

(Post)Yugoslav Identities and East-West Paradigm:  
Empires and Imperialism on the Margins of Europe

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MADISON

2013

Date of final oral examination: 06/21/13

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This work is dedicated to the late Hadis Bećirspahić who was the kindest person I ever knew, and to the group of my war-time comrades with whom I spent the worst days of the Sarajevo siege, our conviviality shielding us from ethno-nationalist fascism around us. They are my inspiration and a reminder that a better world is possible.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Tomislav Longinović for his support and advice; without him, neither this degree nor this dissertation would have been possible. His trust and absolute patience with my writing process was wonderful. Professor Luis Madureira has inspired me many times as we worked through theoretical texts over the years, including those at the heart of this dissertation. Professor Tejumola Olaniyan has been very generous with his time as was Professor David Bethea from the moment I began the Special Committee PhD program. Professor David McDonald was kind enough to read my work aspiring to intellectual history and for this I am most grateful. I must thank the Department of Slavic Languages and Literature at University of Wisconsin – Madison for providing me with the most supportive and comradely scholarly “home.” I also want to thank my many colleagues at the American Comparative Literature Association whose seminar on Eastern European and Eurasian Studies, entering its 16<sup>th</sup> consecutive year in 2013 (and many informal discussions over coffee) gave me the opportunity to test out many of the ideas that made it into this dissertation. Last but not least, I am grateful to Professor Susan Andrade at University of Pittsburgh for listening to the first articulations of the second chapter and for her incredibly helpful advice.

Research presented in this dissertation would not have been possible without the generous support of Title VIII Southeastern Europe Research Fellowship from the American Council of Teachers of Russian / American Councils for International Education and the support of their wonderful staffers in Sarajevo, Ms. Luljeta Koshi and Ms. Aleksandra Popović. My deepest gratitude to the National Archives of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, their amazingly helpful staff, especially Sandra Biletić, Fahrudin Kulenović, and Boro Jurišić who helped me

search the Central Committee's unruly file system. I am also thankful to the Archives of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with special thanks to my research assistant, Ms. Adisa Avdić who helped me wade through the many volumes in the Branko Mikulić collection. I am also grateful to the National Archives of Yugoslavia as well as Mr. Bojan Jovanović whose welcome and help at the National Library in Belgrade is most deeply appreciated. University of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies generously provided me with much needed research space and resources during the last year of writing. My husband John, my sister Sandra, and my parents Dragan and Rozalija supported me in so many different ways and I am forever indebted to them.

# (Post)Yugoslav Identities and the East-West Paradigm: Empires and Imperialism on the Margins of Europe

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## **Introduction**

This dissertation is an attempt to provide the proper context for reading the high literary canon and by implication the wider field of cultural production in former Yugoslavia from within a postcolonial paradigm, i.e., in the context of empires and imperialism. The inspiration for such an approach came from two post-socialist realities: first, the ease with which 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse of the Balkans (Balkanism) and Eastern Europe “came back” in the Western media and scholarly production to signify contemporary, post-socialist realities and second, the political straight-jacket of national(istic) interpretations of Yugoslav literature that left so much to be desired. It was rather puzzling to me that stereotypes of Eastern Europe in circulation in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century returned so easily in the 21<sup>st</sup>, seemingly without much challenge, and as if the socialist period had left no mark on the region. As I learned from Maria Todorova and Larry Wolff’s influential works, the perception of historical stagnation of the region that made this great leap in judgment possible had much to do with the subject of postcolonial cultural studies, which, in turn, attracted much of my scholarly attention for the last ten years. At the same time, reading the canon of Yugoslav literature in the post-Yugoslav period left so many unanswered questions about its role in the cultural life of the former country, what way it engaged with rising nationalism, and most importantly, why were these texts so prominent in the post-Yugoslav cultural and national(istic) debates. These two interests happily coincided when those first postcolonial analyses of the region began to ring true in my reading of Yugoslav literature, especially texts on Bosnia.

The literary works in question were almost always “historical” and their popularity in Yugoslavia prior to the break up rested, as I found out, in their seeming meditations of what it

was or is to be “Bosnian.” In the English-speaking world, as I quickly discovered, some of these texts were afforded the status of Holy Books on Yugoslav history, including in the US military manual for service men and women being deployed to Bosnia. One only had to skim a foreigner’s accounts of how and why they read Andrić or visit the innumerable diaspora websites and blogs on Bosnia in the 1990s with long quotations of Hasan’s monologues from *Death and the Dervish* to realize that this mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century high literature, the very top of the Yugoslav canon seemed to speak, for most readers, to the contested identities of late 1980s Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav period.

But why was this the case? What was it about these works and the way they engaged Yugoslav identities that made them as popular (as they were misread I thought) at home and abroad? The more I explored their interpretations and impact at the time as well as in the present, the more I found the realities of empires and imperialism in Yugoslav history to be central to answering these questions. In fact, it was shocking to me that others have not spoken to this: how could Andrić’s *The Bridge on the Drina* be read without referencing his biting critique of Austro-Hungarian occupation and the rise of capitalism? He devotes entire chapters solely to that topic. And how could anyone read Hasan’s rebellious rant against Istanbul and not see that its popularity today had everything to do with the West and nothing to do with the Ottoman Empire?

As my research took me into the literary, cultural, and social science journals of the time, it became all the more clear that these missed opportunities had more to do with the intellectual orientation of Yugoslav society in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century and its ideological blindness to what I have called in this work Eurocentrism than any individual (mis)readings. In short, Yugoslav wider culture during the socialist period, despite all the proclamations to the contrary, was still

deeply beholden to a view of the world that holds Europe as the unique miracle in human history, a solitary civilization whose benefits Yugoslavs ardently desired and yet never seemed to be able to (re)gain. At the same time, breaking this ideological frame was precisely this realization that they will always lag behind, technologically as well as intellectually. Recognizing this (imposed?) reality was the central intellectual and cultural question of much of Yugoslav cultural history it seemed to me.

In this, Yugoslavia was not unique in the Second World, as most Eastern European societies constructed similar narratives of their (forceful) separation from Europe proper and therefore from what was best and brightest in human history and culture. As I show in this dissertation, the Yugoslav literary works I examine were engaging this problem much more critically, opening it up to ruminations from the periphery about this “Europe” Yugoslav society fetishized as well as the history of empires and imperialism that seemed inseparable from it. In the process, these works began to stake out a position of rebellion against this historical conundrum of European periphery. And they did it so masterfully that even before these presumptions about Europe began to be questioned in public in the 1980s and 1990s, these authors’ popularity rested, in part, on having engaged this issue already. Much of the present work details precisely the way in which these high literary works engaged Europe and Eurocentric historiography, as well as issues of empire and imperialism. It was this element that defined them in my mind as “historical” works in much more fundamental fashion than their setting or narrative frame. But the history they narrate, I contend, was not just the particular history of Bosnia but the way they understood History as such, i.e., a particular Philosophy of History.

Scholarship on Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia especially, in history as in cultural studies, has often suffered from overt or covert focus on nations, ethnic conflict, and “totalitarianism” as a paradigm for the socialist period. Most mainstream studies, both here and in Yugoslavia (with a few very notable exceptions), still remain within the national(istic), anti-socialist paradigm. On the other hand, postcolonial-inspired volumes such as Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* or Larry Wolff’s *Inventing Eastern Europe* had two major blind spots. First was an ahistorical use of the conceptual framework of postcolonial studies in that they failed to establish clearly marked coordinates of material, power relations beyond textual signification. Without these material and power relations we cannot account for the significance and impact textual signification had within Eastern Europe i.e., this corpus of stereotypes remains at the level of banal ethnocentrism. The other major problem in these studies was the almost complete avoidance of the socialist period in considering Western “invention” or “imagination” of Eastern Europe. What happened to these stereotypes and cultural imagination during the Cold War was unclear even though this was the one period of history where the demarcation line between East and West was strongest and most clearly visible.

I began my work on the present thesis by answering these theoretical and historical questions. If I was to use postcolonial frames of reference in analyzing Yugoslav cultural life, I found I had to first justify and contextualize this usage. Yugoslavia was not colonized, at least not since Austria-Hungary’s annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; in the socialist period it was independent, part of the Non-Aligned Movement, so why would we be justified in using concepts of empires, imperialism, and Eurocentrism to speak of Yugoslav cultural production in post-WWII period? Answering this challenge became the topic of the first chapter of the current work.

Turning then to the question of rereading the canon with an eye to the experiences of empires and imperialism, I focused on three representative moments in the canon: works that fundamentally changed the very literary form they engaged in the Yugoslav tradition. In choosing the three authors – Ivo Andrić, Meša Selimović, and Mak Dizdar – I was also guided by the principle of the most common denominator. I focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina's literature because this state more than any other in former Yugoslavia came to embody both the internal self-definition of the federal unity and the orientalist liminality of empires' borderlands the most. Contrasting my approach to the prevailing readings of these authors, my analysis also attempts to criticize and undercut national(istic) interpretations of that same canon that have flourished in the post-socialist period.

This dissertation is divided into two longer chapters. The first chapter addresses the theoretical problems I mention regarding postcolonial cultural studies of Eastern Europe, while the second chapter outlines my alternative reading of the canon. Both chapters focus primarily on the socialist period. Their internal structure is as follows: The first chapter consists of four major sections, each addressing a particular aspect of the problem at hand. The first section (1.1) is an overview of available literature on the topic of postcolonial approaches to Eastern Europe with a critique of the two blind spots I outlined above. In it I also reference major conceptual and textual elements of Western ideological construction of Eastern Europe and Eastern Europeans' responses to it. The second section of this chapter (1.2) establishes my point of entry into postcolonial studies as one of a cultural theory dealing with imperialism. I propose working definitions of the terms and concepts such as colonial, postcolonial, empire, imperialism, etc.; elaborate on the crucial differences between pre-modern and modern empires, and colonial and non-colonial imperialism; and I conclude with a brief contextualization of the failures of

previous scholarship to address the economic and geopolitical elements of Western imperialism in Eastern Europe. Such scholarship was often trapped in the presumed isolation of Second World from the dynamics of domination between the First and Third Worlds in the now defunct Three Worlds theory. The third section (1.3) attempts to fill the gap in definitions of Western relations to Eastern Europe in terms of economic and political dynamic of Western imperialism in Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia. Here I outline the non-colonial imperialist tactics used to undermine the states in the region, be it through military confrontation or through economic warfare. The final section of this chapter (1.4) returns to the wider importance of the historical conclusions and the political economy of Eastern Europe during the Cold War I analyzed here. I argue that analysis of the economic, political and historical contexts must be the basis for all deployments of postcolonial scholarship in the region but that understanding the cultural structures of imperialism must follow such analysis. I broadly define my approach as based on Bourdieu's definitions of artistic, political, economic, and other fields of production in that I do not seek to prove nor expect to find direct definitions or relations of the economic sphere to the cultural one except in so far as they are realms whose actors exist in relation to each other and therefore cannot be examined apart from one another. Examining the cultural structures of imperialism means, in practical terms, tracing the ideology of Eurocentrism as a particular structure of justification and legitimization of European imperialism (and within it global capitalism as its definitive element).

The second chapter consists of four sections as well with a brief conclusion. The first section (2.1) outlines the Yugoslav literary canon as defined in the socialist period, focusing on the debates about the canon in Bosnia and Herzegovina as the place where nationalist definitions imploded most forcefully when confronted with reality on the ground. I establish the differences

between the official Party positions and the extreme right wing nationalist ones while critiquing the former for not attempting to dismantle the literature-language-nation tripartite definition. The second section (2.2) is an examination of the most well known and influential Yugoslav author, Ivo Andrić whose stature alone justifies extended focus on him in any discussion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century canon. I propose that Andrić's narratives seek to undermine the epic narrative formulas, establish history as the primary referent of modern literature and identify him as an example of modernist bilingual intelligentsia of the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Yugoslavia. I argue that he engages the modernist philosophy of history, based on idealist and Hegelian notions of transcendence and the inaccessible unity we desire but can only glimpse through art. I highlight Andrić's belief in art as the only possible human intervention in the tragedy of History and eternal Time as the great equalizer in History as such. The third section (2.3) continues to analyze the engagement with the so-called dark vilayet image of Bosnia ascribed first to Andrić and then to Selimović – the subject of this section. I counter readings of Selimović as a “native informant” on Bosnia and its Islamic features that “orientalist” analysis read into his novels. Such interpretations read *Death and the Dervish* as a theologically inflected psychological portrait of its narrator, rather than a partially occluded history of the ethical hero in the novel – Hasan as I do. I attempt to rescue some of Selimović's socialist and materialist views expressed through an existentialist undercutting of theology and a focus on the dialectical structures of human thought and action. Selimović follows Andrić in articulating the Bosnian space as a positive space of identity defined by spite and defiance of its natives. The fourth section (2.4) finishes this sketch of the canon by turning to Mak Dizdar and his poetry collection *The Stone Sleeper*. I argue that Dizdar's poetry is not a mythmaking project of Bosniak nationhood, but rather, once again, a materialist-based attempt to rescue Bosnian native identity in confrontation

with empires. My analysis of Dizdar's style focuses on the complex phrases such as "kolo bola" [train of pain] or "prkosna od sna" [defiant from dreams] as not only stylistic features but images of the dialectic: two terms, intertwined in their confrontation to create a more complex concept that is more than the sum of its parts. "Prkosna od sna" in particular captures the utopian ideal in defiance as a path that might take us out of the Eurocentric definitions of spite as a meaningless reflex or proof of native irrationalism. The final section (2.5) is a brief summary of the analysis offered in the chapter. I emphasize the three figures of the texts' engagement with history of imperialism: the eternal translators in Andrić, the return of agency in "nobility out of spite" in Selimović, and the inverted pyramid as the symbol of defiance against hegemony in Dizdar. Rather than reading the canon as history of different iterations of different national subject narratives, I present these three authors as a history of engagements with empires, imperialism, and attempts to define and negotiate the idea of Bosnian identity – as interpretation, defiance, defiance-as-utopia.

In the Conclusion, I reflect once again on the major arguments presented in the dissertation as a model to be followed in avoiding the national(istic) reductive readings while offering a narrative that connects socialist to post-socialist cultural production through interactions with the Eurocentric paradigm. I also conclude that the contradiction inherent in a socialist state like Yugoslavia being subject to imperialism (and global capitalism) was the point beyond which our literary canon of the socialist period was not able to go. Eurocentrism inherited from bourgeois nationalism of the first Yugoslavia was being challenged from Andrić on, but it is as if the Second World paradigm and the Cold War as the primary confrontation of capitalism and socialism obscured both the workings of global imperialism in Yugoslavia as well as the Eurocentric ideology that legitimized it. In this, my dissertation is an important

intervention into postcolonial studies of Eastern Europe, addressing the complex interactions of imperialism with socialist states and the importance of Eurocentrism as a paradigm still at work in culture of socialist Yugoslavia. To take this project further, we could address the ways popular culture rather than the literary canon take up these same elements of Eurocentrism and how post-socialist cultural production is engaging the socialist canon in dialogue, recovering this history of Eurocentric paradigms at work in it. I hope the following will serve as a model to follow in such investigations of (Post)Yugoslav history and culture.

## **Chapter One:**

# **The “Postcolonial” in Eastern Europe: Theoretical Framework and Methodology for a Cultural Analysis of Former Yugoslavia**

*This long period of [Ottoman] imperial domination separated Southeastern Europe from the western half of the Mediterranean, but did not place it in the political position of Asian and African colonies emerging from European domination in more recent times. ... The Ottoman military presence was in the end less efficient and widespread than that, say, of the British in India. ... [Southeastern European countries'] growing political independence and modern, national ambitions, accompanied by underdeveloped economies based on peasant agriculture and yet tied to the wider European market, make them the first 'developing nations.' Like their many counterparts since the Second World War, they are distinguished as much by aspirations to move rapidly toward the standards of the developed economies as by their distance from them. Unlike their more recent counterparts, however, the new Balkan states were located on the immediate periphery of the European market. They faced cultural agonies but not ones equal to those of the Third World in borrowing European practices and knowledge.*

Lampe and Jackson *Balkan Economic History: 1550 – 1950*

In the last fifteen years, postcolonial theory has influenced research and analysis in Slavic Studies in unprecedented ways across the disciplines. Theories and concepts taken from postcolonial theory have been applied to Russia, the Baltic States, “Central” Europe, and Southeast Europe. (While “postcolonial theory” is a complex concept for now we can take it to mean a theory of colonial and imperial practices which takes into account the context of the post (after) colonialism to articulate a post (beyond) colonialism and imperialism.) In literary and cultural studies, colonial discourse analysis as influenced by Edward Said has been the dominant (albeit controversial) paradigm for applying postcolonial concepts to Eastern Europe and the Slavic world.

In this chapter I argue for continuing and expanding the use of postcolonial concepts in analyses of Eastern European societies in general and former Yugoslavia in particular. First, I present key texts that instigated the use of postcolonial concepts in Eastern European studies, and

I highlight major contributions and controversies these texts bring forth. Second, I give my responses to these controversies and present a case for a restructured use of postcolonial theory in Eastern European studies. I argue for using a variety of concepts and methods from “cultural theories dealing with imperialism” while maintaining historical specificity in their application to Eastern Europe. More specifically, I present a case for why Yugoslavia can and should be analyzed using the methods outlined in the previous sections, focusing especially on the socialist period, formerly left out of postcolonial approaches to the region. Finally, I round off the exposition of the methodology used in this dissertation with an analysis of how and why culture and especially literary culture and history are relevant for an understanding of neocolonial dependence and forms of resistance to imperial domination in former Yugoslavia.

### **Permutations of the “Postcolonial” in Eastern European Studies to Date**

The use of postcolonial concepts in analyses of Eastern European societies appeared for the first time, not accidentally, shortly after the fall of the Communist regimes in the region. As the communist regimes collapsed, Eastern European states entered a world system radically different from the one in which two superpowers had existed in a delicate balance of forces: a world system now clearly dominated by Western powers and a globalizing capitalist order. To some analysts of Eastern Europe, postcolonial theory represented a systematic approach to understanding this global order, and they began analyzing Eastern Europe’s integration into the post-socialist world through the postcolonial lens. In what follows I aim to cover the most important moments in the development of this subfield in Eastern European studies. I focus therefore on a handful of articles and books that have proven especially influential, and that bring

into focus what I see as the still unresolved theoretical problems in applying postcolonial theory to Eastern European societies.

### ***Orientalism as a Point of Departure***

Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden's "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans'" was one of the first attempts to use postcolonial concepts to describe events in Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> Their article focuses on "Orientalism" as a process of cultural and knowledge politics that was taken up *internally*, within Yugoslavia, albeit as a copy of a European "symbolic geography." The essay outlines the "increasing use by politicians and writers from the northwestern parts of the country of an orientalist rhetoric that relies for its force on an ontological and epistemological distinction between (north)west and (south)east" (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1). In an attempt to claim one's belonging to (Western) Europe, Slovenian and Croatian intellectuals resorted to orientalist rhetoric in distinguishing themselves from their (south) eastern compatriots. Specifically, these intellectuals relied on the East-West division of Europe to claim that Slovenia and Croatia are more properly (West) European, civilized, and democratic than the remaining republics in former Yugoslavia. For Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, the northwest-southeast axis within Europe (and here reproduced within Yugoslavia) embodies the "division of human reality" akin to the one between Europe and the Orient outlined by Edward Said in *Orientalism*.

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<sup>1</sup> I will use terms "Eastern Europe" and "Balkans" interchangeably here not to deny the particularities of Western European discourse that constructed these terms, but rather to point out the similarity of such discourses both in their origin and their basic outlines. Unlike Maria Todorova (see below), I find both "Eastern Europe" and "Balkan" to be results of the same intellectual processes in Western Europe.

Bakić-Hayden and Hayden say that “the main intellectual issue raised by *Orientalism* is whether the continua of human reality can be divided into clearly differentiated cultures, histories, traditions, societies without implying the insurmountable hostilities by the absoluteness of the distinctions” (3). Taken at this very general level, *Orientalism* can be taken as speaking to the East-West divisions within Europe, because the rhetoric of these divisions establishes clear differentiation between cultures and traditions of the east and west of Europe and subscribes to a larger project of dividing human reality along cultural and civilizational lines. However, in order to apply the concept of “Orientalism” to Yugoslavia as elaborated in Said’s work, Bakić-Hayden and Hayden have to make some modifications.

Apart from applying Orientalism to a division within Europe itself, Bakić-Hayden and Hayden claim that while Said’s concept of “Orientalism” was intrinsically linked to an “economic relationship of domination and submission” in the “postcolonial world,” it could be applied to situations that lack this economic (and colonial) relationship: “in the post-colonial world, the language of orientalism still maintains its rhetorical force as a powerful set of categories with which to stigmatize societies that are not ‘western-style democracies” (3). But who does the stigmatizing and why it matters to those who are stigmatized is not explained here. This separation of economic and political reality from the cultural and ideological discourse fueled the strongest critics of Bakić-Hayden and Hayden’s introduction of Orientalism into the Eastern European context.<sup>2</sup> In this de-politicization of the concept of Orientalism, Bakić-Hayden

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<sup>2</sup> Said’s own text invites this separation of material, economic reality from the political and “discursive” one as he includes, for example, the Ancient Greeks in his definition of orientalizers. However, I would maintain that even when Said makes such claims, his main argument is about the elements of Western European intellectual history (including the Greeks) moving in a defined way towards colonialism and imperialism and the production of Orientalist discourse.

and Hayden can be taken to follow a particular strand of postcolonial theory, namely the *culturalist* turn within postcolonial studies.

Maria Todorova's seminal work *Imagining the Balkans* rejects Bakić-Hayden and Hayden's argument that the discourse of and about the "Balkans" is identical to Orientalism. She introduces a new concept, Balkanism, to account for this Western European discourse. Todorova reasons that modifying postcolonial concepts to the point of separating them from their economic and political context is unacceptable. Her argument is two-fold: neither does Orientalism fit as a model of Western European discursive construction of the Balkans nor does postcolonialism as a theory of social and political relations describe the interaction between Western and Eastern Europe. Regarding this first point Todorova offers a long list of specific differences between Orientalism and a discourse of the Balkan difference:

**The "Orient" / Orientalism**

- no concrete, historical or geographic referent
- exotic utopia and escape from civilization
- association with the feminine
- opulent, rich
- intrinsically "other"
- anti-world of the West, complete opposite
- colonial and imperialistic
- Islamic
- racially unambiguously "other"
- non-Europe

**The "Balkans" / Balkanism**

- historical and geographic concreteness
- no sense of exotic as desirable
- association with the masculine
- almost total lack of wealth
- "imperfect self"
- an intersection of civilizations
- never under complete colonial subordination
- ambiguous about Islam and Ottoman rule
- racially mongrel, but essentially white
- peripheral Europe

In an apparent distinction from Orientalism, Todorova claims Balkanism to be a discourse that originated in "innocent inaccuracies stemming from imperfect geographical

knowledge transmitted through tradition.” The initial “geographical appellation” was first saturated “with political, social, cultural, and ideological overtones.” After this ideological move, the designation “Balkan” was consequently dissociated from its object completely, but subsequently occurred as a “reverse and retroactive ascription of the ideologically loaded designation to the region, particularly after 1989” (Todorova 7). In short, the Balkans initially referred (innocently) to a geographic region that was later misrepresented in Western political and cultural discourse, and finally completely disassociated from its original, geographic referent, leaving only the “ideologically loaded” notion to be misused today.

