by Mehmed Pasha Sokolović's death triggered a number of revolts among the downtrodden Christian masses who formed the demographic majority of the Ottomans' Balkan holdings. As the revolts in the periphery grew louder, so too did calls for reform in the imperial core. But with certain "progressive" advances such as religious freedom, the perceived equality of the three faiths, came by necessity a new hierarchical system between landowners and workers as the Muslim *begs* could no longer rely on the Christian *rayah* as a permanent army of labor as in feudal times.

Then, in 1876, the Ottoman Empire initiated a series of imperial restructurings that have come to be known as the Tanzimat reforms. As a result of the reforms, the empire imported wide swathes of European legal structure, which, "gave official recognition of sorts to the European idea of the state," and introduced a secular bureaucracy entirely independent from the sultan, which laid the foundation for a burgeoning Turkish *national* consciousness.⁴² While the narration of the story of the bridge is always careful to delineate the racial and religious designators of various characters and periods, from this moment on, the characters themselves begin to become interpellated into their various narrative pursuits primarily by nationalist designations, over and above the religious ones that had dominated their relations thus far upon which the national affiliations were based in the mythic ethnogenesis that the chronicle-novel describes occurring

⁴² Badie and Birnbaum, *The Sociology of the State*, 97.

after 1878;⁴³ once the state formation has taken root in the Tanzimat reforms, it is accompanied by the formation of national groups along existing cultural differences who seek means to seize the apparatus of the state for the purposes of national liberation.

One important element to the Tanzimat reforms, in addition to importing a state model of governance, was the systematization of the millets, which were forms of “autonomous self-government under [the] respective religious leaders” of various non-Muslim subjects who were “subject to their own native regulations and not to the *Seriat* (Islamic law). Their [the millets] dealings with the Ottoman state were conducted through their respective community leaders.”⁴⁴ The Turkish word *millet* has had a complex evolution, but generally corresponds to the idea of a national body, and the millet reforms were important in the Balkans in terms of laying a foundation upon which Western forms and understandings of the nation and national belonging in former Ottoman holdings could be built.⁴⁵

The millets were imperial administrative controls created for the express purpose of allowing religious self-determination and loose autonomous governance for religious minorities: the millet had historically been a religious *natio*, not understood as an actual political nation on the basis of supposedly ancient ethnic claims to territory until the empire began its reforms and imported the state model in the mid-19th century. Thus, the consolidation and restructuring of the

⁴³ For instance, early on during the construction of the bridge, the Ottoman engineer hires a Croatian master stone mason who employs a Black foreman from one of the small settlements of Africans living in Ulcinj; the the Višegrad townsfolk call the foreman “the Arab,” not because he was from the Arabian peninsula, but for lack of a racial demonym for Black people in the Balkans during the Ottoman Empire.⁴³ Slowly, as the revolutions in Serbia grow nearer and small-town Bosnia becomes subsumed into the modernizing influence of its imperial neighbors, this figure becomes racialized as he comes to represent a boogey-man used to scare children into obedience – the Black Arab. However, there was a real population of Black Africans that lived in Ulcinj, so the novel’s refusal to racialize the character until much later is telling. This figure, the “Black Arab” comes to populate many folktales in the region which, as Ana Martinoska, argues, stem folklorically from the time of national formation. See “Ethnic Stereotypes,” 74.

⁴⁴ Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 64-5.

⁴⁵ See Ebru Boyar, *Ottomans, Turks and the Balkans*, 49-56 for more on the historical evolution of the term.

millet system paves the way for a burgeoning national conception to emerge in the entire empire and is in no small part responsible for the Serbian nationalist uprising on Vidovdan in 1876 which, in the novel, manifests in the militarization of the bridge by the Ottomans where they mount the heads of suspected rebels on pikes until the Berlin Congress of 1878.⁴⁶

The Post-Partition Regime of Limitless Expanse and Quantification

In fact, the shift that occurs at Berlin makes possible the very perception of the historical constellation that *Drina*'s chronicler-narrator is formulating. Until the Annexation Crisis of 1908, "the townspeople had concerned themselves exclusively with what was near to them and well known, with their gains, their pastimes and, in the main, only with questions of their family and their homes, their town or their religious community, but always directly and within definite limits, without looking much ahead or too far into the past." (215). As the consequences of Berlin make themselves aware to the townspeople of Višegrad, both past and future become domains of anxiety, the "sort of obscure threat which thenceforward never ceased to weigh upon the town" was the specter of politics (ibid).

In the cities, this period sees the formation of national and religious political parties whose rhetoric slowly trickles into the town as a result of the shift in imperial control – students studying at Austrian universities bring back political pamphlets and foster inter-generational strife in the town, as the average young man in town became emboldened by "the feeling that he was casting off chains, that his horizon was widening, his thoughts freed and his forces linked with those of men more distant and with other forces never thought of until then" (216) and was

⁴⁶ This is a Serbian national holiday which occurs on June 28 celebrating St. Vitus and the auspicious Battle of Kosovo of 1389, when Serbia was officially defeated by the Ottoman empire. This date has all manner of historical resonances and echoes, but perhaps most importantly, it was the date of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Gavrilo Princip in 1914 and, five years later, the date of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

quite vocal about his views on all these newfangled ideas, which irked the old men from their hometown who were ostensibly much closer to them. What previously went undiscussed as a matter of course became the conversational fodder of all the young nationalists who had to reach back in time to ground their claims of national belonging and aspirations of territorial sovereignty, self-determination and independence in the future.

Critics have spoken on the connection between this section of *Drina* and various theories of nationality like that of Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities," which highlights the prevalence of print culture and mass media in producing the ideology of unified national culture,⁴⁷ and I think to some extent Andrić is very keen on showing this process of national formation, but the critique that comes from this dramatization cannot be separated from the first section that discusses the imperial strategy of religious feudalism being replaced by a new technology of the state without being able to fully root out the old form that it was intended to replace.

Thus, religious division continues to plague the Balkans long after the ascendance of the nation-state form took root amongst various ethnic groups clamoring for political representation, based on a self-understanding derived from (a selective view of) the historical record available to them: their stories and lifeways. Andrić thus shows how the strange alchemy of nationalism in Yugoslavia is the result of commingling religion, empire and history, a volatile mixture in the best of circumstances. Yugoslavia's nationhood, Andrić's chronicler-narrator suggests, emerges from the partition enacted at Berlin in 1878, congealing not around positive cultural affinities, which he has shown are too many and far between, but on the basis of the partition itself. And what is even more clear is Andrić's skepticism of the chosen vessels to carry out this political

⁴⁷ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, White, "Mobility and Stability," and Miladinović, "Heroes of the Imagined Communities."

mandate given the volatility of nationhood; neither communism nor the monarchism before it can plaster over the rupture introduced at Berlin because it concerns the institution of a new regime of time and not merely a new imperial (or economic) system regarding extraction.

The way in which monumental events are described as increasing in frequency, intensity and significance is one way that the chronicler-narrator accounts for the townspeople's understanding of the shifts that were occurring:

With the introduction of the railway travelling became quicker and the transport of goods easier, and somehow at about the same time events too quickened their pace. The townspeople did not notice this, for the quickening was gradual and all of them were involved in it. They became accustomed to sensations; exciting news was no longer something rare and unusual but an everyday food and a real need. The whole of life seemed to be hastening somewhere (217).

As the old empires, whose growth was based on the accumulative logic of territorial expansion, waned and were replaced by the more efficient empires who had modernized their bureaucracies and financialized their systems of extraction, the meaning and significance of the “frontier” takes new conceptual weight; it is no longer seen as the backwater provinces of no import but as the sites of contestation, at the cutting edge of political consequence. We see that after the partition at Berlin, the acquisition of territory is no longer the engine of empire but rather of strategic consequence to protect its capital flows. And it follows that as the political consequences of the frontier are heightened, the pace of life as it is experienced in the town – the dizzying sense of the overwhelming significance of events that previously could go unremarked – accelerates as well.

Under the previous logic of empire, characterized by territorial acquisitiveness and land rent, the Ottomans were largely disinterested in the daily occupations of its subjects, leaving local administration largely up to the ruling landowners in the various parts of their holdings in the Balkan provinces; in the novel, the empire's presence is only ever felt during the construction

of the bridge and in times of minor revolution. During such times, the bridge becomes a literal gate and the *kapia* an army barracks, but always described as a temporary blemish on the lasting splendor of the bridge which fail to make much of an impact on the town's memory and are promptly "forgotten as completely as that earlier Turkish guard when there had been a blockhouse on the *kapia*" whose "bitter memories paled and finally disappeared" (172, 92).

The arrival of the Austro-Hungarian empire brings with it a different imperial presence, one seemingly neurotic in its obsessive catalogues and classificatory mechanisms which is interested not so much in territory itself but in the resources it contains: "They measured out the waste land, numbered the trees in the forest, inspected lavatories and drains, looked at the teeth of horses and cows, asked about the illnesses of the people, noted the number and types of fruit-trees and of different kinds of sheep and poultry" (135). Such measuring, surveying and inspecting invariably lead to increased regulations dictating new hygienic and civil codes, the standardization of house numbers and business licenses for the purposes of better taxation, and the commodification of all land and resources for use by the empire through taxation rather than rent which could be paid in agricultural goods rather than with money. For the peasantry, the feudal system of land rent was fairly quickly replaced with the compulsion to wages and waged labor once the old and ossified social structures that had set in after centuries of Ottoman administration had been cleared out.

These changing regulations which were instituted in line with a highly bureaucratized model of capitalist accumulation that requires a strict tabulation of resources had important impacts on the existing social relations of the imperial domains where they conflicted with existing religiously inflected familial organizations (especially polygamy, which is permitted in certain streams of Islam but not under Christian doctrine), class relations in terms of shifting tax

burdens, and of course racial and ethnic preference of the “civilized” citizens of the empire over the “provincial peasants” in the former Ottoman periphery. The Austro-Hungarian empire’s obsession with the minute details of productivity, resources, and daily life, is the very basis of the control on which their extractive policies depend: “The activities and pressure of the authorities began to be felt more openly in the town, first the civil authorities and then the military as well. And that in quite a new form; at first they had paid attention to who did what and how he behaved, and now they inquired about who thought what and how he expressed his opinions” (217).

The reservations that such town leaders exhibit toward the advance of modernity suggest a skepticism at the promises of perpetual progress and limitlessness that characterized the arrival of the Austrian empire, which runs in defiance of what they see as “natural law,” particular the law of balance and moderation that seems to govern the affairs of the region. They often marvel at the industriousness of the Austrians without understanding what logic propels them to work so much: “to all of them it seemed that the foreigners were doing this work, as they did all other work, only because they must work at something. Work for them was a necessity and they could not do otherwise. No one said this, but everybody thought it” (205).⁴⁸ There is none of the dedicated time for enjoyment, socialization on the bridge, that life on the Drina entailed for Višegrad in this impulse to work. Even with all of the social divisions in the Ottoman empire, the empire of capital fails to integrate the town on ethnic or religious lines, so none of the old enmities between, for instance, the Christian serfs and Muslim landowners were ever resolved.

⁴⁸ Earlier, emphasizing much the same thing, the chronicle says: “they talked in whispers of the new and suspicious measures of the authorities. They were all ill at ease about the new ideas, the very nature of which was contrary to their ideas and habits, for each of them considered this interference by the authorities in his personal affairs and his family life as an unnecessary and incomprehensible humiliation. But no one knew how to interpret the real sense of this numbering, nor could suggest how it could best be resisted” (154-55).

Such hostilities are actually deepened by the mystery of the Austrian work ethic. When the Austrians begin their surveying project, some townspeople, like the “learned and loquacious” schoolmaster attribute this incessant counting and tinkering to some internal cultural drive of the “Schwabes”: “this has, it seems, always been an infidel custom...The Schwabes want to have registers of everything, even our heads” (156).⁴⁹ But, as one of the more discerning town elders, Alihodja gets frustrated with him and retorts: “This does not concern the Schwabes' faith, Muderis Effendi; it concerns their interests. They are not playing and do not waste their time even when they are sleeping” (ibid). As Alihodja rightly sees, the kind of changes brought about by the Austrian invasion was not a symptom of the racial, nor even religious, drive of the “Schwabes” but an incessant need to constantly accumulate and fortify their interests.

But, as the chronicler-narrator earlier reminded us, the sudden change in borders animates a primordial feeling “that had lain quiescent in men, as ancient as that bridge and equally dumb and motionless, now suddenly came alive and began to influence their everyday life, their general mood and the personal fate of every individual” (229). The pivotal scene that depicts this realization features a young man reading to the old Muslim men on the *kapia* from a newspaper, already months old by the time it had reached them, which informed them of the new boundaries of states in the Balkans. In this moment, with the final death of the empire so injuriously experienced by Muslim inhabitants that had been the town elders and leaders until then, the chronicler-narrator demonstrates a certain ossification of identity that bodes ill for the future of region: “Hiding their emotion, they bent over the map which showed the future partition of the Balkan Peninsula. They looked at the paper and saw nothing in those curving lines, but they knew and understood everything, for their geography was in their blood and they felt

⁴⁹ This term refers to the Swabian region in southern Germany but also plays on the Bosnian word for cockroach.

biologically their picture of the world” (ibid).

This feeling of ownership emerges directly from the priority the Muslim population had received under Ottoman rule and the power that accompanied the vast empire which they felt and was embodied in the bridge: “that Turkish power had been the great, indivisible and indestructible unity of the Moslem faith, all that part of the terrestrial globe where the muezzin called the faithful to prayer” (ibid). Crucially, this sense of ownership was never articulated as a blood longing for the land in Turkish times, perhaps because it was so imminently felt that it did not need communicating in language, but more so in the way that the “shrinking” of empire reflects back on the internal process of identity as the sensation of loss, of shattered immanence that can only understand itself as such after the implementation of ethnicity as a narrative of liberation. What Andrić reveals here is way in which these changes are so rapidly internalized, especially by the younger generations but even by the older who lived through the so-called “sweet peace of Turkish times” (154), so soon after they take place. This is an interesting development also in the nature of the state, which Andrić is attempting to display in something like “real time” through the way his chronicle dips in and out of micro- and macroscopic views of the changes in the town.

Not even the ever-discerning and cautious Alihodja could foresee the full scope of all the tinkering and counting of the Austrian surveyors. Using the guise of infrastructural updates and repairs, the Austrians engineered a structural weakness into the bridge which could be rigged with explosives to cut off its strategic use in a time of war. At the close of the novel, the retreating Austrian army avails itself of this option and detonates the bridge, severing this arterial junction as it withdraws. The sense of continuity between the end of Andrić’s historical chronicle and the context of its composition, in Nazi-occupied Belgrade, to the subsequent history of

Bosnia, points to its almost fatalistic outlook on the possibility of political transcendence of ethnic and religious division in the Balkans.

The ultimate rupture with the old order, which had allowed Višegrad to fly under the radar of change even as it loomed ever closer on the horizon, is finalized symbolically in the destruction of the bridge and thus ends the bridge's monolithic, seemingly unchangeable quality. To understand the shift that has taken place, one must understand what led to this moment and all the symbolic weight tied up in the bridge as this monument to a dying regime of time and the social relations that could be fostered through it. And yet, in this image there lingers a latent hope, an almost messianic quality in the bridge, which while badly damaged, still stands: the *kapia* and all that it had come to represent for the social life of Višegrad was in ruins under the fast-flowing water of the Drina, but the well-built bridge could not be totally razed so easily.

The Apocalypse of Balkanization

Ivo Banac characterizes the period following the Congress of Berlin as one in which “Yugoslavia was also the midwife of a new political type... which was meant to prevent the development of separate – necessarily irredentist – national movements on the basis of confessional divisions.”⁵⁰ Especially in Bosnia, notions of nationality – framed as ethnicity – were intended to subsume religious divisions into an ethnically-bound statehood rather than a religious or linguistic one, yet as Banac shows, “the 1890s were the decade of sharpest Croat-Serb clashes over each side's national claims to Bosnia-Hercegovina.”⁵¹ Because of the changes to the map introduced at the Congress of Berlin, the political reality of sovereign legitimacy necessarily shifts and in so doing determines a certain set of the relations to the state that members of the nascent national bourgeoisies are tasked with regulating. These are the workings

⁵⁰ Banac, *National Question*, 360.

⁵¹ Ibid.

of the state that have little to do with the daily life of the small town of Višegrad until the shift that marks the transfer of power from Ottoman Turkey to the Austrian empire inaugurates a slow rise in the political consciousness of the townspeople.

In the internalization of ethnic identity, the state boundaries which exist external to the subject are now seen to reflect some core aspect of that subjectivity as it is hailed by the state, as a recognition of national belonging. The internalization of external frontiers “enables us to inhabit the space of the state as a place where we have always been – and always will be – ‘at home.’”⁵² We saw this take place in the consciousness of the Muslim elders of the town, when at the moment of imperial collapse, they are able to articulate for the first time in the novel a blood relation to the land. And at the same time, Andrić shows how this new rigidity which has replaced the porousness of the Ottoman systems allows for the possibility of a break, a new form of rupture that had yet to be revealed in the Balkans. It is as though with one eye on the ruined bridge and one eye on the Nazi occupation of Yugoslavia that Andrić links the local apocalypse of Višegrad to the global one of WWII to ask what progress might mean for everyday people if it has only unleashed barbarism and destruction of the very “home” which was being fought over.

I'll illustrate this and conclude my discussion of the novel with recourse to the village elder Alihodja, one of the town's “exceptional individuals” whose narrative arc is more fully developed by the chronicler-narrator to illustrate the dramatic rupture of both the bridge and history itself in 1878. Alihodja's fate is tied to the bridge from the moment he is introduced in the chronicle. As mentioned above, along with the bridge the Grand Vizier also bequeathed a stone *an*, a caravanserai, made out of the same stone as the bridge, which was maintained, free of charge to the passing caravans that would shelter there for the night, by means of ground rent

⁵² Ibid.

from the Ottoman holdings in Hungary. Alihodja's family, beginning with the first *mutevelia* Dauthodja, were tasked with the running and maintenance of the *an*. By 1878, the stone *an* had long fallen into ruin, but Alihodja's family still retained the honor of being its guardian.

During the Ottoman army's retreat, Alihodja had angered the Turkish commander by urging him against fortifying the town and entrenching themselves against the Austrian imperial army. Because of his public and vocal denouncement of the pointless suicide on the grounds that "the town could not be defended and that resistance was senseless since the 'Schwabes had already swept through Bosnia from end to end'" (117), he infuriated the arrogant commander who decided to retreat, to the great relief of townspeople of Višegrad. Needing a scapegoat for his failure to defend the empire, he ordered Alihodja to be nailed to the bridge by his ear: "there was no one who would have considered that this deed was good or possible, yet everyone to some extent played his part in the fact that the hodja found himself on the bridge nailed by his right ear to a wooden beam which was on the *kapia*" (120). This ritualistic act binds the hodja to the bridge and gives him a prophetic quality at incisively discerning the changing times, though he remains obstinately opposed to any attempts at modernization.

Thus even in the early years of Austrian occupation in 1878, Alihodja resists even the narrator-chronicler's dispassionate distance from the events recounted, seeing the writing on the walls from early on, in what Theodore Adorno called "the ever new Mene Tekel" of historical decay, though only because it represents a departure from what he understood as the naturalization of the Ottoman empire and the somewhat small worldview that accompanied this perception of a global kingdom of Islam.⁵³ This discernment allows Alihodja to recognize the proclamation of Austrian occupation, well before formal annexation, as the death knoll for the

⁵³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 360.

bridge; he thinks: “this bridge which was the pride of the town and ever since its creation had been so closely linked with it, on which he had grown up and beside which he had spent his life, was now suddenly broken in the middle, right there at the *kapia*; that this white paper of the proclamation had cut it in half like a silent explosion and that there was now a great abyss” (123). The replacement of the Austrian edict over the carved *tarih* becomes the arch-symbol of imperial world-shaping in which paper edicts and declarations laid real claim to certain lands and the people on them without regard for how the new boundaries would effect pre-existing social ties and enmities on the ground.

With Alihodja’s death at the end of the novel, the final destruction of the bridge appears as a culmination of that prophetic vision. In fact, seeing the bridge in ruins after its detonation, how “the broken arches yawned painfully towards one another across the break,” sends Alihodja into cardiac arrest (313). This picture of the bridge actively reaching out to close the broken arches, to fulfill its historic function, fulfills Andrić’s view that despite the way that outside imperial powers have attempted to divide and separate the people of Bosnia, there is a tendency among neighbors to seek unity, as with the leaders of the three faiths in the times of the “Great Floods” under Ottoman rule.

With his dying breaths, Alihodja questions whether anything can resist the forces of modernization that manage to actualize the destruction of the unbreachable bridge. Andrić ends with a sober reflection on the power of this new form of history-effacing violence. The pious hodja observes that “perhaps this impure infidel faith that puts everything in order suddenly and violently to demolish and destroy, might spread through the whole world: it might make all of God’s world an empty field for its senseless building and criminal destruction,” (313-14) because

his world view was contingent upon the centrality and monolithic appearance of the expansive Islamic empire of the Ottomans

For all of his insight, Alihodja had not quite realized that this “impure infidel” empire had already shed its religious mantle for a more insidious secular one with whose effects he was already familiar and had long ago spread through much of the world. He dies pondering his faithful belief in people like the bridge’s creator, the Vizier, who “would raise lasting buildings for the love of God, so that the world should be more beautiful and man live in it better and more easily.”⁵⁴ One should not take Alihodja’s religious vision of humanism to be the perspective of the chronicler-narrator’s, which as we have seen, often undercuts or overrides the behaviors of the characters. But it enables Andrić to ventriloquize the preservation of religious faith even in the secularized model of transcendence that the chronicle lays out.

As discussed earlier, *Bridge on the Drina* was required reading for Yugoslavia, and it used the international success of this book and Andrić to position itself as a champion of newly independent African and Asian nations in the mid-to-late part of the century. Yet this book seems quite pessimistic about the possibility of any iteration of Yugoslavia to actually hold these different groups together as the divisions that have become the groundwork of national politics are too thoroughly entrenched to be cause for optimism at the socialist revolution that ended the Nazi occupation. But perhaps this was also one way in which Andrić is like those stalwart “conservative” holdouts that are cautious at the optimism brought by change: “Alihodja was one of the few local Turks who had accepted none of the novelties and changes which the newcomers had brought, either in dress, in customs, in speech or in methods of trade and business. With that

⁵⁴ Ibid., 313-14.

same bitter obstinacy with which he had at one time stood out against useless resistance, he had for years stood out against everything that was Austrian and foreign” (206).

Not so dissimilar to Andrić’s contempt for the Austrian empire as a youth in Bosnia, he likewise emulated the hodja’s refusal (or vice versa) to be evicted from his shop as a result of the artillery shelling of Višegrad at the novel’s close, which mirrors Andrić’s own to vacate his Belgrade apartment under the same conditions in WWII. The small shop right by the bridge was crushed by chunks of stone from the detonation of the bridge, nearly entombing Alihodja inside “as if it were a coffin” (310). Perhaps the strongest sentiment in favor of liberation and self-determination comes when he was first nailed to the bridge by the retreating Ottoman commander, and reflected that “there had come for a man a time of disaster in which he could neither live nor die, but rotted like a stake in the earth and belonged to whomever you wished but not himself” (122). This glimmer of recognition guides the hodja’s caution but never quite comes to fruition as full recognition, as an understanding of the mechanisms which were at play in the town. As the “ruined bridge, horribly, cruelly cut in half” lay below him, he could not bear to look at the “whole picture” (312) and dies without glimpsing the entire scene of devastation.

Conclusion: Alihodja and the Reemergence of Individualism

As Alihodja’s tragic fate attests, no amount of foresight saved him nor were his warnings sufficient to stave off death and destruction. The perspective and timescale of the human life ultimately prevents Alihodja’s real understanding of the “whole picture” in ways that the chronicler-narrator can better constellate, but here too, to what avail? Andrić attempts to surpass the temporal limitation imposed by the human lifetime, to trace the generational perspective needed to glimpse the origins of the current conditions of decay, but reverts, ultimately, back to this form of individual subjectivity and the constraints imposed upon it. Though he points to the

ways that fiction functions as a *katechon* to delay the coming apocalypse, this too is a fantasy of individualism, which fallaciously mistakes one's continued existence for proof that the apocalypse has not yet arrived.

Much like Andrić himself, the French consul in *Bosnian Chronicle* was obsessed with one “obstinate thought”:

that somewhere out there the 'right road' the one he had sought all his life in vain, must nevertheless exist. And not only did it exist, but sooner or later someone was bound to stumble on it and throw it open to all men. He himself had no idea how, when or where, but it was sure to be found sometime, perhaps in his children's time, or by his children's children, or by a generation yet to come.⁵⁵

Clearly, the timescale of the individual is not sufficient; some larger social ethic is needed. The national liberation movements of the mid-20th century fostered much enthusiasm for the promise of international collaboration as a means to shore up the internal pressure points that threaten unity.

History, as Thomas Pynchon elaborates in the epigraph to this chapter, does not “happen” in the imperial core as much as the European powers like to pretend. What registers as an event – “real history” – in the peripheries of empire are mere records for the “stock-jobbers of history” for whom “lives are [the] units of exchange.” Real history, for Pynchon, is “everything that has been passing down here,” at the nexus of the world in the Balkans, “forever.” Andrić, who buried himself in the archives of western European libraries while posted to various diplomatic missions, attests to the way that the records of history hoarded in western Europe have a tendency to fuel violent events in the spaces of balkanization. But he also seeks to pen a record from the space and perspective of partition itself, from the “black and bloody line that was drawn between people,” as he writes in the other epigraph of my chapter, taken from *Bosnian*

⁵⁵ *Bosnian Chronicle*, 537.

Chronicle, that has been erected as a spiritual and physical border between people who should not be separated.

While the destruction of the bridge and Alihodja's death at *Drina's* end alludes to the devastation of World War II and the Nazi partition, the novel was published under conditions where Yugoslavia was once more united, this time under the socialist banner of Partisan victory led by Marshall Tito. But the legacy of the historic partitions of Yugoslavia prevailed, forming the biggest obstacle to Yugoslav unity of the fledgling socialist government. After the process of rebuilding and centralizing control immediately following the war had subsided, Tito cut off ties with Stalin and the Soviet Union's Cominform, opting for a "third way" that mediated the two-bloc politics of the nascent Cold War. Focusing on bolstering Yugoslavia's international status, Tito adopted an active foreign policy based in diplomacy and friendship, especially with the decolonizing world, which was slowly throwing off the yoke of centuries of colonialism.

Cementing Yugoslavia's ascendance to the world stage, Andrić won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1961 over such literary luminaries as J.R.R. Tolkien, Robert Frost and E.M. Forster, in no small part because of *Drina*.⁵⁶ This happened to be the year that Yugoslavia, India and Egypt inaugurated the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a non-binding political and cultural alliance that attempted to forge a "third way" between the US and Soviet-backed blocs that dominated Cold War geopolitics. Andrić's historic win bolstered Yugoslavia's cultural prestige and thereby lent immense legitimacy to the NAM as a global cultural peace movement cementing his legendary status in Yugoslav letters as well as abroad. This attempt to forge a global ethic of solidarity over and above the nascent and established national independence

⁵⁶ The Swedish Royal Academy's introductory address to Andrić said: "Just as the bridge on the Drina brought East and West together, so your work has acted as a link, combining the culture of your country with that of other parts of our planet, a task, well worthy of a diplomat" <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1961/andric/speech/>

movements of the postcolonial world will be the topic of the next chapter on the Non-Aligned movement and promise of interracial solidarity. Can the generational mandate to uncover the “right road” find some way to overcome the insidious narrative of blood differences in the context of West Africa and the rising optimism of post-independence liberation? In the next chapter, I seek to answer this question with Oskar Davičo’s forceful advance of the cause of international socialism through the lens of Non-Alignment in his travels there during the “highlife” years of the early 1960s.

Chapter Three: “Mutually Assured Development” and the “Color Wall”: Race at the Limits
of Non-Alignment in Oskar Davičo’s Anticolonial Travelogue *In Black and White*

The African nations are realizing that in order to solve their urgent social problems...it cannot be done within the limits of our national micro-economies... Africa remains as grimly hostile as ever to the division of Africa which began with the Congress of Berlin in 1885.

–Sékou Touré, “Africa’s Future and the World”

The great question today is not whether a nation is aligned or nonaligned, but whether it respects the rights of others to choose their own paths, and Yugoslavia, by its example, has given heart to those who would choose their own paths...This same principle lies at the heart of our policies...

–Richard Milhous Nixon, “Toast to President Tito,” Belgrade, 1970

The internalization of borders took a rather literal turn in post-war Germany with the construction of the Inner German Border (IGB), which split the nation into Soviet and NATO controlled East and West Germany. Though the IGB had been erected immediately following armistice in 1945, rumors swirled for years that Berlin itself would be walled off and completely enclosed. In June 1961, following the breakdown of relations between the US and USSR after the U-2 spy plane incident, East German head of state Walter Ulbricht smirkingly declared “*Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten!*”¹ Two months later, the construction of the Berlin Wall commenced in the middle of the night with the laying of razor wire and land mines – the arch-symbol of partition dramatically bifurcating the city that played host to the balkanization of much of the planet less than one hundred years earlier. In September, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) burst onto the international geopolitical scene. Convening in Belgrade, the capital of Yugoslavia, President Josip Broz Tito hosted delegates from twenty-five

¹ “No one has the intention of erecting a wall!” See Rottman, *The Berlin Wall and the Intra-German Border*, 29.