Here Todorova specifically distances herself from Said’s *Orientalism* in that she claims both a geographical concreteness to the Balkans and a specific historical development separate from any Orientalist intellectual project. Balkanism as a concept thus avoids the well-known criticism of Orientalism as denoting both a misrepresentation of a concrete geo-historical reality, and a Foucauldian discursive construction without any concrete signifier identifiable in the real world at the same time. Todorova’s Balkanism is, then, clearly a matter of misrepresentation, which, unlike Orientalism, originates in what she calls “imperfect geographical knowledge.”

What this argument fails to appreciate, however, is that geography is not immune from ideological discourses and political processes. What she calls “innocent inaccuracies” in mapping the geography of Eastern Europe are hardly innocent or separate from the larger intellectual context. As Larry Wolff argues:

Imagining and mapping were not the competing operations of fantasy and science, but were closely related functions; the imagination of Voltaire fed upon geography and ranged over the map, while the cartography of the Enlightenment was deeply influenced by an unscientific imagery of Eastern Europe (Wolff 359).

Mapping of Eastern Europe, as of the rest of the world, followed conquests, changes in geopolitical alignments and the rise and fall of empires. During the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,

mapping of Eastern Europe was “often carried out by foreign experts, [and] was a fundamental part of the general discovery which produced and organized knowledge of ‘these lost lands’” (Wolff 145). The intellectual, political, social, economic, and cultural context in which this mapping of Eastern Europe occurred is the Western European era of colonial expansion. Therefore, even the initial mapping of Eastern Europe which Todorova calls “innocent” cannot be separated from the history of colonialism and imperialism on a global scale.

Todorova rejects not only Orientalism, but postcolonial theory in general as a paradigm for studying the Balkans because it involves a “conflation of historically defined, time-specific, and finite categories like colonialism and imperialism with broadly conceived and not historically circumscribed notions like power and subordination” (16). She claims that in order to apply postcolonialism to the Balkans or Eastern Europe, one has to equate colonialism with less defined notions of influence or subordination which are more accurate descriptions of the relations between Western and Eastern Europe. As for Bakić-Hayden and Hayden’s argument that Orientalism can be equated with a vague notion of “stigmatization” of non-Western societies, Todorova’s argument here holds. But, Todorova here also reduces postcolonial theory to its etymological meaning of “coming after colonialism” without taking into account that postcolonial theory considers precisely the relationship between colonialism and imperialism as economic and political orders and power and subordination as means of maintaining those orders. Implicitly then, for Todorova, Balkanism as a theory of Eastern European society in relation to Western Europe is different from Orientalism precisely in that it did not arise as a means of maintaining some colonial or imperial order. Andrew Hammond, among others, challenges this contention with research into the economic and political benefits of British involvement in the Balkans (see below).

Whether Saidian Orientalism correctly explains the relations between Western and Eastern Europe, or the “nesting” relations within Eastern Europe itself, hinges on the separation of economic relations (imperialism) from the ideological constructions of the region (Orientalism). Bakić-Hayden and Hayden do not explain how or why Orientalism can be separated from economic subjugation, other than to claim that the “postcolonial condition” itself allows for such changes. If what they mean to say is that the postcolonial condition does not hinge on economic subjugation or relations of dominance, we must question their definition of the “postcolonial condition.” On the other hand, Todorova bypasses Orientalism both in terms of its “discursive” definition (“the Balkans” is not a “discursive” construct because it does have real-world referents) and Orientalism’s reference to material conditions (“subjugation” of the Balkans to the West does not measure up to colonialism). The distinction made between subjugation on the one hand and colonialism and imperialism on the other calls for a more detailed definition of both colonialism and imperialism – the subject of a later section in this chapter.

In response to Todorova’s objections to applying postcolonial theory to the region, I contend that the “mapping” of Eastern Europe and the Balkans occurred in the general political, economic, and social conditions of the age of European colonialism and that this context must be the focus of any further discussion of Eastern European postcoloniality. Further, “Balkanism,” “Orientalism,” or any such “discursive” construction of the region did, in fact, arise as means of maintaining a specific imperialist, Western European capitalist order on the periphery. Scholarship to date has addressed in limited ways this larger context of the construction of Eastern Europeanness and the outlines of the imperialist order which this discourse maintained. In the following three sections I present these contributions focusing first on those explaining the

economic order of a capitalist periphery in Eastern Europe and second the discursive constructions and cultural elements of “Eastern Europeanness.”

***(Economic) Center and Periphery as a Paradigm of West-East Relations***

Eastern Europe as a discursive (and ideological) concept has its own history, expertly presented by Larry Wolff in *Inventing Eastern Europe*. But, as Todorova correctly points out, there is also a geographical, historical and political concreteness to the notion of Eastern Europe. Exploring the relationship between Western and Eastern Europe in these concrete historical terms has not been a common preoccupation of scholars applying postcolonial theory to the region. In most cases, one can find only implications of inequality or subordination with few concrete examples. One notable exception is Andrew Hammond’s article “The Uses of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British Travel Writing, 1850-1914.” Hammond notes that

The functions and material effects of balkanist representation are rarely analysed in depth, and are at times omitted altogether. The oddity of the omission is clear when one recalls that the roots of this branch of critical inquiry lie in the poststructuralist field of colonial discourse analysis inspired by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1979). As Said's work exemplified, here was a critical school dedicated to exposing the ways in which the West's understanding of other cultures *vindicates and advances forms of power, particularly colonialism*. For balkanism, it is as if the general lack of direct Western colonization of the region has crippled discussion of the *power relations underlying representation* (A. Hammond 601, emphasis mine).

As Hammond here correctly indicates, the lack of direct Western colonization is at the heart of the confusion over how postcolonial theory applies to Eastern Europe. Economic relations, those “material effects of balkanist representation” are consistently denied in the works on “discursive” constructions of Eastern Europe.

As we have already seen, Bakić-Hayden and Hayden imply that there is no economic or political reality that corresponds to the “orientalization” of Eastern Europe. Even more explicitly, Susan Gal rejects geo-political reality as an element in the Orientalist consciousness of Eastern Europeans she examines in “Bartok’s Funeral.” Gal traces the desire of Eastern Europeans to prove one’s belonging to Europe (a central feature of the orientaling discourse reproduced within Yugoslavia and elsewhere) in statements of Hungarian intellectuals from the end of the 19th century to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>. She concludes that the similarity of these statements spanning a century “points to the longevity of the wish to ‘join Europe,’ something that is nevertheless always ‘just about to happen,’ *suggesting that we are dealing less with a geographical or political relation than with a durable discourse about that relation*” (Gal 12, emphasis mine). Gal implies here that there is no conceivable way in which we can describe the relations between Western and Eastern Europe from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century as such that would justify the longevity of Eastern Europeans’ perception of inferiority. This is seemingly self-evident as European history spanning the “long 19<sup>th</sup> century” is so varied that there can be no constant in the relations between Western and Eastern Europe.

However, the one constant that has survived two world wars, revolutions, socialism and now post-socialism is Eastern Europe’s “peripheral” economic status in relation to Western Europe. This peripherality is historically circumscribed as Todorova points out:

From a historical point of view, of course, these changes in reality [industrialization and the creation of the petit bourgeoisie] are hardly slow: after all, the provenance of this reality, its economic and social laggards, is hardly more than two centuries old. This is not the same as saying that the relative backwardness of the Balkans began only two centuries ago but that the *technological gap between the regions of Europe became meaningful only in the framework of new structural relations with the creation of what Wallerstein has designated as a world economy. More importantly, this is a continuing reality* (Todorova 42, emphasis mine).

Todorova is here talking about an economic and social process of modernization in the Balkans that is persistently interpreted, both at home and abroad, as producing a lamentable, but seemingly *irreducible* gap between Western Europe and the Balkans.

The Balkanites' *perception* of this technological or industrial gap is evident in the portrait of the home-grown "bourgeois upstart" as the Balkan barbarian hiding behind a thin patina of Western culture. Todorova cites numerous literary works from the period that center on these "bourgeois upstarts" and use their failings to be "truly" modern and Western as comedic devices. While the gap between East and West in these literary works is portrayed as *cultural*, the peripheral status of Eastern Europe originated with the development and expansion of industrial capitalism and it persists on the basis of the *continuing* economic and technological lag. The world economy and the development of industrial capitalism – as described by Immanuel Wallerstein – are, therefore, at the core of the Balkanites' perception of peripherality. Unfortunately, Todorova does not analyze further the nature of this material condition nor its causal links to the ideological representation of the Balkans in the West.

Larry Wolff rejects the possibility that economic peripherality is intertwined with Western Europe's "intellectual mastery" over Eastern Europe in two ways. First, he disagrees with Immanuel Wallerstein's idea that Eastern Europe was or is Western Europe's economic periphery, claiming that to describe 16<sup>th</sup>-century economic relations between them as those of center and periphery involves "taking the culturally constructed unity of the eighteenth century and projecting it backward to organize an earlier economic model." Wolff concludes that "social and economic factors were far from fully determining Western Europe's associative construction of Eastern Europe" (Wolff 8). Second, Wolff claims that the "study of Eastern Europe, like Orientalism, was a style of intellectual mastery, integrating knowledge and power, *perpetrating*

*domination and subordination*” (Ibid, emphasis mine). On the specifics of this “domination and subordination” of Eastern Europe by Western Europe, Wolff cites only two examples: Napoleon and the Third Reich. He therefore limits considerations of how “intellectual mastery” of Eastern Europe by Western Europeans aids in their domination only to direct military conquests, implicitly rejecting considerations of non-military, economic “domination and subordination.”

In *Inventing Ruritania* Vesna Goldsworthy explores the economic relations between Great Britain and the Balkans only within the realm of media and cultural production, coining the phrase “imperialism of the imagination.” She does not explore the economic interests intertwined with cultural (mis)representation of the Balkans but rather advances the argument that cultural misrepresentation in itself is imperialistic in nature as it produces profit in the cultural arena in the form of popular novels, films, and other media. It is unclear, however, in Goldsworthy’s argument, what is the effect of this cultural misrepresentation on the natives as she does not connect it to any material effect on the ground. Imperialism of the imagination as a concept explains nothing but the natives’ outrage at Western misrepresentations of the region, without exploring *why* such misrepresentations actually matter nor how they might be implicated in non-symbolic forms of exploitation.

The relationship between the economically peripheral status and the textual constructions of either the Balkans or Eastern Europe has not been fully explored in studies to date. Todorova explicitly asks what the connection between the peripheral status and local identities is, but restricts her analysis to how the locals accept the Western European designation of “Balkan” in its many permutations. Scholarship to date has focused primarily on the discursive construction of Eastern Europe and the following two sections will present the outlines of that research. But,

if one agrees with Wallerstein (as Todorova seems to) that Eastern Europe as a periphery is in a subordinate economic position to Western Europe as the center, then the relationship between the Western European construction of the Balkans and their persistent peripherality must be explored.

Andrew Hammond notably provides the outlines of the British imperial interests in the Balkans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the above-cited article and calls for further study, especially of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century “when the West has achieved an uninterrupted engagement with South-East European economic and political realities” (A. Hammond 623). My analysis of this overlooked problem will focus on Yugoslavia in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but will also provide a general framework for how to integrate economic and political conditions in an analysis of the ideological representations of Eastern Europe (see below). First, I present the outline of these ideological, discursive constructions of Eastern Europe as analyzed in research to date.

### ***Eastern Europe in Western European Imagination***

The fashioning of Eastern Europe as an intellectual space is a curious blend of fact, fiction and political demagoguery. While created by historians and politicians, it continues to be an intellectual enigma for anthropologists: the dark terrain of Dracula’s castles; the wild frontier to be discovered *and* protected; places of blood and gore *and* beauty; communist dungeons, secret policemen and high-class call girls; exotic dishes; and, just recently, unbridled capitalism and mafioso warfare ...  
Kurti *Homecoming: Affairs of Anthropologists in and of Eastern Europe*

Of the three major studies of the constructions of Eastern Europe (and the Balkans) by Western Europe: Wolff’s *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans*, and Vesna Goldsworthy’s *Inventing Ruritania*, two focus almost exclusively on travelogues and the third incorporates popular fiction as the sources of the “orientalizing,” “balkanizing,” or

“colonizing” discourses about Eastern Europe. Each of the studies reaches a different conclusion as to the image of Eastern Europe in Western Europe, but they all agree that “Eastern Europe” and the “Balkans” are constructed, imagined realities originating in Western Europe that can, but often do not correspond to the regions they describe.

Larry Wolff and Maria Todorova point to the Enlightenment as the source of ideas for the conceptual framing of the region. Todorova emphasizes the evolutionary concepts in a systematic classification of the Balkans within Europe:

The Enlightenment added a new desire stemming from the concept of the stages of evolution: the clue to determining one’s place in the history of civilization was their reconstruction, and the urge to reach the roots of human history was accomplished both through historical research and ethnological observations ... especially of the ones who are not yet civilized (Todorova 63).

The conflation of time and space – ancient history equals remote regions – in these “studies” of Europe’s history led to a classification of the Balkans as barbaric, less civilized, lower on the scale of development, and therefore, a snapshot of Europe’s own prehistory. After locating the origin of the “balkanizing” discourse in the Enlightenment era, Todorova focuses on the relations between Islam and Christianity, Ottoman Empire and the West, and the Balkans as the place in-between, as presented in Western European texts from early 16<sup>th</sup> century to the present. She excludes the communist period because “Balkans as a geopolitical notion and ‘Balkan’ as a derogation were conspicuously absent from the vocabulary of Western journalists and politicians” during that time (136).

Beyond the evolutionary concepts and the conflation of time and space, Larry Wolff identifies several other characteristics of the Enlightenment era philosophy that governed the construction of Eastern Europe. Tracing references to Eastern Europe in some of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment from Voltaire, Rousseau, even Mozart to the less

known travelers to the region, Wolff posits that the idea of civilization, an invention of the Enlightenment, was the key to the construction of Eastern Europe. In the binary distinctions between Europe and Asia, civilization and barbarism, Eastern Europe was in the position of “emphatic subordination.” For example, Count Louis-Philippe de Ségur in 1784 mused on Russia with “double astonishment: there are united the age of barbarism and that of civilization, the tenth and the eighteenth centuries, the manners of Asia and those of Europe” (Wolff 22). Civilization and barbarism, as Wolff points out, became the ultimate measures of Eastern European societies in the age when the entire world was being divided by Western Europeans into one of these two categories. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento sees the same duality, the unity of barbarism and civilization in his compatriots, *gauchos* – 19<sup>th</sup>-century rural inhabitants of the Pampas:

In the Argentine Republic we see at the same time two different societies on the same soil: one still nascent, which, with no knowledge of things over its head, repeats the naive, popular work of the Middle Ages; another which, with no regard for things beneath its feet, tries to attain the latest results of European civilization. The nineteenth and the twelfth centuries live together: one inside the cities, the other in the country (Sarmiento and Ross 73).

The similarity of these descriptions of Russia and Argentina, while providing anecdotal evidence for the global reach of European categories of civilization and barbarism, also directly points to their origin in colonial discourses of European Enlightenment.<sup>3</sup>

Others found a mixing of barbarism and civilization in Eastern Europe a sign of illegitimacy. Marquis de Salaberry in 1799 compares Turks with Russians, in “ferocity, indiscipline, ignorance, superstition and fanaticism,” and concludes that Russian was only an

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<sup>3</sup> I thank Prof. Luis Madureira for pointing out this similarity between de Segur and Sarmiento.

“affected (*pretendue*) civilization” (Wolff 48).<sup>4</sup> While most of Wolff’s sources tend to focus on this mélange of civilized and barbaric, they are not consistent in this identification and often refer to Eastern Europeans as simply barbaric, devoid of any “civilized” elements. This is especially the case when racial distinctions are evoked and Eastern Europeans are compared to Africans, Asians, and other non-Europeans.

Joseph Marshall in 1772 says of Russian peasants that they are “very near on the same rank, as the blacks in our sugar colonies” while Georg Foster, who traveled with Captain Cook, explains the “mishmash” of civilization in Poland: “You would find ample material to laugh at in this mishmash of Sarmatian or almost New Zealander crudeness and French super-refinement...” (Wolff 338). Another traveler to the South Pacific, John Ledyard, in 1772 writes after arriving to Kazan:

The nice Gradation by which I pass from Civilization to Incivilization appears in every thing: their manners, their dress, their Language, and particularly that remarkable and important circumstance of Colour which I am now fully convinced originates from natural Causes; and is the effect of external and local circumstances. I think the same of Feature. I see here the large mouth, the thick lip, and broad flat nose as well as in Africa (Wolff 345).

Lacking in Wolff’s account, however, is an analysis of the larger context in which the Enlightenment thinkers defined Eastern Europe, specifically, the colonial expansion and ways in which colonialism represented a coherent system originating in Enlightenment thought, based not only on “civilization” and “barbarism,” but first and foremost, race. Wolff notes the irony of Western European accounts of the horrors of slavery in Russia, as in Giacomo Casanova being delighted and horrified at the Oriental experience of purchasing a girl slave in Russia, while “in the eighteenth century white men were buying slaves all over the world” (Wolff 64). And yet

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<sup>4</sup> Affected civilization or the image of the illegitimate European found new expression in the early 20<sup>th</sup> – century image of the Balkan/Eastern European “bourgeois upstart” referenced above.

Wolff never explores the relation between colonialism, racism and Western Europe's self-definition with its construction of Eastern Europe. Rather than positing Eastern Europe as the object Western Europe constructed to define itself against, one is tempted to consider the discourse of Eastern Europe a mere footnote in the larger history of racism and colonial definitions of civilization and barbarism. As Andrew Hammond points out, "the region was constructed from discursive material the West had been developing primarily, though not exclusively, for usage on the colonial object" (A. Hammond 603).

Wolff briefly considers this possibility in his concluding remarks but affirms Eastern Europe's significance on account of its physical accessibility. He says of "Philosophic Geography," that combination of imagination and reality in constructions of the other:

Such intellectual hybridism was hardly unique to the subject of Eastern Europe in the eighteenth century; the philosophical significance of geographical discovery was *equally* apparent in the Tahiti of Bougainville and Diderot. Yet, the adjacency of Eastern Europe, its relative accessibility compared to the remoteness of the South Pacific, rendered it peculiarly susceptible to a cultural construction that partook of both fact and fantasy (359, emphasis mine).

Equating the "philosophical significance of geographical discovery" of the colonial world with that of Eastern Europe and even claiming the latter as more significant is being either disingenuous or careless in consideration of colonialism and racism as elements of Western European history. Wolff proves convincingly that Eastern Europe is a constructed, imagined, and invented object originating in the writings of central figures of the Enlightenment and that as such, it fits within the larger processes of Western Europe's self-definition. However, Eastern Europe's actual position within the racial and colonial order of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as its position within the neo-colonial 20<sup>th</sup> century remains to be explained.

Quite opposite from Wolff's examples of the equation of Eastern Europeans with Africans and South Pacific islanders, Maria Todorova posits that Balkans represent not Western

Europe's opposite barbarian, but rather a "shadow, the structurally despised alter-ego" because of difference in religion (Orthodoxy) and the similarity in terms of race (Balkanites being white).

She says:

On the other hand, despite the presence of the theme of racial ambiguity, and despite the important internal hierarchies, in the final analysis, the Balkans are still treated as positioned on this side of the fundamental opposition: white versus colored, Indo-European versus the rest (19).

The theme of Eastern European's whiteness is a significant factor in the confusion over the applicability of postcolonial theory to the region. Aniko Imre suggests that one way to explore this problem is to question the seemingly obvious "fact" of Eastern European whiteness, and explore race itself as a construct, following in the steps of postcolonial analysis. In this, Imre suggests that at the core of the problem in analyzing cultures of Eastern Europe lies their implied and self-constructed whiteness.<sup>5</sup>

After this brief overview of the history and development of "Eastern Europe" and the "Balkans" as concepts, we can point to several common features of this discourse that persist even today. Eastern Europe is often represented as a bridge between civilizations – either between Christianity and Islam or between Orthodoxy and Western Christianity. The image of the bridge has been interpreted both as a positive and a negative, but it has been especially popularized by Ivo Andrić and Ismail Kadare. The Balkans, like Eastern Europe in general, are seen as an unstable space, moving in and out of the Western European sphere of influence. Todorova points to this feature as marking the Balkans "not as [an] other but as an incomplete self" (18). But it is also a place often considered inseparable from Europe proper. As Marquis de Salaberry characterizes it: "This land here gives to Europe the air of those works of steel, of

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<sup>5</sup> Imre, Aniko "Whiteness in Post-Socialist Eastern Europe: The Time of the Gypsies, the End of Race." *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*. Ed. Alfred J. Lopes. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005.

which the worker has neglected to polish the extremity” (Wolff 49). An unpolished extremity, or as “more or less of civilization,” in Asia and in Europe, “half-wildness and half-civilization,” “the orangutan of Europe,” between West and East are all typical characterizations of Eastern Europe in Western European texts. But beyond this “in-betweenness,” Eastern Europe is also a place of pure fiction, imagination of the otherworldly, of “wandering ghosts among the tombs,” and the birth place of count Dracula. It also appears as “the land of the blind, of the night, of childishly simple lunar imagery,” an irrational counterpart to Western Europe.

The image of Eastern Europe is to be found in many contemporary texts as well. Maria Todorova cites the 1993 reprint of the 1913 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report on the Balkan wars to purportedly explain the wars in former Yugoslavia. Vesna Goldsworthy’s monograph was motivated, in part, by the resurrection of stereotypes about the Balkans in Anglophone media in the 1990s as well. These re-deployments of Eastern European imagery were, at least in part, motivated by the wars in former Yugoslavia and most contemporary sources, in one way or another refer to this conflict. But the discourse of Eastern European inferiority and backwardness with its peculiar imagery persists and can be found not just in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the post-communist Eastern Europe, but as a continuous ideological construction at work in Western Europe’s relations with Eastern Europe since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, the narrative of Eastern European political, economic, moral and intellectual backwardness usually starts with a reference to the Ottoman Empire in the case of Southeastern Europe or Mongol Empire in the East. The Ottoman Empire, especially in British sources, tends to be viewed with sympathy, as a “cosmopolitan” empire that couldn’t break the ethnic isolation of the native tribes. The Russian empire, on the other hand, is understood to be backward and an example of Oriental despotism. The narrative then usually jumps to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the rise

of nation states, where nationalism, imported from the West, took on “virulent” forms because it was “grafted” onto “religious exclusiveness” or on account of a fundamental lack of secular, civil society. One might then encounter a reference to the Balkans as the powder keg of Europe and to the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand at the start of World War I. In reference to Russia, one might encounter a critique of the ultimate failure of Russian intelligentsia to take Russia down the path of liberalism and democracy prior to 1917. The narrative then skips to the end of World War II and the rise and fall of the “Iron Curtain” – a powerful image in itself. Communism is understood to have only strengthened the “political culture inimical to democracy” – either by continuing the Oriental despotism in Russia and the Warsaw pact or by breeding ever more virulent nationalisms in the Balkans. As one commentator says: “The communist party was built on the traditions of the peasant class, the Orthodox Church, and the nationalist state – institutions that in different ways had promoted a patriarchal authority that emphasized the primacy of the group over the individual” (Gallagher 67). The fall of the Berlin wall changed little, as “economic oligarchy based on former communist officials, black marketers, and organized crime built up vast wealth that quickly translated into political power”. The “New Russians” accompanied by former KGB agents took over Russia, while the Balkans engaged in another bloodletting. In Gallagher’s words: *No Escape from History*.

While this brief sketch references only the most exaggerated versions of the Eastern European narrative, the basic premises hold steadily across even the most thoughtful academic writing in Eastern European history, political science, anthropology, literary history, and cultural studies. The point is not that all these fields or specific authors within them are engaging in some intentional distortion or misrepresentation of Eastern Europe, but rather that the discourse of and about Eastern Europe that informs much academic and popular literature is part and parcel

of a much larger and more complex model of world history, development, culture, and intellectual history that favors Western Europe. In short, the construction of “Eastern Europe” is one small part of larger ideological practices of Western European (and later United States) colonialism and imperialism. Eastern Europeans’ self-designation and self-construction as inferior is at the heart of the success of these ideological practices. The following section presents analyses of these self-designations and definitions of Eastern Europeanness.

### ***The Self-Construction of Eastern Europeanness***

Defining Eastern Europeanness, much like defining any group identity, faces the challenge of essentializing a certain number of common attributes at the expense of some other, less homogenizing elements of identity across the group. The charge of essentialization has been leveled at many who attempt to define Eastern European or Balkan identity, be it native or Westerners, and with justification. What I aim to explicate regarding Eastern Europeanness here is that cultural, group identity operates within a specific political field and that, as Alexander Kiossev puts it, collective identity is “not only a question of cognition [of common, essentialized elements] but also a question of (political) *recognition*” (Kiossev 165, emphasis mine). In other words, while the enumeration of group characteristics of Eastern Europeanness is essentializing in itself, it is also a constitutive process of the collective “self-recognition and of the self-proclamation of the group ‘itself’” (166). This is why we can speak of the self-proclaimed West or Europe and in the same way of the self-proclaimed Eastern Europe as well.

Being “Eastern European” or “Balkan” in scholarship on postcoloniality in Eastern Europe was from the very outset understood to be a matter of natives as much as (or in

complicity with) Westerners, participating in the creation of the Eastern European image.

Todorova is explicit about placing the experience of “being Balkan” up front as the context through which one should explore the history of Balkanism. Bakić-Hayden and Hayden address directly the “nesting orientalism” or reproduced binaries within a Balkan culture in terms of the East-West divide. Susan Gal frames her analysis of Hungarian understanding of and response to “European culture” within a history of a “durable discourse about that relation” (Gal 442). These and other authors have identified a certain number of features that operate within the Eastern Europeanness and that are significant markers of the intellectual context in which “Eastern Europe” as a concept arises and continues to exist.

Being “Eastern European” as a self-definition originated among the native intelligentsias in late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century, often within the context of nationalist revivals that would come to dominate 19<sup>th</sup> –century intellectual life in the region. What Susan Gal identifies as the “debate about the meaning of Europe” among Eastern European intelligentsia of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is, in short, the essence of what would become the Eastern European self-perception. She sketches the process as originating in all “peripheral regions of capitalist Europe” and points to the similarity of such debates across Eastern Europe. The common features of this self-perception are as follows:

the elites’ painful recognition of their regions’ economic and political backwardness under peripheral capitalism; the consequent attempt to adopt western (European) models of material and technological advancement, “civilization,” bourgeois life, and liberal democracy; the simultaneous but contrary attempts to reject domination, first by demanding political independence and then by valorizing national identity; the creation or recreation of folk traditions and the assertion of indigenous spiritual values felt to be superior to those of the west (443).

Underlying the processes Gal outlines above is an unquestioned valorization of Europe vis-à-vis the native region and its identity. This is what Gal calls the “ironic logic” of such debates about

European identity on the periphery, as even the traditionalist or indigenist position in the very process of rejecting Europe, still subscribes to “the western image of a world of bounded, culturally differentiated social units,” or in other words, still valorizes an European view of the world. I would add that Eastern European intellectuals, in their valorization of Western Europe mistake the ideological narrative of European culture with objective reality. This is especially evident in their impressions of the petit bourgeois identity and its Eastern European correlate: the veiled barbarian. Many 19<sup>th</sup>-century accounts of this newly industrialized local petit bourgeois that ascribe a Balkan or Eastern European quality to their lack of sophistication could just as easily be describing Western European *nouveau riche* social habits and behaviors. But the humor of these texts lies precisely in the impression that such petty personalities and their unsophisticated ways appear “only in the Balkans.” This belies an idealistic view of industrialized society, its petty and haute bourgeoisie and their supposedly “civilized” social habits.

Eastern Europeanness, like any identity, is not static and it has changed in profound ways over time. However, its supremacy in processes of identification, including those of nationalist narratives, has been unchallenged even during the communist period. For example, consider the narrative of Balkan barbarity hiding behind a thin patina of Western culture. The “veiled barbarian” narrative originated in the era of rapid industrialization bringing about changes in culture and behavior of the sparse, newly established industrial elites. The native intellectuals’ perception of these new industrial elites as the “bourgeois upstarts” who couldn’t measure up to their Western European counterparts was the modern version of the myth of cultural or civilizational illegitimacy dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The “bourgeois upstart” in the Balkans is measured not only against a “bourgeois upstart” in the West, but against another

class altogether – the “legitimate” European haute bourgeoisie as the bearer of high culture. In this particular image then, class divisions get subsumed under some reified concept of cultural über-identity.

During the socialist period, the same perceived illegitimacy was refashioned into a concept of “being” “petty bourgeois.” Again subsuming class divisions, “being petty bourgeois” did not have much to do with the corresponding class in capitalist societies, but rather signified supposedly rural, uneducated, unemancipated pretenders to civilization and Europeanness.<sup>6</sup> Today, the political discourse in Eastern Europe is overwhelmed by the definition of who and what is (Western) Europe and what one has to do to become a part of the European Union as the political embodiment of Europeanness. The illegitimacy of one social group or another or one Eastern European country or another is mostly presumed and questioned only once the country begins to implement economic and social changes dubbed the “transition,” presumably a transition from Eastern or illegitimate Europe to Europe proper. Accusations of not being European or obstructing the path to Europe are common across political parties in Eastern Europe today. In other words, “Europe” is a central metaphor in Eastern European political discourse.

Besides a sense of illegitimacy, perception of backwardness, and deflection of “non-European” attributes onto the neighbors south and east mentioned above, notions of primitivism and the racial self-definition deserve attention at this point. In tandem with the European conceptualization of civilization, the concept of primitivism enters cultural discourse in Eastern Europe. Primitivism can be considered an expansion of the notion of barbarism mentioned above, but during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it had evolved into not only the opposite of civilization, but

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<sup>6</sup> Not even in the common usage of the term “petty bourgeois” in the West as denoting the middle class lifestyle did the correspondence hold because it was so heavily burdened by rural-urban distinctions.

into the opposite of urban and cosmopolitan – a significant distinction in Eastern European cultures, most of which entered the 20<sup>th</sup> century as largely agrarian, peasant, and rural societies.

Racial self-definition is the most stable aspect of Eastern European self-perception. Eastern Europeans fiercely defend their whiteness and have done so throughout the socialist period, even in Yugoslavia, a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Whiteness of Eastern Europeans goes beyond the racism against Roma or the infrequent non-white migrants, but rather stands as one of the basic premises of Eastern Europeans' legitimacy *as* Europeans. While other attributes of being European are frequently questioned in the debates over Eastern European identity, fluctuating from traditionalism purportedly rejecting Europeanness completely, to acknowledgment of backwardness, and characterization of one's culture and language as "primitive," one is hard pressed to find Eastern Europeans wavering on believing themselves to be white.

The fluctuations in the dualistic discourse of European vs. non-European are also one of the hallmarks of Eastern Europeanness in general. It is a distinctly modern feature of this identity that even at the individual level, there is an opposition or a contradiction at play. As Gal says:

Indeed, this opposition may also be reproduced within the individual, who may at one time take the stand of the urban cosmopolite and at other times that of the authentic populist. .. This internal division may have psychic costs, but it allows the individual to feel solidarity with the idea of the country as a whole, in which opinion is seen to be divided in a structurally parallel way (Gal 447).

I question Gal's understanding of how the contradiction of European/non-European operates and the speculative idea that this carries some kind of "psychic costs," but the premise stands that Eastern Europeans can easily define themselves as being fundamentally European and non-European at the same time. For example, a Serbian nationalist might embrace traditional culture:

oral epic poetry, militarism, the Dinaric race theory<sup>7</sup>, all of which supposedly demonstrate Serbian culture's distinctiveness from Europe. From this traditionalist stance, Serbia has been the underappreciated defender of European civilization from the onslaught of Islamic (Asian) "hordes." But, the same nationalist narrative embraces a completely opposite argument, namely the proverbial Serbian fork: the claim that European civilization, including its strict standards of proper behavior and hygiene, originated in Serbia where noblemen ate with a fork and knife while Richard the Lionheart and the crusaders were still barbarically eating without utensils. In other words, Serbs became civilized, i.e., European, before the Europeans themselves.

The dialectical opposition at play in Eastern Europeanness is also more complex. It is not only the interplay of European versus non-European characteristics, but also the dialectic of *being* Eastern European and *perceiving* Eastern Europeanness in self and others. This is what Kiossev calls the endless dialectic between identity and identifications, the former being rigid, often imposed, the latter spontaneous. From personal experience (very typical even if undocumented) Kiossev argues that when confronted with another Eastern European, one can and often does experience "spontaneous cultural identification" which includes a dialectical flux between "the desire to interact versus the attempt *to behold, to hold* in the gaze" (Kiossev 168). In other words, one feels the desire *to be* Eastern European and engage the other person, while also experiencing the act of *beholding* the Eastern European *as* the European "Other."

The list of "shared predicates" of Eastern Europeanness of which I mentioned only a few, is much longer and mostly corresponds to Western European images of the region enumerated above. These internalized images of Eastern Europe are reproduced as self-

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<sup>7</sup> See Vladimir Dvorniković. *Karakterologija Jugoslovena*. knj. 2 Vol. Beograd: Kosmos, 1939. for one version of the Dinaric race theory. Even earlier, in 1922, Jovan Cvijić published his *Balkansko poluostrvo i južnoslovenske zemlje*, (the second volume in 1926) that also establishes this "geomorphologic" portrait of the South Slavic region.

perceptions, but as such they are parts in the dialectic of being or not being European that frames Eastern Europeanness. The essential binary Europe vs. non-Europe is reproduced within the region, culture, nation, social group, reaching all the way down to individual identification. This binary is not only about accepting or rejecting Western images of Eastern Europe, but more importantly about participating in the presumed Eastern European identity or beholding it and thus participating in the Western European discourse about that identity. Race or more precisely the self-perception of whiteness seems to be the only constant in Eastern European self-definitions.

The postcolonial move in the studies of Eastern Europe came about, in part, as a result of the breakdown of the Three Worlds, in theory and in practice following the fall of the socialist regimes. The narrative of European unification seems to have failed at the outset and Eastern Europe find itself today in need of explaining the persistence of “difference” from the West. Early contributions to considering Eastern Europe in a postcolonial context were inspired by the work of Edward Said and the notion of Orientalist discourse. Faced with the lack of direct colonization of Eastern Europe, however, scholarship turned to either de-historicizing Orientalism as a concept by separating it from economic and political domination that is the hallmark of colonialism or to constructing different theories of power relations within Europe, supposedly independent from Saidian critique. While most theoreticians traced the constructions of Eastern Europe to the Enlightenment-era concepts such as civilization and evolutionary conflation of time and space, the questions of race and the colonial origins of these discursive constructs remain unexamined to date. The most significant stumbling block for the

advancement of postcolonial analyses of Eastern European history and culture seems to be the lack of direct colonization and the presumed separate 20<sup>th</sup> –century development of the socialist Second World. Both problems beg the question of how exactly do we define postcolonialism and postcolonial theory and whether such theory has anything significant to say about regions *not* under direct colonial rule. In what follows, I will answer these challenges by presenting a working definition of postcolonialism and its contributions to understanding peripheral regions such as Eastern Europe, and challenge the notion that socialist Eastern Europe was separate from and independent of the workings of neo-colonial, globalizing capital. In this I aim to answer Andrew Hammond’s call for an examination of “the conjunction of representation and power during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, *when the West has achieved an uninterrupted engagement with South-East European economic and political realities*” (emphasis mine) and establish this problematic as the primary theoretical question facing Eastern European studies today.

## **Postcolonialism as a Paradigm for Contextualizing Eastern Europe**

There are strong criticisms of postcolonialism and postcolonial theory, questioning whether they are adequate as working paradigms for the post-colonial world (i.e., nations that have emerged from colonial rule in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). The question of whether postcolonial theory can address the historical development of Eastern Europe further complicates the very definition of postcolonialism both as a theoretical concept and as a "concrete" historical reality. Maria Todorova correctly criticizes deployments of postcolonial theory in Eastern Europe for a lack of historical specificity. Similarly, Andrew Hammond criticizes the lack of economic and

political analysis in the almost exclusively discursive definitions of postcolonialism in Eastern European studies. Both critiques are valid and speak to a lack of consensus on what we mean by the contention that Eastern Europe belongs to the postcolonial realm. As I have shown above, various definitions of the discursive practices relating to Eastern Europe hinge on what we mean by terms such as “colonial,” “imperialism,” “postcolonial,” etc. In what follows I will present (1) a working definition of the postcolonial with inflections from previous debates in the field; (2) definitions of empire and imperialism and a discussion of the applicability of these terms to Eastern Europe; (3) a critique of “Three Worlds” theories that have especially muddied the field of Eastern European Studies and an analysis of some disciplinary stumbling blocks in postcolonial approaches to Eastern Europe.

### ***From Anti-Colonial to Postcolonial and Back***

The most generous definition of postcolonialism comes from Robert J. C. Young’s pedagogic text *Postcolonialism: an Historical Introduction*.<sup>8</sup> He locates the founding moment of postcolonial theory in “the great Havana Tricontinental of 1966, which initiated the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against imperialism” (Young 5). Young specifies three terms that operate within what we have come to know as postcolonial theory: “postcolonial,” “postcoloniality,” and “postcolonialism or tricontinentalism.” The *postcolonial*

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<sup>8</sup> On the rare occasion when Eastern European studies reference postcolonial texts, Young’s definition of postcolonialism is used, often in combination with Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s concept of “decolonizing the mind.” I find this to be a selective (mis)use of both authors in an attempt to avoid the complexity of applying postcolonialism to Eastern Europe. Young’s inclusive definition of postcolonialism is used to bypass the objections to using postcolonial theory for non-colonial regions, while Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s concept of “decolonizing the mind” is taken out of context and used to justify defining imperialism in exclusively cultural terms, avoiding the economic and political meanings. See, for example, Violeta Kelertas. *Baltic Postcolonialism: On the Boundary of Two Worlds: Identity, Freedom and Moral Imagination in the Baltics*. 6 Vol. Amsterdam : New York, NY: Rodopi, 2006.

“is a dialectical concept that marks the broad historical facts of decolonization ... but also the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination.” *Postcoloniality* refers to this new imperialistic context and the conditions in which formerly colonized countries are “required to operate.” *Postcolonialism* further “names a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of *intervention* within such oppressive circumstances. It embodies the epistemological cultural innovations of the postcolonial moment with a political critique of the conditions of postcoloniality.” (57). Young thereby expands the concept of postcolonialism into an umbrella term for all contemporary critiques of imperialism and for the continuation of the “global alliance of the peoples of the three continents.” I call this approach pedagogic since the curricula of postcolonial studies include teaching the history of colonialism, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism under the single umbrella of “postcolonial studies” or “postcolonial theory.” However, the history of the term “postcolonial” and its canonization in the US academy is more problematic than Young asserts, especially since there is not as much agreement on its political subtext as Young implies.

Young’s definition of postcolonialism focuses almost exclusively on the *continuities* between anti-colonial thought and postcolonialism - specifically, the emancipatory potential of anti-imperialist thought and practice - and it is for this reason that he can trace the origin of postcolonialism to the Havana Tricontinental. However, “postcolonial” as a term emerges only in the 1980s as a *replacement* for the terminology of the so-called Three Worlds Theory. In the most general sense, then, “postcolonial” is “a new designation for critical discourses which thematize issues emerging from colonial relations and their aftermath, covering a long historical span (including the present)” (Shohat 101). As a theoretical concept, postcolonialism originates

at the intersection of poststructuralism and “cultural theories dealing with imperialism” and has been canonized in the United States academy as a subspecies of “discourse analysis” (Shohat 99–113; Dirlik 328–56). The limitation of postcolonialism so defined in relation to previous theories of the “Third World” is its “*culturalist* mode of operation”: an “obsessive focus on postcoloniality as a cultural conjuncture (Radhakrishnan 751). In its most restrictive definition, postcolonialism has been considered as originating with or represented by the work of the Subaltern Studies Group.

In this “originary” definition, postcolonialism has been subject to criticism from more decidedly materialist (if not Marxist) positions. I find many of these critiques on point; the basic outline of them is as follows. First, “postcolonial” as a term merges very distinct historical situations under a common umbrella of what Henry Schwarz in a different context calls the “transhistorical cultural imperialism”(Schwarz 4). Further, the equivocal nature of the “post” in postcolonialism conflates the theoretical *movement beyond* the previous theories of imperialism and colonialism (post-anti-colonialism) with the actual *historical condition* after decolonization (after colonialism) (Shohat 101). In introducing this idea of a movement beyond and a moment of historical closure, postcolonialism as a theory of the world conditions undermines or even negates the category of neo-colonialism. As such, “it mystifies both politically and methodologically a situation that represents not the abolition but the reconfiguration of earlier forms of domination,” i.e. neo-colonialism (Dirlik 331).

Most postcolonial theorists moved the focus of their critique from *Europe* to *Eurocentrism*, with the latter considered a discourse or textual practice rather than an ideology. In other words, with postcolonialism the focus shifted from analyses of material, political, and ideological domination of colonialism and imperialism to “discursive analysis and historiography

addressing decentered multiplicities of power relations” (Shohat 106). Correlatively, postcolonialism posits that anti-imperialist practice in the period after decolonization is to be located in what Gayatri Spivak calls “strategies of reading,” and that the “proper form of combat for a politically engaged critical practice is to disclose the construction of the signifying system and thereby deprive it of its mandate to rule” (Parry 42–3). Aijaz Ahmad calls this move in postcolonial theory the “extending [of] the centrality of *reading* as the appropriate form of politics,” while Parry goes on to argue that this strategy and critical practice have not demonstrated their superiority in “disrupting the hegemonic discourse,” presumably the goal of postcolonial praxis.

Finally, as a theory of the world after decolonization, postcolonialism has been correctly criticized for its poststructuralist-inflected repudiation of “metanarratives” and for denying any sense of systematicity to the power relations in the post-colonial world.<sup>9</sup> At the heart of the postcolonial objection to metanarratives stands the claim that nationalism and modernization narratives (both bourgeois and Marxist ones) – the two most influential theories of social change in the decolonized world – are always already complicit in the imperialist, Eurocentric project and must be abandoned in favor of a new, alternative vision of the (modern) politic; one that “pluralizes the history of power in global modernity and separates it from universalist narratives of capital” by questioning the assumption about the hegemony of certain classes in certain stages of the development of capital (Chakrabarty 13–4). Consequently, postcolonialism either

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<sup>9</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah argues for distinguishing the postcolonial rejection of the metanarrative of nationalism from its postmodernist incarnation. He says of a Yambo Ouologuem’s novel: “Because *Le Devoir de violence* is a novel that seeks to delegitimize not only the form of realism but the content of nationalism, it will to that extent seem to us, misleadingly, postmodern: misleadingly, because what we have here is not postmodernism but postmodernization; not an aesthetics but a politics, in the most literal sense of the term” Kwame Anthony Appiah. “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” *Critical Inquiry* 17.2 (1991): 353.

distances itself from Marxism completely or attempts to “rephrase it in the language of poststructuralism, in which Marxism is deconstructed, decentered, and so on” (Dirlik 342). Without a theory of “capitalism as the foundation for European power and the motive force of its globalization,” postcolonialism seeks to

make sense of the world and colonies and empires much less in terms of classes, much more in terms of nations and countries and races, and [thinks] of imperialism itself not as a hierarchically structured system of global capitalism but as a *relation*, of governance and occupation, between richer and poorer countries, West and non-West (Ahmad 41).

But, as Fredric Jameson points out, “a system that constitutively produces differences remains a system,” the same way in which such a system cannot be “in kind ‘like’ the object it tries to theorize,” i.e., somehow un-systematic because it systematizes “difference” (Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 343). As a result, postcolonial theory tends to “generalize from the local to the global while denying that there are global forces at work that may condition the local ones in the first place” (Dirlik 341).

Jameson and Dirlik present the strongest case for the fallacy of this theoretical move away from Marxism. Jameson points out that the nature of capitalism is such that it is, by definition, “dispersive and atomistic, ‘individualistic’, an antisociety, rather than a society, whose systematic structure, let alone its reproduction of itself, remains a mystery and a contradiction in terms” (Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 343). In that sense, by switching the focus from classes – the sites of real social difference in a capitalist system – to that of reified groups impenetrable to systematic analysis, the celebration of difference (for its own sake), even in its schizophrenic mode, remains a mystification and an obliteration of real social difference. Dirlik’s objection is that by repudiating the structure and systematicity of global capital on the one hand and affirming the local in questions of oppression on the other, the postcolonial critics have mystified “the ways in

which totalizing structures persist in the midst of apparent disintegration and fluidity;” so much so that the concrete problems in the world (what the old-fashioned would call "objective conditions") are “rendered into problems of subjectivity and epistemology” (356). In concrete terms, such analyses of nationalism, for example, face a seeming contradiction in the furious persistence of nationalist-based regimes, wars, and violence in an age that has supposedly transcended nationalism as such.