African, Asian, and Middle Eastern nations to forge a “third way” between the annihilative potential of the nuclear superpowers.

From the early 1960s when it began until the gradual waning of the Movement’s significance as the Cold War came to an end, the NAM was a political and cultural movement that hoped to avert the possibility of nuclear-aided mutually assured destruction through diplomacy, mutual development, and commitments to peaceful resolutions of international disputes, rather than through binding trade and military alliances. Emerging from the material reality of decolonization in the midcentury, the NAM was an opportunity for postcolonial nations to establish their independence and sovereignty on the global stage, especially during the increasing intensity of the Cold War, when the new global superpowers vied for cultural influence and economic advantage in the former colonies of the European powers. In order to protect their hard-won liberations, many of these small, newly independent nations sought to distance themselves from the coercive demands of the blocs while also procuring much-needed developmental assistance that would drive them to economic, and not merely political, independence. The NAM became a means of imagining this third way.

To seal the friendships that were developing in postcolonial Africa as a result of the NAM and Pan-Africanist solidarity movements, Tito embarked on a months-long “Peace Tour” towards the end of 1961, fostering an era of not just political and economic, but *cultural* exchange and openness between Yugoslavia and its partners in anti-imperialism on the Continent. Tito’s grandiloquent gesture was accompanied by a host of more modest exchanges of cultural figures, students, workers, artists and more who traveled between independent Africa and Yugoslavia to study, work or share their skills. One instance of this circulation took place just prior to the first NAM summit, when acclaimed Serbian writer, thinker, and revolutionary

Oskar Davičo (1909-1989) made his own trip through Western Africa in a journalistic capacity to cover African sentiments on Non-Alignment, Socialism, the West, the Soviets and Yugoslavia, all of which he documents in his travelogue, *In Black and White* (1962).²

Davičo's travelogue seeks to represent the historical period in which Non-Alignment begins to take shape as a meaningful movement because its content is overtly implicated in the cause and was motivated by Yugoslavia's investment in the NAM as a lynchpin of its foreign policy.³ Davičo goes to Africa to report on an event organized by the Union of African States – West Africa's nascent attempt to promote international solidarity on the Continent through a unique vision for Pan-Africanism – and how it pertains more broadly to African sympathies about the NAM. While there, he recounts a wide range of sentiments and antipathies toward these movements by those on the Continent, both indigenous and colonizer. But Davičo himself is fiercely committed to both Yugoslavian socialism and the promise of Non-alignment, penning *In Black and White* as a self-consciously anti-colonial and anti-racist travelogue that does not succumb to the excessive exoticization and Othering of the genre traditionally.

Davičo calls on his own revolutionary, anti-imperialist pedigree, and gestures to the history of Yugoslav oppression and resistance, to recognize the importance of self-determination and non-coercive bilateral exchange in the context of West African unity. The West African nations that first declared independence began to advance notions like *négritude* and various models of Pan-Africanism as means of forging Continental solidarity despite the balkanized status of the African map. In Yugoslavia, the West African unifiers could find a model of “Grow-Your-Own” socialism that could serve their internal political situations which often had to balance similarly tense ethnic rivalries within the inherited boundaries of the postcolonial

² In the interest of reducing footnote clutter, all references will be cited parenthetically. All translations are my own.

³ Niebuhr, "Nonalignment as Yugoslavia's Answer to Bloc Politics," 149.

state. In fact, promoting solidarity, especially with the African nation builders, was seen as a way to reinforce the integrity of the Yugoslavian experiment as well, to buttress Yugoslavia against internal strife in the form of ethno-nationalism.⁴ This was all the more compelling given the correspondence of Yugoslavia's multiethnic and multinational federal structure to what was being attempted in West Africa through the Union of African States, which sought to institute a similar multinational structure across the Continent as liberation spread to every African nation.

By the time he embarked on his trip to Africa, Davičo was already a well-known poet, writer and cultural figure within Yugoslavia and among the wider network of Socialist writers in Europe. He was born to a Jewish family in 1909 and spent most of his adolescence outside of Belgrade. While still a young student, he began writing Surrealist poetry and was the youngest of the Serbian Surrealist circle of the 1920s-30s.⁵ His work experienced a marked political shift when he became a Communist while studying at the Sorbonne in 1926. He returned to Serbia in 1928 and started a local committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, writing anti-fascist agitprop for Miroslav Krleža's journals. These activities coupled with his own dissident poetry, resulted in the first of a series of political imprisonments, initially by the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, later by the occupying Axis forces, culminating in his capture and internment in various Italian concentration camps in 1938. He escaped from Northern Italy in 1943 and

⁴ See for instance Niebuhr, who says of the period: "even after firmly securing power, political elites worried about the nationalist-based tensions between the country's various ethnic groups," ("Yugoslavia's Answer," 149). See also Edvard Kardelj's "The Historical Roots of Non-Alignment" where he establishes the importance the NAM had for Yugoslavia's political economy – Kardelj was a high ranking minister in the Yugoslav government, at times Tito's second hand man.

⁵ Davičo published experimental poetry in a variety of avant-garde publications, including signing the Surrealist Manifesto in the almanac "L'Impossible/Nemoguće," which spearheaded the Surrealist revolution in Serbia. André Breton (1896-1966) and Paul Eluard (1895-1952) were among the French Surrealists who contributed to the multilingual publication, at Davičo's express request. In fact, Davičo's time in Paris was instrumental in establishing close collaboration between the French Surrealists and those in Belgrade leading to a number of French/Serbian surrealist publications. See The Museum of Applied Arts, "The Almanac Nemoguće – L'impossible," 151-154.

immediately enlisted with the Yugoslav Partisans, fighting in the Rijeka region, then Bosnia, Montenegro and down the Adriatic coast before joining the liberation of Belgrade in 1944.⁶

After the war, he was employed as a state correspondent by various news agencies and the new socialist government alike, joining other literary luminaries like Ivo Andrić and Anica Savić-Rebac (Rebecca West's dear friend and host in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*) on literary delegations to surrounding nations promoting Yugoslav arts and letters and establishing cultural ties between Yugoslavia's socialist neighbors, who were all more strongly affiliated with the Soviet Union. He covered the Nuremburg Tribunal for a number of Serbian newspapers and publications before eventually venturing to Greece during the Civil War (1946-49), where he fought in the Greek Communist party's guerilla war.⁷ When he was tasked with covering the African Unity event in Ghana, he was already well past his journalistic years, but he was eager to advance the cause of Non-Alignment ahead of Tito's "Peace Tour" across the Continent.

I argue Davičo's eye for historical correspondence, what he sees as the shared history of balkanization, is the engine that makes possible the future collaboration imagined by the NAM. It is also what, in Davičo's eyes, makes his anticolonial travelogue possible. Yet this was not a naïve view of history that saw such correspondences as morally or politically binding *sui generis*. I suggest that Davičo viewed his task as the anticolonial travel writer as interpreting practices and beliefs that superficially appear as difference in terms that show their underlying

⁶ See chapters two and three of Davičo's autobiography *По занимању самоубица [A Suicide by Trade]* (1988) for more on his war years and early Surrealism.

⁷ His first travelogue, *Међу Маркосовим партизанима* (1947 – *Among Markos' Partisans*), detailed his time spent fighting alongside General Markos Vafeiadis of Greece, and marked the pinnacle of his reporting career, establishing him as a serious Yugoslav public intellectual and socialist revolutionary, which enabled him to turn his full attention to literary writing. The 1950s saw his literary output explode, and he won the highest prize in Serbian letters, the NIN Award for Best Novel, for the first time in 1956 and would go on to win it back-to-back in 1963-64. Writing until his death in 1989, he published a total of 33 books of poetry, 10 novels, 10 books of essays or literary criticism, one collection of short stories, two travelogues, two plays, four screenplays, a memoir and a Serbo-Croatian translation of Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*. To this day, Davičo is the only writer to have won the NIN Award three times.

similarities. Once he has firmly established the primacy of similarity, rather than difference, especially given the way racial difference dominates social relations on the Continent, he concludes his work with what I would call the defining ethos of the NAM, which will structure the textual analysis of *In Black and White* that follows below: “Similarities do not bind. They are the obligation of all freedom-loving people to uphold...” (339).

I extend Davičo’s argument one step farther. It is not merely the congruency between socialist revolution and post-colonial independence, but the shared fact of territorial partition decided upon at the two Berlin Conferences, that produced more than mere semblance between Yugoslavian and African histories and which formed the firmament for mutually beneficial collaboration in the midcentury. Yugoslavia’s history can be seen as aligning with Africa’s because the territories into which their eventual nation-state apparatus had to fit itself were inherited from the European powers at Berlin in the late 19th century. He shows how the nation of Yugoslavia as it was currently constituted sat at the crossroads of multiple empires, subject to innumerable incursions and internecine wars between faraway empires. Between 600 unbroken years of Ottoman imperial occupation and the subsequent remapping of the Yugoslavian nations and territorial holdings at Berlin in 1878, national borders were arbitrarily drawn – sometimes right in the middle of villages – separating those who may have seen themselves as belonging to one ethnicity and nationality for one reason or another and making them ethnic minorities in an entirely different nation overnight.

And yet, the question of race, and the difference it is seen to represent, cannot (and should not) be casually dismissed, which is why Davičo in fact opens his account with it. However, if as Davičo argues, unity can be fostered between places like West Africa and Yugoslavia, which only share historical *correspondence* as a result of partition, then by

implication, the various Yugoslav nationalities have no excuse but to maintain their obligations to unity since they quite literally share their entire history! While current conceptions of racial difference may object to the work “emptying” West Africa of the particulars of racialized existence in favor of historic factors that are seen as overriding racial differences, the particulars of Pan-Africanism with which the work is explicitly concerned offers much needed context and will be further explored below.

This chapter asks: what is an anticolonial travelogue? How is it different from previous iterations of the genre and what do its political dispensations afford? How does the development of the NAM offer historical context to the cross-continental effort of solidarity that sought to restructure the geopolitical hierarchy on largely cultural grounds? How does wresting Oskar Davičo from his individual intellectual affinities and literary milieu expand the notion of balkanization in 20th century literature? How did race factor into the unity efforts of the West African and Yugoslavian NAM proponents? How might it account for some measure of its shortcomings?

My analysis of *In Black and White* will begin by outlining Davičo’s contribution to the travel writing genre, through the critical and self-reflective concern he has for not reproducing the ethnographic and racist tendencies of travel literature’s focus on Africa. Then, I expound on the founding history of the NAM as a political movement and then discuss the cultural development which it fostered. This background is crucial to incorporating the literary vectors of Non-Aligned cultural engagement, which have not received the scholarly attention devoted to the history and visual culture of the Movement. This groundwork allows me to contextualize the exchange described in *In Black and White* as indicative of this moment as one of the early texts of Non-Aligned literature.

From there I proceed to my analysis of the text, where I examine its concrete claims about race and history to explicate how Balkanization and partition form the structural backbone of cross-cultural similarity which undergird the NAM and this politically motivated, anticolonial travelogue. This portion of the chapter will be divided into three parts: the first looks at the text's considerations of racial difference, in which Davičo recognizes the futility of disavowing his whiteness while mourning the way race distances him from his hosts; the second focuses on the way the text imagines the cross-cultural similarities between Yugoslavia and West Africa; and the third investigates the means by which Davičo intends to create lasting ties based on mutual obligation. The chapter concludes with an examination of the lasting legacy of the NAM in light of the remaining years of the decade and the waning of optimism regarding Africa's future.

A Non-Aligned Canon: The Anti-Colonial Travelogue

The conditions of balkanization form the historic grounds of the Non-Aligned movement and become the basis for a flourishing cultural exchange as the cultural solidarity movement became more advanced and interconnection. I examine *In Black and White* because it attempts to represent this historical interconnection in the form of a journey to Africa and becomes one of the early contributions to what might be called the Non-Aligned canon, the network of texts that flourished in those few decades of international optimism. Within Serbia, and to varying degrees internationally as well, academics are recovering important contributions from the time of the NAM in the realm of visual culture and media, but so far the literary efforts of the period have received little attention.⁸ There is currently no scholarly work on the literary production fostered

⁸ To name two very recent examples in the realm of visual culture, in 2019, the Wende Museum of the Cold War in Los Angeles hosted a traveling exhibition of archival materials related to the visual culture of the NAM called "Nonalignment and Tito in Africa," which had previously been shown in Belgrade and Oxford. This exhibit featured a very rich array of photos of Tito's peace tour through Africa which I address further below. In 2022, the National Opera and Ballet in Skopje and the Museum of African Art in Belgrade co-hosted an exhibition entitled "WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON: On the non-aligned decolonial constellation," which brought together photography, film, and art to showcase how "that legacy and knowledge of (anti)colonialism and anticolonial

by the NAM,⁹ nor on Davičo's contribution to the movement with his travelogue, in English, Serbian, Croatian or Macedonian;¹⁰ what primary material is housed in libraries in the Balkans is often quite difficult to access, if it has been catalogued or recorded at all. Therefore, *In Black and White* is valuable as an artifact of the cultural production that the NAM fostered in addition to its literary merit as a piece by one of Yugoslavia's preeminent writers.

By the mid-1970s, the NAM had a presence on every populated continent except North America. More than a disruption to the Cold War map, seen as neo-imperial vying for disputed territories and nations to shore up the frontiers of the two major blocs, I suggest that the NAM represented the first major disruption to the structure of global power since the Berlin Conferences. Without changing a single border (most of which were inherited from the Berlin Conferences in one shape or form), the NAM attempted to reshape the global hegemony that had for centuries stood in favor of the imperial core. It marked an attempt at "periphery to periphery" or "South-South" exchange, a new system of economic and cultural circulation that "delinked" from the circuit of exchange centered on the imperial centers and that intentionally excluded the neo-colonial "middle man" and accompanying programs of strings-attached foreign aid.¹¹ Part and parcel of this political restructuring included rethinking Eurocentric frameworks of

solidarity is neglected or even erased from today's memory," especially within the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine (Bojana Piškur and Ivana Vaseva, eds. *WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON*, exhibition catalogue).

⁹ Referring to a journal that emerged in response to the rising Afro-Asian solidarity of Bandung, *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings*, Hala Halim states, "*Lotus* instantiated the potential, albeit not fully fulfilled, of what today we would call Global South comparatism" (Halim, "*Lotus*, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism."). While containing similar resonances to the cultural premise of the NAM, *Lotus* did not begin distribution until 1968, making Davičo's text especially valuable as an early example of specifically Non-aligned circulation. Bojana Videkanić's "Nonaligned Modernism," 504–22, takes "cultural diplomacy" as its unit of analysis but no concrete body of literature.

¹⁰ I mention these languages because only one of Davičo's works has been translated into English, his first novel *Pesma* (1952), even as he remains one of Serbia and the former Yugoslavia's most highly regarded and awarded writers to this day.

¹¹ Amin, *Delinking*, 4. Non-Alignment was seen as placing a "clearer focus on a basic restructuring of the global system in the direction of greater equity in North-South relations (Mazrui, Foreword to *The Non-Aligned Movement*, xiii; emphasis in original).

modernity, fostering what has been called “epistemologies of the South,” as a way to literally and figuratively enlarge the episteme beyond the limitations of a Western or European *weltanschauung*, seen as overburdened by racist, capitalist ideologies and rooted in the primacy of the individual.¹²

If Rebecca West’s travelogue illustrated the contradiction facing the British travel writing tradition, intending to pen an anti-imperialist account of her time in Yugoslavia but continuously underwriting the racial ideology of the British empire into her journey, Davičo attempts to go farther, emphasizing the need for a systemic anti-racist and anti-exoticizing account of his time in Senegal, Guinea and Ghana. He refuses to engage in ethnographic detail, offering only the necessary information to understand the present openness and possibility which represented the future of West African and Yugoslavian relations. Though both travelogues are state-sponsored and both West and Davičo mingle with national elites and intelligentsia on their visits, Davičo spends much more time with non-elites than he does mingling among the upper echelons. Further, he does not presume that the experience of the urban elites is the natural nor desirable form of life that Africa should aspire to, finding as much or more stimulation in his fiery political conversations on his three days waylaid in the jungle than in the schmoozing of Ghana’s highlife.

This travelogue thus marks a further departure from that of even West’s critical and anti-imperial work because it concerns circulation between Non-Aligned and balkanized nations exclusively. After WWII, the shift which was taking place in the organization and structure of the global hierarchy opened the possibility for a disruption to the legacy of partition inaugurated by the “Great Powers” at the end of the 19th century. As such, *In Black and White* is the most optimistic of any of the works I address in this project, precisely because there was so much

¹² De Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South*.

latent possibility in the premise of Non-Alignment to yield possibilities of mutual development in the face of global nuclear annihilation and mutually assured destruction. This optimism drives the book's ironic – at times jocular – narrative tone, which sees humor as an effective method to undercut Western chauvinism and racism and which allows the work to tackle difficult questions, especially about racial difference, head on. This emerges from the very outset, in the connotation-laden title itself.

One of the constant themes with which Davičo wrestles throughout his time in Africa is, naturally, racial difference, which is also alluded to in the title. The Serbo-Croatian title, *Црно на Бело*,¹³ would remind Davičo's more devout readers of the name of a Belgrade Surrealist circle literary magazine, which he contributed to as a young poet in the 1920s.¹⁴ But just like the English phrase "in black and white," which I have chosen to use as the translated title, it is an idiomatic expression meaning "only the facts," even though Davičo intentionally summons the racial as well as the textual connotation inherent in the phrase. With respect to the content of the travelogue, the idiom in the title assures the reader of Serbo-Croatian that there will be no effusive, exoticizing, and Romantic treatment of Africa here: Africa has been subjected to enough bad faith accounts by Europeans, rooted in what he jokingly refers to as a kind of perverse Ptolemaic "egocentric, pardon! geocentric system" that places the travel writer at the center of the universe (8).

In this sense, the title is deadly serious, as Davičo feels a profound duty to represent his time in Africa with the respect typically denied by the European travel writer and their infernal shadow, the ethnographer, who pretend at objectivity but disclose little more than their own values and worldviews. Instead, as will recur in numerous metaphors he employs, he moves

¹³ *Crno na Belo* – lit. "black on white."

¹⁴ See The Museum of Applied Arts, "The Almanac Nemoguće – L'impossible," 151.

through West Africa as the roving eye of the camera, that sees the picture and its negative at the same time, mirror images of liberation cast in simple image of the photochemical process. While he may be deeply earnest in expressing the political motivations behind his anticolonial travelogue, any earnestness is well-earned considering the ignorance that is often displayed by Europeans with condescending and racist opinions about Africa; despite this, he is never self-serious and uses this self-deprecating humor to disarm his chauvinistic interlocutors and charm his African hosts. This wry humility is on display as early as the first chapter, called “A Former White Man.”

Davičo spends two months in West Africa, from November and December 1961, composing *In Black and White* in a little over a month after returning to Belgrade. He first arrived in Dakar, Senegal and was shown around the city, having occasion to listen to a *griot* perform and receiving a blessing from a *marabout* outside of town before taking a three-day bus trip through the jungle to Conakry, Guinea. From Conakry he flew to Accra, Ghana, where he is shown around by representatives of Ghana’s political elite and speaks on the radio about Yugoslavian culture and history in support of Non-Alignment. In Accra, he befriends a Ghanaian couple, both educated abroad and working in high level positions in the administration, who show him the “Highlife,” the vibrant nightclubs, bars, restaurants, and cultural hotspots. He leaves Accra for Conakry a final time, where he covers a parade commemorating victims of colonialism and West African Unity organized by Guinea’s president Sékou Touré with participation from Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah and Mali’s Modibo Keita. In their speeches at the parade, these West African heads of state discuss the benefits of African solidarity, compromise, and Non-Alignment. Throughout the work, Davičo communicates in French, English and occasionally German (with Europeans), though only a few chosen phrases (like *ça va*) are left

untransliterated into Serbo-Croatian.

In Black and White is a trip in two parts. Davičo experiences “everyday” Africa: the transversal of liminal spaces required in getting from place to place, traditional customs that have been preserved in spite of their repression by colonial administrations, daily practices that everyday people both cherish and resent, which arose from a complex interweaving of indigenous and colonial life – what the *griot* outside of Dakar characterized as the pursuit of “*other* relationships that may exist between our African desire to live and the destructive forces that surround us” (29). On the other hand, there is the “Highlife” – political and cultural elites, modern urban life, fancy hotels and nightclubs, the concerns of how to govern and develop these postcolonial states with limited resources. Davičo is sympathetic to both spheres while hardly remaining a neutral observer. In both, he meets people of all backgrounds and ideologies and constantly defends the Yugoslav position from both unsympathetic Communists who view Yugoslavia as a compromised, revisionist lapdog of empire and from overt Western chauvinists who are as surprised to hear they have television in Yugoslavia as they are to see electricity in Africa.

Davičo’s travelogue is not only a record of Yugoslav sentiments about the NAM and what it represents for Yugoslavia’s own stability and status in the geopolitical order, but a record of African views as well; perhaps more so, since the only Yugoslavian perspective represented is Davičo’s, whereas he recounts conversations across West Africa with people situated in a wide range of social and cultural strata, composing the bulk of the text’s attention. Instead of contributing to the vast quantities of ink that have been spilled outlining the ways in which Africa represents pure difference, Davičo is much more interested in showing what unites West Africa and Yugoslavia: “Under these historic conditions, Africa’s self-consciousness manifests

as solidarity with the progressive movements of the world, and this solidarity as an expression of that which does not highlight *differences* between people, but their similarities,” (9).

A proper emphasis on such similarities, one that goes beyond trite humanism but is rooted in a shared legacy of exploitation and partition, is the method by which he hopes to achieve his ambition of producing perhaps the first such travelogue penned by a European. This is not to say that he is not prone to the inevitable editorializing of the travelogue genre, which is where he most injects his lyrical style. However, this tendency is directed much more to his own perceptions and to impatient critiques of European prejudices (which he likewise seeks out in himself throughout the work) than to the speech, actions and motives of his African hosts and companions. His travels afford him the opportunity to observe and debate a variety of political, social, and cultural positions that were circulating in West Africa at the time, showcasing the robust development of political education on the Continent and the conditions that have formed it, which only reinforces his belief in the urgent need for Non-Alignment.

The History and Origin of the Non-Aligned Movement: From Bandung to Belgrade

The term “non-aligned” was first used in the 1950s, at the United Nations, in declarations from Yugoslavia and India who refused to join either side of the rapidly multiplying alliances developing around the Korean War.¹⁵ Socialist Yugoslavia’s refusal to join the Soviet bloc stems from the Tito-Stalin split of 1948, when Tito refused to bend the knee and submit to Stalin’s plans for a Soviet hegemony from Vladivostok to the Baltic Sea.¹⁶ India likewise sought to

¹⁵ See Mazower *No Enchanted Palace*, 49-189, for a discussion of Jawaharlal Nehru’s challenge to the newly formed United Nations, which in his view replaced the more egalitarian League of Nations with a return of the hegemony of the Great Powers via the Security Council structure of the UN. Nehru’s intervention presaged India’s refusal to join either bloc in the Cold War and his interest in establishing the Non-Aligned Movement.

¹⁶ Stalin warned Tito and his cadre that their refusal to bend the knee made them appear “dubious Marxists,” ultimately denouncing them as revisionists, expelling them from the Cominform, and purging and killing any alleged Titoists from the party, including high-ranking officials like Albania’s Deputy Prime Minister, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, and others who were deemed too sympathetic to Tito’s cause. See Perović, “The Tito-Stalin Split,” 61-2.

defend its precarious national sovereignty from its very recent colonial past, the recent Communist revolution in neighboring China, and the on-going state of war between the Soviet Union and US-led blocs.¹⁷ Hoping to “thaw” the frosty international conditions, and to preempt a situation in which these small, newly independent nations were coopted into *de facto* clientelism for the superpowers, the leaders of these variously structured socialist nations saw an opportunity for international collaboration and a “third way.”

One such possibility was envisioned at the Bandung Conference of 1955. Indonesia’s President Sukarno hosted diplomats and dignitaries from 29 nations with explicit aims to foster Afro-Asian economic and cultural cooperation and to present a unified front against the depredations of colonialism and neocolonialism from either bloc. The conference adopted a ten-point declaration as the basis of the program of “world peace and cooperation” that they hoped to advance, which provided the foundational values upon which a principled movement of Non-Alignment began to develop.¹⁸ While the concept of Non-Alignment specifically was not discussed at the Bandung Conference, it is in the spirit of Bandung that the Non-Aligned movement began: Bandung marked the first time that formerly colonized territories and nations met together without any European powers present.¹⁹ But certain events made it apparent that at

¹⁷ India’s critical presence in the early founding of NAM was in part motivated by the border skirmishes with China, incited by the 1959 Tibet uprising, which culminated in the full-blown, hot Sino-Indian War of 1962 at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. The border war was ultimately settled by a Chinese ceasefire returning to the previously held borders, but this incident nonetheless shook India’s trust in both the Soviets, who sold India advanced weapons while attempting to extract alliance commitments which India was keen on avoiding, and NATO, which refused any material support while nominally supporting India against “communist aggression.” For more on India’s internal motivation to join the NAM, see Crabb, *The Elephants and the Grass* (1965), and for further discussion of the Sino-Indian War, see Gupta, *Spotlight on Sino-Indian Frontiers* (1982) and Murtry, *Paths of Peace* (1983).

¹⁸ The declaration at Bandung included recognition of equality between all races and nations, the right to self-determination and territorial integrity of all nations, and the adoption of a non-aggression pact and peaceful settlement of international disputes (See *Final Communiqué of the Asian-African conference of Bandung (24 April 1955)*). Three of these points would be adopted verbatim at the first Non-Aligned Conference in Belgrade (1961).

¹⁹ Willets, *Non-aligned Movement*, 2; Willets overstates the point when he argues that “Bandung was not a forerunner of the Non-Aligned Conferences” (ibid), since at the very least, the NAM adopted three of the ten-point declaration proposed at Bandung. Willets is correct to warn against overdetermining Bandung’s

the geopolitical level, an anti-colonial disposition proved to be a more practicable condition of international solidarity and cooperation than one that was predicated on race, as was the case with Bandung and the so-called “Color Curtain” that it came to represent.²⁰

If Bandung provided the ideological basis of Non-Alignment, then the co-crises incited by Egypt’s nationalization of the Suez Canal and the Soviet invasion of Hungary, both occurring a year after Bandung, in November of 1956, were the political flash points that demonstrated an exigent material need to reach beyond racial boundaries and forge a truly transnational and transracial ideological basis for cooperation among those that sought to avoid both conflict and “alliance” with either bloc.²¹ These two simultaneous crises demonstrated the precarity of the new order in the postcolonial world and cemented the need for a concerted development and expression of non-alignment amongst the heads of state of India and Yugoslavia and now Egypt as well.

significance in theorizing the principle of non-alignment that would structure the NAM, however, as Bandung hosted both Soviet and Western-aligned countries. For further analysis on the complex historical interplay between Bandung and the NAM, see Waters, "After decolonization," 153, Rauch, *Farewell Non-alignment?* 3; and Keethaponcalan, "Reshaping the Non-Aligned Movement," 4.

²⁰ This was the title of Richard Wright’s famous travelogue (1956) detailing his time in Indonesia as a journalist covering the Bandung Conference, which was praised internationally for its coverage of Bandung and was held by Vijay Prashad as the inaugural text of Afro-Asian studies ("Foreword: "Bandung is Done," xi). Recalling the centrality of race to the conference’s 29 national participants and many other of the conference’s delegates, Wright quotes President Sukarno opening the proceedings of the Conference with a warm welcome to all of the participants and "Before he had uttered more than a hundred syllables, he declared: 'This is the first international conference of colored peoples in the history of mankind!'" (Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 136). Wright’s political thesis which concludes his book is a plea for Western aid and influence in the postcolonial world, warning that squandering its influence will lead to “an Asian-African attempt at pulling itself out of its own mire under the guidance of Mr. Chou En-lai [sic] and his drastic theories and practices of endless secular sacrifices" (*The Color Curtain*, 220). Like Rebecca West and her connection to the FO, Wright received funding from the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an anti-communist cultural development front of the CIA, to attend and report on the Bandung proceedings, highlighting the potential threat that Afro-Asian solidarity represented to US Foreign Policy.

²¹ See Čavoški. *Non-Aligned Movement Summits* (2022). Egypt nationalized the critical Suez Canal leading to Britain, France and Israel invading (with the attendant backing of NATO). Both India and Yugoslavia provided critical support to Egypt during the invasion and its subsequent victory (with concessions). This, and the fear that Stalin would send tanks through Yugoslavia as he did to quash the “Hungarian Revolution,” cemented the diplomatic ties between Egypt, India, and Yugoslavia which was the foundational groundwork for the NAM (Willetts, *Non-aligned Movement*, 4-5).