The purpose of this brief overview of materialist objections to postcolonialism is not to reduce the complexity of the debate over and within postcolonial theory, but rather to establish coordinates for my own entry into this debate. While much of my theoretical orientation is influenced by the classics of anti-colonial theory, it would be an error to consider some theoretical return to anti-colonialism as the explanatory model for today’s world. If nothing, the problem of nationalism would be misconstrued by such a move. It is rather the spirit of political and moral objection to the conditions of colonialism that translates well into today’s world of not only post-colonialism, but also neo-colonial hierarchies and structures of dependence. While Robert J. C. Young attempts to package these often diverging positions and moments into one comprehensive category of “postcolonialism,” even he is tempted to call it “tricontinentalism” instead. Similarly, it would seem disingenuous to name my theoretical position as something other than postcolonial (as Balkanism was to stand in for Orientalism in Todorova’s work), but it would be equally unreasonable to call it postcolonial as I am persuaded by most critiques of postcolonialism from the materialist perspective. As a compromise, it would seem reasonable to follow Michael Sprinker and categorize my theoretical approach broadly as one of a “cultural theory dealing with imperialism,” and more specifically a materialist critique within such a theory (Sprinker 29).

The peculiar historical situation in which Eastern Europe finds itself today - namely the “transition” to capitalism - dictates that the above materialist critique of postcolonial theory be taken seriously. In other words, to successfully explain the terms of Eastern Europe's cultural exchange with Western Europe as well as the terms of the “transition” that has occurred since the collapse of socialism, it is necessary that a cultural theory dealing with imperialism take into account both the systematic global reach and the uninterrupted engagement of capital with its immediate periphery in Eastern Europe. From this point of view, the “transition” in Eastern Europe is a transition into a “backward zone of capital” rather than some benign assimilation into the welfare capitalism of Western Europe. Here I turn once again to Aijaz Ahmad, who as early as 1992 correctly diagnosed the conditions of this “transition.” In conclusion to *In Theory*, Ahmad says:

The evolving relationship [between Western and Eastern Europe] is, rather, in the nature of capitulation, fragmentation, incorporation, subordination, and what in an entirely different context Andre Gunder Frank once called ‘the development of underdevelopment’, so that those countries can either be simply taken over or restructured into a backward zone on the immediate periphery of the more advanced Western Europe. ... Meanwhile, the punishing logic of the capitalist market that is being imposed upon Eastern Europe today *is neither structurally different from nor less brutal than* the logic that was imposed, say, in Egypt after Nasser or in Chile after the defeat of *Unidad Popular*. In other words, racism is certainly a considerable component in the ideologies and cultures of the imperialist countries but the logic which determines the exercise of their power is a capitalist logic, so that the reincorporated countries of Eastern Europe are being treated structurally, according to their economic problems and capitalist potentials, much in the same way that Latin American countries or any other country of the zones of backward capitalism may be treated. (311).

This is not to say that Aijaz Ahmad’s commentary is the end of the debate; quite the contrary, it should be taken as the opening for Eastern European studies. Particularly important is Ahmad’s focus on the structural similarity between Eastern Europe and the formerly colonized regions; the similarity of incorporation into a particular structure of global capital. Prior to 1989-91, the Cold War partition of the world - together with Three Worlds Theory and, in the

Yugoslav case, the Non-Aligned Movement - conditioned the ways Eastern European societies were analyzed. Often enough, they were cordoned off into a nefarious and separate "Second World." The fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, coupled with the globalization of capital forced analysts to consider anew the wider, global context within which Eastern Europe exists. In especially revealing fashion, once the supposed reason for the Iron Curtain was done away with, the Western European intellectual circles as well as the popular press continued referencing a fundamental or essential difference between Eastern and Western Europe (or even Western civilization).

Revival of pre-World War One attitudes towards Eastern Europe and definitions of some new and old barbarisms in the Balkans on account of the wars of Yugoslav succession were the hallmarks of this new differentiation between East and West, which in turn sparked the first monographs on the ideological construction of Eastern Europe in Western societies<sup>10</sup> But as I mentioned in the previous section, these Saidian accounts of the new Orientalism in Eastern Europe failed to consider how and why this new ideological structure appeared and to whose benefit. In order to answer these questions, we must first define the terminology in use: what are colonialism, imperialism, domination, and subjugation. These terms are used interchangeably in most postcolonial writings on Eastern Europe adding to the confusion between political realities and ideological constructions.

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<sup>10</sup> See especially, Maria Todorova's exposition on the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace reprinting of the 1913 report on the Balkan Wars in 1993 in Maria Todorova. *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

## *Empires and Imperialism*

Ellen Meiskins Wood provides an elegant distinction between empires past and present and their relation to colonialism and imperialism. She distinguishes between four separate imperial systems: empire of property (Roman, Chinese), empire of commerce (Arab-Muslim, Venetian, and Dutch), capitalist empire proper marked by colonialism (British, latter European empires), and a new capitalist empire (non-colonial US and European). Other authors have called capitalist empire proper the “old” empire of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the non-colonial US and European empires of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the “new” empire. Wood’s basic premise is that the “old” form of empire depended directly on conquest and colonial rule, while the “new” form of empire relies mostly on economic domination, but not without the threat of extra-economic, military intervention (Wood 87).

Robert J. C. Young summarizes the history of the term *imperialism* and locates two predominant meanings: first, the 19<sup>th</sup> – century meaning of “a political system of actual conquest and occupation” and the 20<sup>th</sup> – century meaning of “a general system of economic domination, with direct political domination being a possible but not necessary adjunct” (Young 26). What is troubling in Young’s general account of imperialism, however, especially as he distinguishes between the French and the British model, is that “imperialism” in his text stands for both the economic and political system on the one hand, and for the ideology advanced by that system on the other. I insist on separating these two phenomena precisely because their symbiosis produces such historically inaccurate and theoretically unsustainable notions like “cultural imperialism” or “transhistorical imperialism.” I make an argument that the ideology of imperialism ought to be identified in terms of Eurocentrism, understood not as an “empty ethnocentrism” but as – in

Samir Amin's sense – a global political project that serves “particular functions of legitimation” of the imperialist ordering of the world. Specifically, I focus on the imperialist ideology as expressed in Eurocentric historiography, i.e., the myth of the European miracle and exceptionalism based on denying the global processes underlying European development and domination of the globe at the height of capitalist imperialism.

From the earliest definition of modern imperialism in Lenin's *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* to the latest definitions in Young, Wood and others, the development of capitalism as a global system is a central issue.<sup>11</sup> Capitalism is an organizing principle in the operation of imperialism, even if it does not fully explain all of imperialism's motivations or its various effects on different realms of human existence. Without an understanding of capitalism as a complex social structure, an “anti-society,” with all its processes of obscuring the nature of social relations, it would be hard to produce any *systematic* critique of imperialism as a global phenomenon. Harry Magdoff succinctly summarizes the common features of both “old” and “new” capitalist empires: “the urgency to develop a world market, the struggle to control foreign sources of raw materials, the competitive hunt for colonies, and the tendency toward concentration of capital” (Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* 35). Two crucial historical events mark the rise of new imperialism: the sunset of the British empire (with the rise of the US Empire) and the “concentration of economic power in giant corporations and financial institutions, with the consequent internationalization of capital” (Ibid). To equate colonialism with imperialism is, in Magdoff's opinion, an oversimplification, as is the argument that colonialism arises only because of the capitalist markets' need to export its surplus. Rather, “the

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<sup>11</sup> As Neil Larsen points out, Lenin is not the most often quoted source in any postcolonial literature today, but “whether or not a general, humanistic interest in ‘imperialism’ requires one to read Lenin, the geneological centrality of his thought in relation to postcolonial studies must be recognized.” Neil Larsen. *Determinations: Essays on Theory, Narrative and Nation in the Americas*. New York: Verso, 2001.

drive for colonies is not only economic but involves as well political and military considerations in a world of competing imperialist powers” (Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* 45).

Colonialism, in the broadest possible definition is a military and political occupation of foreign origin, sustaining some form of economic benefit for the colonizing country. In modern times, colonialism is closely associated with the rise of the capitalist society in the countries of origin. This, in part, accounts for different forms of colonialism from the Spanish colonies in Latin America at the beginning of the modern era of colonialism to the European colonies in Africa at its end in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While modern imperialism was founded on colonial possessions, it has outlived its colonial form and the end of colonialism cannot be considered the end of imperialism as well (Wood 118–59; Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* 91; Young 16–7, 26–7). At the center of both colonial imperialism and imperialism without colonies lies the economic *domination* and *subjugation* of the society in question by the metropolitan center. In the former, this domination is affected by direct military and political control, while in the latter domination is exerted often without any direct military or political occupation, and often only by economic means. In complex social systems of modern times, some colonial relationships and some imperialist relationships will not show direct economic benefit to the center at all times, or sometimes at all, but the strategic benefit is at least presumed to exist by the center. What is of paramount importance in such instances is the larger context of global capital without which these non-economic, strategic benefits would be meaningless.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that, within the practice of imperialism, there are not behaviors and motivations beyond the economic ones. On

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<sup>12</sup> The most immediate example is the current war in Iraq: one is hard-pressed to attribute its origin to direct economic benefits (although they do exist), but rather its purpose seems to be to fortify the US hegemony in the region, both directly by its occupation of Iraq and indirectly as an example of the continuing US military dominance.

the contrary, what makes imperialism such a slippery category is precisely the fact of its many political, social, and ideological operations. Much like capitalism itself, imperialism is also a complex phenomenon whose opacity is, in part, what makes it so successful.

In Eastern Europe, direct occupation by foreign empires involved three peripheral empires: Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian. None of these three empires can be considered to have “colonized” Eastern Europe in the sense in which colonies of Western European empires were constructed. The difference lies in the organization of these empires, their level of economic development, and their own relations with Western European imperialism which I briefly summarize here.

The Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires were contiguous, old-world empires that never developed into powerhouses of industrial capital that were to dominate much of the world in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, their geopolitical significance should not be underestimated as they were the main protagonists in the Eastern Question and the Great Game – two key moments in European inter-imperialist rivalry.

While the Ottoman Empire drained material resources from its dominions in Eastern Europe and established clear hierarchies among the local population, its rule in the region cannot be characterized as belonging to the history of imperialism. The Ottoman was an empire of commerce and it never developed into a global system of rule on par with the British or French empires. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire did not develop modern, industrial patterns of domination like its imperialist rivals, but rather found itself on the margins of the rising European industrial markets. In fact, the Empire’s decline has been traced to the rise of colonial powers and their interference in its commercial dealings in the Mediterranean. Some have even

identified the rise of silver imports from the New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century as the starting point of Ottoman Empire's long decline.

At the height of its power the Ottoman Empire controlled a large part of what is today Eastern Europe and studying its ideological structures is a worthy endeavor, but it does not belong in discussions of postcoloniality which focus on modern, imperialist cultural and political structures of domination. Nationalist historiographies on the one hand, and Todorova's and Bakić-Hayden's work on the other, exaggerate the significance of the Ottoman rule in the Balkans each in its own way. The nationalist historiographies often blame the Ottoman "yoke" for the underdevelopment of the region or its supposed distance from Western Europe, while more recent postcolonial-influenced scholarship focuses on the ideological consequences of Orientalism as it applied to the Ottoman Empire. While the Ottoman rule persisted for a long time in the Balkans, this long period of foreign imperial domination "did not place it in the political position of Asian and African colonies emerging from European domination in more recent times. ... The Ottoman military presence was in the end less efficient and widespread than that, say, of the British in India" (Lampe and Jackson 6).

The persistence of ideological referents to the Ottoman Empire in nationalist narratives is a matter of timing: the Ottoman Empire, though on the decline, was still the foreign hegemon in the region just as the first nationalist ideologies were being constructed whose ultimate aim of national liberation clashed with any remnants of foreign (i.e., Ottoman) rule. However, the native intellectuals educated in Western Europe, in bringing home the idea of national self-determination also transposed the Orientalist characterization of the "sick man of Europe" which in turn came to occupy a more prominent place in national accounts of foreign domination than Austro-Hungarian rule, for example.

Dispelling the nationalist myth of the “Ottoman yoke” without falling into the opposing fallacy of declaring the Ottoman system a pre-modern form of multiculturalism is an important task in Balkan and East European cultural and intellectual history. Neither, however, falls within the purview of postcolonial studies, except perhaps in so far as the exoticization of the Ottoman Empire by Western European rivals played an important role in the modern self-perception of backwardness in the region.<sup>13</sup>

The Russian Empire has been studied using postcolonial methodology mainly in relation to the Central Asian possessions.<sup>14</sup> Like the Ottoman, the Russian empire was also a contiguous empire and economically less developed than its Western European counterparts. Its Eastern European possessions haven't been analyzed in relation to either the socio-economic processes or cultural effects of colonization as is the case with analyses of Russian imperialism in Central Asia, and especially not in relation to Russian imperialism in its other borderlands. In part, this has to do with the emphasis on the difference between Russian Empire and Western European empires, which tended to obscure Russian imperial prowess on display. Dominic Lieven's discussion of the similarities and differences between the Russian and Western empires stands out in this case ("Empire on Europe's Periphery: Russian and Western Comparisons" in Miller and Rieber 133–50), as does his discussion of Russian Empire as a hybrid one: the cultural elite and the Empire's expansion make it comparable to Western empires, while popular culture and economy were along the lines of the Ottoman Empire (Lieven 163–200). Much like the Ottoman Empire, the Russian empire was also economically and politically on the periphery of the

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<sup>13</sup> Maria Todorova's exposition on Balkanism as a consequence of Ottoman rule in the region is one example of analyzing the intellectual legacy of Ottoman Empire as one of Western exoticization.

<sup>14</sup> See Jeff Sahadeo. *Russian Colonial Society in Tashkent: 1865-1923*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.; Adeeb Khalid. *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform: Jadidism in Central Asia*. 27 Vol. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.; Jane Burbank and David L. Ransel. *Imperial Russia: New Histories for the Empire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.; Robert P. Geraci. *Window on the East: National and Imperial Identities in Late Tsarist Russia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001. among others.

European market and the globalizing imperialism of Western European states. While the Russian Empire participated and competed with Western European empires in the Eastern Question and with Britain in the Great Game, it could not compete in terms of industrial development or capitalist markets which ultimately came to define its peripherality.

There have been attempts to include the Soviet Union in studies of imperialism and treat Eastern European socialist states as colonial possessions of the USSR. While we could analyze the military interventions by the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe as formally similar to military interventions by the United States in Latin America for example, we should not confuse US imperialism with Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. Theoretically, these works seem to rest on Chioni Moore's article "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique" in which he argues for the "inflation" of the term postcolonial to include the Soviet Eastern European experience. However, even Moore admits that he all too easily "yoked" references to the Russian empire with references to the Soviet experience by using the term "Russo-Soviet," especially considering that his examples are almost exclusively from the pre-1917 era (Moore 122). I would argue against this "inflation" of the term postcolonial simply on grounds of historical specificity – the Soviet Union did not draw a profit from its Eastern European dependencies (Gawdiak 421, Appendix B), nor did it operate on the principle of drawing profit from any of its allies around the world, many of whom actually depended on Soviet arms to liberate themselves from Western European colonialism and actually come to form what we today call postcolonial. As for the argument that the military presence of Soviet arms in Eastern European countries is proof of colonization, we ought to keep in mind that those weapons were not turned against the natives, with the notable exceptions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia. A Soviet missile in Poland does not equal a Maxim gun in Africa, for even

though the threat of nuclear holocaust lies in part with the USSR, the industrial killing machine of the British Empire was a threat of holocaust realized. I do leave open the possibility that one can argue for the effects of this military presence to have been similar to the effects of imperialist possession, but no such argument has been put forth so far. In addition, if one is to seriously consider USSR's relationships with other states in terms of colonial or neo-colonial relations, one should turn to African and other "Third World" states whose relationships with the USSR must be examined in more detail and with a critical eye towards neo-colonial structures and practices.<sup>15</sup>

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was also a contiguous, pre-modern empire whose possessions in Eastern Europe were made an integral part of the state. Much like in the Ottoman or Russian case, there was clear differentiation between the dominant elites and the subordinated ones, often with a strong impetus for integration as in the case of Hungarian relations with Croatian provinces. Austria-Hungary, however, flexed its imperialist muscles when it acquired Bosnia and Herzegovina at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Unlike in Croatia, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the imperial policy was much more comparable to the policies Western European empires enforced in their colonies. Much like the Russians in Central Asia, the Austrians in Bosnia and Herzegovina came to discover and conquer an exotic land, motivated not by material gain as much as by the geopolitical games with Western European empires.

Lieven's definition of hybrid empires applies to Austria-Hungary as well. Economically, Austria-Hungary was clearly falling behind other European empires, and its participation in European inter-imperialist rivalry, just as with Russia, depended mostly on its geopolitical strategizing. It remained a mercantile empire to the end, for

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<sup>15</sup> See for example Matthew Connelly. "Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonization: The Grand Strategy of the Algerian War for Independence." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33.2 (2001): pp. 221-245.

despite an internal market whose population nearly matched France's 25 million on the eve of the Revolution, the Habsburg monarchy had failed to develop anything approaching the French connection with foreign markets. It remained a largely landlocked economy without the overseas empire or major seaports that might have called forth a larger commercial class among its own subjects (Lampe and Jackson 58).

In terms of the economic and political structures Austria-Hungary introduced in the Balkans – they were of “less than modern” kind: military borders, feudal regulation of estates, and settlement of German colonists. Commercial interests did not drive Austro-Hungarian policy in its southeastern colonies, political and military motives came first either in defense against the Ottoman Empire or in securing a position against the Russian Empire.

Another crucial aspect links the three empires in control of much of Eastern Europe prior to World War I, a set of cultural attitudes that Ussama Makdisi called Ottoman Orientalism:

A complex of Ottoman attitudes produced by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century age of Ottoman reform that implicitly and explicitly acknowledged the West to be the home of progress and the East, writ large to be a present theater of backwardness. ... Reformers acknowledged the subject position of the empire as the “sick man of Europe” only to create administrative, anthropological and even archaeological spaces to articulate an Ottoman modernity: a state and civilization technologically equal to and temporally coeval with the West but culturally distinct from and politically independent of it (Makdisi 769–79).

Setting aside the controversy over the use of the term “Orientalism,” we could describe the Russian intelligentsia in precisely the same terms as the Ottoman reformers above. Educated in Western ideas and agreeing with views of Russia as backward, both the Westernizers and the Slavophiles sought to change the Empire into a “culturally distinct” but comparably “advanced” or civilized state.<sup>16</sup> In Austria-Hungary, while the elite culture was far more integrated into the

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<sup>16</sup> This complex problem of Russian intelligentsia and the West cannot be addressed here, but it is important to note that the Slavophiles, however much they seemed to rely on “tradition” were in fact educated and erudite in Western (political) philosophy. Their reaction to the autocratic state was in part informed by these ideas and their goal was to “revive” a culture that could stand on equal footing with Western Europe or even outshine Europe in its civilization. This program reveals an acceptance of Russia's inferiority even if the plan for its revival was less accepting of European prescriptions. For a comparison of national identity (of the intelligentsia or elites) in the era of empire in Russian and Ottoman empires see Stone, Podbolotov and Yasar's “The Russians and the Turks: Imperialism and

mainstream of Western European cultural trends, there was a peculiar need to prove the legitimacy of its imperial status to others in the Era of Empire. Robin Okey describes the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia as having two tasks:

One was the colonial-derived vision of spreading the benefits of western progress; the other was the need to show the superiority of the Habsburg multinational idea over ethnic nationalism as the means to that progress. In this light, the Bosnian occupation became a touchstone for the viability of the Habsburg state. Benjamin von Kallay, the most important of Austro-Hungarian administrators of Bosnia, was to link both themes when he defined his goals as to raise the people gradually on to the level of European civilization, and to prove to the world the Monarchy's ability to rule foreign lands (28).

These three empires clearly shared not only the economic reality of being European capitalist periphery, but also the cultural-ideological consequences of this position. Eastern Europe was in the peculiar position of being ruled by foreign empires whose own existence was being brought into question in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the periphery of European capital. It is as if the native Eastern European is twice removed from the center as a subject of a peripheral empire.

These brief sketches of “foreign rule” in the region serve the function of delineating between these “old world” empires and the colonial empires of Western Europe. They are not intended as historical analyses but rather as examples of how foreign rule can be non-colonial and what is even more important in our case, how it does not participate in imperialism. As defined above, imperialism is intricately linked with globalizing capital and while it is simplistic to explain imperialism as driven by vulgar economic profit alone, it is also erroneous to apply the concept of imperialism to non-capitalist empires.

Here we come up to the question of the centrality of economic concerns in these definitions. While I am focusing most of my attention in this chapter to the economic aspects of imperialism, I am not intending to downplay other important realities of imperialism and

especially not the ideological ones which are the subject of the remaining chapters. It is rather that I want to insist on the precision in defining the term imperialism only in reference to Western capitalist, industrial empires. In siding with Jameson, I believe that without the history of capitalism as a global system, we cannot understand or analyze the practice of imperialism. *Vice versa* does not hold in that understanding capitalism and its operations does not explain imperialism as a historical practice in its totality. In addition, what has been lacking in almost all “postcolonial” approaches to Eastern Europe is precisely the economic dimension. Partly as a result of anti-Marxist ideology and partly as an acceptance of the “cultural turn” in critiques of imperialism, scholarship on Eastern Europe has not engaged to whose benefit (economic or strategic) the identified postcolonial ideological structures operate.

Eastern European experience of foreign rule cannot be described as colonial or imperialist. The peripheral empires that occupied this region do not belong to the history of colonialism and imperialism that is the topic of postcolonial inquiry. Using postcolonial concepts in Eastern European studies must be confined to the relations with Western Europe proper. Tracing this *non-colonial* relationship with the help of postcolonial concepts makes sense only in as much as Western European practices of imperialism without colonies were present in Eastern Europe. While Todorova is correct in stating that subjugation and colonization is not the same thing, what she fails to perceive is that whatever we want to call the experience of Eastern Europe vis-à-vis Western Europe, it is an experience that shares with colonialism and neo-colonialism the global, capitalist, imperialist type of *subjugation*. In other words, this is a subjugation which makes sense only within the capitalist social system. Understanding the nature of that subjugation – its economic, ideological, cultural, historical and other elements – is the task of postcolonial studies in Eastern Europe. So what is the nature of Western European

subjugation of Eastern Europe? There are only a handful of studies that research this important question. Section three below attempts to show some basic features of this non-colonial imperialist subjugation.

Andrew Hammond has sketched some ways in which the British Empire reaped benefits from the Balkans. The British support for the Ottoman Empire, eliding responsibility for the financial ruin of the Balkan states, and support for the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia are examples of policies whose acceptance at home or in the international arena depended in large part on the ideological representation of the Balkans as an unruly, unstable space not to be left to the natives to govern. Using these three examples, Hammond makes a strong case for how “Balkanism” served specific political and imperial purposes. He says:

Beneath the variegated political stances – what we might term the surface utterances of individual travelers – lies an articulation of fundamental cultural assumptions that shape, organize, channel, and profoundly synthesize the majority of texts from the period. Of these assumptions, the denigration of the Balkans as a set of inferior cultures has a significance, and unifying function, that should not be underestimated. In both rhetoric and practice, imperialism had rigidly partitioned the world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into nations destined to rule, existing in privileged space, and regions fated to be ruled; and there was no doubt into which category the Balkans fell (A. Hammond 603).