Despite the state of crisis at the geopolitical level, this period nevertheless marked the optimistic high point with respect to Africa's future, as it was imagined on and off the Continent,²² because of the atmosphere of liberation in the newly independent African nations, whose number was growing by the day. This in turn fed the optimism regarding the viability of Non-Alignment as a practicable "third way" which sought to imbue an international ethic of peace into a background of looming nuclear war, a possibility loudly amplified by collapsing diplomatic relations between the United States and Soviets in the early of the 1960s.²³ Could Mutually Assured Destruction be met by an inimical force of Mutually Assured Development?²⁴ Most importantly, the foundations of such collaborations could not be on the basis of

²² Young, *The Postcolonial State in Africa*, 12. This optimism was echoed by UN Secretary Dag Hammerskjöld who believed Africa was "a continent launched on the road to cooperative success by new and able young leaders with the help and advice of the UN" (ibid.) after traveling around the Continent in early 1960. Hammerskjöld would be dead within the year, killed under suspicious circumstances in a plane crash on his way to broker peace in Congo. Even after the collapse of the Mali Federation, this optimism remained high until roughly the end of the decade, according to Young.

²³ In 1959, First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev visited the United States, marking the first time a Soviet leader had ever visited US soil. President Dwight D. Eisenhower hosted the corn-loving Soviet leader at the presidential Camp David retreat. While no concrete disarmament terms were reached, this meeting likewise contributed to the atmosphere of optimism in the early 1960s that the Cold War might be coming to an end. The two leaders agreed to meet the following year in the "spirit of Camp David" along with the French and British heads of state. This historic summit (May 1961) rapidly devolved into chaos following revelations by the Soviets that they had captured CIA pilot Francis Gary Powers along with his top-secret U-2 spy plane deep behind Russian lines mere weeks earlier. Along with deeply embarrassing the United States and Eisenhower personally (Eisenhower had approved these risky missions in order to more fully ascertain Soviet nuclear capabilities before the historic summit), this set back US-Soviet relations decades and directly precipitated the disastrous Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961 and the subsequent Cuban missile crisis of 1962, which ratcheted nuclear anxieties to a new high under President John F. Kennedy. See Philip Taubman, *Secret Empire: Eisenhower, the CIA, and the Hidden Story of America's Space Espionage* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003) for a broad, though fascinating account of this history, and William Pickett, "Eisenhower, Khrushchev, and the U-2 Affair: A Forty-six Year Retrospective," in *Presidents, Diplomats, and Other Mortals*, ed. J. Gary Clifford and Theodore Wilson (2007) for the episode's lasting legacy. For the legacy of this event on Soviet-Cuban affairs building to the Cuban missile crisis from the Soviet perspective, see Sergo Mikoyan (state historian and Khrushchev's advisor), *The Soviet Cuban Missile Crisis: Castro, Mikoyan, Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Missiles of November*, ed. Svetlana Savranskaya (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 89-99, 136.

²⁴ With the development of submarine-launched ballistic missiles in 1962, both the Soviet Union and the United States were finally technologically capable of implementing the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, though the term did not come to dominate the rhetoric of nuclear deterrence until later in the 1960s (Robert Jervis, "Mutual Assured Destruction," *Foreign Policy*, no. 133 (2002): 42).

militarization and the disastrous alliances that had dragged the entire world into two consecutive World Wars not even two decades prior.

Instead, the architects of non-alignment argued that this kind of unprecedented global unity needed to be grounded in a shared history of foreign interference and oppression and an ideology of cultural solidarity expressed through socialist ethics; the future of such a project would be fueled and funded by huge infrastructure development projects that would fuse the vastly different and diverse cultures represented in the NAM nations into a unified political organism through a collaborative distribution of knowledge, skills and workers. Only then would these small nations be capable of evading the bloc system and presenting a peaceful alternative to the annihilative saber-rattling of the nuclear superpowers.

The Non-Aligned Movement as an organization was officially founded at Tito's residence on the Adriatic island of Brijuni in 1956, where he was joined by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. The first meeting of the heads of state of the Non-Aligned Nations was not held until 1961, a month after the construction of the Berlin Wall, again in Yugoslavia, but this time in Belgrade. Building on the momentum of the Bandung Conference and the resolutions adopted there, Tito played host to many of the Asian and African delegates who attended Bandung, like Indonesia's President Sukarno, Burma's U Nu, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, and rising socialist names like Ho Chi Minh, Zhou Enlai, and Indira Gandhi. The "Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries," as the first meeting was called, gathered 25 national heads of state and adopted five resolutions, similar to the ten-point declaration at Bandung: mutual respect and recognition of territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference, benefit and

equality, and peaceful co-existence.²⁵

Despite the collapse of the Mali Federation in 1960,²⁶ which contributed to wariness of binding defense agreements, economic development packages, or any territorial alliances that could be seen as shifting the precarious balance of power within their inherited borders, Ghana and Guinea were among the first nations to join the NAM. President Nkrumah came to be one of Africa's most vocal champions for the NAM, in close concert with Guinea's president Ahmed Sékou Touré. Senegal joined in 1964, after President Léopold Sédar Senghor put down a coup organized by his Prime Minister Mamadou Dia in 1962 and started to thaw relations with its neighbors on the Continent. All three nations were also strong proponents of various forms of Pan-Africanism in this period.²⁷ Each saw the NAM, and a close friendship with Yugoslavia, as crucial to the development of Pan-African relations and the rise of Africa's status in world affairs as well.

In fact, Yugoslavia's model of socialism was seen in Africa, especially by Ghana's Nkrumah, Guinea's Sékou Touré, and Senegal's Sédar Senghor, as a way to develop socialism in "your own way" rather than relying on dictates from Moscow or Beijing.²⁸ More so than merely

²⁵ *Presidential Papers of John F. Kennedy: Non-Aligned Nations Summit Meeting, Belgrade, 1 September 1961*, (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, 1961).

²⁶ The Mali Federation was a short-lived union linking the colonies of Senegal and the Sudanese Republic (or French Sudan) for two months immediately following their independence from France in June 1960. Unable to accommodate the ethnic tension between Sudanese and Senegalese ethnic groups, the two sides mobilized the army and national police in advance of the 1960 presidential election which led to Senegal's withdrawal from the federation, orchestrated by erstwhile supporter of Senegal's eventual president Léopold Senghor, vice-premiere Mamadou Dia, limned sinisterly in Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. The Sudanese Republic cut off diplomatic relations with Senegal and defiantly changed the name of their country to Mali. See Foltz, William. *From French West Africa to the Mali Federation*, 166-85.

²⁷ Senghor was one of the primary theoreticians of the *négritude* movement, and Nkrumah advocated for a Continent-wide federation of states, like a socialist United States – Yugoslavia being a prime example! See Markovitz, *Léopold Sédar Senghor and the Politics of Négritude* (1969) for a more complete history of Senghor's poetry and its relation to his political struggles and Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (1956) and *Africa Must Unite* (1963) for his pre- and post-Mali Federation views on the future of African socialism and confederation.

²⁸ Wilson, *Tito's Yugoslavia*, 124.

offering a pattern for socialist development and self-determination, Yugoslavia took concrete steps to materially support African liberation and independence. Yugoslavia was the only non-African nation in the world to contribute funds to the Liberation Committee of the Organization of African Unity.²⁹ Likewise, Yugoslavia helped fund infrastructure and cultural development projects on the Continent including building dormitories at Kwame Nkrumah University in Kumasi, implementing the general urbanization of Conakry, and constructing Zambia's tallest skyscraper, the FINDECO House in Lusaka, in quintessential Yugoslav brutalist style.³⁰ Thus, what better role model and friend to usher in a new phase of Pan-African unity and welcome the newly independent nations to the world stage than a country that had been through the same paces barely two decades prior; in the words of Ethiopia's emperor-king Haile Sellasie, "only Yugoslavia helped develop Ethiopia without any interest and hidden agenda."³¹

Tito acknowledged the importance of forging ties personally, and later in 1961 embarked on a monumental "peace tour" of Africa on his yacht, *Galeb* (meaning Dove), with his wife, Jovanka, and 1500 crewmembers and Yugoslavian representatives, to personally seal the agreement of cooperation with African heads of state; this trip to Africa was the most expensive ever undertaken while Yugoslavia's head of state and lasted a full 72 days.³² While this was not Tito's first visit to the continent, it was seen as heralding a historic era of not only Yugoslav-

²⁹ Markakis, "The Organisation of African Unity," 142.

³⁰ Niebyl, "16 Works of Yugoslav Modernist Architecture in Africa & the Middle East."

³¹ Vučetić and Betts, eds., *Tito in Africa*, 28. I do not uncritically uphold these kinds of claims, nor do I believe that there is really such a thing as altruism at the international level – Yugoslavia's primary trade partner was the West and not Africa or the Middle East for most of its history. Whether that makes the NAM purely aspirational or hypocritical is a matter for political economists to debate.

³² Adamović, "*Galeb*" *mira i razdora*, 7. The "peace tour" was also an opportunity to showcase two Yugoslavian destroyers, a cargo ship, and several models of military aircraft and, as Davičo notes later when visiting the parade celebrating African unity, Yugoslav-produced automobiles like the Yugo made by Zastava Automobiles (a subsidiary of Zastava Arms) (Davičo, 327).

African relations, but of Yugoslavian influence in global politics.³³ This peace tour was more than a diplomatic mission, since Tito had already developed most of his diplomatic ties in prior state visits.³⁴ Instead, it inaugurated what Tito would later call the Non-Aligned movement's role in "resolute struggle for decolonisation in the field of culture,"³⁵ through what scholars have called grand "spectacles of friendship and solidarity."³⁶

This cultural exchange began well before the NAM was formally established, as evidenced by Sékou Touré's tour of Eastern Europe in 1955 which brought Guinean folklore, dance and song arranged by Fodéba Keïta to Yugoslavia.³⁷ Recalling the trip to Eastern Europe during a visit to his music school in Conakry, Keïta tells Davičo: "I don't know how, but I could feel much more in the extended applause of your audiences than mere gratitude for the enjoyment of our program. I also felt something else. More than anything, I felt sympathy for the struggle of our people. And solidarity with all the liberation movements of the world," (316). The NAM offered the opportunity to formalize and therefore multiply such relations; therefore,

³³ In fact, Tito's visit was part of a wider phenomenon of leaders of the socialist world visiting the Continent and courting the heads of state of the newly independent nations. For instance, Leonid Brezhnev had a competing tour through Africa around the same time as Tito's in 1961 and Zhou Enlai proceeded with his own in 1963, but Tito was still the most traveled, especially to African and Asian nations, of all the socialist leaders, going to Africa dozens of times until the age of 87, one year before his death in 1980 (Pirjevec, *Tito and His Comrades*, 360. For more on Tito's grandiose trip to Africa, see Vučetić and Betts' *Tito in Africa* which features a terrific curation of photos whose analysis is only limited by the lack of *any* African perspectives on the events depicted.

³⁴ Vučetić characterizes Yugoslavia's involvement in Africa as its joining in the "competition for the Third World" (*Tito in Africa*, 17), which is only possible if one views Yugoslavia as something other than a "Third World" country, an appellation Yugoslavia actively claimed (See Kardelj, "The Historical Roots of Non-Alignment," 89). Non-Alignment emerges as a movement to channel and unify the energy of this emergent "Third World" that is trapped between East and West, and while different than say, Mao Zedong's Third Worldism or the interpretation of the Third World as periphery in world-systems conceptions, it was nevertheless an interpretation of the same principle along its own political and cultural lines. In any case, I do not find the usage of "Third World" terribly compelling especially when, in the case of the NAM, there is a more concrete interpretation of and name for international solidarity than what is offered by this nebulous term, but suffice it say that Yugoslavia firmly imagined itself as part of, and not somehow above, the Movement it was championing.

³⁵ Remarks Tito delivered at the 6th Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries in Havana (1979). See the special issue of the newspaper "*Druga obletnica titove smrti*," *Delo*, May 4, 1982, dedicated to the anniversary of Josip Broz Tito's death for the full text of the speech.

³⁶ Sladojević and Slavković, eds. *Nonalignment and Tito in Africa*, exhibition catalogue.

³⁷ Keïta was the founder of the first professional African theater troupe and composed the Guinean anthem, *Liberté*.

the concrete result of the first NAM summit was the *proliferation* – and not the inauguration – of efforts between its constituent nations to establish political, economic, and cultural ties between each other. The NAM's influence on cultural production emphasized a criticality of intellectual colonialism and cultural dependency. Bojana Piškur suggests that “the idea was not only to study the Third World, but to make the Third World a place from which to speak.”³⁸

The Cultural Development of the Non-Aligned Movement

From the start then, the NAM operated at two distinct but inter-related levels that became less discrete and more fully integrated components of the Movement as it matured. The first is the political level, which sought to develop a non-binding – and crucially, *non-military* – alliance between the member nations dictated by the priorities of peace and mutual cooperation. The second level is as a cultural and ideological movement that would help to bolster the national identities of the newly “decolonized” nations and would have the added benefit of raising each nation's standing in the geopolitical milieu of the Cold War through economic development. In attempting to reshape the global order and present a viable “third way” between the US-led West and the behemoth of the Soviet Union, the NAM was necessarily a multifaceted anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-racist movement.³⁹ The cultural response by the people of these Non-Aligned nations resulted in what Ali Mazrui called “a solidarity of the less powerful in global affairs” that powered the NAM.⁴⁰ As a result, this solidarity was both political, as a strategy to shore up national *bildung* from neo-imperial predation, and cultural, as an attempt to forge real ties between the nations of the NAM and voice long suppressed cultural expressions.

³⁸ Piškur, “Solidarity in Arts and Culture.”

³⁹ Singham and Hune, *Non-alignment in an Age of Alignments*, 1. For instance, Cuba was an early member of the NAM, even though it maintained much closer relations to the Soviet Union than someone like Tito would have desired. This was a source of contention within the movement, but both Castro and Tito emphasized unity and democratic resolution of such conflicts under the non-coercive aegis of the NAM. See LeoGrande, “Evolution of the Nonaligned Movement,” 44.

⁴⁰ Mazrui, *The Non-Aligned Movement*, xiii.

That this cultural development had a distinct political shape from the beginning, however, is an understatement. At the national level, several African and Asian NAM countries began fiercely lobbying to repatriate works of art which had been stolen (“discovered”) from their countries during the colonial period and housed in such revered and august institutions as the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the MET in New York, and Museuminsel in Berlin.⁴¹ At a grassroots level, on the other hand, people who had been denied many traditional forms of cultural expression by the colonial powers began to emphasize the emancipatory role it played in their lives and in shaping their new national identities, as noted by anti-colonial philosopher and martyr Amilcar Cabral in his speech to the UN in 1972: “people are only able to create and develop the liberation movement because they keep their culture alive despite the continual and organized repression of their cultural life and because they continue to resist by means of culture, even when their political and military resistance is destroyed.”⁴²

In this way, the cultural development of decolonizing and newly independent countries became as important as their economic development; cultural production and economic production were seen as the dual engines of growth and stability. Piškur notes that this led to “epistemological solidarity” among the masses of the NAM nations because culture was no longer meant only for the bourgeois, foreign educated national elites; national art and culture sprang from below.⁴³ Davičo would add: “The West’s museum defies the notion of a civilizing mission because if Africa needed civilizing so badly, why were they so eager to loot and steal artifacts to fill their museums with?” (281).

⁴¹ Ghaddar, “Provenance in Place,” 59.

⁴² Cabral, *Return to the Source*, 60. Cabral was assassinated in Conakry, Guinea in 1973 on the eve of Bissau-Guinean independence, which he was set to lead as the newly independent nation’s first president after an extended and bloody war with Portugal that began in 1963 and saw significant material war aid in support of the beleaguered Bissau-Guineans from many Non-Aligned nations, in accordance with the NAM commitment to uphold anti-colonial struggles in those territories still suffering colonial oppression.

⁴³ Piškur, “Solidarity in Arts and Culture.”

Apart from recovering the vast cultural plunder taken during the colonial period, over the course of the NAM, this vigorous cultural development program took many creative forms, such as transnational solidarity-based art expos and biennales,⁴⁴ the creation of new museums of art, history, and culture predicated on anticolonialist grounds,⁴⁵ the formation of a Non-Aligned News Agency Pool,⁴⁶ and other forms of exchange in the fields of architecture, industrial design, and culture.⁴⁷ Davičo's travelogue, I suggest, fits quite neatly into this period of production, as a rather early example of cultural exchange along the lines of non-alignment.

In fact, Davičo closes his book with an eagerness to welcome the "growing number of young Africans who study and will study at our universities and technical colleges" (339). For Davičo, it becomes clear that cross-cultural collaboration can only be possible when obstacles to mutual understanding are removed, through more than proximity to Africans or a mere acquiescing tolerance of difference which is no less patronizing than prevailing European attitudes, but as we will see, through active cooperation in matters of real significance which concern the future and well-being of all. But before he can fully come to terms with what it will

⁴⁴ Throughout the 1970s, a series of international biennales were held in cities such as Alexandria, Medellin, Havana, Ljubljana, and Baghdad featuring work that embraced the transnational solidarity of the NAM (ibid.).

⁴⁵ The first museum in Europe dedicated exclusively to African art and culture was the Museum of African Art, which opened in Belgrade in 1977 and furnished its permanent exhibit with the many gifts and donations that were given to Yugoslavian ambassador Dr. Zdravko Pečar and his wife Veda Zagorac by diplomats and artisans during their two decades in diplomatic service in seven African nations. In the 1980s, The Josip Broz Tito Gallery for the Art of the Non-Aligned Countries was established in then Titograd, Yugoslavia, with the aim to collect, preserve and present the arts and cultures of the non-aligned and developing countries (ibid.).

⁴⁶ The Non-Aligned News Agencies Pool "worked as an international, collaborative cooperation between Third World news agencies whose main objective was to decolonise the news, provide its own mass media channels and to offer counter-hegemonic reports on world news concerning the developing nations," (ibid). This wire service operated in Belgrade from 1975 to 1990. See Pinch, "The Flow of News," 163–171 for a critical (though clearly hostile to the possibility of journalistic freedom in socialist countries) assessment of the NANAP's coverage and international placement.

⁴⁷ As mentioned above, one such effort that arose out of Bandung Conference and later establishment of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association (AAWA) which issued a trilingual quarterly journal, starting in 1968 until the 1970s, called *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings* (Halim, "Afro-Asian Third-Worldism into Global South"). The literature of balkanization allows for a critical apparatus that includes the NAM and Yugoslavia alongside Halim's useful notion of Global South comparatism.

take to work together, he first must overcome the more pressing – if superficial – question of difference, specifically of racial difference.

“A Former White Man”: Africa and the Ethics of Racial Difference

In Black and White opens *in medias res* with descriptions of a sermon loudly resonating through the streets of Dakar. A white priest speaks to a gathering of African laborers – mostly plantation workers and herders – exhorting them not to steal from their masters with recourse to threats of hellfire. Davičo, irate at the hateful rhetoric spewed by the priest, lays out a few statistics on European exploitation of Western Africa, asking who the real thief is. But more than anger, the scene, the first impression of Africa he gives his reader, fills him with an impotent shame:

It's pointless, but what can I do, I'm ashamed. The people to whom I belong and the class whose son I am have never killed, enslaved or conquered. We have only enslaved ourselves for centuries. Yes, but I'm white, that's all passers-by see. If only I could wear a concise history of my country on my lapel! ... To them I look like a Frenchman, an Englishman, a Belgian, a Portuguese, a Boer, a segregationist and a lyncher from Little Rock. And I am ashamed to know that in the eyes of even one African I could amount to any of them. If I could change my skin color, I would do it without hesitation. Under that sun, the color of my face is the color of all the injustices and all the cruelty that the people of this Continent have experienced (13).

This is a rather interesting position: unlike many bathos-heavy expressions of white guilt, Davičo does not assert any especial affinity toward, claim upon, or proximity to Blackness⁴⁸ (he does not

⁴⁸ I use the terms “Whiteness” and “Blackness” to represent the conceptual categories that these racial designations are seen to signify within the context of this work, in the sense that emerges, in the words of Achille Mbembe, “as the direct consequence of the logic of self-fictionalization and self-contemplation, indeed of closure, [which] Blackness and race have played” in European societies (*Critique of Black Reason*, 2). While Blackness might be fiction, for Mbembe it produces a very real thing by way of Black reason “a collection of voices, pronouncements, discourses, forms of knowledge, commentary and nonsense, whose object is things or people of ‘African origin’” (27). Homi Bhabha says, “The critique of whiteness, whether from literary studies, labor history, autobiography, or sociology,” (and to that I would add the negation of Blackness that forms the basis of afropessimism’s recent critique) “attempts to displace the normativity of the white position by seeing it as a strategy of authority rather than an authentic or essential ‘identity.’ Since ‘whiteness’ naturalizes the claim to social power and epistemological privilege, displacing its position cannot be achieved by raising the ‘gaze of the other’ or by provoking the ‘return’ of the repressed or the oppressed” (Bhabha, “The white stuff”). These concepts, of course,

say, for instance, what color he would choose in place of his white skin) nor does he record instances of voicing this shame to any of his Black interlocuters in the text, which would place the burden upon them to reassure him of his decency or approval.

Davičo's travel occurs in the wake of Aimé Césaire's triumphant negation of Black negativity *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (1947), a lyrical mediation on the return voyage after his graduation from university in Paris. Interestingly enough, Césaire penned this famous hymn of *négritude* in Yugoslavia, where he was visiting his good friend from school, Petar Guberina. Anja Jovic Humphrey suggests this connection, and Guberina's preface to Césaire's *Notebook* as a tribute to the contradictions of black African identity in the 20th century, forms the basis of an emergent connection in the 20th century between Black African and Caribbean intellectuals and Yugoslav intellectuals. Jovic Humphrey traces the racialization of Black and Balkan existence from the etymological connection of Slav/slave to the racist discourse of 19th century universal histories.⁴⁹ For Davičo, the legacy of partition and struggle for independence is sufficient grounds for a future solidarity between West Africa and Yugoslavia, even as he describes feeling similar prejudice on racial grounds in his dealings with western Europeans.

Thus, Davičo's narrative unfolds in the context of the discussions of Black African subjectivity, where *négritude* attempted to articulate a positive quality of Blackness to match the racial discourse of whiteness.⁵⁰ But in Davičo's own experience, whiteness is unevenly

have changed historically, and as is the case in *In Black and White*, were being worked out in dramatically different ways in the 1960s in Yugoslavia than they were in the United States or other parts of Europe, much less on the African continent.

⁴⁹ Jovic Humphrey, "Aimé Césaire and 'Another Face of Europe,'" 1139-1141.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, while the poet-politicians Césaire and Senghor were strong proponents of *négritude*, it was less popular with African writers who were not active in public office. Wole Soyinka famously despised it as overly defensive, saying "the duiker will not paint 'duiker' on his beautiful back to proclaim his duikeritude; you'll know him by his elegant leap," a rather fantastic turn of phrase that later morphed into the more well-known version

distributed in Europe. Thus, Davičo's plaintive cry of white guilt is probably better read as an expression of recognition: because the social relations in Africa were so fractured by colonialism, the primary signifier that structures all social relations is race. By virtue of representing Whiteness, he is seen as representing everything it has brought to the Continent. Even if he could adequately represent his history on his clothing, a far more immediate expression would be visible on his skin. This, first and foremost, will structure his interactions on the Continent because of the visibility of race as a signifier. For instance, a few days after this opening incident, on his way to meet with the Minister of Culture, Davičo asks directions of a policeman who repeatedly calls him "patron" or boss, which bothers Davičo who says they are comrades and brothers (23-24). Davičo attributes this unconscious deference to the way that colonialism has warped the language and soul of the generations that struggled for liberation; this account echoes Kwame Anthony Appiah's critique of Pan-Africanism based on the movement's "*intrinsic* racism" in quite similar terms.

Appiah presents two dispensations of racism that prevail after the 19th century, both undergirded by what he calls racialism: the view that race describes a set of "heritable characteristics" used to subdivide peoples into a small number of races, in which members of that race are seen as sharing "certain traits and tendencies with each other that they do not share with members of any other race" constituting their "racial essence."⁵¹ This position, developed intellectually throughout the Enlightenment, in the 19th century leads to two views on racial essentialism: extrinsic racism, where moral distinctions between races are based on morally relevant qualities which are positively ascribed to racial essence and intrinsic racism, where

about tigers at the African Writers' Conference at Kampala in 1962. (See Lindfors, "The Early Writings of Wole Soyinka," 86).

⁵¹ Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 13.

moral distinctions about races are made independently of the moral characteristics entailed by racial essence.⁵²

Usually, Appiah suggests, rhetoric of racial solidarity, like that used in the Pan-African and Pan-Slavic movements, uses the language of intrinsic racism, appealing to some shared characteristic, typically something positive like bravery or resilience, that *race* is seen as signifying, while movements that use race as the basis to perpetrate harm typically use the language of extrinsic racism, presenting arbitrary racial hierarchies as the basis for the primacy of Whiteness.⁵³ Just because it has a good intent, however, does not absolve the intrinsic racialism of racial solidarity like Pan-Africanism of the more fundamental error of racial essentialism, which accounts for its failure to properly unify the Continent; Appiah argues that “If we are to escape from racism fully, and from the racialism it presupposes, we must seek other bases for Pan-African solidarity.”⁵⁴ Davičo’s work suggests that socialist principles espoused in the framework of Non-Alignment, might be one such basis, though we should be clear to reiterate that the NAM never saw itself at odds with Pan-Africanism of any but the most Stalinist strains at the time.

The episode with the policeman ultimately concludes with Davičo walking past an elementary school where much to his delight, a child greets him as comrade, suggesting that he believes while racism has utterly destroyed social relations in Africa up until the present, the next generation, inculcated in socialist humanist values, carries the possibility for the restoration of dehierarchized social relations given the proper education. In a sense, this is how Davičo feels justified in saying that because Yugoslavia has not benefitted from colonialism, slavery, or

⁵² Ibid., 13-14.

⁵³ Ibid., 17.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 20.

empire, it has not benefitted from Whiteness in the same way as racism, slavery and the exploitation of Africa benefitted the French, English, Belgian, Portuguese, Boer and American states during their pivotal transitions to modern economies – it never had nor took the opportunity to institute a racially-hierarchized colonial system and as a socialist nation, fostered unity where nationalism had entrenched itself through ethnic superiority. In Appiah's terms, while they may have white skin, Yugoslavia is not one of the "beneficiaries of social orders that deliver advantages to them in virtue of their 'race'" in the way that the aforementioned White nations were.⁵⁵ Because of this, Davičo is therefore able to imagine himself, however temporarily, as a *former* white man because it was not until he arrived in West Africa that he came to be seen as being White, at least in his own eyes.

The pain of this interpellation into Whiteness and the regime of racism is twofold: first, because it ascribes to him a history of brutalization and oppression that he in some part personally experienced as a prisoner in the concentration camps but also that Yugoslavia had historically experienced under the Western, Ottoman and Nazi boots, even if the grounds for dehumanization were not predicated on antiblackness as they were in Africa; and second because it places a distance between himself and his hosts that appears insurmountable, precisely because there is no way to actually disavow one's race. Yet, there has never been a Yugoslavian empire and no significant colonial ventures in the modern period, he decries⁵⁶ – only an excessive degree of infighting, which makes them more than poised for collaboration with the newly

⁵⁵ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁶ There is disputed evidence that the Republic of Ragusa, the aristocratic city-state centered on Dubrovnik, on the Dalmatian coast, from the mid-14th century to the early 19th, under Venetian and Ottoman suzerainty at various times, established a spice trading colony in Goa, India in the 1540s. In any case, if true, this was the only attempt by any of the later-Yugoslav republics at colonialism during the so-called "Age of Empires." See Mirkovich, "Ragusa and the Portuguese Spice Trade," 177.

independent African nations who are all trying their own versions of socialism suited to the conditions of ethnic division that they were forced to manage internally.

The first half of the book is thus Davičo's coming to terms with the racial conditions of Africa, both the unpleasant interpellation into Whiteness which reveals the obstacles which must be overcome by international solidarity, and the way that colonialism's racial engine has been engrained into the African state. However, Davičo suggests that certain affective responses, especially those in response to liberation – whether from racialized imperialism or ethno-fascist nationalism – ultimately produce expressions that reveal a more abiding humanity underlying the superficial difference denoted by race. While observing the grand parade held in Conakry, Davičo feels a rush of nostalgia as he sees the spectacle, which Western journalists openly scoff at and mock:

It seemed to me, while I was watching the parades and banners, that I was watching the negative of a film reel with one of our May Day parades from 1946 or 1947. That unforgettable thing of ours from those unforgettable post-revolutionary days when we were still young – I now experienced all over again. Only translated from white to black. There could be no confusion: the same ecstasy, the same ebullient shouts comprised the freedom-loving consciousness before me. And once again some indivisible quality of freedom became clear to me. (331)

This passage finally elucidates the title in the clearest way, bringing the ecstasy of the successful Yugoslav revolution and the joyous celebration of unity put on display before him in the present together in one image, “like the negative of a film reel,” capturing the same euphoria in both black and white simultaneously. Freedom and self-determination taste the same no matter where they are experienced; in fact, each successive victory of independence makes freedom taste all the sweeter since “Nowhere in the world can a truly liberated people, on their way to new, socialist relations abide tyranny anywhere in the world. Not because that lack of freedom would

directly threaten them politically or militarily, but because general, universal happiness is woven out of the fabric of socialist freedom, because one cannot be happy alone” (ibid).

With the benefit of time, the premise of this argument seems shakier and shakier: both West African and Yugoslav unity collapsed in similar ways and under similar pressures and racialism has fully penetrated every corner and pocket of the earth marking a limit of the nation-form that every state faces (perhaps because of the same factors as ended the NAM’s relevancy? A question for another time). Ultimately the fault in this logic is a result of earnest desire for connection that was seen as eminently and newly possible in this phase of global cultural exchange. Davičo’s quest is to discover by what means the vast distances that exist between people as a result of the way racism structures social relations in such a systemic way can be bridged, and this requires a good deal of earnestness, especially in the face of such brazen ignorance that a priori discards the cultural and racial equality between Africans and Europeans as displayed by the many Europeans he encounters.

Since Davičo is unable to change the color of his skin, then he feels it is the responsibility of freedom-loving and historically oppressed people to support each other’s struggle for equality, self-determination and freedom. This entails combating the racism of his European counterparts wherever he comes across it, as in the press box at the parade above when he defends the spectacle from their cynical sneers or on an airplane next to a white diamond dealer from Belgium as we will discuss below. Even the relatively liberal, and nominally non-aligned (perhaps better put: “neutral”), Swiss journalist Davičo encounters in “a luxurious hotel once reserved for whites only” parrots a classic self-annulling Eurocentric (extrinsically racist) ideology: “I don’t mean to defend [the colonizers]. But you do realize that before them there was

absolutely nothing there. No, I'm not defending colonialism, I'm just not going to get excited about barbarism," (84).

If this is true, Davičo counters, what of the barbarism of colonialism in which "A civilization different from ours was killed along with the past, a civilization about which we have no right to speak ill of, because we do not know how it would have developed if colonization had not taken place. Based on what we know about Africa today, suffice it to say that in many ways it was more advanced than in Europe, and that it did not lag behind Europe in anything," (86). Whether he means technologically or socially "advanced" is not entirely clear, but as he sees it, colonialism served to eradicate these civilizational advancements regardless of their nature. Racial was developed into an ethic and weaponized by Europe in service of dehumanizing Black Africans; it has been so effective at instilling difference at the fore of social interactions on the Continent, that in order to overcome the way it structures social relations, it must be negated on the level of racialism, not on the level of racism, intrinsic or otherwise.

Davičo's immersion in the West African "highlife" serves to better illustrate this point; as he learns from the upper echelons of Ghanaian society, the more lasting struggle for the African continent will not be combating racism, which is typically overt enough to be easily identifiable, but in fact, the insidiousness of racialism, which has structured the very decision-making processes of the postcolonial African state. Davičo's conversations on the topic of education and the administrative issues facing the Continent lead to a discussion of corruption – a case of the "Same Old Story" everywhere. From there, we will follow Davičo's conversations on his three-day trip in the jungle from Dakar to Conakry, which features a multitude of socialist perspectives and finally discover where these disparate ideologies find common ground through the history of territorial partition.

“Similarities Do Not Bind”: Highlife and the “Same Old” Troubles

Davičo once again deploys his ironic style of characterization with his usage of the term “highlife,” meaning both the West African genre of music that fused foreign instruments with indigenous melodies and a sarcastic categorization of a conversation he has with a boorish Belgian diamond dealer aboard the plane to Ghana, who goes on and on about the luxuries of West Africa, from strip clubs and high-end shopping to rubber factories and other lucrative extractive industries on the coast.⁵⁷ Highlife takes on different resonances depending on one’s priorities. Davičo does not marvel at the scenes of West African nightlife he witnesses but focuses his attention on the cultural expression that highlife music gives life to in dance.

Through dance, highlife comes to take an even more ironic, distanced quality for Davičo, one in which he sees a parody of white affect: “But that demeanor of highlife, seen with the critical eye of former slaves, was not at all flattering to the masters. Seen from this angle, the dance is stooping, slow, impotent, weak, insipid; and the smile – forced for no reason. The expression is vacuous and without human content. That's how they play at their experience of whites. That's how they caricature them at the beginning of the dreamy beats of highlife,” (293).⁵⁸ From there, the dance explodes into life, into proper open motion, unfettered by the

⁵⁷ “Highlife emerged in the coastal cities of Anglophone West Africa such as Accra and Lagos in the early decades of the twentieth century. In its stylistic varieties such as the brass band, the guitar band, or the most widespread and popular, the ballroom dance band, highlife is a fusion of local dance melodies and rhythms and imported European brass, string, and woodwind instruments...best [conceived] as the product of a mutually disciplining relationship between foreign instruments and indigenous melodies” (Olaniyan, *Arrest the Music!* 7).

⁵⁸ I’ve chosen to translate *робова* [robova] as “slaves” and *зочноды* [gospodu] as “masters” because they are the closest words in English that retain the colloquial style of speech used here by Davičo while also (if incorrectly) retaining the Hegelian connotation that he deploys here. I recognize that *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft* is better rendered as the lord-bondsman dialectic, especially in this context where slavery is historically present but not precisely the subject of Davičo’s musing, since highlife does not emerge until the late 19th- early 20th century. However, the use of the properly Hegelian English terminology here would make the language sound much more arch and theoretical than Davičo’s prose actually reads.

hunched pose, the dancers shed their performative smile for a smile of triumph and actual enthusiasm.

But as nice a metaphor for liberation as one might hope to draw from this, Davičo does not quite make the expected maneuver of doing so. As Olaniyan states, “The name ‘highlife’ literally and unashamedly indexes the class character of the music it refers to as for the elite, meaning, in context, the westernized elite...The mode and protocols of its consumption – the classy night club with, of course, an equally classy entrance fee and strict codes about dressing and being in couples – left no one in doubt as to the status of the clientele.”⁵⁹ Davičo is introduced to the highlife by just such a couple whom he befriends at a soiree at the Ministry of Culture in Accra. Miss Helen and Mister Roger are both aspiring writers educated in London; she comes from a storied Asante family and he from a similarly storied family who collaborated with the English during colonialism.

Neither finds themselves able to write the book they would like: she because her novel would inevitably be too harsh and destroy the fragile emotional state of the young nation, and he because he is preoccupied with creating radio programs, which he says will do more to reach the illiterate masses than a novel could, while lamenting that the first “real Ghanaian writer has yet to emerge” (263). Davičo finds them rather pitiable, referring to Mister Roger as “the writer who doesn’t write” for the rest of his time in Accra, if astute observers of the problems facing Ghana’s political elite. But in his desire to side with his African comrades against the White oppressor, he makes a racist assumption that based on his earlier musings, he should have known better to avoid.

Davičo makes the inevitable comparison between anglophone Ghana and francophone

⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

Guinea to them and says he was immediately struck by the level of infrastructural development in Ghana and by Accra's skyline, filled with tall buildings, office towers and cranes busy constructing more. In comparison with Guinea which did not yet have a paved highway, in Ghana "the English left almost 1,000,000 miles of asphalt, close to 60 primary and secondary schools, two universities, a museum. Ghana is very rich. By comparison..." (260). Davičo repeats the old saying, "I know the French stole while the English..." but Miss Helen interrupts him "the British stole too. And how." (ibid.). The problem with Ghana's administration is far more systemic than Davičo understands when he attributes the issue to the very racialism he opens his book by critiquing! He tells her that he has enjoyed his time in Ghana and has met many of the country's ministers, but behind every black minister is a white undersecretary who is tasked with the technical execution of whatever task the minister oversees.

Miss Helen's rebuttal is incisive and warns him that he is operating under faulty racist assumptions. The problem is not the white undersecretary, who will be replaced in a matter of a few years with an equally capable Ghanaian, but that the infrastructure and development which the British offered was actually the means by which they robbed Ghana of its linguistic and cultural identity: "The greater evil will remain in those of us who were educated in English schools: even when the last Englishman is long gone from these shores, we, believing we are thinking in the most radical anti-colonialist – and, therefore, anti-English way – actually do so in the English way, not only in thinking and concluding like them, but also in trying to behave like them, to solve problems in the English way... That is evil." (257).

The racialism lingering in certain avowals of solidarity is one such legacy of the English method. This is a far more complete coup than the few vestigial bureaucrats who, Davičo will soon discover, would easily find opportunities in the private sector at much higher pay. What's

more, and Miss Helen's is ultimately a fairly compelling and self-critical basis for Pan-Africanism (and Non-Alignment, I would add), as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o reinforces in his seminal work, *Decolonizing the Mind*: "This is what this book on the politics of language in African literature has really been about: national, democratic and human liberation. The call for rediscovery and the resumption of our language is a call for a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues in Africa and the world over demanding liberation."⁶⁰

As if he had conjured it himself, Davičo encounters this very issue put on display before him when he accompanies the Yugoslavian ambassador to Ghana's national radio for a lecture on the significance of November 29th in Yugoslavia.⁶¹ However, the very morning of the scheduled radio presentation, the director of the radio station called the ambassador to inform him that the Minister of Culture had cancelled the lecture on account of it being too polemical and biased. Upon inquiry with the Minister himself, it was quickly discovered that the radio director acted unilaterally, invoking the Minister's name without the authority to do so. The Minister cleared up matters quickly, ordering the director not to "deprive me of the pleasure of learning something on my radio tonight about a country that is our sincere and loyal friend and towards which, apart from friendship, we have the deepest sympathies" (277). Two hours later, the radio director finally got around to calling the Yugoslav ambassador with the great news: "I re-read the text of your lecture very carefully and, after thinking it over, I decided to assume the risk myself; so please come today at the appointed time and hold your lecture. I will meet you personally" (ibid.).

⁶⁰ Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, 108. In 1970, Ngugi began writing and publishing in his native tongue, Gikuyu, first before translating his work into English. His first Gikuyu work, *Devil on the Cross* (1980), captivated Kenya and almost incited riots when it was published (ibid.).

⁶¹ This was the Yugoslav Day of the Republic, which signified the transfer of power from Tsar Petar II to Marshal Tito, marking Yugoslavia's rebirth into democracy and was celebrated as a national holiday similar to an Independence Day celebration.

In spite of this interference, Davičo calls the radio lecture an unqualified success, saying that the embassy received hundreds of requests seeking “more systematized materials about our struggle, our system, our art, our sport,” (278). Even the meddling director of the radio station faces justice and is asked to resign because of his underhanded behavior. However, Davičo says, within 24 hours, an English diamond mining corporation took sympathy on his plight and made him director of their national operations at a far higher salary than the national radio could ever hope to offer. The final twist casts the whole story in a different light: was the radio director running interference on behalf of neocolonial interests? Davičo would not presume to say as much, but hints at this possibility, calling the chapter, “The Same Old Story.”

This kind of banal corruption is the plight of all bureaucratic democracies, much less those emerging from the immediate constraints of colonial administration. As we see below, disunity and militarized borders on the Continent play much to the benefit of foreign interests who rely on borders to regulate the labor and raw materials markets. Yugoslavia is deeply familiar with such occurrences and the way such seemingly insignificant disputes between its constituent ethnicities over bureaucratic minutia can balloon into huge erosions of national stability. Davičo’s exchanges with Miss Helen and Mister Roger express the conflict that West African national elites experience when tasked with administering a state which they inherited, while the episode with the conniving radio director shows the ways in which foreign interests still serve to undermine and structure the bureaucracy in systemic ways which are far more effective because they have a tremendous amount of international capital and power at their disposal. Such issues are manifest not only in West Africa’s “highlife,” a sphere of society populated by the primarily foreign-educated national elites, but in the spheres of the masses as well. We will conclude our textual analysis of *In Black and White* with recourse to this level of

West African life, in which Davičo sees the synthesis of political thought, history, and action which will make Non-Alignment not only possible, but successful.

“They Are the Obligation of all Freedom-Loving People to Uphold”: Solidarity in Partition

Davičo’s optimism regarding the future of such an alliance must first be tested in the gauntlet of the jungle, when the bus he takes from Senegal to Guinea breaks down leaving the group stranded in the bush for three days. In Davičo’s prior conversation with his Ghanaian friends, Mister Roger affirms his support of Ghana’s Non-Aligned membership but advocates for a “less fluid and much more structured path to socialism” than Yugoslavia’s (259). This is a relatively delicate rebuke of Yugoslavia’s economic structure, which was seen as unorthodox and too compromising with the West by many African Marxists, especially the Maoists and Soviet hardliners on the Continent. Mister Roger’s tact was not shared by many of Davičo’s fellow travelers. Though he ultimately befriends even fundamentalists like Diallo, who despises the NAM for its revisionism of orthodox Marxist principles, Davičo is shocked at his hostility at the outset of the journey, when Diallo brashly declares: “I know everything I need to know [about Yugoslavia] to avoid falling for your rhetoric [...] You are deviationists. I have nothing to discuss with the likes of you!” (104). Two points of connection facilitate their eventual friendship: a historical and a practical similarity that force them to put their petty ideological differences aside and recognize that their very survival is contingent upon their cooperation.

First, Diallo and Davičo connect over the historical issue of territorial partition. In an extended monologue that Davičo humorously characterizes as classic case of preaching to the choir, Diallo says: “I’m Malinke. You can tell by these three scars on my cheekbones. We’re on both sides of the border. But, how can I explain it to you – those boundaries are fictitious and, how should I put it, arbitrary. Former administrators used a ruler to draw them on maps, so it

came to pass that the old territories were severed by a pencil and tribes were divided on paper” (121). This condition in turn gives rise to an artificial tribalism that threatens national stability and thus any possibility of national development; the tribes are not “real” in the very same sense that the constituent Yugoslav nationalities, predicated on fictions of ethnic difference, are not “real,” but rather the natural result of the subsumption of precolonial political and social structures under colonial ones. Continuing his point, Diallo tells Davičo, “Once upon a time, in the Middle Ages, there was an empire of Mali, a wholly pre-feudal empire, and so on. You know, it was similar to those large agglomerations that were the kingdoms in Europe during the time of Charlemagne and later” (122).

After the collapse of these historic empires, colonialism kept the Continent frozen in time, and then the artificial boundaries drawn by the colonial administrators established yet another means of division, but one which was not able to properly “break” the now-ossified structure of tribalism. This structure may have been a boon during colonialism, but in the aftermath, the administrators of the postcolonial African state are left trying to prevent the outbreak of violence between these “tribes” over the proper drawing of the territorial partitions and the proper division of labor in the new state bureaucracy amongst them. This entire historical process has fomented what Diallo calls a “convex consciousness or consciousness in a hollowed sense. It is the unifying knowledge we have, all of us in black Africa, that we have been inhumanely exploited and that the dam of colonization has prevented us all from naturally developing, according to the specifics of our political evolution. That’s why the tribe has become the greater emotional reality than the nation” (123). The ideological condition of the empires is more or less complete, enforcing not only a racial hierarchy but instituting “tribal” divisions as well to continue the legacy of partition long after the withdrawal of the colonial administrators.

Just as Davičo is set to begin his rebuttal in defense of Yugoslavian socialism by recourse to the tribalism that similarly plagues Yugoslavia on the self-same grounds of empire and partition, the bus blows a tire, leaving the group stranded. This prompts the second point of connection between Diallo and Davičo, this time predicated on their *cooperation* in a matter of life and death importance, when they are forced to hunt a wounded leopard and help deliver a baby in the jungle. The mechanical troubles might be a convenient narrative device, since the Yugoslav reader would hardly need such a parallel explained to them.

Narrative device or not, the problem with the bus turns out to be severe enough that it necessitates the group camping out in the jungle for a few nights. After an initial late night of conversation that descends into group self-criticism in Maoist style regarding their disunity and inability to fairly divide up the labor of collecting supplies, the stranded travelers awake to a stir in the underbrush. Two hunters emerge from the bush, hot on the trail of a wounded leopard that they shot protecting their cattle. Davičo jumps to their aid after Diallo declares his intention to join their hunt, wanting to show “I am not just a man who happened to board the same truck as them. I come from a certain country whose name they have now heard and, precisely because Diallo introduced himself to me as a man convinced that the path of my country is opportunistic and cowardly, I must prove to him by my behavior that my ‘tribesmen’ are neither cowards nor opportunists” (168). They plan to corner the leopard by lighting a swath of grass on fire around a meat trap which they prepared; this time, Davičo is a bit more prepared to account for himself and his “tribesmen.”

The hunt and its immediate aftermath greatly endear Davičo to his comrades, especially his insistence that he take an equal share of the night watch, to avoid another incident with a wild animal. If the threat of the wounded leopard was not enough, one of the co-passengers, a

pregnant woman, goes into labor, sending the hunting party into a frenzy to gather supplies to assist with the birth of her child. Both of these moments are rendered in much more active and agitated narration than the rest of *In Black and White*, and the climax of these events in the jungle intersects at the pivotal moment of birth: the baby's first cries are met with the last magnificent leap of the leopard, whose final pounce was cut short by the blast of a shotgun. Exhausted from the feverish events of the past 48 hours, Davičo nevertheless firmly insists on taking his share of the night watch, saying he would not allow them to fool him as with the previous night and show him deference – “special status” as a foreigner as he puts it – by letting him sleep through his turn.

Even more so than when he volunteered to join the leopard hunt, it is this act of camaraderie that most endears Davičo to his hunting companions saying they were “much more animated after my call to treat me equally. I think it was only after that that they both opened up and talked to me for a long time, lying on the ground there next to me. I found out exactly where they had all been, what they had learned and how they would apply that knowledge, each in his own country. Of course, this all will have to stay between us” (190). This level of connection, forged by facing numerous, dangerous conflicts together, is sealed when Davičo insists on refusing his “special status” in keeping the night watch. Lacking the excitement and bravado of the hunt, it is this act, one that shows a quiet concern for the well-being of the group, that conclusively allows him to overcome the many obstacles that have been placed in the way of their genuine connection and cements his place of belonging in the group.

The episode in the jungle culminates in one last laugh around the fire which the whole group shares at Davičo's expense. Noticing Davičo's awkwardness when he sees the woman's baby for the first time, Diallo asks “‘What's with you?’ surprised by my, I guess, surprised

expression. I was embarrassed that her ‘sins’ with a white man had come out in the open. He burst out laughing when I told him the reason for my discomfort, marveling: ‘Didn't you know that we are born white too? Even if for just one day. After twenty-four hours we adapt and get darker. Like a film strip in the light.’” Not afraid to get the last word, Diallo throws one last winking barb at Davičo: “For us, white skin is therefore perhaps a sign of weakness and lack of adaptation to conditions” (189).

This time, Diallo’s gibe can be understood as a friendly taunt, unlike at the start of their trip, for instance, when he provokingly gave Davičo a Maoist pamphlet to read that denounced Yugoslavia as a revisionist lapdog to Western imperialism (184). Once they have shared in these experiences together, the ideological differences which they had spent the majority of the trip insisting upon, hashing out, arguing and berating each other over, melt into laughter, friendship, and relaxation. Davičo’s gaffe only endears him further to the group now that he has shown his commitment to them. The truck is fixed in the morning of the third day and Davičo is able to continue his journey, even spending the day with one of Diallo’s friends in Yimbéring, Guinea, where they discuss a showing of a collection of Mao’s speeches projected on a wall in the town square; this conversation is much more cordial than the opening salvos he exchanged with Diallo, despite Mao’s relentless insistence on orthodoxy and discipline in the background.

Not only does Davičo’s fumbling obliviousness at the end of the hectic trip clarify our earlier discussion of the parade in Conakry being like “the negative of a film reel” of Yugoslavia’s post-war May Day parades (331), it affirms the possibility of racial confraternity without racialism, of an international alliance predicated on non-alignment. Diallo posits black skin as a physiological advantage responsive to the harsh landscape of the Continent. As black skin is an adaptation to the sun, it propounds no inherent moral obligation to those who share its

biological function. Any obligation felt to those who have suffered similarly as a result of the visibility of this physiological advantage is a result of that history of racialization and not inherent to the evolutionary advantage of black skin. Just as suffering does not ennoble, it does not naturally produce solidarity. That requires systemic support, a narrative that highlights correspondences and minimizes differences so that the continued onslaught of racism can be actively combated rather than temporarily exiled.

This allows me to close with a more complete understanding of the possibility which Non-Alignment was seen as holding for the people and statesmen of these countries who believed in its promise. The speeches of Nkrumah and Sékou Touré that make up the conclusion of the book, which like West's Epilogue in *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, forms the most politically intentional component of the work – this time an apology for Non-Alignment – offer Davičo an opportunity to reflect on what he has learned and how he will apply that knowledge in his own home, as he described his whispered fireside conversation with his now-friends from the eventful bus trip. Likewise, he has given an example of what it means to “uphold” similarities over differences (even ones that are nigh insurmountable, like those over socialist tendencies!), an active ethic requiring humility and quiet service rather than bombast. In so doing, Davičo, unconsciously perhaps, quietly chastises the “grand spectacles” such as Tito's tour and the display of African unity sponsored by the ruling elite of these nations because on such grounds alone Non-Alignment will not be capable of sustaining itself.

Conclusion: The Legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement

The specter of Berlin that lingers over the balkanized spaces of Yugoslavia and West Africa forms the historical basis of the similarities Davičo has articulated throughout his journey. As Guinean president Sékou Touré emphatically states in a 1962 issue of *Foreign Affairs*

(published by the Council of Foreign Relations, turned in-house thinktank of the CIA's during the Cold War) from the epigraph, "the African nations are realizing that in order to solve their urgent social problems...it cannot be done within the limits of our national micro-economies... Africa remains as grimly hostile as ever to the division of Africa which began with the Congress of Berlin in 1885." In that sense, Davičo carries both Berlin conferences within himself on his journey to West Africa: on one shoulder sits 1878, the partition of the Balkans that frames his own history and subjectivity, and on the other sits 1884, the partition of Africa that frames the history and subjectivity of his hosts. And yet, while Berlin itself was bifurcated and divided, actualizing the metaphor of the Iron Curtain with the Berlin Wall shortly before Davičo's trip, West Africa and Yugoslavia were posed on the verge of an exciting and unbridled future of expansive openness and freedom.

Sitting at the airport, Davičo reflects on the diversity of people who move through the lobby as a result of Guinea's Non-Aligned status and open-door policies, what Yugoslav politician Čiča Janko⁶² jokingly characterized as its "politics of hospitality, referring to the countless progressive people, dignitaries, semi-dignitaries that we were forced to guide around the country after the resolution of 1948, in order to give them the opportunity to see with their own eyes the dogmatic arbitrariness and falsity of the accusations that have befallen our Party, leadership and people" (299). In Conakry, Davičo sees many American figures like Averell Harriman and Eleanor Lansing Dulles, Soviet figures like Leonid Brezhnev and many African leaders and delegations filter through during his several stopovers at the airport, musing that this open-door "politics of hospitality" must not be "exclusive to our destiny." This is the lot of all

⁶² Moše Pijade (1890-1957) known as Čiča Janko, or "old man Janko," was a Yugoslav politician, close friend and collaborator of Tito's, and a Partisan war hero, known for translating Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* into Serbo-Croatian, who served in high state functions until his death.

Non-Aligned nations who do not have the luxury of closing their doors to anyone. While Davičo considers this their strength, it makes them susceptible to interference as well.

At the parade, Nkrumah, Sékou Touré and Keïta announced their intention to formalize monetary unity and foreign policy between their three countries, drawing inspiration from the United States and NAM respectively, as part of the Union of African States. Sékou Touré begins his speech: “our path is the path of unification, and if, following it, it is necessary for each of our countries to gradually give up something that constitutes the prerogatives of independent and sovereign states, we will do so with a light heart. We have the highest interest in mind: the unity of Africa, the condition of independence” (333). Here, he is promising Nkrumah’s designs for a centralized federation of states, a synthesis of the US and Yugoslavia, on the Continent.

Nkrumah echoes Sékou Touré’s words with his own invocation of unity through history in what Davičo says is one of the most masterful displays of oratory he has witnessed: “We want to correct the injustices that were done to us in the past. With the help of our friends, whose sincere and disinterested outlook we have every reason to trust. But above all, and in the first place, we will only rid ourselves of our inherited troubles if we trust in ourselves, in our work and in our dreams” (ibid). This moment evokes euphoria, in Davičo and in the thousands gathered to hear the leaders speak. The alternate vision of the Continent this evokes is quite powerful, and Davičo is deeply moved: “it became evermore apparent to me [...] that there is no other way forward on the international level than a politics of active coexistence, a politics beyond the blocs, a politics virtually oppositional to the obsolete and vampiric Cold War alliances” (334).

In the light of the “all-annihilative power of contemporary weaponry,” but more importantly, “the increasingly explosive will of peaceful humanity to live and work outside the

framework of the accumulation of misery and inhumanity that is capitalism, with its derivatives of imperialism and colonialism,” the only path forward is Non-Alignment. Davičo’s editorial optimism is unbridled as he concludes his observations saying, “there is no doubt in my mind that at this moment I am witnessing the making of one of the most far-reaching and momentous decisions for the fate of the modern world” (334). The decolonization of the entire Continent is inevitable, for Davičo, and its political unity predestined: “Africa is already one, and nobody's intrigues will destroy its unity” (338).

Davičo’s optimism notwithstanding, this ostentatious parade and grand proclamation of West African unity was held in the shadow of the dissolution of the Mali Federation earlier in 1960. The present-absence at this meeting of Union of African States was Senegal, which had broken off from Mali a few months prior and whose president, Sédar Senghor, was notably missing from the proceedings in Guinea that day. Franz Fanon’s important chapter in *Wretched of the Earth*, “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” published the same year, refers to this episode of West African history in order to describe the competition for bureaucratic positions left in the vacuum of colonizers.

Citing Mamadou Dia, still Prime Minister of Senegal in 1961, who was reveling in the fall of the Mali Federation on the grounds that now Senegal could retain commercial and administrative positions which were lost in what Dia casts as its compromise with Mali, Fanon writes, “for the mass of the people in the towns competition is represented principally by Africans of another nation.”⁶³ For Fanon, the work of national development necessarily entails the weaponization of borders against those who are seen as belonging to other African nations, even if prior to the institution of those borders, they had no problems peacefully coexisting:

⁶³ Frantz Fanon, “Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1963), 104.

“wherever the petty-mindedness of the national bourgeoisie and the haziness of its ideological positions...has proven to be incapable of expanding its vision of the world, there is a return to tribalism, and we watch with a raging heart as ethnic tensions triumph.”⁶⁴

In 1962, Mamadou Dia would go on to stage a coup against Sédar Senghor, which was ultimately quashed, forcing Dia into permanent exile. Many other African leaders would not be so lucky. Early on while still in Senegal, Davičo comments on the difficult fight facing Patrice Lumumba of the Republic of Congo, who would be murdered, likely with foreign support, before *In Black and White* went to print. In 1966, while visiting China, Nkrumah was deposed by a military coup, also likely sponsored by Anglo-American intelligence. In a remarkable gesture of goodwill and unity, Nkrumah would be named co-president of Guinea by Sékou Touré, but the title was honorary, and the coup effectively ended not only Ghana’s participation in the NAM, but any latent possibility in the continued expansion of the Union of African States. The Same Old Story, in another form?

I do not mean to suggest that it was foreign interference that was entirely at play in ending this optimistic post-independence period on the Continent. While Davičo proved correct in his argument with the Swiss journalist that the saber-rattling at the border between Senegal and Guinea was the product of foreign meddling and did not constitute Senegalese ambitions on Guinean territory (80), there were plenty of successors who stood to benefit from his removal.⁶⁵ But it is without a whiff of irony that Richard Nixon, in the first state visit of a US president to Yugoslavia, said the principles of self-determination lie at the heart of US foreign policy, though he would be ousted from office four years later before withdrawing from Vietnam. With such

⁶⁴ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁵ A US State Department report on the 1974 assassination of Amílcar Cabral, right on the cusp of Bissau-Guinean independence at least intimates that Sékou Touré would have benefitted from handpicking Cabral’s successor but this intelligence is difficult to evaluate on its own (Department of State, *Portuguese Guinea February 1, 1973*).

support from the eventual victor of the Cold War conflict, what happened to the promise of Non-Alignment as a buttress of internal stability and social cohesion against foreign interference?

Such is the nature of liberation, Davičo suggests; the revolutions experienced by Yugoslavia after WWII and by these West African nations in the very recent past must be continuously nourished, as differences between people will never shy from making themselves known. This is the calling of revolution, “which does not simply stop once it has begun, which does not start in the first place if it does not have the strength to continuously discover and reveal itself in the mirror of man's needs, desires, hopes” (339). Revolution is nourished in acts which are clearly made for the benefit of others, regardless of the differences which separate them, which brings us full circle to Davičo’s closing statement which served as a departing point for our analysis: “Similarities do not bind. They are the obligation of all freedom-loving people to uphold in all struggles for liberty around this ever-increasingly human world. Here. There. Everywhere.” (ibid).