But an even more important task is to identify ways in which the imperialist tactics were used against Eastern Europe throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries when the region was not only nominally, but in many real ways independent.

A telling problem of “postcolonial” accounts of Eastern Europe is their avoidance of the socialist period. Like the new “Orientalist” texts that “confused” the Balkan wars with the wars of Yugoslav succession, so the critics of this discourse failed to address the socialist period, thereby making the same error of ignoring much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or denying its relevance for

this supposedly historically stagnant region. There are fine analyses of pre-WWII Western discourse and ideology about Eastern Europe, as there are adequate references to the current state of affairs and the reproduction of that same 19<sup>th</sup> – century ideology, but there is not a single work explaining what happened in between, during the socialist regimes, to this Western ideology or its mirroring within Eastern European societies. Todorova claims that “Balkans as a geopolitical notion and ‘Balkan’ as a derogation were conspicuously absent from the vocabulary of Western journalists and politicians,” as Eastern Europe predominated but only as a shorthand for “socialist” or “under the influence of USSR” (Todorova 136). The implication here is that the attitudes about Eastern Europe current in Western academia, journalism and politics were somehow non-objectionable criticisms of Eastern Europe for its socialist ways, and evinced no prejudice beyond what was required by Cold War *realpolitik*.

In the following section I will analyze why cordoning off of Eastern Europe into a separate Second World apart from the imperialism understood to operate between the First and the Third World was not just an empirical, but a theoretical error as well.

### ***The Pitfalls of Three Worlds Theory in Eastern European Studies***

The poststructuralist turn in studies of formerly colonized countries is, in part, a response to the failure of Three World Theories and the cultural nationalism they endorsed. The Third World as an alternative to the *two* imperialisms (US and USSR) develops into an ideology and a political position at the Bandung Conference in 1955 and later in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, “as an ideology of already-constituted states” attempting to find footing in the coming Cold War. Ahmad argues that “an exclusive emphasis on the nation, and on nationalism as the necessary ideology emanating from the national situation, has been a *logical*

feature of Third-Worldist perspectives” precisely because the Third World as a political program was established in a union of already decolonized, formally independent *nation*-states (Ahmad 92). Consequently, the Three Worlds Theory became

an ideological formation which redefined anti-imperialism not as a socialist project to be realized by mass movements of the popular classes but as a developmentalist project to be realized by the weaker states of the national bourgeoisies in the course of their collaborative competition with the more powerful states of advanced capital... (Ahmad 293).

The failure of the national bourgeoisies in opposing imperialism as well as their in-fighting in part resulting from their “differential incorporation into the structure of imperialist capital” is proof enough that the Third World was neither unified nor as homogenous as Three Worlds Theories claimed (Ahmad 294). The fall of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe further debunked the Three Worlds theory as an explanatory model for today’s world. However, the theoretical failure of positing nationalism as the oppositional model to imperialism continues to exert influence in the “redoubled vacuum” created by the failure of the national bourgeoisies on the one hand and the prior rejection of socialism as a viable alternative on the other (Ahmad 92–3; Larsen 142).

The contention that the Second World is different and completely separate from the First and Third worlds is especially relevant in our case. In the US academy, Slavic and East European Studies played a crucial role in the production of knowledge about the region during the Cold War and the models used fit well with the Three Worlds Theory. The totalitarian model in Soviet history, for example, fits well with the notion that the Soviet Union was an empire on par (or even worse) than Nazi Germany.<sup>17</sup> In the studies of culture and literature, dissident

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<sup>17</sup> An interesting discussion regarding the theoretical models and methodologies used in Soviet history appeared recently in *Slavic Review* revealing the extent to which Soviet history in the United States was under the ideological

writings were given primacy over literature published in Eastern Europe. Yugoslavia was a somewhat different case on account of its break with the Soviet Union in 1948, but overall, the field of Slavic Studies developed in the intellectual climate of the Cold War, on an anti-Marxist politics and prospered as such.

The fall of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe in some circles confirmed the anti-Marxist outlook in Slavic and East European Studies, but the stakes are clearly lower now that “our” side had won. Despite the observable dissolution of the Three Worlds into one globalized capitalist market, the traces of the theoretical fallacy of this now defunct theory persist. In the postcolonial studies the traces are visible in the preoccupation with (anti)nationalism and the emergence of reified categories such as neo-ethnicities, culture, or the ethnic as the sites of anti-imperialist resistance. In the Slavic and East European studies, the perception of the region’s separateness from the rest of the world remains in force. Even the postcolonial approaches to the region have maintained its exclusivity: either as Todorova’s Balkanism or Wolff’s overvaluation of geographical proximity to the center.

As a result of the continued theoretical influence of Second-World exclusivity all postcolonial approaches to the region invariably display two blind spots: the region’s socialist period remains virtually unexplored as does the economic, materialist counterpart to the postcolonial discourse analysis. The first error results from an incorrect assumption that the socialist Second World was truly a world onto itself and was not influenced by any changes or actions of the First or Third worlds and therefore cannot be assessed using categories of colonial or imperialist relations. The second error arises out of the institutional conundrum facing would-be postcolonial theorists of Eastern Europe: they work in a discipline steeped in anti-Marxism

whose “knowledge” of the region cannot be reconciled with the history of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles at the center of postcolonial theory; struggles that were not only ideologically, but often enough materially supported by the Soviet Union.

Aijaz Ahmad pinpoints this contradiction in the wider anti-Marxist academic circles:

While the revolutionary wars were going on, it had been difficult for the more truthful even within the anti-communist Left to ignore entirely the *contradiction* that an internally bureaucratized society was in every single case the main supplier of the material and diplomatic support which made those wars possible; it was, after all, in the so-called ‘period of stagnation’ (the Brezhnev years) that so many of the revolutions had in fact taken place, with direct Soviet assistance, and it is at least arguable that the crisis of the apartheid regime was intensified somewhat later owing to the demise of the racist regimes in the surrounding countries and to the tenacity of the ANC itself, all facilitated with Soviet arms. As the metropolitan Left came to shelve its identifications with post-revolutionary societies of Indochina and Southern Africa, that memory, and what it had meant for the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa, was simply suppressed; the subsequent Gorbachev years were to help that willed amnesia greatly (33).

In area studies, and particularly in East European studies, it was that much easier to focus only on the failures of the communist regimes. But if we are to seriously engage postcolonial studies, this contradiction has to be explored and the Soviet Union’s contribution to anti-colonial struggles acknowledged. Furthermore, the totalitarian model of Eastern European history must be discarded because it does not allow for any breaks in the hegemony of the party rule and in its simplicity prevents analysis of the interaction between Western and Eastern Europe during the socialist period.

The Second World’s distinctiveness lies in its socialist state orders, which are presumably responsible for its supposed isolation from the rest of the world. Even those who do not equate United States imperialism with the Soviet Union still perceive the Second World as a third way, a world apart from the dialectical struggle of the First and Third worlds.<sup>18</sup> In reality, the countries of the Second world participated in the anti-colonial struggles in the “Third World” by

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the debate between Ahmad and Jameson on “Third World” literatures.

providing logistical and material support and were themselves engaged in various ways with the “First World” –in a military standoff of the Cold War and in degrees of economic engagement with the capitalist countries and the international financial institutions.

It is my contention that Eastern Europe has participated in the history of European imperialism and has been dominated and subjugated by Western Europe in very specific ways despite never being colonized. In other words, Eastern Europe has been a periphery of European capitalism, has faced challenges similar to those faced by other European imperialist dependencies, and has been on the receiving end of specific imperialist tactics utilized against countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. In order to prove this contention, I must focus on economic and political interaction between Western Europe/US and Eastern Europe. It is precisely because others have ignored the economic-political aspects that I must devote substantial space to it in what follows. This is not to say that economic-political analysis exhausts the practice and history of Western imperialism in the region, quite the contrary, but since the economic-political analysis is the stumbling block in assessing the validity of the entire postcolonial approach to Eastern Europe, it is especially important and must be illuminated.

Harry Magdoff pointed out three major imperialist tactics: formal economic and political arrangements such as preferential trade agreements and maintenance of currency blocs; manipulation or support of local ruling groups preventing or reversing internal social revolutions; and establishing influence and control over the direction of economic developments, including government allocation of resources enforced through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* 112–3). All three sets of tactics are on display in the history of Western European engagement with Eastern Europe before and after the fall of socialism. It is beyond my research abilities or the scope of this dissertation to narrate a

history of Western European economic engagement with Eastern Europe, but from research to date, the following basic outline can be construed.

## **Imperialism without Colonies in Eastern Europe**

The unstated premiss of most of the news about current East-West economic relations is that the West has had little or nothing to do with Eastern Europe in the past. ... In reality, of course, the West had a complex and highly structured economic relationship with Eastern Europe before the summer of 1989, albeit a predominantly conflictual one (Gowan, "Western Economic Diplomacy and the New Eastern Europe" 64).

Since the end of World War II, United States' primary foreign policy mandates were rebuilding Western European allies and maintaining hegemony over them, dominating client states (especially in Latin America and East Asia), expanding influence over other "Third World" states, and confronting the USSR and its allies.<sup>19</sup> The relationship between the US and Western Europe on the one hand and Eastern European states minus the Soviet Union on the other developed and changed over time. In the immediate postwar period, Eastern Europe was squarely on the list of adversaries, but as the neoliberal, free market ideology gained influence in the West, differential treatment of specific states within Eastern Europe was perceived as more

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<sup>19</sup> In the willful amnesia of the post-Cold War era, these claims might seem radical. However, Paul Wolfowitz's Defense Policy Guidance of 1992 outlines the role of empire American is to take on, and even as recently as 2003 prominent political commentators in the US were claiming this country's rightful place as the hegemon and imperial power it has been since World War II. Michael Ignatieff, for example, argues: "Those who want America to remain a republic rather than become an empire imagine rightly, but they have not factored in what tyranny or chaos can do to vital American interests. The case for empire is that it has become, in a place like Iraq, the last hope for democracy and stability alike" (Michael Ignatieff. "The American Empire: The Burden." *New York Times*. January 5, 2003 (2003)). "Empire" seems once again an acceptable political designation for the United States. See also Christopher Layne and Bradley A. Thayer. *American Empire: A Debate*. New York: Routledge, 2007. For specific criticisms, see, for example, Ellen Meiksins Wood. *Empire of Capital*. London: Verso, 2003. , Harry Magdoff. *Imperialism Without Colonies*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2003. , Harry Magdoff, *Economic Aspects of U.S. Imperialism*. 27 Vol. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966. , James Petras and Steve Vieux. "Bosnia and the Revival of US Hegemony." *New Left Review* 1.218 (1996): 3-25. , (Harry Magdoff, *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy*. 1 Modern reader ed. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969. , Etienne Balibar and Erin M. Williams. "World Borders, Political Borders." *PMLA* 117.1, Special Topic: Mobile Citizens, Media States (2002): 71-8.

strategic than open hostility (Gowan, “Western Economic Diplomacy and the New Eastern Europe” 63–82; Mastanduno 353). The intensity of economic pressure on different countries was different and it varied over time despite the overall anti-communist policies endorsed early in the Cold War. Regardless of specific strategies employed, however, the US and Western Europe were operating with the full intention of instigating, sponsoring, and aiding counterrevolutions in Eastern Europe for the explicit purpose of bringing down the socialist regimes. Ranging from “strategic embargoes” to full blown “economic warfare,” Western states imposed conditions on Eastern European economies that were ultimately designed to limit these countries’ industrial development and modernization, contribute to the weakening of the socialist regimes, and facilitate Western economic domination of the region (Mastanduno 353). In what follows I argue that these economic and political measures taken by Western governments were a product not only of the Cold War but also of the globalization of capital and the development of imperialism without colonies discussed above.

### ***Eastern European Underdevelopment in Context***

Western European and US engagement with Eastern Europe during the socialist period was complex as numerous institutions were involved in regulating and mandating economic and diplomatic measures. The most important institutions involved in policing Western involvement with Eastern Europe included: North Atlantic Treaty Association (NATO), Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).<sup>20</sup> These organizations,

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<sup>20</sup> While NATO and COCOM covered Western European and US relations with all of Eastern Europe and the USSR, Eastern European countries joined GATT, World Bank, and the IMF at different times as shown in Table 1.

often following US directives, worked to destabilize the regimes in Eastern Europe and limit their economic recovery and development following World War II. The intense focus on economic destabilization of these regimes points to what critics have identified as the “new imperialism”: economic domination with the threat of military and political intervention.

NATO was the primary vehicle of military confrontation with Eastern Europe. But the effects of NATO’s aggressive posture in Europe were also economic. In combination with the nuclear arms race between the US and the USSR, the presence of NATO forced most Eastern European governments into building extensive militaries often draining the largest part of their gross domestic product. Peter Gowan cites the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London assessment that into the 1980s, there existed “a rough parity of ground, air and sea forces in the European theater.” Considering the economic and technological lag between the East and the West in Europe, it is clear that the arms race affected Eastern European states far more severely than the Western ones (Gowan, “Western Economic Diplomacy and the New Eastern Europe” 65).

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(see below)

| <b>Country</b> | <b>World Bank</b>                     | <b>GATT/WTO</b> | <b>IMF</b>                         |
|----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Albania        | 1991                                  | 2000            | 1991                               |
| Bulgaria       | 1990                                  | 1996            | 1990                               |
| Czechoslovakia | 1945; leaves 1954;<br>rejoins 1990    | 1993            | 1947; leaves 1955;<br>rejoins 1990 |
| Hungary        | 1982                                  | 1973            | 1982                               |
| Poland         | 1946; leaves 1950;<br>readmitted 1986 | 1967            | 1986                               |
| Romania        | 1972                                  | 1971            | 1972                               |
| Yugoslavia     | 1945                                  | 1966            | 1945                               |

Sources: (“World Bank Historical Chronology: 1944-2005”), 9/3/2009 2009 <[http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTARCHIVES/Resources/WB\\_Historical\\_Chronology\\_1944\\_2005.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTARCHIVES/Resources/WB_Historical_Chronology_1944_2005.pdf)>; (“WTO | GATT Members”), 9/3/2009 2009 <[http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/gattmem\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/gattmem_e.htm)>; (“WTO Members”), 9/3/2009 2009 <[http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/tif\\_e/org6\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm)>. (“IMF Country Information Page”), 9/3/2009 2009 <<http://www.imf.org/external/country/index.htm>>.

While NATO and the US threatened Eastern Europe militarily, The Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls was the vehicle of intense and aggressive economic warfare. COCOM functioned as a gateway for all trade with Eastern European governments and the USSR. Dictated mostly by the US and in the service of the Cold War confrontation with the USSR, COCOM limited technological transfer, controlled trade in industrial products and know-how, and controlled or monitored all exports to and imports from Eastern Europe. Michael Mastanduno calls this policy “economic statecraft, or the use of economic measures to achieve political objectives” (Mastanduno 8). He divides the postwar period into four separate ones, according to the severity of measures imposed onto Eastern Europe: 1949 – 1958, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In the immediate postwar period from 1949 to 1958 the West took measures intended to slow down if not completely retard Soviet (and Eastern European) industrial development. Mastanduno cites National Security Council (NSC) record from the Truman administration defining “comprehensive economic warfare with the explicit purpose ... of inflicting ‘the greatest economic injury to the USSR and its satellites’” (Mastanduno 94).

From 1958 to 1968, the US policy “was in transition from the confrontational posture of the early cold war to the more conciliatory stance of *détente*” (Ibid 116). Control of “less strategic” trade was relaxed, but an effective “strategic embargo” persisted for so-called “dual use” items (computers, electronic advanced technology), areas of “clear American dominance” (117) Starting from the mid-1960s the trade between Western Europe and Eastern Europe increased and by 1964, “Western export competition became government-guaranteed long-term credit competition.” Significant beneficiaries of this development were “West European subsidiaries of U.S. multinationals” (126). Importantly, in the 1960s, the US government began a shift towards trade liberalization not as a reversal of previous policy objectives, but rather as a

more effective way of extracting both economic and political benefits in relation to the Soviet Union. Kennedy's Policy Planning Council

was convinced that trade liberalization could bring the United States significant political benefits. If carried out properly, the adjustment of trade controls would give U.S. officials effective leverage in political bargaining with the Soviets. Going even further, it suggested that trade adjustment could be the most important bargaining instrument the United States possessed (p. 86) (Mastanduno 132).

Economic warfare, albeit with changing strategy, against Eastern Europe continued into the 1970s, and "the US government increasingly resorted to controls that were not directly aimed at holding down the communist bloc's war-making potential," but rather crippling the economy as a whole (92). Zbigniew Brzezinski, then the NSC adviser, headed the policy review on relations with Europe, and in the section on Eastern Europe clearly outlined the need to use economic and trade tools in the overall political strategy of undermining the USSR and Eastern European regimes.<sup>21</sup>

The 1970s were a crucial decade in the development of "new imperialism" as the Bretton Woods system collapsed and a new international capitalist order was emerging, built on internationalizing finance capital. For the first time, developing nations could borrow from private international bankers and this led to extensive borrowing; the "Third World as a whole owed \$750 billion abroad, three-quarters to private financiers" (Frieden 370). To revive the US economy, the Carter government raised the interest rates towards the end of the decade ushering

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<sup>21</sup> The section reads: "This section should analyze the situation in the area in terms of general trends – political, economic, and social stability. The status and outlook in each country for relative internal liberalization and external independence should be examined. In particular, there should be a discussion of the US should approach the area and the countries involved; whether and how we should differentiate among the countries in trading or political relations, e.g., treat them more or less uniformly, or primarily as a function of the policy toward the USSR, or on the basis of other criteria, e.g., should US policy be more forthcoming toward Eastern European countries that are relatively more liberal internally (e.g., Poland and Hungary), or relatively more independent from Moscow (e.g., Romania). This review should include an examination of the role of RFE/RL [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty]. This analysis should also address the GDR in the context of US-German and Berlin policies, as well as Eastern Europe" (Zbigniew Brzezinski. *Presidential Review Memorandum NSC-9*. ed. 2009 Vol.).

crippling defaults on foreign lending across the globe, which in turn forced countries into abandoning industrialization and development and integrating their economies into the world market on increasingly unfavorable terms (Frieden 372–78). The road to “globalization” for many Third World states began in the 1970s.

In the 1970s and under the new system of global capital, differential trade regimes were being established towards specific Eastern European countries following the trend of trade liberalization in exchange for political concessions first initiated by the Kennedy administration. Hungary and Romania entered formal relations with GATT, with the latter also joined the World Bank and the IMF. On the basis of Brzezinski’s recommendations, Carter’s Presidential Directive focused on differentiation between Eastern European countries on the basis of either “independence internationally” (distancing from the USSR) or “degree of internal liberalization” (specific internal political and economic measures away from state economic planning and control). Poland and Romania continued “to receive preferred treatment” and relations with Hungary were to be “carefully improved to demonstrate that its position is similar to Poland and Romania.” For the more obstinate regimes Carter signed the following:

-- Relations with Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and the GDR will remain limited until there is demonstrated progress along one of the two dimensions mentioned above [distancing from USSR or internal “liberalization”]. No particular initiatives toward any of the three will be taken, nor will there be indications of willingness to grant MFN [Most Favored Nation status in trade]. That does not preclude continuing efforts to put formal bilateral relations in a somewhat more normal basis: e.g., through US naval port visits to Bulgaria or through negotiations with Bulgaria over outstanding bond debts, with Czechoslovakia over nationalization claims and with the GDR over a consular convention and claims. The results of such negotiations must be justified on their own merits, and must not dilute the basic differentiation. Any other specific steps taken to improve U.S. relations with those three countries must tangibly and demonstrably advance specific U.S. interests (Carter 2).

In essence, the Carter administration furthered the use of economic statecraft, blackmailing Eastern European regimes with trade and credit opportunities in order to both drive a wedge

between these socialist states and the USSR and to weaken them economically to the point of compliance with the liberalizing trend in global trade and the abandonment of planned economy.

The decade of the 1980s was marked by further intensification in economic warfare as initiated by the United States under the Reagan administration. Previously, efforts by Nixon and Kissinger to liberalize trade in accordance with the new globalizing trends ended with the renewed hostility over the war in Angola (whose decolonization was funded by the USSR and Cuba). At the end of the 1970s, the Carter administration attempted a relaxation dubbed “tactical linkage,” but such efforts ended with the USSR’s action in Afghanistan, given that it “jeopardized the security of Iran, Pakistan, and Persian Gulf oil deemed vital by the West” (Mastanduno 220). Reagan’s National Security Decision Directive in 1982 regarding Eastern Europe reinforced the strategy whereby economic relations are treated as an award for proper political behavior. The decision reads: “While the impact of differentiation in some cases may be marginal, it offers the best vehicle for achieving the primary U.S. goal of weakening overall Soviet control in the region.” The aim was to produce specific effects such as (1) Encouraging more liberal trends in the region; (2) Reinforcing the pro-Western orientation of their peoples; (3) Lessening their economic and political dependence on the USSR and facilitating their association with the free nations of Western Europe; (4) Encouraging more private market-oriented development of their economies, free trade union activity, etc.”<sup>22</sup> The last section of this Directive is especially relevant for understanding the point regarding economic statecraft and outlines the endgame of Western economic warfare that was to hold until the collapse of the socialist regimes. This warrants a lengthy citation:

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<sup>22</sup> This last objective and much of what is included in the citation below was classified even today and obtained only with the Freedom of Information Act request.

The U.S. Government will employ commercial, financial, exchange, informational, and diplomatic instruments in implementing its policy toward Eastern Europe to include the following:

-- Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) Status. MFN status will be exploited consistently with U.S. law and policy objectives when the states of Eastern Europe are responsive to our concerns ... Our actions in this regard will depend on the readiness of the relevant East European government to enter with us into a constructive bilateral relationship.

-- Credit Policy. Access to private and official Western capital is a key asset for the economic development of Eastern Europe. The U.S. Government extends financing which benefits Eastern European countries as well as U.S. trade interests through a number of programs. In deciding on the extension of such financing, we will take into account U.S. political and security objectives within the framework of U.S. law, agencies' regulations, and economic criteria on a case-by-case basis. We will seek to avoid situations in which reverse leverage related to the overextension of credit could be exerted by the debtor country.

-- International Monetary Fund (IMF) membership. It has long been U.S. policy to support the membership in the IMF of any country which is prepared to accept the obligations of Fund membership. The U.S. will continue to place economic and financial factors first among other decision criteria ... continue to judge applications on a case-by-case basis, giving due weight to political and security factors when considering whether countries, particularly those in Eastern Europe, can be expected to meet the obligations of Fund membership fully and without reserve.