Given the context of Non-Alignment, this sounds quite convincing, and *In Black and White* demonstrates the purchase, even the urgency, that such an ethic held in this period of optimism and national liberation on the Continent and in Yugoslavia. Davičo presents a similarly convincing case for the possibility of a postcolonial travelogue, of a European traveling to Africa without recourse to exoticism and dehumanization, seeking friendship, solidarity, and meaningful connection. In the light of nuclear annihilation to which the world was submitted because of the war games of the two superpowers, the notion of the active work required to maintaining connections between various diverse groups of people, the obligation to do so, remains quite ethically compelling. But given the events of the 1970s-80s on the Continent and of the 1990s in Yugoslavia, it appears that the promise of the NAM was always more

aspirational than practical.⁶⁶

While the NAM is still active, and what's more, all but two nations on the African continent are members – the supermajority of its membership in contemporary times – its influence waned dramatically in the closing decades of the century. After the death of Tito in 1980, the bonds that held Yugoslavia together began to visibly fray leading to its neglect of the NAM and eventual dissolution. When the Berlin Wall came down at the end of 1989, and so fell any limits to time's expanse, the much-hailed end of history, what use could there be for non-alignment? And when the bulwark of non-alignment gave, how long did it take for the bitter historical narratives of nationalism to yet again draw blood? Thus, the shared legacy of partition may have been enough to function as a foundation of solidarity, the starting point for comparison, as it were, and an ethic of postcolonial solidarity and friendship might be necessary to build those sympathetic affiliations into robust, mutually beneficial relationships. But clearly some element was missing in *sustaining* such a movement.

In the next and final chapter, I look to Ghanaian writer Ayi Kweh Armah for his diagnosis of the bitter failure of the African nation-state at actually rising to its historic mandate and attaining liberation for its citizens, which undergirds the failure of West African unity and the ultimate breakdown of the NAM as an alternative to the forces of partition, imperialism, and annihilation that continue to threaten the world into our present moment.

⁶⁶ Even from a purely calculating economic standpoint, in 1965, Yugoslavia's trade with Non-Aligned countries only amounted to 15% of its total import and export exchange volume (Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav Peoples*, 244).

Chapter Four: Apocatastasis Now!: The Failure of *Bildung* and the Regeneration of History

in Ayi Kwei Armah's Postcolonial Chronicle *Two Thousand Seasons*

In the dark times, will there also be singing?
Yes, there will be singing.
About the dark times
– Bertolt Brecht, "Motto"

This is our swan song...
We carry in our worlds that flourish
Our worlds that have failed....
– Christopher Okigbo, "Lament of
the Silent Sisters"

Ghana's Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah was deposed in 1966 while on a peace mission to Hanoi pursuing an end to the Vietnam war and was replaced by the military with National Liberation Council which was much friendlier to the interests of private and international capital.¹ While Ghana's cultural and political elite saw their wealth, power and prestige increase, every day people suffered; the new government, and much of Western media, blamed the authoritarian single-party "regime" of Nkrumah for the breakdown in the legal process. One of the first postcolonial novelists out of Ghana wrote in the aftermath of this broken dream of West African unity that marked the end of the optimism of the initial phase of national liberation. Ayi Kwei Armah (b. 1939) became the strongest literary expression of that bleak pessimism and "epitomized an era of intense despair" that followed in the wake of Nkrumah's ousting and the crisis in the postcolonial nation across Africa.²

Armah, a young, Harvard educated intellectual recently returned from his studies abroad

¹ Fuller, *Building the Ghanaian Nation-State*, 152. While certainly not the first coup of a democratically elected African leader, 1966 was a banner year for coups in West Africa; seven of ten coups attempted that year were successful of which five were supported with military and foreign backing (Duzor and Williamson, "Coups in Africa"). This gels with Crawford Young's affective periodization of the post-independence history of the Continent as three cycles of hope and despair in which the 1960s quickly slips from euphoric optimism to disappointment (Young, *Postcolonial State in Africa*, 10).

² See Fraser, *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*, 13.

and eager to work in his home country, was dismayed by the state of political affairs in Ghana, with the abortive promises of the nation-state and the skein of corruption in its bureaucracy. In the halcyon days just following Independence, Miss Helen and Mister Roger, two of Ghana's intellectual elite from Oskar Davičo's travelogue *In Black and White*, longed to be writers but were unable to produce the words to articulate the vastness and complexity of the present situation. Mister Roger, a television executive, laments to Davičo that the first Ghanaian novelist had yet to arrive on the literary scene, and Miss Helen is terrified that her words would be too acerbic for the fledgling nation. By all accounts, Armah was the novelist they were waiting for,³ though it is hard to imagine Miss Helen writing a more eviscerating portrayal of the state of the nation than Armah's first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968).

In spite of his family's political prominence and the promise of his education abroad as a self-styled "been-to," that is, someone who has "been to" the metropolitan centers of the west and returned to work in the new government, Armah turned down a role in the nascent national bureaucracy, exchanging material success for an uncompromising eye for the moral, political and spiritual diseases that plagued not only his nation, but his whole Continent. Steeped in dissatisfaction with the nominally socialist comprador regimes that inherited the postcolonial state, which were tasked with the project of building and unifying a nation, Armah's early work centers on the failure of artistic and individual *bildung* that emerges as the unresolvable kernel of contradiction in the sphere of African political life. In short, Armah refused to confuse liberation with national independence.

³ Ama Ata Aidoo was a very influential playwright and writer of Armah's generation who debuted her seminal work *Dilemma of a Ghost* in 1964, four years prior to Armah's first publication, but Aidoo would not publish her first novel until 1971.

Armah, thus, emerges as an early voice among this generation of African writers decrying the political powder-keg of nationalism, which did not sit well with some of the Continent's established literary voices, most prominently Chinua Achebe. Achebe, who reprinted Armah's first novel as editor of the influential African Writers Series by Heinemann,⁴ took Armah to task for misrepresenting African culture, warping traditional life and actively subverting African nationalism with excremental vulgarities and crass depictions of filth and decline.⁵ Achebe's perhaps most famous description of Armah as an "alienated native writing like some white District Officer" was a personal attack leveled for what Achebe saw as the universalizing impulse in Armah's work that presented Africa as depleted and corrupt.

In response to this deeply personal provocation, seeking to prove his dedication to the specificities of an indigenous African history and culture, Armah abandons the novel of the disaffected artist moving among the wreckage of the postcolonial state that characterized his early work. Depicting the history of the fictional people of Anoa, drawn from Ghana's Akan culture while syncretizing a vast assemblage of Pan-African cultural history, from the earliest internal divisions in the time of the ancient past to the arrival of multiple waves of empire that brought chattel slavery and land partition. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) takes the form of a chronicle-novel spoken by a plural, multivocal narrator that tells the history of this ruination

⁴ Though Armah makes a quite explosive claim in "Larsony" that Heinemann actually tried to sabotage the publication of his novels and that claims he "sold out" to western interests are laughable since his publisher Houghton Mifflin stole royalties from him, for which he provides royalty receipts in his introduction to Per Ankh's edition of *The Beautiful Ones* ("Larsony," 50 and "Introduction" in *The Beautiful Ones*, Per Ankh, 2008).

⁵ See Nwachurwu-Agbada and Achebe "An Interview with Achebe" and Achebe, "Africa and her writers." Neil Lazarus regards it as "among the bleakest and most disenabling texts to be produced during the first decade of independence in Africa" (Lazarus, "(Re)turn to the People," 15). Although Wole Soyinka argued that "*Two Thousand Seasons* is predicated on the fulfilment of one of the social functions of literature: the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purposes of a social direction" (Myth, Literature and the African World, 106), it was not until more recently that this analysis seems to have been taken seriously. For instance, Ato Sekyi-Otu premises his notion of an Africentric, leftist universalist ethics in no small part on Armah's notion of reciprocity developed in *Two Thousand Seasons*, which I discuss in greater detail below.

as well as the counter-history of resistance that sprung up to combat it.⁶ This hidden tradition of resistance, forged in the abjection of African history that robbed the Continent of so many lives and traditions, posits a real and radical regeneration that can take place beyond the inherited forms of empire, of which the nation-state was the most current iteration, beyond the ends of the current apocalypse.

Armah exhorts his critics (and readers alike) to give themselves a “particularly solid grounding” in African history, providing a framework for understanding the phases of his literary production: “The human value of literature must lie in its ability to improve man's life on earth. Literature should stimulate us with questions such as, “What is the quality of our life now? How did it get this way? What are our future options?”⁷ These three questions fairly usefully summarize the three movements in Armah’s oeuvre, tracking the shift from the failure of the postcolonial state as one of disappointment and despair to a historical shift emphasizing the value of artistic community and finally the final phase which entails the creative redeployment of history to the creation of new models of community and resistance.

In *Seasons*, Armah shows that political formation, national *bildung* in other words, is inextricably caught up in the partition of land, which itself is introduced as a possibility by the priests and merchants of empire who ply the Anoman kings with gifts to further ingratiate themselves into the domestic rule. Because Africa was forced to cobble nations out of the vestigial colonial states left behind in the wake of its 19th century balkanization, Armah viewed the nation-state as irretrievably hampered with Eurocentric notions of blood belonging, artificial unity, and cultural alienation that could not fulfill the promises of liberation. I demonstrate how

⁶ In the interest of reducing footnote clutter, further references will use the abbreviated title *Seasons* and will be cited parenthetically.

⁷ Armah, “The Lazy School of Literary Criticism,” 35.

Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* articulates the way in which the African nation is an inheritance of the balkanization of the Continent performed at the Berlin Conference of 1884 by the European empires.

In my reading, Armah's work reveals how both the nation-form, the reformism of African socialism, and racial models like *negritude* are inadequate to combat the continued oppression of the Continent because of the continual honing of the techniques of balkanization in more and more subtle forms well into the waning years of the 20th century.⁸ Armah also discerns the ideological basis that allowed partition and division to take root in among the African masses and that mine the past in order to reproduce the system of balkanization into the future. In place of these deficient, nostalgic vehicles of liberation that pointlessly seek a return to precolonial conditions, Armah posits an indigenous ethic, recovered through his half-fictive half-historical chronicle-novel, that advances the possibility of a break in history, a radical rupture from the legacies of partition and division foisted upon Africa that can sustain future regeneration.

My reading focuses on the non-nostalgic historiography developed in *Two Thousand Seasons* which is not an attempt to recover the possibility of the individual artist's formation as one that mirrors the nation's development but to regenerate what Armah's abortive early *bildungsromane* were striving for in the first place: the artist's growth into a reciprocal community of artistic creation. The failure of *bildung* in Armah's early novels is a particularly painful kind of failure for the African intellectual: it is one that necessitates a counter-narrative. This in-built failure of postcolonial nationalism registers the arbitrary balkanization of a

⁸ In his essay "African Socialism," Armah criticized the political program of *negritude* that was embodied in the African Socialism of the Senegalese poet and politician Leopold Senghor stating it was a desperate, nostalgic attempt at a Westernized African intellectual class to take shelter in a romanticized past while serving the interests of European imperialism ("African Socialism," 18-21).

continent; the nation was doomed from the outset, and its literary allegory doomed to a similar failure.

The integration of the individual into a social whole is symbolized in the indigenous rite of initiation into the *fundi* (educational community or guild) of speech;⁹ the “we-chroniclers,” themselves initiated by the last *fundi* (master) of speech, Isanusi, before he was betrayed by their king, says: “Our vocation goes against all unconnectedness. It is a call to create the way again, and where even the foundations have been assaulted and destroyed, where restoration has been made impossible, simply *to create the way*” (8, emphasis added).¹⁰ The call to restoration and regeneration, what the narrators call “the way,” is rooted in an ethic of reciprocity that was lost in the history of betrayals and complicity in slavery. The we-chronicler of *Seasons* demonstrate that the novel itself functions as precisely that chronicle seeking to constellate – to connect – history in such a way as to contribute to the re-creation of the abandoned “way.” This is why it is necessarily both fictive and historical – the call to creation contains the calls to remembrance and to invention, especially when one’s history was stolen and only partially preserved.

Armah’s critique mirrors Aimé Césaire’s polemical claim that the nation, birthed in its modern form in the foundry of colonialism, will ruin the entire world.¹¹ In *Seasons*, Armah aims to trace out the apocalyptic edges of this ruination to show how certain divisions were weaponized by the invading colonial powers. It simultaneously speaks to the desire to regenerate, or re-create, lost and stolen traditions while recognizing the impossibility of return, identifying nostalgia itself as yet another technique of the “white destroyers.” I call the

⁹ *Fundi* means something like a guild or school as well as master, from the Swahili and Shona *kufunda* – to learn.

¹⁰ Lief Lorentzon’s “Epic We-Narrator,” 221, usefully discusses Armah’s formation as an epic “we-narrator” but since I read *Seasons* as a chronicle and not an epic, though its historical range is epic in scope, I call the narrators the we-chronicler.

¹¹ Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 74.

chronicle-novel's heretical impulse – “apocatastasis” – an eschatological position that rejects the telos of messianic time and redemption for a social, communal ethic of regeneration that is forged in its continual adaptation to the ever-evolving techniques of imperial devastation.

Armah's apocalypse is not predicated on any imported faith's eschatology: he depicts the way in which the “end of the world” has already arrived numerous times to the African continent, chronicled over the course of two thousand seasons, “a thousand seasons of dry and a thousand seasons of moist” (16), or a thousand years of calendrical time. Instead, I submit that the heresy of apocatastasis captures Armah's vision of the end of history and marks the time where the impossibility of restoration, symbolized in the eternal expansiveness of calendar time, has been transcended through the act of creation, after *bildung*'s failure has been stretched to its logical end in search of a more complete healing and integration. Limitless extraction is not sustainable, as the logic of reciprocity is encoded physically into all relations, according to the worldview of the we-chronicler. Apocatastasis is the time after the historical trajectory of limitless expanse.

Contrary to recent scholarly trends that seek to valorize and recover the work of the postcolonial African nation-builders as a radical departure from the inherited forms of sovereignty through the “universalization of the nation-state,”¹² Armah's pessimism was nothing new in the critiques of the postcolonial nation swirling around in the 1960s and 1970s. At times, it seems as though Armah is writing while reading from a copy of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* in his lap. But the valorization of the nation-form in defense of some of the more

¹² Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 10. Getachew most forcefully advances this argument saying “the anticolonial account of self-determination marked a radical break from the Eurocentric model of international society and established nondomination as a central ideal of a postimperial world order” replacing the widespread notion that self-determination entailed “an expansion of an already existing principle in which anticolonial nationalists universalize a Westphalian regime of sovereignty” (11).

admirable notions of African (or Yugoslav or whatever!) Socialism cannot prevent the more abiding presence of disjunction between the means and ends of national liberation movements and the nationalism they later foster. This has led to a gap in the critical evaluations of Armah's novels, which have not discussed *Seasons* as a chronicle-novel, if they discuss it at all given its difficulty to categorize and qualify. More recently, Ghanaian political philosopher Ato Sekyi-Otu has done remarkable work tracing out the ethical dimension of Armah's work, but this chapter offers a more literary and historical reading under the aegis of Sekyi-Otu's important politico-philosophical intervention.

This chapter asks: how does the chronicle-novel use history as a basis for a future ethic of solidarity on the African continent and throughout the African diaspora that does not depend on European value systems or political ideologies? To what extent does Armah's critique of balkanization articulate what is necessary to effect an actual rupture from the inherited forms of sovereignty bequeathed by colonialism? What is the connection between the chronicle-novel as a genre and the end of history in Africa? How does Armah represent certain tendencies in the African literary tradition and the limitations they impose on creative thought and systemic insight?

First, I will flesh out the dimensions of Armah's postcolonial chronicle-novel, tracing out Anoa's prophecy of two thousand seasons of death followed by regeneration in order to examine the legacies of Berlin as they are developed and worked out over time. The rupture that the partition of land symbolizes for the political life of the people of Anoa gives rise to Armah's philosophy of the end of time, a heretical view that encapsulates what will come after the prophecy of two thousand seasons. Next I flesh out both the communal, artistic initiation into the secret history of resistance and the Eurocentric notion of *bildung* of his early novels which it

phases out. I will then investigate the heretical claim of regeneration, what emerges as Armah's apocatastatic mandate to creative violence before concluding with the non-teleological antidote to balkanization and partition that Armah sees as animating not only his work but all of African history.

Postcolonial Chronicle-Novel: The Janus-face of *jetztzeit* and *gleichzeit*

Armah is therefore deeply important to this period of African literature because his work carries the marks of the Berlin conferences and gestures toward a way past the balkanization of Africa's history. As colonies, the African holdings were essentially off-shore territories of the European national empires, and were correspondingly divided according to the logic and rules of Western nation-states. Upon independence, the national form posed a teleological development that the fledgling African states would grow into the inherited formation of the nation. Armah rejects this notion, as did many of the African nation-builders themselves in the post-independence period but so too does he reject any nostalgic political formations that romanticize the past as serving European interests. *Seasons* charts a new direction for the chronicle-novel, and historical fiction of the period more broadly, that is relentlessly future-oriented, not with the naïve intercultural humanism of the travelogue, nor of the transcendent traditional core of Achebe's village life romance. Instead, induces new creative life emerges in finding ways to resist the totalizing oppression of the continuous rubble of history.

Though *Two Thousand Seasons* marked a departure in genre and form from Armah's earlier work of beleaguered, alienated artists in the corrupt post-independence period, it is no less disaffected, if more difficult in both content and form. It attempts to narrate a possible historical account of an indigenous African ethic of an artistic community that can sustain a tradition of resistance in the future without succumbing to an atavistic teleology in which Africa's future

must contain a return to some prelapsarian past; it does so by identifying the need for a wider ethic, “the way of reciprocity,” to stimulate and engender social cohesion than what has been offered by the inherited forms under European colonialism such as religion, nationalism, or even international socialism. The regeneration of “the way” lies in artistic creation, like *Two Thousand Seasons* itself, that reveals historical tendencies in order to sustain a movement of resistance into the future.

Recounted in the first-person plural, Armah’s postcolonial chronicle narrates the trials of the “people of Anoa,” loosely associated with the Akan people of what is now Ghana while incorporating elements of numerous African traditions in a decidedly Pan-African manner, over the span of a thousand years.¹³ The chronicle’s narrative draws from the legendary history of the Akan nation’s fabled migration from Sudanic lands through the desert to the sea until the arrival of the “white destroyers,” first the Arabic incursion by land, followed by the European by sea, the communal voice narrates a story of the ancient, mythological formation of this people in a primordial past and shows the genesis of their social relations ranging from internal contradictions predicated on the organization and social hierarchies of the group, to natural obstacles that such early social formations must overcome in their migrations in search of arable land and safe haven.

One of the forms which the resultant division of labor takes is the creation of guilds or schools, called *fundi*, which specialized in specific arts or sciences that were orally and practically transmitted to successive generations becoming vessels of creative traditions. One

¹³ Derek Wright suggests “Recorded history makes up only a part of the narrative, which draws not upon the experience of any specific tribal or ethnic group, but upon the projected race memory of a fictitious pan-African fraternity whose names—in Swahili, Yoruba, Gikuyu, Ibo—are gathered from different parts of the continent. In this book the bounds of historical realism and naturalistic narrative are daringly burst and a new fictional zone entered” (“Ayi Kwei Armah,” 37).

such was the first *fundi* of speech, which served as a translating body between the seven Anoa languages. In quite a different formulation of Rebecca Walkowitz's notion of "born translated" literature, the chronicle-novel arrives "translated" through the seven Anoa languages as well as the multiple and multivocal we-chroniclers themselves. In this case, translation within the chronicle serves to unite the people and facilitate communication, ensuring that the principle of balance and reciprocity would not be lost for lack of communication. That is because language is not what unites the people of Anoa.

Thus, from the start, Armah rejects what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o would later articulate as linguistic decolonization, which he famously advanced by writing in his native Gikuyu rather than in English as of 1977. Ngũgĩ expanded this position in *Decolonizing the Mind*, where he states: "This is what the politics of language in African literature has really been about: national, democratic and human liberation. The call for rediscovery and the resumption of our language is a call for a regenerative reconnection with the millions of revolutionary tongues in Africa and the world over demanding liberation. It is a call for the rediscovery of the real language of humankind: the language of struggle."¹⁴ Armah might agree with the final conclusion that the language of struggle presents a viable future politics, but *Seasons* rejects the primacy of linguistic unity as another romantic formulation of the past. The Anoa people had seven languages – which of them should be the language of Ghana's "national, democratic, and human liberation" in the mid-twentieth century?

Because of the diversity of languages and the necessary diversity of people which that entails, the people of Anoa themselves are not initially organized on the basis of any blood ties, nor are they even called the people of Anoa. Instead, they are people of the "way of reciprocity,"

¹⁴ Ngũgĩ, *Decolonizing the Mind*, 108.

bound by an ethic, welcome to any outsiders and strangers so long as submit to its practice:

“Reciprocity. Not merely taking, not merely offering. Giving, but only to those from whom we receive in equal measure. Receiving, but only from those to whom we give in reciprocal measure. How easy, how just, the way. Yet how easily, how utterly you have forgotten it. You have forgotten that justice is not ease” (17). With time, the we-chroniclers describe how they lose sight of this ethic of reciprocity and enforce a hierarchical division of labor that quickly descends into typical patriarchal oppression and the subsequent feudal agrarianism of pre-colonial society.

In the incessantly translated narrative of the we-chroniclers, who attempt to show the full history of the arc of resistance to destruction, the figure of Anoa emerges in the ancient time of their recollection to speak to the shortcomings of language or race alone as the principle of decolonization given the teleological inheritance of national development. Anoa is a young seeress of the ancient *fundi* of speech who channels a prophecy of the future to warn what will befall her people for abandoning the way of reciprocity. Through Anoa’s prophesy, Armah articulates the arrival of first the Arabic and then the European empires in eschatological terms, as a multi-stage African apocalypse brought on the caravans and boats of what he calls the “white destroyers.” Its delivery is marked by a similarly apocalyptic mood, and it’s worth quoting here at some length:

It was in a season of rains that Anoa began her utterance [...] all were astonished not by what she said alone, but also by the way her deliverance was made, for she spoke in twin voices – twin, but clearly discernible from one another. The first, a harassed voice shrieking itself to hoarseness, uttered a terrifying catalogue of deaths – deaths of the body, deaths of the spirit; deaths of single, lost ones, deaths of groups snared in some killing pursuit; deaths of nations, the threatened death of our people (15).

This voice goes on cataloguing the series of plagues that will come to the continent of Africa bearing slavery, devastation, and catastrophic dehumanization.

But at the same time as the apocalyptic utterance of the first voice of death, Anoa speaks with a second, calmer voice: “for every shrieking horror the first voices had given sound to, this other voice gave calm causes, indicated effects, and never tired of iterating hope at the issue of all disasters: the rediscovery and following again of our way, the way,” (15) suggesting the inherent resistance to total destruction inherent in the stubborn persistence of Anoa’s people. Ultimately these two voices combine to tell a story of “a thousand seasons wasted wandering amazed along alien roads, another thousand spent finding paths to the living way” (xv). This prophecy of two thousand seasons, a thousand seasons of rain and a thousand seasons of dry, become the eschatological narrative which binds the people of “the way” after they forgotten their roots and abandoned the ethic of reciprocity.

The second voice speaks to the way forward, the future-oriented position that Bernth Lindfors refers to as Armah’s “work toward effecting a cure” for this blighted sense of postcolonial time that reigns in Africa.¹⁵ But there is no refuge in the apparently future-oriented vision of the nation-state, which like other nostalgic ideologies of unity such as *negritude* that Armah rejects, relies on a highly romanticized view of the past. Armah intends Anoa’s prophecy to metonymously articulate the development of African political and racial consciousness itself, which will become the inheritance of all of Black Africa through what the narrators call “our common captivity” (195). Racial difference, in Armah’s view, is yet another inheritance of the “white destroyers” and cannot be the basis of a future community unless first submitted to the ethic of reciprocity, a discussion I elaborate on below. If language and race cannot be the foundation of a viable and free African future, then the nation certainly cannot!

¹⁵ “Armah’s Histories” in *Critical Perspectives*, 269

In 2016, in a rare public appearance, Armah explained that in *Two Thousand Seasons*, he was interested in exploring the history of division, marking certain events that enshrined division into African culture's self-understanding, starting with the partition of land. Yet again, the Berlin conference forms the present absence of this core aspect of the chronicle-novel of balkanization. It is not until the arrival of the European "destroyers" by sea that territorial partition is introduced, when "one man tried to run land into something cut apart and owned. It was asked what next the greedy would think to own – the air?" (64).¹⁶ *Two Thousand Seasons* articulates the way in which this foundational partition and then each successive empire that sweeps through the Continent is also necessarily a temporal separation of the people of Anoa from the traditions which sustained them.

The partition of 1884 becomes a point of convergence of two systems of time, framed within the two voices of Anoa's prophecy. It carries with it the imposed calendar time of empire and at the same time, a process which unfolds over huge amounts of time, a quantity of time that is unthinkable in imperial epistemologies and must be conceived in the temporal category most relevant to African life: the two seasons of the year, wet and dry. Despite the system of calendrical time that is foisted upon Africa with the nation-state, it can never fully subsume this underlying and prevailing form of time. In its privileging of the cyclical time of natural seasons, Armah's chronicle, therefore, untells the story of the nation-state, which his critics like Achebe cannot stand.

Armah's critique of Ghana's failed socialist revolution, the way it seemed to lay the blame for the coup at Nkrumah's feet, seemed also to naturalize the disunity of Africa on the

¹⁶ Morehouse College, "Global Conversations with Dr. Ayi Kwei Armah," The bottling and selling of clean African air becomes a resounding chorus in postcolonial African fiction of this era, appearing somewhat prominently in Ngugi wa Thiongo's *Devil on the Cross* (1980).

basis of some inescapable element of human nature – what Achebe called the “human condition” – while simultaneously promising some hazy, ostensibly ahistorical, symbolism from Africa’s precolonial past as an antidote to the despair.¹⁷ Achebe’s claims tend to orbit around what he characterizes as Armah’s universalism which avoids the particularity of African existence for a watered-down humanism that is little more than an extension of what he calls “colonial criticism” that insists on Africa as a site of this universal human experience that tries to sidestep issues of race and inequality, a critique which Armah counters is rooted in Eurocentric skepticism and not critical analysis.¹⁸

One issue with what can be called the Euro-universalist interpretation of Armah’s work is that the symbol at the end of *Beautiful Ones*, which Achebe took great exception to, was actually not fictive – Armah really did see a bus with a sign that read “The Beautiful Ones are not yet Born” on the side of it in Takoradi. Defending himself from the accusations of such banal universalism, Armah explained:

the phrase 'The Beautiful One' is ancient, at least five thousand years old. To professional Egyptologists, it is a praise name for a central figure in Ancient Egyptian culture, the

¹⁷ Indeed, Achebe’s primary gripe with Armah’s earlier work, *The Beautiful Ones*, was likewise that it was “Sick, not with the sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the human condition” and thus did not attend to the particularities of Ghana in a meaningful or sincere way (Achebe, *Africa and her writers*, 624). Achebe admits that his negative response to *The Beautiful Ones* mostly arose from the popular discourse surrounding Nkrumah shortly after the coup: “At that point, you know, the Western world was so anti-Nkrumah. And I saw in Armah’s book a number of flaws, including a sneaking attack on Nkrumah.” (Interview, 279). Other early critics insisted that Armah’s forceful critiques of African nationalism meant he had abdicated or rejected his African identity in exchange for Western exile, which Armah takes tremendous umbrage too, as ideologically informed by western racism. See especially Larson, *The Emergence of African Fiction* (1971). For Armah’s blistering response, see, “Larsony, or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction,” 1-4.

¹⁸ See Achebe, “Colonialist Criticism” and Armah, “Introduction” in *The Beautiful Ones* for the full tête-à-tête. Achebe initially said he was holding Armah accountable for overburdening Ghana with too much “foreign metaphor” in the form of scatological references, when really he was simply ideologically invested in the structures which Armah was critiquing. Achebe’s feigned surprise that Armah would find such labels as “alienated native” abusive and take exception notwithstanding, he rarely comments on Armah’s work in anything other than a moralizing vein, which and shows an offended sensibility rather than a critical perspective. At the end of the day, Achebe cannot be said to be commenting in good faith because it *is* in fact possible to critique Nkrumah (and Tito, and every socialist leader) from the Left regardless of Western discourse, and this is what Armah was intent on showing – the failures he represents are not held to Western criteria and judgments but the way in which the socialist leaders literally sold out the revolutions and their people in their respective countries when centering Africa as the analytic perspective.

dismembered and remembered Osiris, a sorrowful reminder of our human vulnerability to division, fragmentation and degeneration, and at the same time a symbol of our equally human capacity for unity, cooperative action, and creative regeneration.¹⁹

Thus, the image at the end is not ahistorical as it appears – it has simply been lost to history, or at least, the history accessible to critics of African literature who could not ascertain the “provenance of the concept and image of the beautiful ones.”²⁰

Despite the nominally socialist positions of many of the early African states, they could neither offer real social unity based on a stolen and lost history nor defend themselves against the depredations of neocolonial interests as demonstrated by the overnight collapse of Nkrumah’s government. Seen from the vantage of the initiates of “the way,” the nation was never a vessel of liberation but merely another clever trick in the vast repertoire of the imperial destroyers, another tool of division and not of unity. Achebe took umbrage with *Seasons*’ depiction of African complicity in the history of oppression and dismissed the novel “unacceptable on the basis of fact, and on the basis of art. The work is ponderous and heavy and wooden, almost embarrassing in its heaviness.”²¹ But if anything, the work is relentlessly factual, it simply weaves a different constellation of facts than that summoned by the nation, which Achebe was ideologically opposed to.

In this way, *Seasons*’ historiographic methodology opposes a specifically Ghanaian

¹⁹ Armah, “Introduction” in *The Beautiful Ones*.

²⁰ Ibid. Here as in his novels post-*Seasons*, Armah hints at a sneaking sense that Egypt has become a font of racial pride and a well-spring of African culture and technology. This ethno-mythological thinking is most noticeable in Armah’s latest works like *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT: The House of Life* (2002) which have received very little critical attention, likely because of the nearly conspiratorial historicism that they evoke (see Sougou, “Armah’s Politics in *Osiris Rising*”). While Armah has certainly not endorsed or proposed anything like the Egyptomania among African-American subcultures in the early 20th century or the growing popularity of “hotep” culture among Black supremacist movements like the Black Hebrew Israelites, which syncretize pre-colonial African history, such as it is, with Judeo-Christian myth to explain how they are God’s actual “chosen people,” these resonances seem to increase in frequency and intensity even if they are present in his earlier work. In Armah’s first novel to a limited extent. A further study of Armah’s later works would be necessary to evaluate the historical systems deployed there as opposed to those in *Two Thousand Seasons* or *The Healers* (1978) or those in other Egyptocentric Black identitarian movements but is beyond my scope here.

²¹ Achebe and Nwachurwu-Agbada, “Interview with Achebe,” 279.

ethnogenesis, intentionally eschewing a genetic account of the Akan – or Fante or Ashanti – people’s origin for a mythopoetic one. The we-chroniclers call this “the search for paths to that necessary beginning” (149) which might finally bring about a “beginning to destruction’s destruction” which has characterized African history through the present. This vocation seeks to transcend the artistic and philosophical limitations encountered in Armah’s earlier novels, which were concerned with the failure of individual *bildung*, of the impossibility for the self-conscious individual to reconcile the aporias of the modern state in Africa. The vocation of the artist is to compile a work that can give voice to the dual narratives of division and regeneration using real and imagined historical referents, to make clear the “constellation” of history that sees both catastrophe and its final end.²²

Unlike Ivo Andrić’s chronicle novel *Bridge on the Drina*, which was praised for its synthesis of fiction and history,²³ *Seasons* was criticized for deviating too widely from historical facts in seeking to write a fictional origin of the people of Anoa.²⁴ *Seasons* is most generically similar to *Drina* in the way that it seeks out what I will later elaborate on as Walter Benjamin’s “*ursprung*” of division that culminates in the partition of the African continent and its territorialization through the nation-state apparatus. Like *Bridge on the Drina*, it is obsessed with the way these foundational divisions mirror onto partitions of the land and seeks to catalogue the

²² In his essay “Masks and Marx,” Armah writes “As far back as our written and unwritten records go, it has been the prime destiny of the serious African artist to combine the craft of creativity with the search for regenerative values. To this neo-colonial day, the best African artists are obsessed with the philosophy and history of our people, with our values and how we express or betray them in our present lives, with how we strengthen or betray them in our planning for the future” (95).

²³ Nicolas Moravcevic reinforces this point forcefully arguing “Andrić deliberately does not differentiate between his people’s factual and legendary heritage” (Moravcevic, “Ivo Andrić and the Quintessence of Time,” 316).

²⁴ Armah’s work is “misanthropic” and “sick” according to Ben Obumsele. See Obumsele, “Marx, Politics, and the African Novel,” 115. Even Ama Aidoo Ata, whose relatively sympathetic reading of the novel echoes many of the concerns she herself fronts in her plays *Anowa* and *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, chides Armah in the preface to the American edition of *The Beautiful Ones* for eliding “whatever is beautiful and genuinely pleasing in Ghana or about Ghanaians” (xii). Armah has been fiercely private since his first publication, but Ode Ogede argues if it were not for the acerbic critiques of Armah’s early works by the likes of Achebe and Charles Larson, we likely would never have heard from him at all (Ogede, “On Literary Essays of Ayi Kwei Armah,” 439).

many sources of present crises in the arc of history as narrated by a local yet deeply informed, nearly prescient, chronicler. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the Janus-faced “we-chroniclers” look back into the past so that they can speak to the possibility of a future, much like Walter Benjamin’s description of the “angel of history” who is buffeted forward against her will by the winds of “progress,” but who can see nothing but the rubble of history – one giant catastrophe.²⁵

And yet, Benjamin’s notion of the *jetztzeit* contains the messianic potential of every present moment: the “now-time” stands as an invective, a recurrent judgment day engendered in the total catastrophe of history, because of the incipient potential for things to change in the flash of an eye while seeming to remain exactly as they are. This view of history is crystalized in the potentiality for a rupture in time as a “tiger’s leap” into the past. I suggest that the two-voices of Anoa, like the Janus-faced we-chroniclers, also voice a *gleich-zeit*, a “same-time,” speaking to the synchronic simultaneity of history’s future extension – the precise trajectory of the tiger’s “elegant leap” in Soyinka’s turn of phrase.²⁶

Seasons differs structurally from *Drina* in two primary ways: first, in place of *Drina*’s “master chronicler,” *Seasons* theorizes its collective we-chronicler as emanating from an artistic community rooted in an ethic of resistance that it advances even metafictionally as a solution to the disintegration of hope in the condition of postcoloniality; and second, that unlike the eschatological purpose of narrative in *Drina* to function as a *katechon*, the artistic community of *Seasons* welcomes the end of time and despite its pessimistic tone bears hope for a heretical

²⁵ Benjamin, “Theses,” 256.

²⁶ The word *gleich* meaning equal or same appears numerous times in the constellative view of history Benjamin proposes to indicate dialectical synchronicity: *zugleich* and *gleichzeitig*, meaning “at the same time” and “simultaneously,” notably appear in one of his most famous aphorisms “There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism” (Thesis VII), and later, “On the first evening of fighting it turned out that the clocks in towers were being fired on simultaneously and independently from several places in Paris” as though “in order to stop the day” (Thesis XV). As mentioned in the previous chapter on Davičo, Wole Soyinka famously declared his opposition to *negritude* by saying “the tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, you will know him by his elegant leap.”

regeneration in the as-yet formed community of future resistance, such as it is. The next section traces out these two differences more completely in terms of an initiation into the *fundi* of speech, which ultimately voices a prophecy of the end of history, of a coming fullness of time in which both voices of Anoa's prophecy will have been exhausted and the people of her prophecy returned to a new dispensation of reciprocity.

After Anoa: Initiation into Apocatastasis

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah sees the division of the land as an absurdity that could only be accepted by the people of Anoa because of a more fundamental division that they had allowed to infiltrate their midst, on the backs of the ostentatious cripples and their doctrines contained in the "miracle of belief" required by the "religion[s] of slaves," (201). In this case, the dualism of the white destroyers which arbitrarily introduced a division between mind and body, between spirit and cosmos, where none had previously existed seemed to permanently fracture the possibility of connectedness – not because of the insidious persistence of this dualism but because it was reinforced materially at all turns. The agenda of the Christian missionaries taught a model of neo-colonial extraction that mapped quite neatly onto that experience in the waning years of the 20th century: "there was far greater profit in keeping the victims of the trade here on our own land, having the kings and their courtiers use them to mine and grow whatever the whites need, then offering the product to the white destroyers, the kings and courtiers getting gifts in return" (163).

The eschatological foundation brought by the missionaries to the continent is an end to the African people, a formula for bolstering oppressive governing structures designed to perpetuate what Sebastian Mahfood calls "an at-home diaspora."²⁷ The violence against the

²⁷ Mahfood, *Radical Eschatologies*, 188.

people of Anoa will be attenuated to the point of near imperceptibility – this too is a tactic of the destroyers to position themselves as victims of reaction rather than as instigators and continued beneficiaries of Africa’s destruction. Only narratives attuned to the multifarious techniques of destruction, what amount to the secret esoteric histories of the adept, in Armah’s view, will be suited to turn them against their masters.

Armah’s vision rests on the need for an artistic community that knows the history of its survival and the arts that sustained it throughout those historic onslaughts, and which is capable of maintaining that art through successive generations until the end of time or some new world when the two thousand seasons have passed, and Anoa’s prophecy has been fulfilled. In *Seasons*, this is represented by the *fundi* of speech, led by the teacher Isanusi, in whom lies the preservation of the art of clarity and truthful persuasion, rather than the greed-motivated sophistry demonstrated by the missionary-influenced counselors and friends of king Koranche. Isanusi embodies the ancestral stories of oral tradition and knowledge, descending from the original *fundi* of speech, Anoa, which he will pass down to the students who successfully complete the rite of initiation and join the *fundi*.

After the prophecy of Anoa and the subsequent migration across the desert, the narrative traces the social development of the group over subsequent generations, including a long section on the sexual depravities introduced by the first wave of “destroyers” in the Arabic incursion into Africa. Most of the narrative coalesces around the time of the arrival of European missionaries and slavers. The poison of whiteness, fed to the people by the corrupt king, himself plied by all manner of indulgences by the missionaries and colonial administrators, convinced them of their inferiority and the superiority of their oppressors and their false faiths. This especially entailed

the disruption of the *fundi* of speech, which presented the greatest threat to the corrupt regime because it was able to pierce through the veil of lies of the king and his foreign sponsors.

The last *fundi* of speech, the wise Isanusi, realizes the full extent of the king's corruption when Koranche's participation in the slave trade is uncovered after he sold a number of the *fundi* of speech to European slavers. From this point on, he goes into hiding, organizing the remaining members of the *fundi* and those who were able to escape the slave ships with a combination of cultural education, passing down the old oral tradition which the *fundi* was responsible for embodying and physical training. Isanusi shapes this cultural resistance into a guerilla force to attack Koranche's castle, the stronghold of the white slavers, before being martyred by the king for his dissent.

It is ultimately Isanusi's students who avenge his betrayal and death and carry on the legacy of "the way" that he has helped to coax out of the oral history that he embodies to the purpose of liberty and the destruction of the white destroyers. It is at the end of the novel that the we-chroniclers reveal themselves to be the inheritors and secret initiates of Isanusi as the now-underground *fundi* of speech, forced into hiding by the dead king Koranche's son Bentum, who remember and re-recite Anoa's utterance in order to promulgate the regeneration of "the way of reciprocity." *Two Thousand Seasons* is ultimately an unfinished chronicle: the revolution against Koranche that concludes the narrative finishes in the four hundredth season, meaning that only two hundred years of the foretold thousand years of torment have elapsed. A full 800 remain.

Therefore, with Ato Sekyi-Otu, I suggest the simple reading of *Two Thousand Seasons* as governed by the Benjaminian "messianic triad" of "origin, fall, and redemption" fails to adequately attend to the nuances of the work's philosophy of history and the mystical initiation into an ethic of reciprocity that it propounds, which is categorically against the possibility of a

return to origins at the end of time, seeing it as pure nostalgia and a tool of the white destroyers.²⁸ When read as a future-oriented chronicle demarking the faint line between apocalypse and apocatastasis, that is, between total desolation and a stubborn, heretical hope for regeneration, rather than as a historical novel aiming to accurately render the past, *Two Thousand Seasons* articulates the limits of liberation that emerge as a result of partition and the total territorialization of the world under the aegis of the nation-state form. As discussed above, Armah's fictive chronicle attempts to recover what has been lost to history in order to redeem a future that is only barely possible, latent only negatively, in the dialectical fact of continued resistance to oppression and annihilation.

If two thousand seasons of apocalypse have already befallen the people of Anoa, then logically all that remains of the "end of the time" is regeneration, a recovery of lost connection through new expressions that voice a shared history of annihilation, a recovery of the lost arts of speech if not the precise content of ancient speech acts. Since there is no messianic potential in history, liberation – secular redemption – rests not in return but in the use of history to animate new stories that speak to the ethic of reciprocity, "the way" that will open history to its own end in the present dispensation. Resisting the tendency of religious eschatology to link apocalypse with the moment of creation, as a teleological fulfillment of creation at the end of time, Armah instead argues that the condition of continued resistance seeds the heretical possibility of apocatastasis – regeneration – of the ancient "way of reciprocity." This is not a return to some

²⁸ See Sekyi-Otu "Anoa," 192. For further analysis of this "messianic triad" in Benjamin's work, see Wolhfarth, "Messianic Structure," 148-212.

nostalgic “Edenic” time that has been irreparably lost but a call to the violent creation of a new path and a new future in the face of centuries of dehumanization and destruction.²⁹

This regeneration, then, cannot take place in the etiological time of ancient African systems and structures, which have been lost and submitted to innumerable distortions so as to make the truth unrecoverable: “How the very first of us lived, of that ultimate origin we have had unnumbered thoughts and more mere fables passed down to us from those gone before, but of none of this has any of us been told it was sure knowledge. We have not found that lying trick to our taste, the trick of making up sure knowledge of things possible to think of, things possible to wonder about but impossible to know in any such ultimate way” (3). *Seasons* does not propound an actual, historical origin and a continuity of tradition such as archaeological discovery might entail.

Rather, it is the regeneration of the ethic of reciprocity through resistance, driven by the never-ceasing counter-narratives and counter-actions, what the narrators identify as the “search for paths to that necessary beginning,” created to contest the forces of depredation and death that enshrine themselves in the ideologies and actions of the white invaders which continue to devastate the Continent into the present (149). This “necessary beginning” is the only path toward the reciprocal “necessary” end which history’s catastrophe demands. Armah entertains an almost mystical belief in an initiation into a tradition of artistic creation that becomes the bulwark of cultural resistance to whatever new technology of oppression Africa will encounter. *Two Thousand Seasons* is one such utterance, a chronicle of past struggles that stem from a fundamental partition which provide the grounds for their own transcendence, both inner

²⁹ As Amar Guendouzi points out, this is also an attempt to evade the messianism of the cult of hero/personality worship which seemed to dominate the landscape of liberation movements in the 20th century, not only on the African continent (“Revolution, Evolution,” 568).

enlightenment through historically-rooted artistic creation and outer liberation through a revolution of the initiated.

On the one hand, Armah's antagonism to Christianity, indeed to any faith of the book, might discommend a reading so rooted in theological terms like apocatastasis, but the millenarian tone of *Two Thousand Seasons* cannot be ignored nor was Armah ignorant of the discursive weight of these ideas in it or any of his other works.³⁰ Yet, Armah seems to revel in his controversial status as a modern "heretic," the most contentions of the Continent's midcentury writers. What's more, the apocatastatic character of Armah's epic chronicle does not entail the arrival of a salvific figure nor the atavistic promise of an experience of a system of reciprocity and regeneration such as what existed before the onslaughts of a millennium of colonialism.

Just as much the cultural mandate to remember forces them to look backwards, the we-chroniclers speak with two mouths, pointing to the burden of history that bears ever upon the present *jetztzeit*, and the simultaneous extension of *gleichzeit* as a stubborn, unashamed heretical belief in the possibility of restoration that lingers *within* the ever-present threat of extermination. The secret knowledge passed from Isanusi to the last *fundi*, the we-chroniclers, in the ritual of initiation demonstrates the cultural precocity to create a tradition which can sustain and nurture the spirit of resistance that supererogates the abortive revolutions of the midcentury.

Despite this concern for social unity, the collectivity founded upon reciprocity does not mean Armah has, with *Two Thousand Seasons*, relinquished his interest in the role of the individual, especially of the intellectual, in African society. The restoration of the *fundi* of

³⁰ See Guendouzi, "Salvation History in *Two Thousand Seasons*," and Mahfood, *Radical Eschatologies* for further elaboration of these themes in Armah's work. Ato Sekyi-Otu invests no small amount of value in Armah's eschatological foundations in *Left Universalism* as a basis for the ethic of communalism which he propounds.

speech, which emerged organically from the natural division of skilled labor according to one's faculties in the pre-exodus time of the ancestors, constitutes the central plot of *Two Thousand Seasons*, as Isanusi is responsible for re-forming the collective of thinkers, philosophers, historians, teachers, and orators eager to respond to the violence and degradation of slavery and colonialism whose ranks were decimated by the slow corruption of the royal line and the eventual participation in the chattel slave trade. With this recovery, in which candidates must undergo an initiation ritual of ego death, symbolic (and consummated) fertility rite and eventually creative transcendence, the "speech-makers" of the *fundi* are inducted into the mysteries of restoration, into a community that challenges destruction with creation as though it were a historical conspiracy.³¹

These students become the plural we-chroniclers after their initiation, as a kind of metafictional device to clue the reader in to what such an artistic vision looks like, with *Two Thousand Seasons* being the inaugural chronicle of remembrance which is oriented towards future resistance. Prior to their initiation, candidates were able to train in any of the offered *fundi*; those who sought entry into the *fundi* of speech were tested by Isanusi, who asked the candidate-adepts: "what was it we desired to do, and why we desired to do it now - whether it was mere rage of vengeance animating us, or a clearer vision beyond that" to which they reply that their intention is to work against the forces of destruction, to resist the invading destroyers with their art and bodies (155).

³¹ With this, Armah suggests that such a creative community, which he clearly hoped to continue with his publishing house, Per Ankh, established after the publication of *Seasons*, produces a microcosm of communalism where such the African intellectual can learn to speak collectively, while still valuing individual will and desire. As I mention above, this also hints at a certain Egyptocentrism in Armah's recent thinking. According to the website, Per Ankh is advancing "a model of social construction in which power is sought for sharing, knowledge for transmission, and the purpose of work is the peaceful exchange of knowledge and wealth in an egalitarian society. In the writings of the ancient tradition, this slower ethos working against chaos is called Maât. It implies a commitment to justice, reciprocity and the peaceful, intelligent sharing of resources." (<https://stores.bbkwan.com/>).

Armah continues to outline the historical dimensions of the conspiracy they find themselves imbricated in: “[Isanusi] was again anxious to know if we no knew it clearly in our minds that we ourselves would not outlive the white blight; if we knew no one now working, living against destruction could be sure of any sweet decline into a natural end to life; if we knew clearly that in the glare of the white destroyers' power it was parasites, not creators, who found long lives to live?” (ibid). The millenarian vision of Isanusi and the *fundi* of speech is subject to the prophecy of Anoa and the vast time of tribulation that the people of the prophecy would experience – their work then is to produce a cultural legacy that can finally stand up to the seemingly-perpetual power of the parasitic white destroyers, who vampire-like, extend their lives unnaturally at the expense of the African lives.

“Initiation processes,” argues Khondo Mtshali “prepare young individuals to be incorporated into the world.”³² Prior to their initiation into the *fundi* of speech, the candidates incorrectly viewed Isanusi as one who would “bring [the way] back to an oblivious people” rather than, as his name suggests, one who “smells out” new paths to the way.³³ Still children, they operate under a paternalistic world view that sees in the mystical sage a messianic figure who will bring back redemption rather than as a herald to the path against destruction. This leads them to want to join the *fundi* for the wrong reasons, as seekers of a secret tradition with positive answers, rather than, as Isanusi prompts with his questions, as those who are intent on forging the “way of creation.” At this point, “the masters began to speak in riddles deliberately pitched beyond our age, riddles easy to remember for their sound, hard to understand for their meaning. They talked of an imminence of an initiation beyond all initiations” (86). It was only after this

³² “Gods, Ancestors, and Hermeneutics of Liberation,” 185.

³³ In the Nguni language of the Zulu and Xhosa people, Isanusi is the name or title given to healers and diviners, etymologically related to the word smell as in “smell out,” in the sense of divining unseen qualities (Dictionary of South African English).

questioning process that they wandered “into the forbidden grove, the grove of sources,” the “fifth grove” where they met Isanusi (89).

This process of initiation takes many years tracking their growth from childhood to adolescence to puberty and finally to young adulthood, where they consummate their initiation with the “dance of love,” a fertility dance culminating in a sexual pairing-off of the members of the *fundi*, initiated by the choice of the women candidates. But because king Koranche had forcibly paired his son Bentum with the most beautiful of the candidates, Abena, instead of finding places pair off in, the entire *fundi* makes way for the fifth grove in secret to confer with Isanusi. This act of communal unity and rebellion against the pronouncements of the king prompts the final initiation, which was hidden behind the veils and riddles of each step of the initiatic process but would not culminate until they had experienced the totalizing violence of slavery: “all these veils hid parts of the truth from us. It was not till the veil of the final initiation had been torn - a terrible tearing - that understanding broke in on our violated soul. Then it was that uncomprehended stories, senseless fragments, joined other pieces from which they had been forced apart and the truth of our lives was whole - a terrible wholeness” (87).

In *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*, Mircea Eliade lays out the basic patterns of initiation as: group puberty rites, entrance into secret cults, shamanic instruction, individual visions, and heroic rites of passage.³⁴ The initiation into the *fundi* of speech in the secret fifth grove marks each of these in symbolic or literal form. All lessons of this initiation are images taken from the history of the Anoen people, coming from their mythic past in the symbolism of water in the desert, with which we will conclude our discussion, to the “modern” past of collaboration with a devious and underhanded white threat, are symbolically reenacted in the ritual space of the secret

³⁴ Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation*.

grove except for the final one. The heroic rite of passage emerges when Koranche discovers their rebellion and sells them into slavery, at which point they must put their training to practice to not only escape but to free their fellow captives and kill their slavers, a creative practice that becomes the symbol for the emergent community of resistance that will need to spread throughout the whole Continent in order to fulfill Anoa's prophecy of two thousand seasons. In this way, they prefigure what Armah will articulate as the community of reciprocity that will reintegrate the artificial partition of the land and people through a secret tradition of resistance.

The Arrested *Bildung* of the African State: Disappointment of a "been-to"

The rite of initiation into the *fundi* of speech is *Seasons*' analogic response to the interrupted *bildung* of Armah's earlier novels, what Wright called "a microcosm for the whole African historical experience": no longer does the individual allegorize the problems of the postcolonial nation – here the "nation" represents the entire Continent!³⁵ I will briefly discuss Armah's early novels in order to understand the position that *Seasons* occupies as mediating the earlier anger at the oppressive inheritance of partition to a latent, secretive initiation into optimism and what Sekyi-Otu calls "ethical communalism" which drives Armah's ethic of reciprocity to find the path towards an answer to the question "what are our future options?"³⁶ Armah's first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, set in his home town of Sekondi-Takoradi, is an existentialist novel of profound angst that follows a year in the life of an unnamed railway clerk whose alienation from the post-independence regime in Ghana places him at spiritual odds with his environment and everyone around him. His conscience does not allow him to accept the routine bribes that his colleagues accept without second thought and puts him at an economic disadvantage in spite of his decent job.

³⁵ Wright, "Ayi Kwei Armah," 37.

³⁶ Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism*, 94.

Unable to get ahead in an honest manner, the man runs into an old friend from English boarding school, now a prominent politician in Nkrumah's government, who tries to convince him to sign some papers masking an illegal money-laundering scheme for a tidy profit. The man almost caves to the pressure of his wife, who is tired of living below the means of her friends. before refusing to sign the papers, so she does so in his place. Shortly after, while on a state visit to Vietnam, Nkrumah's government was overthrown and his ministers arrested. Overnight, it seems, the masses have suddenly switched sides and collectively express a sigh of relief that the decadence and excess of the Nkrumah regime, which they had sworn undying loyalty for the day before, were finally over. The man returns from work that night to find his old politician friend cowering in his home, and he smuggles him out of their house and to exile through the open latrine, in a scene that is as disgusting as it is humorous. This work demonstrates Armah's initial concern with the corruption and unscrupulousness of the nascent nationalist movement, a problem of moral weakness amongst its leaders, who are as prone to corruption and unscrupulous dealings as were their predecessors during the colonial incursion, all too happy to secure their own positions through graft or at the expense of the masses they were elected to serve. It is powerfully written, though clearly not the most mature of his political thought.

The angst and disappointment that emerges from the failure of the African nation-state also drives Armah's second and third novels, *Fragments* (1970) and *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), which are like the quiet existentialist novels of Sartre or Camus. In both, the protagonist is an artist, quiet and removed from the busy, avaricious environment of his social background. *Fragments* perhaps most closely mirrors Armah's own biography, in which the stifled screenwriter for Ghanavision, Baako Onipa a "been-to" who has studied in America, is burdened

by his family's expectations as an "intermediary" between the land of the living and the land of the ancestors, "the bringer of good things from beyond."³⁷

Disgusted with the Western-inspired materialism and moral decay that is actively subverting the traditional values of the past, represented by his blind, mystic grandmother Naana, Baako falls in love with Juana, a Puerto Rican psychiatrist, who attempts to heal him through a nervous collapse after which his family has him institutionalized. After this, Armah's next two novels, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* depart from the post-independence setting and represent his historical investigation into the sources of the corruption, failure and disappointment that he identified in his earlier work. In *Seasons*, as we will see, the work of the artist is no longer problematized, the artist is no longer torn between the old and the new modes of life, as though Armah had settled on the vocation of the African artist in the era of disappointment as one that strengthens communal ties by embodying a lost art of collective wisdom for the alienated times of the late 20th century.

The significance of the *bildungsroman* as a discursive analog of the African intellectual both in cultural and economic terms superseded by the later postcolonial canon which was deeply critical of this possibility is a development that has been well-explicated in literary history.³⁸ One reason the novel was such an ideal form for the modern, bourgeois (European)

³⁷ Armah, *Fragments*, 227. In *Fragments*, Armah writes: "The been-to here then only fleshes out the pattern. He is the ghost in person returned to live among men, a powerful ghost understood to the extent that he behaves like a powerful ghost, cargo and all. Meets established, well-known expectations handsomely, *functions* like a ghost (look into Afro-American usage of word spook, also West Indian myth-clusters around the zombie idea), accepts the ghost role" (*Fragments*, 226). In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the narrators will often call the askaris, African servants who work for the imperial invaders, zombis.

³⁸ Most (in)famously, Frederic Jameson has argued (how hyperbolically has been disputed since its initial publication) that "Third-World texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic — necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" ("Third-World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism," 69; italics in original). Neil Lazarus echoes the claim arguing that one of the primary features of this genre (as evidenced, curiously, by Armah) is the Lukačsian "adventure of interiority" in "Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will," 156. Aijaz Ahmad refutes Jameson's dictum saying "postcolonial fiction need not engage obsessively with national allegory or the

nation is that it is suitable for capturing a kind of mythical development of subjectivity. It was capable of tracking, as Etienne Balibar says, “the history of nations” which are “always already presented to us in the form of a narrative which attributes to these entities the continuity of a subject.”³⁹ Peter Ribic shows that the genre of the *bildungsroman* – the novel of formation – is one concerned with “staging the integration of youthful heroes into a wider social organism,” a process that Franco Moretti characterized in the nineteenth-century European *bildungsroman*, the height of the genre, as one in which “one’s formation as an individual in and for oneself coincides without rifts with one’s social integration as a simple *part of a whole*.”⁴⁰

In *Spectral Nationality*, Pheng Cheah seizes on this notion of individual *bildung* operating in and against a social totality as one of the driving forces of national culture from its basis in eighteenth century German idealism to its application in post- and anticolonial discourse in the wake of African independence, calling it the root of a vitalist “organismic metaphor of the national body.”⁴¹ Cheah argues that the postcolonial statesmen and cultural elite of postcolonial nations operated under vitalist conceptions that the nation was like a living body aching for liberation and was to be out- or retro-fitted with “cybernetic prostheses” such as cultural production to combat the moribund or parasitic interests of neocolonial capital, regressive corruption, and the ill-fitting vestiture of the modern state. In this way, they were essentially reconciling the organicist vision of national vitality and cohesion – the integrity of the people or masses – with the ongoing crises they were experiencing as a result of uneven development and

nation,” which if inaccurate has the benefit of articulating the critical focus on the *bildungsroman* as the genre par excellence of (a particularly western strand of) scholarship on the African novel (*In Theory*, 92). See also Jed Esty’s *Unseasonable Youth* where he tracks the arc of 19th century notions of *bildung* in the modernist canon as replete with notions of virile vitality stemming in the psycho-social investments in the colonial project.

³⁹ Balibar, *Race Nation Class*, 86.

⁴⁰ Ribic, “*Bildung* or Development?” 136 and Moretti, *Way of the World*, 16.

⁴¹ Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 213.

the aftershocks of colonialism.⁴² In the transition from colonial dependency to postcolonial state, Cheah says, “the national struggle’s success depends on the popular organism’s ability to eradicate these prostheses, or to appropriate them so that they can be put in the service of its life.”⁴³

In a sense, Cheah is correct to suggest that this vitalist ontology fails from the outset to do the work of national *bildung*, of culture’s political vocation to transform the masses into “a self-generating whole that approximates or actualizes the ideal of freedom.”⁴⁴ But that is not because of the vitalist ideological underpinnings of national *bildung*, which were somehow subverted by their inability to be converted into material gains for the masses, but I suggest, because the unquestioned center of the postcolonial movement was by necessity that of nationalism itself, propped up by racialized notions of ethnicity as the autochthonic expressions of territoriality of an ancestral homeland.⁴⁵ The question was not the misfit of “bad prostheses” that could not sustain actual national development but rather the perception that there were no other forms of sovereignty available to them other than the nation-form that were not being both actively subverted and structurally reinforced: the body itself was doomed before the first “prosthetic” was fit. It is not simply that the African nationalists inherited a state and built a nation – they inherited the very form of the nation too.⁴⁶

⁴² Ibid., 209.