-- Debt Rescheduling. U.S. policy is to extend debt relief only when it is necessary as a financial measure to ensure repayment and when the debtor country embarks on an economic/financial stabilization program designed to rectify the country's financial position. Normally, we expect such a program to be supported by an agreed regimen of conditionality. In addition to these financial criteria, political and security objectives will continue to be given due weight in reaching a final decision on rescheduling debts of Eastern European countries.

-- Technology Transfer and Export Controls. U.S. strategic concerns will remain paramount. Since there is a high probability that technology legally sold to any Eastern European country other than Romania will be passed on to the Soviet Union, it will not be possible to differentiate in the provision of COCOM-controlled production and process technology. However, a cautious U.S. policy on the sale of end products can be a facet of a differentiated policy toward Eastern Europe provided such sales will not prejudice U.S. efforts to strengthen the COCOM system (Reagan 2).

It is clear that by this time (1982), U.S. and its allies were controlling not only trade, but credits, indebtedness to Western banks, and all foreign exchange with Eastern Europe. Memberships in global financial institutions (like the IMF and the World Bank) as well as the extension of credit through those and other sources were fully under US and European control.

The background of an intensification of economic warfare against Eastern Europe since the mid-1970s, as mentioned above, is larger than the issue of Western domination of Eastern

Europe. It is no coincidence that the oil shocks of 1972-3 and the subsequent decline of the global economic conditions preceded Reagan's draconian measures outlined above. As Wood points out: "this was the beginning of the long downturn, which affected all western economies, and the US in particular" (Wood 132). Among several competing theories of how to end the economic downturn and secure growth for Western economies, general liberalization of markets or what "we call globalization, the internationalization of capital, its free and rapid movements and the most predatory financial speculation around the globe" eventually won out (Ibid 133).

In relations with the Third World, the process of "structural adjustment" was a key element of this new globalizing trend. The structural adjustments were a result of the new "standard format for debt negotiations" whereby the IMF would impose conditions on the debtor's economy and lend small amounts "bridging" the gap as long as its conditions were upheld. Private bankers would lend only to governments which had IMF approval, resulting in debtors having to accept whatever conditions the IMF imposed (Frieden 374). Wood describes this as the "Washington Consensus" that was imposed onto "developing" economies making them more vulnerable to penetration of Western capital, especially in an emphasis on domestic production for export and market-dependency on highly subsidized Western products (especially in agriculture) (Wood 187).

In Eastern Europe, the differentiation in trade and other bilateral agreements with Western Europe and the US became a tool for breaking down these developing economies and integrating them into the global capitalist market. The government-backed long-term lending that started in the late 1960s became part and parcel of the new financial system and Eastern European states found themselves on the verge of default in the 1980s much like the rest of the "Third World." This process was also described by Susan L. Woodward:

The economic and political reforms that caused so much contention during the 1980s, and led to the eventual break up [of Yugoslavia], were part of a global agenda, pushed by the US government and the multilateral institutions it controlled, promoting liberalization, privatization, stabilization, human rights, and democratization. Yugoslavia was only one of the many countries that received bilateral aid, IMF and World Bank loans, and arms agreements in exchange for such domestic reforms. Nor was it alone in feeling the corrosive effects that these reforms had on the institutional arrangements and social commitments that underpinned social peace in most countries during the Cold War (Woodward, “The Political Economy of Ethno-Nationalism in Yugoslavia” 86)<sup>23</sup>

Ellen Meiksins Wood and Susan L. Woodward might as well have been citing Kwame Nkrumah’s 1965 treatise on neo-colonialism. He points to trade agreements, foreign aid, and international, but US-controlled, organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF as instruments of Western control over former colonies in the new post-colonial era (as cited in Young p. 47-8). Latin American dependency theories, as well as other theories of underdevelopment, show that very similar tactics were utilized by imperialist powers against other post-colonial states.<sup>24</sup>

The similarities I am trying to tease out are not between the historically specific conditions of colonial states and Eastern Europe. Rather, I am attempting to show that the instruments of economic domination used by the core imperialist states of Western Europe and the US against the post-colonial states in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the neo-colonial period) were identical to those used against Eastern European states. There are, of course, significant differences between former colonies and Eastern Europe: colonies faced physical and material destruction of the society including the native intelligentsia in part through the imposition of the colonizers’ language and culture. The historical experience of colonialism left

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<sup>23</sup> For complete contextualization of Yugoslavia specifically, see below and also Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> See for example J. F. Petras and Henry Veltmeyer. *Globalization Unmasked: Imperialism in the 21st Century*. Halifax, Nova Scotia; New York: Palgrave, 2001. esp. chapter 4 on “Latin America and Euro-American Imperialism” 74-91.

its mark on all aspects of the social development of these states and most developed entrenched local bourgeoisies acting in the interest of empire. Eastern Europe did not have these problems, mostly because it had never experienced the direct colonization.

However, the lessons of postcolonial thought are relevant for Eastern Europe, in that the relationship with Western Europe can be understood properly *only within the conceptual framework of global imperialism*. The critique of Western imperialism and Eurocentrism that postcolonial thought provides is the only context in which East-West relations can be fully understood. The peripheral and dependent relationship Eastern Europe has had in relation to the capitalist empires of the 20<sup>th</sup> century allows us to consider how the ideological influence exerted by the West is similar to and different from the patterns evident in formerly colonized regions. Using a postcolonial approach to identify, analyze, and interpret the ideological influence of Eurocentrism on a peripheral region of Europe does not in any way obfuscate the historical specificity of either post-colonial nations or Eastern Europe, nor does it imply that identical situations prevail in these places. Rather, it is the economic domination coupled with Eurocentric intellectual hegemony that is the prevailing system both post-colonial and Eastern European nations had to confront, albeit at different times and in different historical conditions.

Having entered the Cold War as severely underdeveloped economies with minimal industrialization, Eastern European countries found themselves confronting extreme economic challenges, caused in significant part by Western embargoes, trade restrictions, and lending policies. Not only were these economies unable to rebuild from World War II without the aid that Western Europe received, they were also not in a position to enforce protectionist measures to develop native industry and markets to the level necessary for effective competition as East

Asian “miracle” states had done.<sup>25</sup> While their path to dependence started out from the ashes of old-world empires and the periphery of European capital, the Cold War placed them at the center of US-led imperialism of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The final stages of the development theory for Eastern Europe, prescribed by none other than Jeffrey Sachs, the father of free-trade theories, are being played out right now.<sup>26</sup> Differentiation tactics have hardly disappeared; they are now couched in terms of European Union conditionality. The last on the list of all the Eastern European states in terms of EU conditionality is Bosnia and Herzegovina – the geographic and ideological center of the former Yugoslavia.

### *The Yugoslav Case*

Da i Marksa dignemo iz zemlje ne bi nam mogao dati formulu [za prevazilaženje krize].<sup>27</sup> (Mikulić, *Kut. 54, Dok. 255* 54:284, 15)

John Lampe’s study of Balkan economic development points out two important distinguishing characteristics of Southeast European “developing nations” in relation to colonial and neo-colonial states in the Third World: 1) the Ottoman period cannot be identified as imperialism in the sense in which postcolonial theory uses the term as the imperial domination of that period is qualitatively different from Western imperial domination; and 2) the Balkan states’ experience of imperial domination by the West was mediated by their proximity to Western Europe. My analysis of the Yugoslav case starts from these premises and examines the socialist period in greater detail. In this section, I argue for considering the history of Western relations

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<sup>25</sup> See especially Ha-Joon Chang, *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism*. New York: Bloomsbury Press : Distributed to the trade by Holtzbrinck Publishers, 2008; 2007., chapter 3 p. 65-83

<sup>26</sup> See Peter Gowan, “Neo-Liberal Theory and Practice for Eastern Europe.” *New Left Review* 1.213 (1995): 3-60.

<sup>27</sup> “Even if Marx could rise from the grave, he couldn’t give us a formula [for overcoming the crisis],” translation mine.

with Yugoslavia as ones of imperial dominance, even if tempered by Yugoslavia's geographical proximity to the center.<sup>28</sup>

Prior to World War I, regions that would form the first and second Yugoslavia were colonial satellites or dependencies of Western empires. Slovenia and Croatia (and as of the Congress of Berlin Bosnia and Herzegovina) were serving the needs of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy: export of raw materials and agricultural goods and development of the region limited to facilitating such extraction of goods (transportation lines, for example, were developed on the south/north line to export raw materials and agricultural goods). The independent Serbia was blocked from establishing protective tariffs by Austria-Hungary, while its internal development still suffered from the inherited Ottoman "practice of government extracting surpluses from the peasant" (Singleton and Carter 52–6). In terms of Western capital, across the region, it "developed almost exclusively as usury and trading capital, penetrating and contributing to a transformation of a traditional Ottoman fief-system" (Schierup 31–2). While the traders often had only indirect contact with the peasants, the landowners were dependent on them and "in turn increased their exploitation of the peasants through an oppressive quasi-feudal system of land

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<sup>28</sup> Literature on Yugoslav economic relations with the West is fairly limited. Most studies of Yugoslav political economy explore only the internal economic conditions, i.e., "self-management." The two exceptions are Susan Woodward's work and Lampe, Prickett and Adamović study of Yugoslav-American economic relations. I rely in much of this section on Susan Woodward detailed study *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945-1990*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. Woodward challenges the traditional reading of Yugoslav political economy and history by emphasizing the international restraints put on the Yugoslav regime. For an overview of such traditional readings, see Frederick Bernard Singleton and B. Carter. *The Economy of Yugoslavia*. London; New York: Croom Helm; St. Martin's Press, 1982. and Harold Lydall. *Yugoslavia in Crisis*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1989. Other important studies of Yugoslav economy can be found in John R. Lampe and Marvin R. Jackson. *Balkan Economic History, 1550-1950: From Imperial Borderlands to Developing Nations*. 10 Vol. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982. , Lampe, Prickett, and Adamović. *Yugoslav-American Economic Relations since World War II*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.; James H. Gapinski. *The Economic Structure and Failure of Yugoslavia*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993. and more recently John B. Allcock. *Explaining Yugoslavia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. I also extensively cite Carl-Ulrik Schierup's study of Yugoslav immigration to Western Europe, as he engages in a Marxist analysis of Yugoslav economic predicament in the context of an international division of labor. (Carl-Ulrik Schierup. *Migration, Socialism, and the International Division of Labour: the Yugoslavian Experience*. Aldershot, Hants, England; Brookfield, Vt., USA: Avebury; Gower Pub. Co., 1990.)

tenure” (Ibid 32). This was especially the case in the newly appropriated Bosnia and Herzegovina where Austria-Hungary played out its last attempt at imitating British and French empires in discovering a proper, exotic colony.

Royal Yugoslavia, in Schierup’s words, had such serious inner problems that it “was incapable of implementing a strong and independent foreign policy and was thus unable to achieve one of the most important preconditions for independent socio-economic development, namely a settlement with imperialist domination” (35). Specifically, foreign ownership of the richest mineral resources and export of raw, unfinished products to the more developed countries characterized the dependent position of the newly established country (Singleton and Carter 37). French and British interests owned copper, lead and zinc mines, and by 1940 controlled between 75% and 90% of all mining, metal-extracting and chemical industries (Singleton and Carter 66; Schierup 38). Foreign control of the royal economy was also evident in international debt. As Singleton says:

The economy of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was influenced and even controlled by foreigners. The state borrowed heavily abroad; large parts of industry were either under direct foreign ownership or their activities were circumscribed by agreements with foreign cartels; and finally, the predominance of Germany after 1935 as the principal trading partner gave that country and its Nazi rulers an overwhelming influence on YU economic development (Singleton and Carter 69).

By 1940, 85% of all industrial goods were imported, and 75% of exports came from agriculture, forestry, and minerals (Schierup 38). At the same time, 53% of Yugoslav exports and 55% of imports were exchanged with Germany (Singleton and Carter 66). As these statistics indicate, royal Yugoslavia was controlled by German financial interests and trade even before the start of WWII and the narrative of Yugoslav resistance to Nazi occupation as a national liberation struggle has some factual basis. The armed struggle was waged against the Nazi occupiers,

while the political struggle included an anti-colonial program of resisting foreign economic domination. Susan Woodward summarizes one of the communist reports on the royal economy:

The royal government had failed to develop a domestic economy for the benefit of its citizens, and the result was a dependent position in the world economy. The report condemned the government for seeking to evade this failure by foreign borrowing that made this dependence worse and by inviting foreign capital into domestic production with special protections that exacerbated poverty and unemployment at home. Selling off Yugoslav mines, factories, and even state monopolies over basic commodities (tobacco, matches, salt) to French, British, Swedish, Czech, and German capitalists in order to line the pockets of Belgrade bureaucrats and merchants was as hostile an act to the Yugoslav people as the export of food to pay for imports, the protections for a weak Serbian bourgeoisie that could not compete abroad, and the collusion among the national bourgeoisies to protect their power over workers (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*, 47).

The communist leadership materialized the anti-colonial program with nationalization of all industry and mines immediately following the war. Western countries in turn insisted on reparations for the nationalized property as a precondition of any economic engagement with communist Yugoslavia. In much of the following section on socialist-era development I rely a great deal on Susan Woodward's *Socialist Unemployment*, supplemented in part with my own research into Yugoslav relations with the West in the 1980s and beyond.

Observing the relations between the West and communist Yugoslavia, Woodward divides the communist era into seven distinct periods: 1) 1945–1947: Yugoslavia receives United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) aid; 2) 1947–1948: Yugoslavia is completely excluded from Western trade; 3) 1948–1952: Yugoslavia breaks with USSR and turns to the West for economic assistance; 4) 1952–1960: Western support for industrialization including local tariff barriers, subsidies, import controls etc.; 5) 1961–1969: the Reforms in response to some international pressure: decentralization, low re-investment, and stagnation; 6) 1970–1980: excessive borrowing and dependence; and 7) 1980–1990: economic collapse. Woodward points out that in the transition to socialism in Yugoslavia the leadership was faced

with one basic and crucial question, namely how to position themselves in relation to the developed countries:

Should they follow an export-led path and, in view of their comparative advantage at the time, invest substantially in agriculture and labor-intensive primary products for export, which would impose a slower and potentially dependence-renewing path of industrialization? Or should they seek assistance from friendly powers to sustain an import surplus while they built up capital-intensive, infrastructural, and producers' goods industries, which would enable them to move sooner onto a higher-growth path and develop a comparative advantage in processed and manufactured goods? (79).

As her study of socialist unemployment demonstrates, much of what passed for internal economic reform and "market socialism" was, in essence, an attempt at resolving this basic development question. The Yugoslavs opted initially for the latter model, but were inevitably pushed towards the former as their dependence on the West increased rather than decreased.

From 1945 to 1947 Yugoslavia nationalized all foreign and local industry, initiated labor-intensive industrialization, and the government's "policy measures were aimed at the development of a self-centered process of accumulation ..., an integrated and differentiated industrial structure, an integrated internal market and an evening out of internal gaps in regional development" (Schierup 59). During this period Yugoslav relations with the West were limited to UNRRA aid, as Yugoslavia was still on the UN list of those most in need of American food aid (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 95).

While most analyses of this period focus on the Yugoslav break with USSR in 1948, 1947 was equally if not more significant for the future of Yugoslavia. It was in 1947 that Truman removed Yugoslavia from UNRRA aid list, prohibited the sale of any food to Yugoslavia, the COCOM regime was applied to all trade with Yugoslavia and consequently "Yugoslav leaders were forced into bilateral agreements on trade, thus reverting their strategy to the dependence-

renewing path” (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 95).<sup>29</sup> Starting in 1947 but culminating the following year, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY) was expelled from the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). This proved to be a fatal blow to the Yugoslav economic plan of development based on support from friendly powers and effectively forced the CPY into trade agreements and political concessions to the West, which marks the period from 1948 to 1952.

From the end of 1948 and into the summer of 1949, Yugoslavia established economic contacts with the West that prevented an economic collapse, but included important concessions: Western interests were compensated for nationalized property and Yugoslav support of the Greek revolution had to end. The first IMF and World Bank delegations arrived in Yugoslavia and the new trade regime with the West was based on trade credits “negotiated on ‘beggar’s terms”” (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 120–29). From 1949 to 1952, the government initiated the first round of many decentralizations to come, whereby localities and republics were held more directly accountable for the necessary export production and the first elements of the Yugoslav self-management economic system were put in place. Yugoslavia gained full membership in the IMF, applied for loans with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), established bilateral agreements with the European Community in mineral exports, reached a longer-term agreement with Britain, and received American military assistance (Ibid 145). Woodward forcefully argues that the self-management system established during this period was not so much a break with previous, supposedly Stalinist practice, but rather a logical continuation of Party policies since the war and came in part as a response to international economic pressure.

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed overview of US economic relations with Yugoslavia, see Lampe, Prickett, and Adamović.

As many observers noted, 1950 to 1960 was the most prosperous period in Yugoslav history as industrial output rose faster than in almost any other country in the world (Singleton and Carter 129). Up until 1961, Yugoslavia had protective barriers, import quotas, and non-market-related currency rates in place, all of which account for the rapid rise in industrial output during this period. However, Yugoslav economy also suffered from “marked unequal exchange,” and a dependence on Western markets for industrial products and technical know-how necessary for industrial development (Schierup 73). The second five-year plan (1957 – 1961) was achieved one year early as annual industrial output rate rose by 13% but “while exports paid for imports in 1954 to the tune of 97%, in 1960 they accounted only for 69%” (Singleton and Carter 130). This trade deficit was to continue to the very end, as every “five year economic plan from the second (1957-1961) to the last (1985-1990), moreover, gave priority in investment policy to restoring liquidity to the current account, whatever the consequences for employment or for the sectoral balance of the domestic economy considered necessary for steady growth” (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 224).

In the 1960s an economic recession in the West affected Yugoslavia’s ability to export, but also two international crises distanced Yugoslavia further from both the West and the USSR: the Cuban missile crisis on the one hand and Yugoslav involvement in forming the Non-Aligned Movement on the other. Since 1958 Yugoslavia had been seeking full membership in GATT and the economic liberalization required by GATT was at the heart of the reforms implemented between 1961 and 1965. In terms of trade with Western countries, Yugoslavia “replaced the multiple exchange coefficients in foreign trade and differential tax rates appropriate to sectoral planning with uniform customs tariffs and tax rates, removed agricultural protection, and reemphasized enterprise profitability” (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 245–6; Singleton

and B. Carter 134). In other words, Yugoslavia embraced the model of free trade that was to become the hallmark of GATT and later World Trade Organization's approach to developing countries. Other elements of the Reforms instituted in 1965 included lifting of the price freeze resulting in 30% price hikes, two devaluations of the dinar, and decentralization of investment funding via Interest Communities, supplemented by a federal fund for underdeveloped regions, which in turn was to become the lightning rod for Slovenian and Croatian requests for independence in the 1990s (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 248; Singleton and B. Carter 138).

Decentralization was the defining element of reforms passed in this period. As Woodward argues, the central ideological element in the Yugoslav economic plan was the concept of the "market." It stood for the operation of the law of value as defined by Marx, which was to be the guiding element in a socialist economy, preventing the rise of "state socialism." The initial laws on self-management instituted in the 1950s operated under this basic logic of the market. However, with time, "market" also came to stand for decentralization as the leadership became increasingly committed to the operation of the law of value in all aspects of society (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 171). To be held accountable for the profits and losses and therefore contribute to development of a real economy, enterprises but also republics, local communities, health delivery systems, even education had to be given full control of their operations, including the responsibility for development and profitability. This was based on the assumption "that ever less central direction and ever more autonomy for actors within the economy necessarily meant that market principles would emerge." In addition to the influence of GATT membership requirements on these reforms, the IMF also came to insist on "decentralization as a Trojan horse for marketization (especially in the 1950s and 1960s), and it

could explain in part why each IMF program was followed by further decentralization of some kind” (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 171).

Decentralization, however, did not produce the desired effects. Schierup argues that the results of the reforms were “an increasingly fragmented economic structure and stagnant economic development” attributed in part, to “the concentration of capital and economic power within the banks” (Schierup 80). The economic planning and redistribution of capital was now in the hands of republican authorities, export-import banks, and individual monopolistic enterprises. Consequently, economic surplus was reinvested in activities guaranteeing short-term profit: tourism industry, export-import activity, speculation in land and housing (Ibid). What the leadership failed to appreciate is that it was precisely the operation of the law of value in capital redistribution that produced economic stagnation and worsened the economic divisions within the country as well as its international position within the global market. The investment required for developing less-developed regions in Yugoslavia disappeared as the regional banks found more profitable ways of investing their capital. Furthermore, regionalism developed as republics received more authority and responsibility in the decentralization efforts. Even in the last federal organ of any significance, the National Bank, “members of the Managing Board felt not a part of a single organ of the bank, but as a representative of individual politico-territorial communities, and felt that their chief task was that in the distribution of the centralized funds, their politico-territorial unit received its share” (Singleton and Carter 140). This unfortunate linking of theories of the law of value with decentralization was a tactical and a theoretical mistake on the Yugoslav side and became the primary vehicle for further Western penetration of the Yugoslav market and the economic collapse that was to follow.

Schierup summarizes the decade of the 1970s as “marked by a growing economic autarchy of single republics and autonomous provinces ... Each isolated unit developed its own particularistic links with the world economy – links characterized by growing financial and technological dependency” (69). On the Western market, the demand for Yugoslav products was down, but unlike in previous recessionary periods, the expansion of commercial banks created more opportunities to borrow abroad. Yugoslavia’s recently liberalized foreign investment policy, permitting direct foreign investment, and a new stabilization program under an IMF stand-by loan further opened Yugoslavia to the world markets (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 251; Lampe, Prickett, and Adamović 82).<sup>30</sup>

1973 was a crucial year for all developing countries, including Yugoslavia, as the Bretton Woods agreement was abandoned and the first OPEC oil shock occurred. The price of oil “wreaked havoc with the balance of payments” in Yugoslavia, in addition to protectionist measures in the West, including a ban on Yugoslav beef imports in 1974, furthered in 1975-6 (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 251). After 1974, the percentage of primary commodities in Yugoslav exports increased, but it was borrowing of OPEC dollars, rather than an increase in exports that allowed Yugoslavia to service its international debt since 1973. To make matters worse, Yugoslav international account was divided among the republics in 1975, while the federal government remained the main guarantor of all international borrowing (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 252–53).