⁴³ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁴ Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 235.

⁴⁵ Anthony Smith offers a useful history of the modern use of the deeply-ambiguous Greek term *ethne* and the Latin term *natio* which have become the basis for the most insidious of political formations, “ethno-state,” a synthesis of 19th century ideologies of nationalism fused with the mid-century political atmosphere of independence, including the creation of the Jewish “homeland” out of British colony of Palestine in 1948. Smith remarks that the study of ethnicity is as much the purview of cultural studies as political science since it is a narrative of no inherent fixed meaning and is deployed as a cultural narrative of cohesion in typically contested territories. See “Ethnicity and Nationalism.”

⁴⁶ Would that I could take credit for such insights, which are, as ever, better and more forcefully advanced by Tejumola Olaniyan in “Introduction: State and Culture in Africa: The Possibilities of Strangeness,” 3–4. Olaniyan calls the precedence of the state over the nation in Africa a form of “inverted development” wherein “state structure and authority—coercively imposed by foreigners—preceded the nation conceived as an imagined

Armah's very first novels operate from this assumption and starting point – not even a decade in and the promises of postcolonial independence, liberation, and autonomy expressed through *nationalism* and not simply through the state, were already impossible, a “riftless” integration like Moretti described between the individual and the nation and the nation itself nothing more than a fantasy of 19th century literature. This is not because of the organicist nature of the ill-fitting prostheses required to produce a unified national cultural but because of the literal plundering that was taking place by the comprador bourgeoisie and their foreign financiers which prevented any real investment in the material basis of national cohesion. Armah suggests that, *pace* Cheah, the postcolonial state was not nearly vitalist enough!⁴⁷ Armah's early works feature the very same kind of “dualistic” *bildung* that Ribic identified as riveted by a fundamental opposition: on the one hand, nationalist allegory and on the other, the (stunted) organismic development of the state which operate in contradiction, as the fundamental rift which the postcolonial *bildungsroman* formally registers as a failure – in Armah's case manifested in the journey through the river of shit.⁴⁸

In the period of balkanization under consideration, the articulation of a continuous subjectivity – of a balkanized region and people – is a futile project. *Beautiful Ones* reaches this conclusion at the end, when instead of welcoming a new political era, and a neat psychological and narratological arc of *bildung* for the unnamed narrator, we see an abrupt break in the political and social order with the overthrow of Nkrumah and the overnight shift in support of the new government. The last breath of the novel is not hope but a sigh of despondency: “the never-

community with more than less shared cultural traditions and worldview” (ibid). I add only that the nation already contained elements of culture that were rooted in insoluble division as well, in spite of the obviously arbitrary and recent nature of the nation-form's ascendance in Africa.

⁴⁷ Achille Mbembe's concept of “necropolitics” taken from his theorization of the concept of sovereignty in afropessimism would very much affirm this critique, if not necessarily opting for a stronger vitalism to negate it as does Armah. See Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” 11-40.

⁴⁸ Ribic, *Bildung*, 139.

ending knowledge that this aching emptiness would be all that the remainder of his own life could offer him.”⁴⁹ This signals to the narrator not a possibility of linear progress, of a development that can reconcile the contradictions that surround him which plague him and alienate him from his surroundings, but the continuing regime of the same, the same irreconcilable forms of life with new figures profiting from them, in other words, an absolute effacement of historical difference.

For Armah, this realization of the formal incoherence of the postcolonial *bildungsroman*, requires a new form, and a new time scale to accompany it. And so, once Armah has exhausted the possibility of narrative *bildung*, and thus of a narrative resolution of the contradicting forces at play at the national level – rifts in the form of open sewers quite literally dividing the classes of Ghana – he moves on to ever more fragmentary forms, including the novel *Fragments*, until arriving at an epic of seasonal cycles, a chronicle of a millennium suffered under imperial hegemony. First we will briefly discuss the breakdown of *bildung* across his early fiction before turning to the experiment in genre and form that is *Seasons* where Armah attempts to resolve this arc of individual *bildung*, and thus by extension a notion of national *bildung* that so clearly accompanies it, with an antidote to the metonymy of the artist-hero of African fiction as stand-in for the nation, by supplementing the individual transformative arc of man in and against his world with the multiple and temporally disunited figures of the voices of this epic chronicle: a community of artists united in their common struggle against destruction.

⁴⁹ *Beautiful Ones*, 215. Neil Lazarus reads this bleak ending of *The Beautiful Ones* as a hopeful one, suggesting that because the man elects to return home out of sheer necessity, because nothing can change in Ghana, an individual stance of defiance marks the way forward to liberation (“Pessimism,” 185) but this seems implausible (liberation where? For whom?) and does not account for the pessimistic exhalation of the novel’s last sentence when the man cogitates on “the never-ending knowledge that this aching emptiness would be all that the remainder of his own life could offer him. He walked very slowly, going home” (Armah, *Beautiful Ones*, 180). Yet again, Armah depicts a return journey that is suspended in time, a structurally incomplete *nostos*.

The Heresy of Regeneration on the African Continent

The unresolved kernel of contradiction that Armah's early novels face can be summed up in the self-critical reticence to overestimate the ways that cultural transmission can bring about political and social change in Africa while still recognizing the crucial role of cultural transformation in shaping the educational landscape, which in this era takes especially nationalistic terms, with which the African intellectual is so often entrusted. Failure to rise to this calling is tantamount to treason, or as in Baako's case, to a profound betrayal of one's very identity. As Armah himself discovered, regardless of one's actual political commitments or avowed intent, a poor reception of his representation of Ghana was enough to write him off as not only a writer but an *African* writer as well.⁵⁰ Redemption is only ever one wrong move away from being permanently revoked. This perverse notion of a rescindable redemption will ultimately be found in pretty much all of his work which is concerned with how the individual can be liberated with the myriad expectations that make possible such tenuous salvation and integration into social cohesion. In spite of its plurivocal narration and vast historical scope, *Two Thousand Seasons* is ultimately concerned with this same question of individuation, but this time shed of what Armah saw as the Eurocentric trappings of *bildung*, opting for recovery of the humanity and creative community stolen by colonialism rather than the progressive technical developmentalism of modernity.

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born begins in the time just before Passion Week. Sometimes called Holy Week, this is the time of year in the Christian calendar that commemorates the death and resurrection of God's chosen Messiah come to earth in human form. Even for Christianized Ghana, Armah is quick to point out that the primary point of

⁵⁰ Though unable to produce a citation, Achebe says "Armah is quoted somewhere as saying that he is not an African writer but just a writer" ("Africa and Her Writers," 626), which Armah categorically denies.

celebration during Passion Week for most Ghanaians is the extra paycheck that they receive which eases the burden of covering expenses for the month – an apt encapsulation of Ribic’s notion of dualistic *bildung* pulling the postcolonial protagonist in diametrically opposed directions of spiritual liberation and economic reality. Passion Week is the most eschatological of the Christian holidays: after the sacrificial execution of the Messiah figure, his resurrection and ascendance into Heaven are celebrated as promises of a Second Coming, of a return in which the injustices of the world, and especially those perpetrated upon Christians, are finally reckoned with, where evil is finally defeated and locked in hell for good, inaugurating a new millenarian reign where the Earth has shed its imperfect, fallen husk, has been reborn and transfigured into its final, perfected form in the sphere of the divine.⁵¹

It is telling that Armah opens his first novel in this symbolic time of Christian apocalypse and an extended meditation on profit, money and commodity exchange which circles the unnamed narrator’s thoughts as he is rudely roused from sleep by the bus driver who demands he pay his fare. In *Fragments*, Baako’s mother highlights that the “only sensible time is the first weekend after payday,” emphasizing the commodification of time and the triumph of consumerism it entails for modernizing Ghana.⁵² Armah shows a Ghana divided in two, ruled by the newly rich, the party fat cats that drive around in foreign cars, send their children to foreign schools, and indulge in foreign luxury consumables while preaching the ideals of African socialism; all the while, their neighbors live in squalor, in cities with open sewage running in the streets and rural villages left neglected and unincorporated into the bustle of development. In a stunning synopsis of the African world in this period, Armah’s unnamed narrator in *Beautiful*

⁵¹ There are many competing eschatological dispensations available to Christian theology, and this account accords with what predominantly Christian Ghana’s generally protestant evangelical doctrine might be, though naturally there would be a considerable degree of variation from church to church, much less between denominations.

⁵² Armah, *Fragments*, 131.

Ones describes the bus he takes to work as “held together by too much rust ever to fall completely apart.”⁵³

Yet in spite of this spiritual season of regeneration that frames the novel, Armah’s unnamed protagonist sees no such regeneration in the lives of those around him. Not even Passion Week and the promise of spiritual renewal that it holds for the devout can break the cycle of misery which confounds the people of Ghana and keeps them living through cycles of “debt and borrowing, borrowing and debt.”⁵⁴ The messianic hope of Passion Week, which promises not only the resurrection and return of a savior, but the collective resurrection of humanity in the earthly time of salvific return. However, in Ghana, even abstaining from the corruption of the comprador elites is not enough to grant the man a measure of solace, which his wife duly informs him is simply a part of how the system works, hardly even worth describing as corruption.

Yet the man’s refusal to acquiesce to these stifling social demands and at the same time the refusal of his wife to accommodate what he feels to be an ever more futile ethical resistance, produces a condition where it is no longer possible “to look with any hope at all at time.”⁵⁵ Jed Esty reads this as announcing “an unstable contest between the reconsolidated individual self and its insistently collective other, registering the pressure of history on the postcolonial subject and on the postcolonial novel.”⁵⁶ To a certain extent, as a reading especially of *The Beautiful Ones*, Esty’s argument that the inability to reconcile the individual self with the pressure of history, a failure of narrative *bildung* on the part of the protagonists of Armah’s early novels, speaks to the

⁵³ Armah, *The Beautiful Ones*, 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁶ Esty, “Excremental Postcolonialism,” 55.

curse of “developmental” progress, both for the nation and its national collectivity, and for the individual subject forced to exercise subjectivity in such terrain.

Juana, in *Fragments*, assents to as much when she meditates on her youth while walking by the sea, nostalgic for a romanticized past that she unconsciously realizes she did not actually experience. She reflects on “a time when youth was not something one lived through, not just a defeated thought, but the hope of constant regeneration, the daring to reach out to a new world. Life then had taken its color from the brilliance of an always imminent apocalypse.”⁵⁷ But the lost time of youth, of the possibility for a new world taken place in the glow of the political apocalypse of the independence movements in Africa, is replaced by a new form of time, one which only wizened Naana can discern, and then only at the threshold of death, in the last, mystical chapter when she perceived that Baako crumbled under the pressure of others’ “heavy dreams and hopes filled with the mass of things here and of this time.”⁵⁸ “This time” is a deviation from the old ways that Naana still embodied up to her death and is represented in the novel by the ubiquitous presence of mass-produced marketing calendars plastered on every surface in the city advertising skin whitening cream, suggesting a neocolonial victory that subjugates time not only to the hopeless and despair of cycles of debt and borrowing, but to the racialized regime of European “calendar” time, where it is measured not in seasons, months or years but in the successful intervals of skin whitening.

The narrative of *bildung* attempts to reckon with the subsumption of the old ways into new perverse rituals by featuring a kind of mystical device that speaks from the authority of tradition: Naana prays for her grandson Baako to return from his studies as a “been-to,” not as a broken “ghost in an overturned world in which all human flesh was white” but as a traveler who

⁵⁷ Armah, *Fragments*, 52

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.

artfully bears the hopes of his people, his family, his nation.⁵⁹ He stepped into the time of the ancestors when he went abroad, as a traveler into the vast world beyond the local borders, but he was not suited for “this time” because he was “thrown into the world in haste, like forced seed.”⁶⁰ The arc of *bildung*, we see, is stunted from the outset by a regime of time that did not adequately incubate the necessary germ of individual development and thus is described as medically aberrant. When his family realizes that, unlike most been-tos, Baako has no interest in joining the civil service and the ranks of the Ghanaian urban elite, they have him institutionalized. His dissent so contradicts the logic of the postcolonial status of such figures and the time they are seen to embody, that they cannot risk allowing him to harm the family through inaction and failure under these new criteria. Juana is unable to rescue him from the abyss of despair despite her background in psychiatry because she herself had “never conquered hers”: “She searched in herself for something that might make sense, but there was nothing she could herself believe in, nothing that wouldn’t just be the high flight of the individual alone, escaping the touch of life around him. That way she knew there was only annihilation.”⁶¹

During Baako’s nervous breakdown, he fixates on “cargo cults”⁶² which become an overarching and overdetermining historical symbol rife with sinister meaning in which they enshrine the systemic and totalizing, near monadistic, quality of division that pervades the modern world: “The most impressive thing in the system is the wall-like acceptance of the

⁵⁹ Armah, *Fragments*, 24.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 283.

⁶¹ Ibid., 271-72.

⁶² A cargo cult is a complex and loaded term to refer to a system of belief, largely indigenous to Melanesian people of Papua New Guinea, in which the cast-off detritus of colonialism that washes ashore comes to signify a gift from the spirit realm which, properly valorized through ritual, can be used to beckon more cargo into the future. Both the creation of colonial anthropology and genuine indigenous expression of millenarianism, it a rather compelling image for Armah in *Fragments* (Lindstrom, *Cargo Cult: Strange Stories of Desire from Melanesia and Beyond*, 18).

division. Division of labor, power, worlds, everything.”⁶³ Baako’s conspiratorial thinking about the all-permeating presence of division has lead Lief Lorentzon to observe that the consequent failure of Baako and Juana to produce a symbolic fulfillment of the Pan-African ideal, uniting indigenous and diasporic Africans through a child, marks the moment when Armah begins to contemplate the need for a new textual paradigm apart from the novel of development or formation.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Aaron Bartels-Swindells has attributed Armah’s transition to a historical mode of narrative to his repudiation of Marxism as a wholly Eurocentric system and a concomitant “conversion” to Afrocentrism.⁶⁵

Odhiambo Ojwan'g goes even further, arguing that *Seasons* presents, “the first markers of an atavism that is more clearly expressed in Armah's later novel *Osiris Rising* in which ancient "civilisations" are unearthed and then valorised.”⁶⁶ Ojwan’g suggests that Armah jettisons the focus on the individual in exchange for attempting a “communalistic” story that nonetheless relies on the individual, in the form of Isanusi – the elder who teaches the young generation to fight and speak – for its deployment of the ethic of reciprocity that Armah pursues. This is all based on a vision of individuation centered on the figure of Osiris that is monolithically applied to the African continent by Afrocentrists of an Egyptological persuasion according to Ojwan’g.

⁶³ *Fragments*, 227.

⁶⁴ Lorentzon, “We-Narrator,” 230.

⁶⁵ Bartels-Swindells, “Unmasking Communism,” 175.

⁶⁶ Ojwan’g, “Essence Excrescence,” 115. Ultimately, once again, Armah’s critics have a tendency to dismiss his project in *Two Thousand Seasons* almost ideologically out of hand: Ojwan’g says that in his earlier work Armah “savages the nationalist bourgeoisie; it therefore comes as a surprise that in a later novel he adopts the monolithic precepts of their brand of nation” because of the “essential unity” of Blackness that he allegedly constructs (ibid). “African nationalism is indeed a positive development on the foreign domination that it negates,” he continues, except for where Armah would have it police difference, in the mode of the African bourgeoisie (ibid). As we have discussed, Armah’s conception of Blackness is essentially negative, a commonality arising not from some shared essential experience of race but from a “common captivity” (*Seasons*, 64) and thus allows plenty of room for diversity of experience, but the critique is baffling anyways. African nationalism negates foreign domination except where it insists on some unity of African or Black experience as a result of racism and colonialism when it becomes monolithic and coercive? What, one wonders, was the nature of “foreign domination” if not the arbitrary partition of people and land to suit their economic, imperial and cultural ends?

But as we have seen with Armah's rebuttal to Achebe above, ancient Egyptian symbolism is disguised in various ways in African culture and is present from his very first novel (in ways that were never seen critically as atavistic until he revealed their meanings much later), and what's more, *Seasons* does not argue for an atavistic return to precolonial practices anyways: as Bartels-Swindells rightfully points out, "although the novel emphasizes the pre-colonial origins of 'the way,' its meanings emerge through the group's praxis."⁶⁷

Esty suggests that "the problem of merely individual resolution – described so far in terms of the novel's thematic content – is also a problem of literary form for Armah. The protagonist cannot quite come into his own as a figure of political resistance; he remains a tragically (if stubbornly) inert principle of ethical nonalignment."⁶⁸ With *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah shows that coming into "one's own" as a figure of political resistance is an action that necessarily requires community and *initiation* into the craft of culture. Esty is right to point out that this is the general direction taken by Armah's fiction up through *How Are We So Blest?* (1972), but from *Two Thousand Seasons* on, Armah's contemporary historical fiction has been marked by a concerted effort to account for a non-individualistic notion of social and cultural development.⁶⁹

The Coming Community of Resistance: Against the Nostalgia of Return

As Armah showed in his first novels, neither the sublime, apocalyptic beauty of the sea that Juana experiences as a nostalgia for a lost youth, nor the short-lived undisciplined counter-cultural communality of the *wee* smokers in *Fragments*, nor the Teacher's cynical, literate

⁶⁷ Bartels-Swindells, "Unmasking Communism," 175).

⁶⁸ Esty, "Excremental Postcolonialism," 40.

⁶⁹ See Priebe, *Myth, Realism, and the West African Writer*, 11-21 and especially Derek Wright, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1992), which features seven chapters on *The Beautiful Ones* alone and only two dedicated to *Two Thousand Seasons*.

socialism, nor even a domestic reconciliation of the sort the man longs for in *The Beautiful Ones* were an adequate basis for the individual's integration into the social whole: the teleological component of their entelechy was in each case denied because each was missing the historic and communal basis required for such an integration; as such, these experiences fail to deliver anything other than the briefest reprieve from the stinking failures of the postcolonial state's vaporous promises. In Africa, Armah argues, there can be no individuation without tradition. And yet, as Sekyi-Otu argues, Armah's communalism can be characterized by a latent fixation on protecting the individual's liberty and autonomy within the community, dialectically driving its communalistic ethic.⁷⁰ Isanusi attempts to flesh out this dialectic as he trains the next generation to carry on the creative vocation of restoration.

Integration into the creative community of the way is Armah's path out of the received limitations placed on the African individual predicated upon European values of subjectivity as the realm of social change and action. When one of the core members of the *fundi* of speech betrays them, saving his own life while dooming his comrades, the narrators say:

How infinitely stupefying the prison of the single, unconnected viewpoint, station of the cut-off vision. How deathly the separation of faculties, the separation of people. The single agent's action is waste motion; the single agent's freedom useless liberty. Such individual action can find no sense until there is again that higher connectedness that links each agent to the group. Then the single person is no cut-off thing but *an extension of the living group*, the single will but a piece of the group's active will, each mind a part of a larger common mind (134; emphasis added).

Community is in fact an operating condition of individual liberty, according to the we-chroniclers. Note that Armah has not dispensed with the vitalism which Cheah identified as driving the failure of postcolonial politics but has recognized it cannot be channeled through the nation-state apparatus which is propped up by arbitrary distinctions and divisions of what he

⁷⁰ Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism*, 274.

considers an essential unity of African existence rooted in the Continent's history. What's more, there is a subtle parody of the twelve "stations" or "ways" of the cross, a ritual of Good Friday which precedes Easter in which the various scenes on the path to the crucifixion are symbolically presented and re-enacted by the believer, in this new thirteenth "station of the cut off vision."

This parody of the messianism of Christianity as one in which a spiritual division is introduced where the people of Anoa saw continuity with the realm of the ancestors and the divine,⁷¹ elaborates an earlier passage that cut to the quick of the Cartesian substance dualism that formalized the divorce of subject and object – mind and matter – in western philosophy: "Of unconnected consciousness is there more to say beyond the clear recognition that this is destruction's keenest tool against the soul? That the left hand should be kept ignorant of what its right twin is made to do – who does not see in that cleavage the prime success of the white destroyers' road of death?" (128). Mocking Rene Descartes' "First Meditation" in which he posits this substance dualism, on the basis that a deceptive demon may be tricking him into believing he maintains control of faculties, upon which is based much of western epistemology of individuation thus forming the restrictive horizons of individual liberty, Armah scornfully says that "it is their habit to cut fingers from the hand itself uprooted from the parent body, calling each fallen piece a creature in itself...Is it a wonder we have been flung so far from the way?" (2). He rejects this philosophical intervention as a tool of the soul's unrecoverable destruction, for the same reason he rejects the system of *négritude* elaborated by Senghor, because it introduces an arbitrary philosophical division that grows into an unspannable rupture – pure difference.

⁷¹ Mtshali, "Hermeneutics of Liberation," 171.

The followers of “the way of reciprocity” are tasked with identifying new ways forward through a communalistic ethic. The “way” is necessarily a critique of capitalism which arrives on Africa’s shores on the same ships as the European slavers, though as Ato Sekyi-Otu identifies, one that attempts to depart from a Marxist foundation which prior to writing *Seasons*, Armah began to see as just one more European import.⁷² Armah seeks an indigenous African epistemic paradigm for this critique though is not always successful in finding one given the vicissitudes of history and the permanence of cultural loss on the Continent.

But by the end of the chronicle, the we-chroniclers have seen enough war that they are able to arrive at a higher understanding of the battles which they face, which they frame as a spiritual affliction that keeps people separated: “The root of the disease is not in things themselves but in the use of things; the disease is not in the abundance of things but in relationships growing between users” (202). This process, according to the narrators, was enforced by the religious priesthood of the invaders who are described in starkly Nietzschean fashion: “Among us new ostentatious cripples—the more dangerous because theirs were not visible, physical infirmities but deep inadequacies of the soul—were finding ways to turn the whole community into a lifeless thing, their crutch” (61).⁷³ Sekyi-Otu has discussed this notion of reification and social alienation as rooted in Armah’s “Africentric” ethic of communalism, but as Robert Collins has pointed out, this is in fact a rather neat reformulation of Marxian ideas, in this case the concept of commodity fetishism where commodities “appear as autonomous

⁷² See Armah “Masks of Marx,” Ogede, “Literary Essays of Armah,” and Guendouzi, “Revolution without Evolution.”

⁷³ There’s a very valid critique to be made here of Armah’s vitalist ontology as indulging in ableist language through its representation of the foreign invaders as “cripples”; while the followers of the “way of reciprocity” do care for those who have been wounded or otherwise disabled as a result of their on-going war with the slavers and king Koranche, there is an emphasis on the congenital physical deformity of Koranche and his son Bentum that seems to be visited upon them as an expression of their moral corruption because of their betrayal.

figures endowed with a life of their own” with the concomitant reification of social relations with which we are all familiar.⁷⁴

Given the “flight into the misty realm of religion” that Armah seems to be making, it is appropriate that he describes the incongruity between the Marxian concepts of exchange value and use value in terms of spiritual decay and the social estrangement it produces as the transmutation of the “whole community into a lifeless thing.”⁷⁵ In contrast to this disease, the narrators say, “Isanusi saw the cure: the hope of the way, creation of what is necessary, creation sufficient for sharing, creation that makes sharing easy, natural, reasonable, not an unbearable sacrifice, creation for community” (202). Sekyi-Otu reflects on the way that Armah’s narratives, in *Seasons* and elsewhere, are deeply concerned with the ethical recovery of individualism within an ethic of communalism rooted in reciprocity, “an ethics of charity and trust demanded by the ontology of motion and possibility,” what he elsewhere characterizes as an ethic of “elective affinity” that distinguishes Armah’s vision of Africa’s future from both the African socialists and the national bourgeoisie in its preservation of individual autonomy.⁷⁶

But where Sekyi-Otu sees in the *nostos*-like rhythm of reciprocity-remembrance-return a hermeneutic circle of “the way,” I read it as restoration – apocatastasis – in keeping with the heretical tone of the work and because it avoids the nostalgia of return with which such a mythic image necessarily resonates as a result of the foundational status of the *nostos*-myth in “western civilization’s” self-mythologizing. While Sekyi-Otu is careful to avoid suggesting that Armah yearns for a return to the prelapsarian, precolonial condition, I hesitate to privilege the language of return at all because Armah seems to use it as a negative analog to reciprocity, part of the

⁷⁴ Collins, “Communism Today” and Marx, *Capital*, 165.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Sekyi-Otu, “Toward Anoa,” 206 and *Left Universalism*, 95.

poison of nostalgia that has no place in the *fundi*'s resistance: "Returning was their dream. Strongest for these spirits, was the call to return, the unequivocal call simply to go back to the places where mothers had borne them, places where fathers' brothers had dug holes to hold their navels" (148).

This vision of restoration is dogmatically critical of nostalgia, which may be a suitable topic for (European) literature but can no less be a foundation for resistance than can wishful thinking effect a change in present conditions. When "the sickness of nostalgia descended" on the *fundi* of speech, it "turned [one of them] backward and made him a child again hankering after situations forever lost, craving the love of blood relatives better in his remembering mind than they could ever have been in their own flesh" (180). Nostalgia is yet another tool of the destroyers whose rampant destruction has so deeply fragmented African social life, the resultant traumas become yet another means to seed division and disintegrate the unity of the now-revolutionary cadre of the *fundi* of speech.

Nostalgia is a "hankering" for the "forever lost," a gastric form of desire whose fulfillment lies in the realm of romance or fantasy rather than in reality, making it impossible to satisfy. Where there is restoration, there cannot be a return, because "the way is the call to creation. Easy it is to fall into the trap of loneliness if we forget that our people are not just of the present, not just the walking multitudes of murdered souls and zombis now around us, but many, many more gone and many, many more to come. Because it is useless to locate hope in the already destroyed" (203). Nostalgia, in the eyes of Isanusi and the *fundi* of speech, is a shortcut to the merely pyrrhic victory of national liberation, one that disregards the timescale of Anoa's prophecy of collective regeneration in exchange for a temporary and individual escape, honoring neither the ancestors nor the lost souls of the present.

Nostalgia seeks to artificially hasten the end, to speed up the process of destruction's history for one's personal, individual relief. Such are the messianic promises of nostalgia which spurs the wayward souls unable to face harsh reality into embracing a symbolic *eschaton* accelerating the end of time but only for themselves, thus cutting themselves off from the community and beginning down the path of what the narrators warn is the very soul's destruction: 'Ancestors, this death is so new. We cannot join you. We cannot even be wandering ghosts.' The answering voice: 'No. This is a complete destruction, death with no returning.' (127).

The *fundi* of speech on the other hand has committed itself to a multigenerational vision that will outlive each of the group's individual lives while granting meaning to their deaths as fuel in the chronicles of future struggles. Because there are many souls on the path to a total, annihilative, soul-destroying end through the abnegation of their humanity in the service of the white destroyers, it is the mission of the future-oriented *fundi* of speech to reintegrate such lost souls into the "way" which operates on a totally different scale of time: "And the passage of seasons: What of that? This is no hurried hustle hot with the sweaty anticipation of impatient profit but a lifetime's vocation. This is work of undying worth, the only work of worth in these surroundings blighted with death's tinsel, in all truth. It is not the passage of seasons that concerns this vocation then" (158).

The "hurried hustle" that nostalgia provokes stems from "anticipation of impatient profit" and becomes yet one more tool of division in service of the destroyers: "Seeing the way the acceptors of the new religion lived, it was clear we would become a community shattered into hustling zombis, our separate energies laboring to support, to comfort parasitic, predatory alien conquerors" (41). The "hustle" itself becomes de facto participation in the reproduction of

imperial domination, an artificial acceleration of time under an imported messianic regime whereas Anoa's prophecy of two thousand seasons dictates a slow, thoughtful creative action occurring in the proper fullness of time needed to effect radical rupture and real change.

After Koranche finally succeeds in assassinating Isanusi, the *fundi* of speech decide they have trained long enough and launch their counter-offensive, storming the king's castle and killing his *askaris*, the native police force raised out of the hordes of "zombis" created by the debauching of the people, as well as the white destroyers who had taken the castle as their stronghold. As they enter the keep, taking the king and his court hostage, Abena, who Koranche tried to force into pairing with his degenerate son, spoke first, asking "forgiveness for the suddenness of their awakening this night. Of the events of this night themselves she spoke briefly only, then moved on to causes. She told the people the causes of these events and other recent events were distant, deep as our roots themselves" (196).

Two Thousand Seasons registers the virtual presence of the past in the present and their mutual co-extension into the future as a "call to remembrance": the chronicle of remembrance must constellate a vast archive of recorded and oral histories and fictions over enormous amounts of time without succumbing to a futile nostalgic "hope in the already destroyed." By the chronicle's end, the we-chroniclers have fully realized the seemingly "endless" nature of their struggle for nothing more than "a life *closer* to our ancient way" (197; emphasis added) but stress that the death of the soul caused by the division of the invaders is far worse a fate than the mere death of the body.