Yugoslavia’s debt acquired during the 1970s soared in 1980 with a rise in US interest rates disproportionately affecting Yugoslavia as the majority of its debt was in US dollars while

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<sup>30</sup> Prior to this point, Yugoslavia had concluded three previous stand-by arrangements with the IMF; two were concluded during the 1970s, and five during the 1980s. See James M. Boughton. *Silent Revolution: The International Monetary Fund 1979 -- 1989*. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/history/2001/> ed., 2001.

its hard currency exports were primarily to Western European countries. Woodward notes that “at the same time, Yugoslav trade in markets in the East and South was hit by a second price rise for OPEC and Soviet oil [and] export of primary commodities came to a halt as US and France flooded the markets” (254). During this initial crisis in 1980, Western banks, for the first time, refused to lend any additional sums to Eastern Europe, including Yugoslavia. Lampe cites Ambassador David Anderson’s cable from 1981 indicating that Yugoslavia “was in a serious risk of defaulting” (Lampe, Prickett, and Adamović 160).

Consultations with the IMF in 1983 led the way towards another stand-by arrangement with all the required changes in policy, in line with the leadership’s new Long-term Plan of Economic Stabilization. The fact that there was no formal default and that Yugoslavia “paid the piper in full” even at great cost “of a decade of nearly unremitting austerity,” did not result in any privileged lending terms in the 1980s (Lampe, Prickett, and Adamović 189).

Two important misperceptions guided the 1983 Long-term Plan: 1) reorienting production for export and exposing the native industry to world market competition would bring about changes “not only in the account balance and economic policy in the country, but also a different internal orientation in production which would be based on world productivity and quality standards;” and 2) the republics would *in solidarity* with the less developed regions, overcome the problems of underdevelopment (ed Dimić 35–6, 84). The former can be attributed to, on the one hand, IMF’s suggestions propagating free market policies and, on the other hand, the leadership’s original mistaken belief in the “market.”<sup>31</sup> The solidarity between republics and even between regions within a republic that the Long-term Plan presupposed was not in existence, and the fragmentation along republican lines was growing. Inter-republican capital

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<sup>31</sup> On the politics and effects of free market policies on developing countries, see (Chang).

transfer suffered ever since the reforms in the early 1960s which established a federal fund for underdeveloped regions. The constitutional arrangement of 1974 cemented much of the regionalism established with prior reforms and did not encourage any furthering of inter-republican ties.<sup>32</sup>

The 1983 Long-term Plan was endorsed by the IMF and every failure to achieve the goals set out in the Plan was followed by another infusion of IMF credits and further economic liberalization and decentralization (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment*. 259). The IMF now acknowledges this approach was a failure, but in the Yugoslav case, still blames the government's own attempts to remedy the system by depreciating the exchange rate supposedly even before the IMF requested such actions (Boughton 574).<sup>33</sup> While in 1981 the United States still expressed interest in supporting the Yugoslav state economically<sup>34</sup>, by 1984, US interest in helping resolve Yugoslav economic woes was declining. David Anderson politely explains this shift in policy to a member of the federal Presidium:

I fear that the Yugoslav governmental bodies will get angry. Namely, Brazil, which is not even close to having the positive trends [economically] to the extent that Yugoslavia has them, this year will receive a multi-year package [with the IMF]. What I can tell you about this is that this has to do, in large part, with the geography and size, the extent of indebtedness. I would love to tell you that there are other reasons, namely, that Brazil has positive economic trends, however, that would be a lie (Mikulić, *Kut. 47, Dok. 162 8*)

By 1987, the United States was advocating non-intervention in the Yugoslav crisis as the Prime Minister Branko Mikulić was alarmingly conveying to the federal Presidium:

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<sup>32</sup> For a full treatment of the constitutional crisis, see Robert M. Hayden. *Blueprints for a House Divided: The Constitutional Logic of the Yugoslav Conflicts*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. and for a more economic take on the division, see Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment: The Political Economy of Yugoslavia, 1945-1990*.

<sup>33</sup> Boughton cites Olivier Blanchard, Kenneth Froot, and Jeffrey Sachs. *The Transition in Eastern Europe*. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1994. as they “infer that the exchange rate policy was imposed by the Fund and imply that it was the cause of the hyperinflation.” It isn't necessary to infer the imposition or imply the cause because IMF's policies in Yugoslavia in the 1980s resembled similar policies in Latin America with well-known results.

<sup>34</sup> Lampe cites a State Department telegram urging European countries to help Yugoslavia. (Lampe, Prickett, and Adamović.

I would like to read the opinion of the advisor to the US Embassy, expressed recently and obtained by special means:

“In terms of the willingness of the West to resolve the problem of Yugoslav international debt, the governments of the Paris Club are thinking of not offering any support. If Yugoslavia is falling apart, then let it be sooner rather than later.” After, it says that Yugoslavia should receive aid later, on some other basis, which we should understand as on the basis of a changed internal situation.

The US General Consul in Zagreb, on October 28<sup>th</sup>, while visiting Slovenia announced an increasing pressure by the West on Yugoslavia and a sharper and merciless dictate of the IMF (Mikulić, *Kut. 54, Dok. 260* 11).

The Prime Minister Milka Planinc (1982-1986) had a “mandate to ‘restore foreign confidence,’” but there were very few choices available to her and she had to “reemphasize commodity export to the West and negotiate with the IMF” which now had much stricter conditions (Woodward, *Socialist Unemployment* 254). Planinc submitted her resignation to the Executive Council in April of 1985 as she correctly diagnosed the internal problems of the federation that would bring about the failure of the Long-Term Plan. She says:

I can say responsibly that despite an objectively difficult situation, where the inertia and pressure all led to centralization, we managed to resist it, and instead of republican and federal *etatisme*, we still, in essence, opened up a space for self-management. ... I am deeply concerned that the way we are doing things now, I mean the way we are organized in the federation, and it’s not better elsewhere either, that the program of [economic] stabilization cannot succeed. I said this not once; it cannot succeed in the way that makes our self-management system stronger; it cannot succeed without a common program at the Yugoslav [federal] level. ... What we are missing, in my opinion, is exactly that whole, common program in Yugoslavia, where it’s clear who has what responsibility and what moves they have to make, where we will be making agreements, see what is lagging and what additional measures need to be taken and synchronize and coordinate it (Mikulić, *Kut. 52, Dok. 225* 2–3).<sup>35</sup>

Despite her accurate diagnosis about the need for a unified response to the crisis, her resignation was rejected and she served out her full term.

In 1985, the IMF, contrary to Boughton’s claims, insisted on the real exchange rate as one of the conditions of the new stand-by as they would in 1988, bringing the negotiations to a

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<sup>35</sup> It is clear that Planinc was not advocating centralism but she was also not resigning because of Serbian centralism as Viktor Meier claims (Meier).

halt over the issue.<sup>36</sup> As the government kept insisting that “there was no difference in goals between Yugoslavia and the IMF,” the disagreement was essentially over the speed and extent of liberalization and devaluations of the currency. In 1988, Massimo Ruso, Director of the European Department at the IMF, proposes – and it appears the Prime Minister Mikulić accepts – an outright collusion between the IMF and the Federal Executive Council whereby the actual depreciation of the currency would be underreported and the additional 5% the IMF required would be presented as the normal fluctuation in exchange rate rather than an agreed-upon IMF condition.<sup>37</sup>

By then, the Prime Minister, as well as the Executive Council as a whole, understood the real extent of Yugoslavia’s foreign debt problem and the very few maneuvers available to them. In 1987, the Executive Council summarized Yugoslavia’s economic crisis, pointing to several failures of the leadership as well as the increasing international pressure. In the new Long-Term Plan for Consolidating Foreign Debt, the Executive Council recognized that the policy guiding foreign debt servicing from 1983 to 1985, namely, reducing the debt regardless of the toll it would take on the economy, was misguided. The stagnation that followed only renewed Yugoslavia’s need for capital and from 1985 to 1987, while the medium and long term debt was

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<sup>36</sup> The new proposal included: “not abandoning the real exchange rate,” establishing a real interest rate above the rate of inflation even for short-term deposits, quarterly re-adjustments of the dinar in relation to inflation abroad, and freeze on all public spending (Mikulić, *Kut. 52, Dok. 240*).

<sup>37</sup> Ruso proposes: “First, when we are more or less certain that we have the finances necessary for your account, [we devalue] by 20%, in this initial phase, as that is the percentage you mentioned as your upper limit. Then, 2-3 days before we go in front of the Executive Board [of the IMF], you bring about, with other measures of liberalization, the new system of regulating the exchange rate that we proposed to you, in which the market plays a larger role. Then, you immediately *allow the rate to depreciate an additional 5% in real terms*, but that *will be seen* as the product of the market forces, as a part of the new system, *and not as a government decision*. ... At the same time we *will not have the political exposure* on this depreciation done as it is now.” When Mikulić objects to hiding this from the Executive Council or the Parliament, Ruso says: “Mr. President, Yugoslavia must certainly be the only country that would announce 20% depreciation a month and a half in advance. Yesterday I spoke with the Cabinet in Washington. The Executive Director was surprised that I was discussing such issues over the phone. But, I told him that such issues are discussed in meetings with very many people. That is a bit strange” (Mikulić, *Kut. 64, Dok. 403*).

lowered, the short-term debt increased leaving a worse debt structure in the end (Mikulić, *Kut. 35, Dok. 184* 1–34). The federal Presidium also finally admitted that enterprises and government subjects were dividing what little capital there was rather than focusing on obtaining more capital for reinvestment. The export stimulation that was at the core of the program turned into purely administrative measures with market forces that were not in play. In their consistent belief in the “market,” they failed to perceive, however, the inherent contradiction between developmentalism of the system and the operation of the market. Their recommendation for adjustment states:

Connection between the economies of the developed regions of Yugoslavia with the economies of the undeveloped regions *must be based on economics*. Finances must go toward those who are capable of moving forward, and they in turn must *integrate into their business system the economic subjects from underdeveloped regions* and share the responsibility for their business decisions, and their commodity placement, the market, their human resources and so on (Mikulić, *Kut. 34, Dok. 170* 34, emphasis mine).

The contradiction arises in the idea that the economic basis, the operation of the law of value, translates into reinvestments proper for the development of the underdeveloped regions. It is as if the approach taken by the developed nations towards the undeveloped was repeating itself in the Yugoslav microcosm. Just as the IMF was convincing underdeveloped nations that only the market can help them catch up with the developed nations, so the Presidium was thinking that the market, the operation of the law of value, can get the underdeveloped regions to catch up with the developed ones. In both cases, the failures are quite apparent.

In summary, the second, socialist Yugoslavia, upon inheriting a colonial pattern of development from the first Yugoslavia, and upon suffering the devastation of World War II, faced long odds at developing into an independent socialist state. The international context of the Cold War, the break with the Cominform and the subsequent push towards dependence on Western aid, created some room for Yugoslavia’s development, as Western capital became

available. However, the changed international economic system following the breakdown of the Bretton Woods agreements and the oil shocks of the 1970s, coupled with the gradual breakdown of the Soviet Union, led to Yugoslavia's crushing debt and gradual loss of sovereignty in the economic realm. The 1980s were as devastating a decade for Yugoslavia, as for many former colonial countries. As the Cold War was coming to an end and with it Yugoslavia's strategic value to the US was declining, the international economic system of unbridled free markets and new imperialism without colonies was allowed to exert itself over Yugoslavia as well. With its internal divisions and decentralized state, this spelled an end to the Yugoslav state as well.

Yugoslavia is a good example of a case where Western imperialist strategy included aid and a propping up of a regime (especially in the 1960s) with no direct economic benefit but for the political advantage it provided. Supporting Yugoslavia was the promise held out to other Eastern European states should they follow Tito's example and break away from the Soviet Union. The overall strategy, of course, was the weakening of the Soviet Union and the instigation of counter revolutions in socialist states as a way to eliminate both a political challenge to capitalism and a practical obstacle in the globalization of capitalist markets. Returning to Magdoff's summary of modern imperialist tactics, we have seen the Western capitalist states use formal economic and political arrangements such as preferential trade agreements and maintenance of currency blocs in Yugoslavia; we have seen manipulation or support of local ruling groups preventing or reversing internal social revolutions at the break up of the federal state when support went to nationalist parties rather than the federal state; and we have seen the West establishing influence and control over the direction of economic developments, including government allocation of resources enforced through the World Bank

and the International Monetary Fund (Magdoff, *Imperialism Without Colonies* 112–3). In short, the history of Western engagement with socialist Yugoslavia is a history of modern, capitalist imperialism's treatment of its periphery.

Imperialism without colonies has been variously analyzed as neo-colonialism, underdevelopment, critical development theory, but the central tenet has remained the same: the imperialist center dominates its periphery by economic and limited extra-economic means. While I agree with the 'post-development theory' critics that neo-colonialism or development theory do not address 'the cultural dimension of domination,' I have to point out that this is not their task. The cultural dimension of domination is not a useful category in analyzing the *systematicity* of the relationship of dominance between any given imperialist metropolis and its periphery. However, one cannot explain the *totality* of imperialist dominance without explaining the cultural dimension of domination.

### **The Cultural Dimension of Eastern European Dependence**

In the preceding sections I have argued that the major stumbling blocks in postcolonial analyses of Eastern Europe include: 1) an overtly culturalist analysis at the expense of economic and historical analyses; 2) failure to distinguish between pre-capitalist empires and (capitalist) imperialism as the subject of postcolonial analysis; and 3) the role of Marxist and materialist analysis in postcolonial theory. In response to these challenges, I have proposed that postcolonial theory and methodology can be used in analyses of Eastern Europe but only in reference to Western European domination of Eastern Europe. (As postcolonial theory is a

theory of Western, capitalist imperialism, if we are to use its conclusions it must be in relation to that particular global system.) Having specified that postcolonialism is based on an analysis of economic domination of the periphery by the center, I presented an outline of the history of Western economic domination of Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia in particular. I focused especially on the socialist period to demonstrate the longevity of the center-periphery structure, and to argue that the socialist period must be considered in postcolonial approaches to Eastern European history and culture. In what follows, I argue that while economic and historical contexts must be used in justifying the use of postcolonial theory in Eastern Europe, the cultural manifestations of imperialist structures must be analyzed as well.

### ***Literature and Culture in Context***

One cannot draw a straight line from the state of the economy to the dominant forms taken by politics and ideology. ... The scarcely viable notion that literature is an autonomous entity above or outside of the material determinations of political and social history will have to be given a decent, but more or less summary, burial. Students of literature and culture need to retrain themselves to be responsible to categories and methods that professional historians would recognize and approve (Sprinker 27).

In *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation* Andrew Wachtel addresses the role of ideological mechanisms in the formation and disintegration of the Yugoslav state. Wachtel claims that “the gradual destruction of *the concept* of a Yugoslav nation” led to the demise of the state, emphasizing, therefore, the ideological and cultural elements of nation-building over the economic failures of the new state (4). He presents a history of culture and politics in former Yugoslavia “delineating those ideological mechanisms” that first formed and then supposedly

destroyed the Yugoslav state (Ibid 5). Aware of the consequences of this “cultural” turn, Wachtel attempts to negotiate between cultural and political explanations of Yugoslav history:

In foregrounding cultural processes, I am disagreeing with the emphasis of other accounts of Yugoslavia’s failure, which have placed the blame primarily on political and economic factors. This is not to say I believe that cultural analysis alone can explain Yugoslavia’s demise. Such a claim would clearly be simplistic. But Yugoslavia’s political and economic malaise in the 1980s, real as it was, would not have led to the disappearance of the country had a robust vision of the Yugoslav nation been in place (Wachtel 229).

The dichotomy Wachtel sets up between cultural and politico-economic explanations of Yugoslavia’s destruction is misleading. Distinction between cultural history on the one hand and the political and economic ones on the other is neither a matter of emphasis or of direct opposition, but rather a more complex interplay of these realms. In other words, we cannot posit cultural analysis of Yugoslavia against the economic and political analyses because the subjects of these analyses are not realms independent of each other. In previous sections I have outlined the main critiques of the “cultural turn” in postcolonial studies from a materialist perspective. Starting from the premise that culture alone cannot explain or document the postcolonial condition, and that the relationship between culture and economic and political conditions is not one of a “straight line,” I propose a methodology of studying literature and culture in line with Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the “field of cultural production.”

Bourdieu argues against a “derealization” of texts that occurs in literary studies when texts are “stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time ... impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism” (Bourdieu 32). In opposition to structuralists, Saussure, Lévi-Strauss and Foucault who focus on symbolic objects, language, myth or discourse respectively, Bourdieu proposes a theory that takes into account all of the above but also the “social relations of which these symbolic systems

are a more or less transformed expression” (Ibid). In other words, he argues for a contextualization of cultural production in both the social situation of its production and its intellectual milieu.

Bourdieu proposes a schema for understanding the interaction between three distinct but interconnected fields of production: the economic, the power/political, and the artistic. Avoiding the trap of vulgar economism in which artistic production is explained by economic production, Bourdieu documents how economic or political capital stands in, at times, an inversed relationship to the symbolic capital of the artistic field. Without any further elaboration of Bourdieu’s theory, it is already clear that Bourdieu’s analysis of how these different fields interact is based and references artistic production within a capitalist system of economic relations. In our case, these three fields of production and their interrelations have to be applied to a different economy and thus a different symbolic economy within the artistic field.

For example, consider the inversion of values within the artistic field, based on the presupposition of disinterestedness of the artist and the related symbolic capital acquired. This model is not helpful in analyzing the Yugoslav artistic field of production. Miroslav Krleža in his famous 1952 speech to the writers’ conference in Ljubljana outlined a new approach to literary production in the socialist state: no censorship by the state, no overvaluation of socialist realism, and an independence of the field *not* marked by a disinterested art for art’s sake, but rather socially engaged art (Krleža, Čengić, and Frangeš 7–48). As a result, disinterestedness presumed in the artistic field of production in capitalist society is in our case explicitly dismissed thus remaking the way symbolic capital is secured within the artistic field, rearranging the available positions and subject position-takings, as well as the entire schema of the artistic field’s interaction with the fields of economic and political capital. Bourdieu acknowledges that such

historically specific alterations of his basic model must take place: “this degree of autonomy [of the field of cultural production] varies considerably from one period and one national tradition to another, and affects the whole structure of the field” (40). However, Bourdieu’s basic schema of the complexity of interaction and connections between economic, political, and cultural fields of production stands. The nature of this interaction furthermore still remains the proper subject of cultural history.

In the Yugoslav case, we also have to consider the way in which cultural production in former Yugoslavia figures within the international field of cultural production, influenced first and foremost by its corresponding fields of economic and political relations. Here we must take into consideration not only the place of minor literatures within the European literary field of production, but also its political overdetermination. For example, take the Nobel Prize in Literature Ivo Andrić received in 1961. The Nobel Prize has always been not just an artistic recognition of value, but also political. There can be no doubt that this award came about as part of the political capital invested in propping up Yugoslavia as an example to the rest of Eastern Europe. At the same time, it seems that this international recognition, albeit in cultural production, was also a sign of Western approval for Yugoslav Reforms proposed at the time. Within the field of power/politics, Ivo Andrić occupies a position of high value: Andrić = Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia = political capital as 1) an example to the rest of Eastern Europe; 2) as an approval for the Yugoslav Reforms; and 3) as the legitimation of the ideological position corresponding to the prevailing Balkanist interpretations of the region. Within the international field of artistic production, Ivo Andrić also occupies a position of high value, but not for the reason he holds that place in the political field. Within the international literary field of production, minor literatures like the Serbo-Croatian one, are politically overdetermined. A

literary text from a minor literature gains cultural capital only by corresponding to the already established perceptions of minor literatures: overburdened by history and always, already political, similar to Jameson's reading of Third World Literature as "national allegory." Ivo Andrić conforms to and confirms this politically overdetermined reading of minor literatures and for that reason occupies a position of high value within the artistic field. The political and the artistic correspond here, but only by chance because the reasons why Andrić is valued in these fields are completely different. The happy coincidence results in Andrić receiving the Nobel Prize for literature as both a political and literary acknowledgment of value.

The methodology I employ in this dissertation when analyzing cultural production in socialist Yugoslavia relies on these basic outlines of Bourdieu's model: competing and interconnected fields of production: economic, political, and artistic. I apply this model with the necessary historical adjustments and add a dimension that specifically addresses the position of Yugoslav cultural production within the perceived larger context of European culture. In considering this international, wider context, I address the position of dependence towards the European center reflected within all three fields, albeit in "transformed" and different manners.

### ***Ideological and Cultural Dimensions of Dependence***

I contend that one of the most important threads running through modern Yugoslav cultural production is the reception and internalization of the Eurocentric view of the world. I am following Samir Amin's definition of Eurocentrism as the cultural dimension of imperialism and an ideology of global capital. For Amin, Eurocentrism is a global political project that serves

“particular functions of legitimation” of the imperialist ordering of the world. In its most basic function, Eurocentrism serves to obscure the capitalist mode of production, amplify the uniqueness of Europe, and obscure the connection between the polarization of the world and the global processes of capitalist reproduction. In other words, Eurocentrism “legitimizes at one and the same time the existence of capitalism as a social system and the worldwide inequality that accompanies it” (Amin 75–7). In that function of legitimation Eurocentrism is also a “colonizer’s model of the world” (Blaut).<sup>38</sup>

Much of what previous postcolonial approaches to Eastern Europe identified as either Orientalist or Balkanist constructions are to be found in Blaut’s definition of Eurocentric history. Like Amin, Blaut points out that Eurocentrism is not, as the term might imply, a “banal ethnocentrism” but rather a paradigm and a view of the world that remains when we “banish all the value meanings of this word, all the prejudices” (Amin vii; Blaut 9). Globally, as Said explicated in *Orientalism*, this view of the world divides human reality and societies into an Inside and an Outside. The Inside (Europe) is the sector that invents and progresses, while the Outside (non-Europe) “receives progressive innovations by diffusion from Inside” (Blaut 14). This is the model, for example, of colonization and imperialism as the modernization of the non-European world. It seems just as important to delineate what “Eurocentrism” is not in my use of this concept: it is not a banal ethno-centric personal or societal prejudice nor is it any and all thought, political theory, philosophical treatise, etc. that was penned in Europe or by those born in Europe, and perhaps most importantly, it is not a discursive practice standing apart from the ideological service it provides to imperialism. Rather, I am referencing here a particular

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<sup>38</sup> The history of the term “Eurocentrism” might serve to obscure the particularity of the concept I am attempting to sketch out here. However, it seems to me the most useful container in which to place the various ideological practices whose ultimate aim is to serve to obscure the imperialist reality on the ground. I am however, aware of the ways in which “Eurocentrism” as a concept is passé in today’s academy.

historiography of the world that legitimizes European states' domination and exploitation of the non-European world. That historiographic model might have left marks on many cultural products of colonial and post-colonial era Europe, but just as many of what are considered quintessentially "European" cultural products came about with fundamental contribution of the non-European world. Once again, like C.L.R. James, we must remember that Beethoven belongs to the West Indies as much as he belongs to Europe, i.e., that great achievements of humanity belong to all and that no one place can claim them as theirs exclusively, especially not Europe whose industrial capitalist development followed up on colonial expansion to create the first truly global socio-political system with inputs from all those places it had conquered.