In the climactic scene of a proper proto-revolution (rather than the abortive revolutions of African nationalism earlier discussed), we see a rather fascinating reversal of what we discussed in a previous chapter as Ivo Andrić's characterization of narrative – *pričanju* – as being like as

the tales told by Scheherazade of *1001 Nights*, functioning as *katechon*, in service of delaying the apocalypse, rather than as *eschaton* in hastening it. In Armah's reversal, it is the story-tellers who finally have the upper hand on death and time and who hold the king hostage, rather than vice versa. When Abena summons Koranche to publically account for his crimes, for selling his people into slavery and permanent death, he begins to speak, to rationalize and excuse his many sins, to confess his corruption to the court and the kingdom, and to incredulously inquire how it was possible that the tables had so suddenly turned, that former slaves could have stormed his castle and held him hostage with guns stolen from his keep. His questions were never answered as "Abena herself shot king Koranche dead at the end of his tale" (196). Any attempt to read some neat, utopian hope in the truthful confession of the dotard king and the political confusion he caused, is necessarily subverted by the ascendancy of Koranche's son, Bentum, who counterattacks with a host of European ships resulting in the near-extinction of the *fundi* of speech, who end the novel by going into hiding, whispering as though from the dark, secret grove of their initiation, about the ancient ways and the future struggle.

While this regicide may not be a revisionist telling of Scheherazade, it nevertheless avows an uncompromising belief that the stories of the destroyers, the minds they have warped, and the hegemony they have established will come to a similarly unceremonious end at the conclusion of the prophesied two thousand seasons of destruction. But as discussed above, attempts to hasten this period of struggle, to preempt the time of tribulation or to supersede it, are doomed to the immature failure experienced by Armah's characters in his earlier fiction, like Baako who "died of hastiness, of being thrown too hastily into the world."

In this sense, Armah's ethic of reciprocity both beckons and belays, welcomes and shuns, the end of world seeking the balance of reciprocity not as a pithy, new age mantra but as a

material practice, countering the dualism imposed by the African state with a substantive non-dualistic ethic that marries action and contemplation, theory and praxis, “whose intimations of remembrance will turn intenser, turn into conscious thought, turn from thought to action. That is our vocation, not the crippling suspicion that brings the fear of motion. We are not a people of stagnant waters. We are of the moving stream, rememberers of the way” (192). This invocation of moving water highlights the basis of this ethic not in the restoration of deep time but in the language of metaphor, through the naturalistic image of desert and wellspring. I will conclude my discussion of Armah’s epic with the we-chroniclers opening invocation of belonging to the way of the “moving stream,” Armah’s derivation of the ethic of reciprocity from the indigenous conditions of the African landscape.

Conclusion: Creative Violence and the “necessary preparation of the future way”

The “call to creation,” which produces the grounds of the *fundi*’s artistic and therefore revolutionary community, resists the tendency to see history as purely recursive, composed of constant cycles of eternal return, or as purely teleological, as the deterministic ascension of the “messianic triad” of Origin, Fall, and Redemption that many critics found in the arc of *Seasons*.⁷⁷ Instead, the narrators ask themselves: “What are we if we see nothing beyond the present, hear nothing from the ages of our flowing, and in all our existence can utter no necessary preparation of the future way?” (204).

The “necessary preparation of the future way” is “a vision of creation yet unknown,” resonating with what Giorgio Agamben calls “the coming community,” an as yet-revealed form of belonging predicated in an as-yet unrevealed “coming politics” that brings history and the state to a simultaneous conclusion, in which the aporias of modern history are resolved in the

⁷⁷ Sekyi, “Towards Anoa,” 192.

profane “sufficiency” of continued resistance rather than in presupposed commonality or identity as a condition of belonging (206).⁷⁸ I concur with Sekyi-Otu that Armah offers a non-teleological futurity, but while I there may be a rather high degree of openness in what he calls the “ontology of possibility” of Armah’s vision of eschatological “restoration,” it is not quite *radically* open: it entails a measure of necessary violence that echoes almost literally what Fanon described in “Of Violence” in the following terms: “The settler’s work is to make even dreams of liberty impossible for the native. The native’s work is to imagine all possible methods for destroying the settler...but it so happens that for the colonized people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their characters with positive and creative qualities. The practice of violence binds them together as a whole.”⁷⁹

The mythopoetic account of origin embodied in the way of creation in some ways necessitates this creative violence, since the way of reciprocity, of balance, accommodates the “indispensable” violence of self-preservation – of “destruction’s destruction” – which is seen, by all accounts, as a generative force in the face of the white destroyers’ ruinous devastation: “Others devoted to life will surely find that between the creation of life and the destruction of the destroyers there is no difference but a necessary, indispensable connection; that nothing good can be created that does not of its very nature push forward the destruction of the destroyers” (199). A fuller account of the “meaning of the way itself” describes it as a “call to reciprocity in a world wiped clean of destroyers” (149), which portends the violence of its eschatology.

There is no redemption for the individual at the end of time offered in *Seasons* but integration into the collective struggle against the endless division and destruction through the “preparation of a future way.” Even then, it is figured not as salvation but as the start of a new

⁷⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 87.

⁷⁹ See Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism*, 128 and Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 73.

ontology; the inner transformation effected by liberation from the fear of death, in essence the ego-death of ecstatic or transcendent mystical experience, that comes with integration into artistic community will produce an outer transformation: “the exit from fear is to let the mind enjoy its freedom to thrust deep, contemplating that most frightening eventuality known to the cut-off self: death. For the mind untrammelled reaches this knowledge: that in these surroundings usurped by destruction the distinction is not between those dying and those not dying in our physical selves, but in the quality of the deaths we choose” (199).

Life in such a community registers death itself as a political transformation in history – the “search for *paths* to that necessary beginning” is the creative vocation of contributing to “the beginning of destruction’s destruction” with one’s creative and integrated intellect (149): “Why else did they not think *to beat new paths to the old way*? Why could they not see that those whose vocation it is to destroy destroyers do not through their work become destroyers but the necessary, indispensable finders of paths to the way again?” (203). Only in such a way will the total integration sought in community be removed from the plane of “messianic time” as a precondition of “destruction’s destruction” and enter the “now-time” of our present conditions. Within the artistic community that is bound by its rejection of a binding identity, by a commitment to ethical reciprocity in “the call to creation,” which entails both beginning and end, in an imagined origin that historicizes the current apocalypse and portends apocatastasis.

There is reciprocity of form in this too, as the end of this apocalypse called time emerges in not the discovery of one’s literal origin but in *seeking* new paths that can begin or actualize the process itself, in narratives of ancient times that sufficiently impel the people of Anoa to see past the divisions of their past which knowingly or not put them in service of their oppressors. But, Isanusi warned, the path of liberation is one of a “necessary silence, from a necessary secrecy

strikes the destroyer. That, not loudness, is the necessary beginning” (204). This harkens to the initiatic resonances of the fifth grove’s call to secrecy that I addressed above. As attested in the mythos of many secret societies of both revolutionary and esoteric dimensions, there is a unity of symbolism and resonance in acts of silence and speech, initiation and termination, creation and destruction, cosmogeny and apocalypse, *ursprung* and *jetztzeit* that becomes vested with mystical significance when populated with the shared symbolism of the initiated.⁸⁰ Thus, at the end of the narrative, as it seems the *fundi* might be finally wiped out, they triumphantly utter: “Know this: we continue” (201) and return one last time to the language of the novel’s beginning.⁸¹

The opening invocation, emerging from mythic time, gives a model of reciprocity built right into the harsh reality of the desert, the primordial enemy of man and the people of Anoa who had to contend with this natural obstacle. As in all societies, the material landscape is the basis of the initial division of labor, the impetus for society’s very gathering and the provocation for its first fragmentations. The voices from beyond time speak a warning: “Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration. The desert takes. The desert knows no giving. To the giving water of your flowing it is not in the nature of the desert to return anything but destruction. Springwater flowing to the desert, your future is extinction” (xi).

⁸⁰ In *Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism*, Gershom Scholem write of the intensely secretive *merkabah* mystics, who saw the fundamental separation of man from God as indicative of an inner exodus that occurs in which the historical fact of the Jewish flight in Exodus is re-enacted transhistorically in the heart of every Jewish person. They attempted to rectify this separation through a new “technology” of ecstatic prayer and intense contemplation of apocalyptic texts: “If, however, the Absolute which the mystic seeks is not to be found in the varying occurrences of history, the conclusion suggests itself that It must either precede the course of mundane history or reveal itself at the end of time. In other words, knowledge both of the primary facts of creation and of its end, of eschatological salvation and bliss, can acquire a mystical significance” (20).

⁸¹ Sekyi-Otu refers to the grammar of the ending as semantically connected to that of the beginning in the fashion of an “infinite text” (“Toward Anoa,” 210).

This elliptical utterance offers a rather cosmic basis for reciprocity as a foundational “First Principle” upon which the world is axiomatically premised, down to the formulations of almost philosophical logic in such utterances as “say it is the nature of the spring to give; it is the nature of the desert's sand to take. Say it is the nature of your given water to flow; it is the nature of the desert to absorb” (xii). It is from this naturalistic logic in which the “First Cause” of the ethic of reciprocity is derived in the spring of life-giving water from which flow symbolic movements that can be interpreted as ethical actions and tendencies in part because of the essential categories of these mythic images: “It is your nature also, spring, to receive. Giving, receiving, receiving, giving, continuing, living. It is not the nature of the desert to give” (ibid).

Forced into movement, like the springwater in perpetual flow, by first internal strife and then by the Islamic incursion into Africa, *Seasons* imagines in the Anoa beginnings a somewhat literalized version of what Walter Benjamin characterized as the *ursprung*, having numerous overlapping meanings akin to origin, source, or spring, and containing for Benjamin a resonance of extended potentiality and openness: “the *ursprung*, then, does not arise from the facts attested but concerns their fore- and after-history.”⁸² Just as Abena had to constellate the history of the present conditions in the *ursprung* of the ancient past, causes buried “distant, deep as our roots themselves” in order to stir the deceived people of Anoa into a semblance of revolt, so do the narrators return to the image of the desert spring of the beginning invocation at the end of their remembrance to remind of the “broken connectedness before the onslaught of the predators and destroyers” (125).

But history is not deterministic and the reciprocity of past and future does not entail pure identity, since the future, what the narrators refer to as their “true destiny,” was “not to flee

⁸² Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 25.

before destruction, not to wander impotent, our soul turned coward, our bodies mere vessels for the demonstration of a massive impotence” but to face ruination on even ground. As they later attest, “movement alone was no lasting answer. The way, the highest beauty, did not come again at the end of that long journey from the desert's edge. Instead, what a scene of carnage we have come to live here!” (203). The book urges a “third way” that will not lead them to further carnage (149).

This third way comprised the core of Isanusi's teaching, which pivoted on a “central understanding: remembering the thousands upon thousands of seasons of our people's existence, remembering the thousands upon thousands of days spent journeying to find new resting places, remembering ancient and present assaults against the soul of our people, and remembering the harsh division – division yet to find resolution – between suicidal contention and desperate flight.” (157). From one apocalypse into another, the narrators are prompted to open their remembrance, after the opening invocation, with a declaration of negative belonging, disavowing nostalgia and nativism at once: “we are not a people of yesterday” (1). Just as Benjamin locates the same apocalyptic *ursprung* of the German genre of the *trauerspiel* in the fictional form of the chronicle, Armah probes what might be likened to the “esoteric extension” of “the fore- and after-history” of past events, a secret history for the properly initiated.⁸³

The practice of art in postcolonial Africa is esoteric because it necessarily circulates hidden from sight, having been nearly eradicated by colonialism and its aftereffects yet surviving; it is keyed into the nature of empire and intends to outlast it, indeed to seed its very destruction. It is in this, in *Season's* call to structural violence and not in the stubborn necessity of return, that Armah's latent glimmer of optimism most emerges – thus while Hugh Charles

⁸³ Benjamin, *Ursprung*, 65.

O'Connor suggests a "residual weak-utopian impulse" in the "yet" of Armah's first novel's title *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*, despite the limitations of the postcolonial state that it seems to be depicting, I think it is fair to take Armah at his word that he sees no life or future in nationalism, that the "yet" is not a promise of any form of state that will resolve its contradictions but a new as yet-unrevealed "coming community."⁸⁴ In spite of the unceasing obstacles to freedom, oppressed people have always found ways to fight back; while this may not itself be grounds for a radical break in the system of global imperialism and capitalism, this "yet" alone may be grounds for a kind of (comm)unity.

If the novel seems basic, didactic, "preachy" as Ojwan'g put it, then it does so in the same way that faiths and scriptures often sound to those outside the circle of belief. *Seasons* is the imagined communication of a received tradition of resistance that attempts to serve as the reader's symbolic initiation into that tradition, much in the same way that Karl Marx stated that philosophy's mandate was not to interpret but to change the world. The aphoristic meaning of spiritual text, what essentially amount often to rather simple claims that gain meaning with faith and accretive symbolism, is only activated by faith and initiation into the wider significance and such accretive meanings come to take on more complex resonances for the believer who finds numerous ways to apply them to daily life.

It is essentially into such mysteries that the *fundi* of speech is initiated and becomes a force of influence within the wider community to which they belong. In the same manner, the "way of reciprocity," when it becomes a corporate ethic, can meet the ethic of extractive destruction on even grounds given time, faith and education. Regeneration, then, means not merely the liberation of the African people in terms of self-determination. It requires a social

⁸⁴ O'Connor, "A weak utopianism," 372.

component that elevates the plight of the cut-off individual tied in the morass of modernity to a collective struggle against the forces that made nationalism possible and desirable in the first place, one which cannot be won in terms of individual liberation alone. Contrary then to the faiths preached by the invaders, inner enlightenment in secular time cannot come without communal liberation on the same temporal plane.

The “yet” in the *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* teems with potentiality, a prayer for its own overturning on the basis of the history which it promises to forbear. It speaks to the possibility of such a (re)generation of “beautiful ones” that emerges from a vaster African history than the narrow field of Ghana’s national narrative. This aesthetic principle of resistance makes possible the conditions for the beautiful ones to be born: “there is no beauty but in relationships. Nothing cut off by itself is beautiful. Never can things in destructive relationships be beautiful. All beauty is in the creative purpose of our relationships” (206).

This is not a spectral future of some messianic cult, but the call for the residual maintenance of community care animated by the bonds of shared struggle, a struggle whose difficulty is amplified by the ever-changing form of its tireless enemy – now conqueror, now slave, now victim, now victor. In the face of the struggles of the past, the very possibility of a future is enough to animate the will of the *fundi* to sustain the struggle as a contribution to a shared legacy that can, perhaps someday, stand up to the monolithic legacy of partition and division that characterizes history, even if no living individual in this or any forthcoming age will live to see it come to fruition. This is a continental vision of regeneration, of working out from under the spell of destruction’s way after a millennium of violence.

Though balkanization may form the political boundaries against which unity must often struggle, *Seasons* pictures of what kind of struggle that might look like moving into the future.

Though often bleak and unyielding in its description of the violence of the successive empires that swept across Africa, it offers perspectives on how community survives such assaults, and how to prepare for a future that retains a measure of humanity, that does not relinquish the last glimmer of hope for a future that remains, in the struggle.

Two Thousand Seasons ends as a loop that obsessively speaks both the on-going catastrophe of history and the tradition of resistance that lingers at its edges, the two mouths of the Janus-faced narrator uttering one last gesture to the incipient potential of *jetztzeit* and *gleichzeit*, of now, and at the same time, of the future: “But still, in the present what a bloody desolation the whites have stretched over this land!” – “There is no beauty but in relationships” – “Yet still, what a scene of carnage” – “Against this what a vision of creation yet unknown” (306). That same potentiating, excruciating yet resounds in the final words of the *fundi*’s remembrance as in the elusive, mystical Benjaminian *jetztzeit*, as in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the same yet in the prayerful repetitions: “yet nonetheless [life] lasted and endured like the bridge on the Drina.”⁸⁵

And yet, it is incumbent upon us to ask some final lingering questions: can an ethic of reciprocity stand up to an economy based in the inequivalence of use and value? Can ethics change economics? Armah suggests something deeper than a mere ethical system, more like the regimented training and self-discipline of a martial art or guerilla cell than a literary creation. *Seasons* is no *Anarchist’s Cookbook*; its critique is much more systemic and abstract even as it seeks to unite contemplative intellectual history with pragmatic action in the realm of physical liberation. *Two Thousand Seasons* embodies a fervent, stubborn hope in the creative power of culture despite the gruesome abattoir of history.

⁸⁵ Andrić, *Bridge on the Drina*, 81.

As Biafran martyr Christopher Okigbo hauntingly predicted mere months before his death in that bloody civil war: “this is our swan song” — it carries “in our worlds that flourish / Our worlds that have failed...” Victory can only emerge through the bitter lessons of failure. Every swan song joins the plaintive chorus of history, just as every triumphant world hides one which has failed, to reveal an occluded truth: it is the failure of worlds, and not victory, that propels history forward. In this chapter’s epigraph, Okigbo’s swan song mirrors the sentiment of Bertolt Brecht’s achingly concise sketch of our ever-darkening present: a song “in the dark times...About the dark times.” But a song nevertheless.

The reader’s initiation into the struggle of the Anoman *fundi* of speech forces a confrontation with the question of what kind of end can come of this. Can newness really rise, as though “by dint of secret heliotropism” in so much division and devastation?⁸⁶ Or will it ever be more of the same, more grist in the malady mill of balkanization and the proliferating partitions that produce nigh insurmountable distances between us all, the spun-off stories in which we have since time immemorial sought mythic origin to rectify and validate the hazy catastrophe of history as some primal separation enacted without our consent, in order to justify ourselves in the ever-looming immediacy of time’s terrifying fullness?

⁸⁶ Benjamin, Thesis IV.

Coda: New Vectors of Balkanization

In a universe of cells—who is not in jail? Jailers.
—Bob Kaufman, “Jail Poems”

and she said: i'm hungry for a home
and he said: even bones thirst
—Bhion Achimba, “my parents’ first meeting
in a refugee camp”

This dissertation has been my effort to reconsider what provincializing Europe means in the light of 20th century historical ties between Africa and the Balkans which circumvented the European metropole. Given the stakes in the history of what came to be known as “balkanization,” I have claimed that the term and the phenomenon led to the shaping of lived political realities of millions of human beings, literally changing the world map to suit the narratives of power. Witnessing certain cultural expressions warp to fall in line, it was necessary to outline the changing nature of both space and time as it was understood in the partitioned regions themselves. Therefore, in order to trace out the spatial and temporal extension of balkanization, I focused on the literary genres which explicitly centralize space and time in their organizing formal structure to study their developments over the course of a century.

Throughout this project, it has been my desire to elaborate upon three key aspects of the literature of balkanization. First, that territorial partition plays a critical role in the repertoires of control and hegemony that structured global relations in the 20th century and influenced literary production in more than metaphorical or allegorical ways in the sites of balkanization. Second, because of the historical co-incidence of the Berlin conferences, Africa and the Balkans display remarkably similar traces of balkanization culturally, politically and historically. What is perhaps more important, is that these spaces reveal more about our collective futures than our pasts, beyond the territories they directly impact. Finally, I claim that the historical co-incidence of two major conferences in the 19th century, in the capital of a newly unified Germany, points to larger

historical trends that unveil the multifarious violence of balkanization alongside other techniques of violent dehumanization, which were continuously evolving and being honed in the 20th century. These include, above all, racism and ethno-nationalism, which contributed to the pessimistic philosophical outlook of the time that saw history as one staggering catastrophe.

Given the two rather counterintuitive archives of West African and Yugoslavian travel literature and historical fiction that I have pursued in my dissertation, in this final section I would also like to offer the background of the genesis and poesis of this project by way of a personal confession. Contrary to the cottage-industry-turned-industrial-complex that has spawned around such sayings, the ancient Greek platitude/proverb engraved over the Delphic Temple of Apollo did not in fact read “*Only* know thyself” – nevertheless, there is no way I have yet discovered to fully escape those unanswered questions of the self that lead to examinations of a home one was, for whatever exigencies of time, forced to depart at a young age. That Yugoslavia ceased to exist a few months before I was born in the fledgling independent Republic of Macedonia (since re-christened North Macedonia) adds yet another wrinkle of nostalgia – that is, the ache of knowing there is no return – to this confession. Throughout my academic career, I would return to the Balkans with two intentions: visit “home” and extend my research network, both elements motivated by a strident desire to better understand my own particular pocket of history’s catastrophic ruin.

When I was introduced to Frantz Fanon’s critique of the postcolonial nation in graduate school, it read to me as a direct indictment of the pre- and post-collapse national bourgeoisie of the Yugoslav socialist state. This experience left me wondering if there was not a broader critique of 20th century global politics to be pried out of Fanon’s analysis. How could such similarities be possible? Was it mere consonance I was hearing in Fanon’s work or was there

some underlying element that made legible the direct translation (in the Latin sense of carrying over) of his words to the Yugoslav context? It was not until I was sitting in my late-advisor Tejumola Olaniyan's seminar on the structure of the African state, which was inherited from the European imperial occupiers in 1884, that the relation hit me like a bolt from the blue. Berlin was the key, and balkanization was the vehicle.

As the project began to develop, what at first appeared as mere sympathetic resemblance between Africa and the Balkans began to coalesce and proliferate into more materially and culturally tangible connections, reducing Europe further to the margins of this sprawling geopolitical arc of stifled liberation as it unfolded in the 20th century. Nevertheless, Europe was not as wholly exorcised and relegated to footnotes as I would have liked it be – history itself could hardly be so kind. My initial plan was to compare Davičo's travelogue to publications by African students and travelers who visited Yugoslavia during the height of the cultural exchange of the NAM. However, the global Covid-19 pandemic, coupled with profound personal losses, restricted access to archives that more centrally showcased African voices describing the NAM and Yugoslavia in their own words. I am hopeful that despite the challenges that shaped this dissertation, it will nevertheless be a small contribution to a growing body of scholarship that explores this surprising, counterintuitive and rich vein of cross-cultural collaboration and exchange between the balkanized spaces of Africa and the Balkans, which will further enrich our critical understanding of the tactics of control and resistance as they continue into the present. Going forward, I would like to further reinforce the analysis of balkanization in the African context while expanding the scope to investigate its tendril-like expansion into the present, given the ever-fluctuating face of geopolitical control.

As discussed at various points throughout this project, one of European Enlightenment's most abiding critics, Theodore Adorno, takes up the question of history's extension into the present and the conditions of the future as the domain of mutually linked concepts of history and freedom: "I should like to begin by reminding you that we have defined freedom as escaping from the spell or working our way out of the spell."¹ The spell [*Bann*] is the constantly changing historical process that binds the individual to their context, which requires an ethic of liberation that is constantly attuned to these shifts in order to open the unequivocal catastrophe of history to its hidden liberatory dimensions. Because of the constantly fluctuating quality of history, no universal ethical foundationalism is possible but instead must be critically pried out of each historical moment.

The teleological view of history, which defiantly proclaims history's fulfillment – a world historic end worthy of world history itself – as triumph rather than as wreckage, sees the historical record as a progression of "victories" rather than "defeats," rendering it spellbound [*gebannt*] to an incomplete picture of the world, the ideologically constrained view that "things are getting better all the time,"² In actuality, history has been what even Hegel could recognize as a "slaughterhouse in which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed."³ The spell dictates the outline of life as a whole by ironically implementing a perception of "the eternal sameness of the historical process," the end of history as limitless progress, in which categories of identity are mapped onto fundamentally incongruous reality, which exceed the inherited categories of representation that have heretofore been available.⁴

¹ Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 177

² Ibid., 92.

³ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 21.

⁴ Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 183.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of global communism did not in fact signal the “end of history” nor any sort of symbolic triumph of the liberal state and the end of division, separation or partition at all.⁵ Rather it entailed yet more re-litigations of borders especially in the spaces of the 19th century balkanizations enacted in Berlin, inaugurating a new age of mass displacement and forced migration on an unprecedented global scale. While older forms of balkanization continue to dictate the persistent militarization of national borders, entrenchment of ethno-nationalism, and resurgence of nativist narratives of every variety, the multi-faceted crises elicited by political conflict and climate collapse threaten the immutability of state borders, provoking new anxieties that orbit the mass of displaced humanity that finds itself stateless and dispossessed in the continued maelstrom of partition that has caught up every corner of the globe in its chaotic vortex.

Thus, as balkanization continues to evolve, both politically and culturally, new figures come to populate global narratives of division and partition, inheriting the mantle of the guest traveler and chronicler in the new millennium. In the 21st century, the refugee, migrant, displaced and unhoused meet the incarcerated, imprisoned and captive as the new figurations of balkanization. The migrant’s journey traces the spatial dimension of balkanization in the 21st century, whereas incarceration becomes the temporal correlate to the imaginative flight of the chronicler, representing the forcible confinement to one place over vast swaths of time and the chronological extension of balkanization in this era. Unlike in the 20th century, where the spatial and temporal extensions of balkanization, while chiastically connected were nevertheless experienced in distinct ways by discrete cultural figures, in the 21st century, the refugee and migrant can often embody both the spatial and temporal effects of partition at the same time, in

⁵ See Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

one person.

As B. Venkat Mani argues, the refugee is the figure of the 21st century world topography *par excellence*. In Mani's powerful constellation, the refugee is "a figure that is constantly out of place," whose abjection arises from her dispossession, of land, nationality and stable categorization in the inherited terms of citizen and outsider or foreigner.⁶ Thus, the refugee, migrant, unhoused and otherwise displaced culturally represents for statecraft and majoritarian thought "the figure from whom we need to guard our relatively safer homes by shutting doors or closing borders."⁷ The refugee is systemically connected with the prisoner, however. The nations with the lowest incarceration rates in the world are those facing the worst of the refugee crisis and those with the largest prison populations accept the fewest refugees.⁸ In the United States, where mass incarceration has taken over the function of slavery, legalized through provisions in the 13th Amendment of the Constitution, prison populations form the literal surplus that stands in excess to the communal body of the nation and state, restricted from engaging in the vital democratic process while powering the engine of its accumulation and reproduction.

The vast majority of refugees and internally displaced persons are housed in camps that bear more than a stark resemblance to prisons. Those who happen to escape from these bleak tent cities are typically resettled in urban areas where they face further precarity and criminalization, often populating jailhouses and prisons due to the systemic injustices facing racial and ethnic minorities. Thus, while the figure of the refugee populates the crisis of displacement in the former spaces of balkanization, the figure of the prisoner populates the utter enclosure and social

⁶ Mani, "Finding Odysseus's Scars Again," 3.

⁷ Ibid., 1.

⁸ Widra and Herring, "States of Incarceration" UNHCR, "Figures." As Widra and Herring aptly summarize: "Not only does the U.S. have the highest incarceration rate in the world; every single U.S. state incarcerates more people per capita than virtually any independent democracy on earth."

partition of criminalized poverty in the sites of accumulation themselves. And these sites are both real and imaginary, territorial and virtual.

As the looming ecological collapse will only accelerate displacement across the planet, and the consequent deterritorialization of the most literal sort will structure future crises as that of the global circulation of displaced and migrant populations, the narratives of refuge, migration, and incarceration become the grounds of resistance against the totalizing narrative of limitless expanse at the expense of utter balkanization. The refugee and prisoner become possible applications of the two narratives of Armah's Janus-faced we-chroniclers in *Two Thousand Seasons* voicing, in one body, the total catastrophe of history as one long apocalypse and at the same time the irrepressible antagonism to the ever-shifting face of annihilation that emerges in the ebullience of creation and resistance, in that defiant strain of life-clinging resolve that perseveres despite the concerted effort to stamp it out, that strives for its meager measure of freedom.

The refugee/prisoner inherits balkanization's insidious extension into the present and is therefore a figuration of resistance to the totalizing tendencies of identity and representation that seek to pin and categorize the world into neatly delimited and perfectly enclosed spheres, into discrete nations and the narratives of belonging they have fostered on the basis of exclusion. The refugee/prisoner is one such figuration of the non-identical excess of Adorno's negative dialectics: far from delineating the fringes of the social totality, it represents the invisible, abject(ed) center of current dispensations of balkanization, embodying the illusory promise of permanence upon which is built the foundation of progress.

As history spirals on, oblivious to its mandated end, ownership and possession (of all manner of tangible and non-fungible commodities) continues to be inextricably tied to blood in

ever stranger ways and continues to manifest in more and not fewer conflicts over territoriality across the globe; the refugee/prisoner is the ghost in the machine that speaks to the transitory promise of ownership, that speaks the ever-looming possibility of un/re-settlement and captivity that awaits just outside the proverbial city gates. The refugee/prisoner is a living record of the one calamity that stands between any one of us and the heart-rending ache of final nostalgia: seeking refuge only to be met with confinement, a state of home-lessness from which there is no return journey nor movement of any kind at all.

Ever harangued by surveillance and captivity, the very possibility of hospitality then lingers in the insistent work of welcoming the stranger, visiting the prisoner, educating the dispossessed, offering however momentary a reprieve from the aching spareness of Bhion Achimba's quiet response to the cruel thought of home in a refugee camp: "even bones thirst." Can these dry bones live? Is it possible to refuse the current terms of history's spell, binding us to the narrow categories of existence available in what Bob Kaufman called the "universe of cells" in which one can either be prisoner or jailer. If so, this must be the vocation of culture in the current era of fragmentation, in this bizarre careering swerve of balkanization's bitter legacies of partition.

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