This division of the world dictates an explanation of this basic difference in progress and this is where Eurocentrism establishes the myth of the European miracle. The cause of European progress is explained as "something intellectual or spiritual" without any reference to the interaction with the non-European world.<sup>39</sup> Blaut documents many of the aspects of this belief in a European "miracle": (i) biology (superiority of the European race, or recently "culture"); (ii) demographic behavior (non-Europeans are held back by high birth rates, which Europeans avoid with rational reproduction); (iii) environment ("Nasty-Tropical Africa," "Arid-Despotic Asia," "Temperate Europe"); (iv) rationality (primitive minds, i.e., traditional mentality of non-Europeans vs. rational Europeans); (v) technological diffusionism (rests on European rationality as the cause of technological progress); (vi) state (medium-sized, well-integrated, moderately democratic state that comes early enough to cause modernization and European miracle); (vii) church (supposed unification of Europe through the church and the Protestant Reformation as the

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<sup>39</sup> Many have contended this particular point: Walter Rodney. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972. , Janet L. Abu-Lughod. *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989. , Samir Amin. *Eurocentrism*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989.

cause of the rise of capitalism); (viii) class (especially the European aristocracy and independent small-holding peasant that are claimed unique); and (ix) family (traditional, arranged marriages in non-Europe, love-based marriages in Europe) (Blaut 50–134). Blaut shows how these beliefs, already clearly debunked by many anti-colonial thinkers, pervade not only popular media and amateur perceptions, but even the most unprejudiced professional historical texts and are in fact, on account of their wide acceptance, often very difficult to detect.

The belief in the European miracle, the diffusion of technology and progress from the center to the periphery, and the European path to development as the only possible one, mark the dominant worldview in former Yugoslavia, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. Blaut's "diffusionism" is in essence, the conflation of time and space – ancient history equals distant regions – in which Eastern Europe represents Europe's own prehistory. The superiority of European civilization, justified as it often is in constructions of Eastern Europe, by race, culture, or even class conforms to Blaut's description of the justifications of the European miracle. And as we have seen above, Eastern Europeans themselves subsume the class distinctions between bourgeois upstarts and haute bourgeoisie under a reified concept of cultural identity. And last but not least, Eastern Europeans stubbornly believe in their own Europeanness as a birthright and as a promise of development.

Like any successful ideology, this Eurocentric view of the world is implied and presents itself as common sense. But, being a paradigm, Eurocentrism is also a complex phenomenon that irradiates much of the cultural production in Europe and non-Europe. Despite the socialist character of the state, the Yugoslav culture during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was defined by a decidedly Eurocentric view of itself and its environment. The following chapter presents, in short, a history of this paradigm in the field of cultural production.

## Chapter Two:

### **(Post)Yugoslav Cultural Production in Context: Narratives of Identity in the Literary Canon**

The previous chapter presented a theoretical argument for the use of postcolonial concepts in South Slavic studies. The present chapter applies such a methodology to studying the field of cultural production in former Yugoslavia during the socialist period and beyond. Specifically, here I employ a materialist critique within a “cultural theory dealing with imperialism” in analyzing the narratives of identity<sup>40</sup> in certain major canonical texts or moments. In as much as my analysis in this chapter is “materialist,” it follows the Jamesonian approach to narrative, and in short, analyzes the *political unconscious* of the texts, i.e., “structures and senses” in so far as they direct us to “the contradictions the text tries to resolve in vain” (Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* 49). I will identify these social or contextual contradictions beyond which the texts in question conceptually cannot advance, contradictions expressed not (or not just) through narrative themes, but form as well. Following an introduction to the Bosnian and Yugoslav canon, I devote the remaining three sections of this chapter to analyzing the symbolic, interpretive allegories (as opposed to the simplistic allegories identified here as I will show as nationalist, empty humanist, and anti-communist) of Ivo Andrić’s, Meša Selimović’s and Mak Dizdar’s texts. I will point to how this form of analysis can expand to, once again in Jamesian fashion beyond the text itself, to analyze the oppositional voices that these

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<sup>40</sup> Identity is a complex concept and warrants a lengthy study all by itself. However, in the present work, identity is understood to be a constructed narrative of space and its inhabitants, in some cases more exclusively so than in others. So, in our case, for example, the idea of Bosnian identity encompasses a certain narrative of cultural cohesion within the state lines of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the national identities Bosniak, Croat, Serb circumscribe smaller groups of that same population in a narrative of ethnic preservation and purity through history. Whether any of such narratives can be confirmed empirically is beside the point since the only way we “recognize” such notions is via narratives we tell each other about them. That is not to say, however, that all narratives are equally “truthful” just that they are all constructed rather than natural or a priori to culture.

canonical masterpieces have suppressed or re-appropriated, voices found often at the heart of the popular culture.

As I will show below, such a reading necessarily focuses on the dominant ideological paradigm in 20<sup>th</sup>-century Yugoslavia – Eurocentrism (as a particular historiography). This narrative of engagement with the Eurocentric intellectual model, I contend, also presents an alternative reading of the canon, one that escapes the narrow definitions of the neo-biological or “cultural” ethnic as the guiding interpretive principle. In the following section, I present the central features of the canon debates and ethnic definitions that have characterized it so far.

### **The Yugoslav Literary Canon and Narratives of Identity**

- ...and now... *Bosnia*.  
 - *Oh, no, not Bosnia!*  
 - *I'm afraid we must.*”

*The History of Eastern Europe for Beginners*

The predominant reading of the Yugoslav literary canon, both at home and abroad, rests on a national(istic) definition of the canon, with all the pitfalls such definitions entail. Authors, texts, traditions are situated within this or that “national” canon, at the expense of any but the most vulgar contextualizations. The result is a political overdetermination of literary texts so that any change in the political realm dictates a parallel change in the reading of this or that national canon.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Western readings of the Yugoslav literary canon have also been overdetermined by political and historical considerations. Texts and authors have been

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<sup>41</sup> See Enver Kazaz, “Egzistencijalnost/povijesnost Bosne - interpretacija u zamci ideologije; U povodu zbornika radova *Andrić i Bošnjaci*, BZK Preporod, Tuzla, 2000.,” *Novi Izraz* 10-11 (2001): 120 – 36. for an overview of such readings of Ivo Andrić.

repeatedly read as a “key” to solving the “puzzle” of history and politics of Yugoslavia.<sup>42</sup>

The relationship between politics and literature in such readings is always one way and direct. The nationalists read literature as an expression of their national mythology, while the Westerners read it as native confirmation of their original suspicions about the barbarity of the Balkans.

Twentieth century literary canon debates in former Yugoslavia, not surprisingly, culminated around the question of the literary canon in Bosnia and Herzegovina. With a heterogeneous and, in today’s parlance, culturally hybrid population consisting of Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks, and a slew of other minorities, the largest of which were Sephardic Jews and the Roma, Bosnia and Herzegovina was a metonymy of Yugoslavia as envisioned by the new socialist administration. As Srećko Džaja explains in his study on the Yugoslav political problematic, in studies of Yugoslavia one has to pay special attention to Bosnia because:

This two-part country entered the Yugoslav state as a culturally very mixed region, but also because this once peripheral province, first in the Ottoman Empire and then in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, became the geographical center of the Yugoslav state. Inevitably, with the transformation of a periphery into a geographical center of the new state, the political focus shifted from foreign to domestic politics. This explains why this two-part country, with its multicultural heritage, becomes the case par excellence for assessing the new Yugoslav political system (S. M. Džaja, *Politička Realnost Jugoslovenstva (1918-1991): s Posebnim Osvrtom Na Bosnu i Hercegovinu* 13).

And I would add that the same holds for assessing the cultural history and politics of the Yugoslav-state era as well. Bosnia was, in its hybridity, a place where Croatian and Serbian canons collided, and intertwined with the Bosniak and ‘other’ literatures. Bosnia and Herzegovina should also be analyzed as the metonymy of Yugoslavia and *as such* standing in for the imagined Oriental alter ego – in part because of its peripheral status at the height of

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<sup>42</sup> Much like at home, Ivo Andrić has been read as the apex of literary achievement precisely on account of his texts “decoding” Yugoslav history.

imperialism in the region and in part because of its large Muslim population. Following these recent wars in former Yugoslavia, we also have to consider the image Bosnia has obtained in them: as the site of primary ethnic violence, a place where the multicultural society implodes ever so temptingly suggesting that multiculturalism is simple disingenuousness or repression of ethnic identities. Important to keep in mind however is that ethnic violence “should [...] be seen not as expressive of primordial ethnic differences, but as a response to unstable historical conditions that catalyzes essentialist identities – be they ethnic, generational, gender, class, or urban-rural ones” (Nixon 7). Returning then to literature and culture, the debates over the Bosnian and Herzegovinian (BiH)<sup>43</sup> canon best illustrate the problematic, reductive definitions of the literary canons that have plagued Yugoslavia as well as its successor states today.

### ***Bosnian and Herzegovinian Canon Debates***

The first significant *public* engagement with the problem of (national) literary canons in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the communist era began in the 1970s, an era marked by a discernable rise in nationalist ideologies across the board in Yugoslavia. Coming right after the 1960s federal Reforms that spelled out the path towards decentralization and republican, rather than federal political control, these nationalistic surges culminated in two federal interventions – the suppressions of the “Croatian Spring” (December 1971) and the “liberal” student movement in Belgrade (October 1972). In Bosnia, Šaćir Filandra correctly identifies this period as the

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<sup>43</sup> BiH is used in the text to stand for the full name “Bosnia and Herzegovina,” or the adjective form “Bosnian-Herzegovinian.” I also occasionally use Bosnia as a shorthand for the full name.

“Second Bosniak-Muslim National-Cultural Revival.”<sup>44</sup> The League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) was facing serious challenges to its “nationality policy”:

That crisis [of nationalism] was an expression of the communist program according to which the national question is a bourgeois and a counterrevolutionary one. Coupled with that, in a socialist society no new nations can be formed. Socialism is capable of surpassing the nation as a concept, as a form of social consciousness and as a way of life, with class consciousness taking its place. Socialism can perhaps “recognize” the inherited national form of the class society, but with the intention of surpassing it, not recognizing development of some new national consciousness (Filandra 230).

The Party’s position on national self-determination was complex, but in essence held that the nation was a product of particular historical circumstances of the rise of capitalism and as such had to be taken into account, even respected for as long as those historical circumstances hold. In a socialist country like Yugoslavia, this theory held that rather than denying the right to self-determination, the Party had to guarantee national rights, in conjunction with raising socialist consciousness so that the latter – in a sense of internationalism – becomes a vehicle for overcoming the confrontational, bourgeois nationalist rivalry. Standing in the path of national self-determination would only provoke a nationalist counter-revolution, and the remnants of *bourgeois* nationalism had to be overcome by the development of socialist social relations (Kardelj 249).

Despite the well-articulated communist position on nations as bourgeois categories to be overcome, the vast majority of communists in former Yugoslavia subscribed to an increasingly nationalist point of view, as evident, among other places, in their discussions of language and literature. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there was a growing realization that Bosnian Muslims are

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<sup>44</sup> The first one being the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, early 20<sup>th</sup>-century literary and cultural movement among the Bosnian Muslims within Austria-Hungary.

a separate and distinct nation, culminating in “recognition” of Muslims at the republican and then federal level.<sup>45</sup>

Šaćir Filandra’s work is an excellent study of the development of the modern, national, Bosniak intelligentsia. Its only defect is the lack of critical understanding of nation and nationalism as evident in the above quote and throughout his text. In his and any national(istic) worldview, the nation always already exists and the *history of a nation* (such as the Bosniaks in Yugoslavia) cannot *by definition* be a history of *nation formation*. A nation that is “formed” in the present – in nationalist ideology – is not a “legitimate” nation. Documenting the history of the Bosniak nation, Filandra must conclude – as he does – that Bosniaks must have been oppressed or at least suppressed for what else could describe their lack of national identity prior to the 20th century? And yet, ironically, his book presents the most rigorous examination and historical documentation of those very processes of nation-formation.

Crucial to keep in mind is that the same processes of *nation formation* occurred within the Croatian and Serbian nations, only earlier, at the end of the 19th century.<sup>46</sup> While Serbian and Croatian nationalists successfully built the myth of (ethnic) homogeneity of their nations in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Bosnian state was still under Ottoman and then Austro-Hungarian rule.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> As early as 1963 the republican political bodies began referring to Bosniaks as Muslims (at the behest of the Bosniaks at the time), and the process continued until 1968 when the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina openly argued for the national rights of Bosnian Muslims. In 1961, the federal census already had a category “Muslim (by ethnicity)” while in the next one, in 1971 “Muslim” was understood to mean just that. (The federal censuses were understood to be the expression of the federal government’s changes in nationality policies.) See Šaćir Filandra. *Bošnjačka politika u XX. stoljeću*. Sarajevo: Sejtarija, 1998.

<sup>46</sup> For an overview of national nomens, see Vera Kržišnik-Bukić. "Historijske i historiografske kontroverze i dileme nacionalnog nominiranja u Bosni i Hercegovini." *Prilozi (Institut za istoriju Sarajevo)*.32 (2003); on history of national mythologies in Yugoslavia see Ivo Banac. "Teret lažne povijesti." *Forum Bosnae*.18 (2002): 42-47.; and for an authoritative account of the national mythologies see Srećko Džaja. "Tri kulturno-političke sastavnice Bosne i Hercegovine i moderna historiografija." *Forum Bosnae*.18 (2002).

<sup>47</sup> For an excellent account of the politics developed from these consolidations, see S. M. Džaja, *Die Politische Realität Des Jugoslawismus (1918-1991): Mit Besonderer Berücksichtigung Bosnien-Herzegowinas*. Bd. 37 Vol. München: R. Oldenburg Verlag, 2002., and also on Bosnia: S. M. Džaja, *Bosna i Hercegovina u austrougarskom razdoblju 1878-1918: Inteligencija između tradicije i ideologije*. knj. 7 Vol. Mostar: 2002.

The Muslims-Bosniaks did not consolidate their national narrative until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the crucial period in the 1970s. But, within nationalist ideology, just as the Bosniaks claimed their nation had existed all along and was thus only suppressed up to this point, the Croats and Serbs were adamant in their rejection of Bosniaks as a “legitimate” nation, for which they dug ever deeper into history to justify their position. This conflict explains the basic course of nationalist development with relation to Bosnia in the latter part of the 20th century. Ivo Banac points out this basic nationalistic fallacy in Yugoslavia:

As far as [Serb, Croat, and Bosniak] separate national identities are concerned, they can only recall a common beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Instead of a common origin, we should direct ourselves towards the common beginning *in modernity*. That simply means that the national integrations of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have a common starting point. At no point should we confuse premodern national formations with modern nations. The difference between them is enormous (Banac 47).

Inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary and cultural revivals – the period during which Croatian, Serbian, and to a lesser degree Bosniak national narratives were being constructed – the concept of the national canon in former Yugoslavia is based on an idealist, Herderian conceptualization of language, literature, and nation:

Literature is in itself a national spiritual discipline and those who produce it have a place in national matters. ... The idea of literature is inseparable from the idea of language, since literature comes out of language, and language portrays the essential being of a nation. Because of that, the question of language within the nations of communist Yugoslavia is most often posed as a national-political one [...] If there is a Bosniak [or Serbian or Croatian (my comment)] literature, and there is, [...] how can there not be a nation whose literature it is? *In other words, can there be a literature without a nation or a nation without a literature? The answer is self-evident* (Filandra 271–76) .

Indeed, for the nationalists the answer cannot be anything other than self-evident, as any successful ideology would have it. In this somewhat circular argument, language, literature, and nation are all linked in an unbreakable bond and any one of the three cannot occur without the accompanying pair of the other two.

In Bosnia, such an understanding of literary canons presents three distinct problems: the problem of identifying the language spoken and written in BiH; the question of whether a BiH canon exists; and the question of whether a Muslim/Bosniak canon exists. The official, federal Yugoslav ideology at the time held that the language spoken in Yugoslavia is Serbo-Croatian; that there are two variants, Serbian and Croatian, and that there is no such thing as a Muslim or Bosnian language or literary canon. The response from the official institutions in Bosnia during the upheavals of the 1970s held, on the other hand, that: BiH canon does exist; that Muslims have a canon of their own, but no distinct language; and that the language spoken in BiH is either Serbo-Croatian (as a Yugoslav concept) or a “Bosnian form of expression,” but neither a third variant, nor some combination of two or three variants (Serbian, Croatian, Muslim).

In February 1971, the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina (LCBiH)<sup>48</sup> produces the guiding principles of language politics, a document entitled “Literary Language and Literary-Language Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina” (CK SKBiH, “Književni Jezik i Književnojezička Politika u Bosni i Hercegovini”). The most important conclusions are as follows: 1) Croato-Serbian or Serbo-Croatian literary language is one language with all its differences and variants; 2) LCBiH has to care for the autochthonous BiH literary-linguistic and cultural artifacts, as these serve BiH’s unity; 3) the two variants are used in BiH differently than in Croatia and Serbia insofar as their use is not marked ethnically [but rather regionally]; 4) others’ efforts regarding the “rights” of the two variants in BiH are an expression of a paternalistic relationship towards the republic and its culture; and 5) in order to prove scientifically the characteristics of the Bosnian “language standard” full support is given to the

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<sup>48</sup> I will refer to the League of Communists as either LCBiH or the Party.

formation of the Institute for Contemporary Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian Language.

These conclusions eloquently represent the LCBiH's attempt to overcome nationalist division. They proceed from basic linguistic facts such as the existence of only one language, however it is called, the non-ethnic marking of "variants" in BiH (a Bosnian Serb can and does speak the Croatian variant, and vice versa), and the fact that the topic of BiH linguistic, literary, and cultural practices remains under-researched. The conclusions they draw are anchored in an attempt to produce a scientific answer to the nationalist challenges. New political and educational practices established during the 1970s had their basis in this document.

However, the Party still did not resolve the conundrum of the language-literature-nation connection. They correctly analyze the insistence on the two separate variants, Serbian and Croatian coming from Belgrade and Zagreb, as being paternalistic ("BiH is not and will not be anybody's 'linguistic colony'") and that furthermore, "accepting the idea that each nation here *has to have* its own separate literary language is a direct negation of the Muslim national particularity" (because Muslims share the linguistic practices of Serbs and Croats in the republic) (Ibid 6). They also conclude that the insistence on the "rights" of the two variants in Bosnia would lead to "cultural disintegration and consequently would bring into question the very sovereignty and independence of the Republic" (8)." While this correctly identifies the basis of Croatian and Serbian insistence on "respect" for "their" variants in Bosnia as being motivated by nationalism in politics, the Party stops short of questioning that very ideology that holds language, literature, and nation to be these unchanging, ahistorical categories forever linked to each other.

In Bosnia, the language debates can be traced back to at least 1964 and 1965 when articles regarding language and literature (and nation) started appearing in BiH literary journals.

*Izraz* had a special issue in August of 1965 devoted to Literature and Language having solicited contributions from a variety of Yugoslav intellectuals. It would be two years later that the Croatian and Serbian nationalist intellectuals issued their respective “Declaration” and “Proposal” – nationalist arguments against Serbo-Croatian being one language, which mark the onset of visible, public nationalist confrontations in the cultural arena.<sup>49</sup>

As for literature, debates over the history and standing of BiH literature started appearing in literary journals as early as 1967 when Risto Trifković published his study entitled “Twenty Years of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Literature” in nine installments, the last one containing the controversial chapter entitled “In Conclusion: Facing Once Again the Phenomenon of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Literature: To Be or Not to Be.”

1970 proved to be a crucial year for the debates on language and literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina. First, in April, there was the influential *Symposium on Language*, followed in November by the *Symposium on Contemporary Literature of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, both held in Sarajevo. At the *Symposium on Literature* leading BiH intellectuals presented their work on the definitions of the canon. Midhat Begić was the keynote speaker, with significant responses from Miodrag Bogićević and Risto Trifković. Faced with challenges from Zagreb and Belgrade

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<sup>49</sup> “Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika” argued that “in practice even today, a “state language” is being enforced so that the Croatian literary language is suppressed and forced into an unequal position as a local dialect. ... The undersigned institutions and organizations hold that in such instances [of inequality of languages] the Croatian nation is not being represented and that it is forced into inequality” (Babić, Brozović, Dalibor, Pavčić, Josip). “Predlog za razmišljanje (grupe članova UKS povodom hrvatske jezičke deklaracije)” on the other hand, states: “This group of writers in Serbia, agrees that the institutions who put out the ‘Declaration regarding the name and position of the Croatian literary language’ truly are the most competent in questions of the Croatian literary language, and this group considers their Declaration representative and authoritative. ... Therefore, the group that is proposing this resolution, without opening up the historical and scientific aspects of this problem, and having in mind the facts that follow the demands of this Declaration, considers the Vienna and Novi Sad agreements invalidated.” In addition, they asked for changes in language use in the media, the removal of “Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian” as official names of the language and furthermore the changes in the Croatian and Serbian republic constitutions that would guarantee the right of any Serb in Croatia or Croat in Serbia to be educated and to communicate with the authorities in his own language (Šipka). Jointly these two documents not only proposed the disambiguation of the two “languages” but effectively proposed full, constitutionally guaranteed bilingualism.

regarding the definition of BiH literature, Begić, Bogićević, and Trifković present three possible definitions of this multinational literature that would come to dominate much of the debate in the 1970s and 1980s.

The key questions of the *Symposium* revolved around a seemingly banal question of terminology: what is the name of the literature in Bosnia and Herzegovina? Begić represented the position that named the literary production as *Bosnian-Herzegovinian literature* (one, unified canon), Bogićević argues for the name *literature of the nations of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (multiple national canons), and Trifković, who stands in between, as in the essay mentioned above, points to the 19<sup>th</sup> – century origin of this problem and how its resolution is linked to recognition of the *legitimacy* of the *Bosnian state*.

Serbian nationalist intellectuals had established a particular reading of “Bosnian literature” that held such a category to be an invention of Austria-Hungary during its occupation of Bosnia, intended to divide Serbian interests in the region. The central tenet of Austro-Hungarian cultural policy in Bosnia, such interpretations hold, was “to do everything possible [...] to contribute to the denationalization of Bosnia and Herzegovina, that is, to create a new, even if *artificial*, Bosnian nation on the Slavic south” (Kecmanović 188). Thus, any mention of Bosnian or Bosniak literature that appeared at the time, was part and parcel of the Austro-Hungarian colonial policy regarding the Bosnian state. In the familiar language-literature-nation vicious circle, Bosnian literature is therefore an artificial invention, not an actually existing practice. Trifković identifies the fundamental error of this reading practice:

According to some, this unhappy union [the term *Bosnian and Herzegovinian literature*] is a product of the ill-minded Austro-Hungarian politics in the region; a ploy and a coinage born on the wings of Kallay’s “divide and rule” politics; a Kallayism, clearly a foreign import and a poison; but all the while they forget that Bosnia and Herzegovina existed even before czar [sic] Franz or sir Kosta Hörmann and his fully austrophile

policies on the literature of Bosnia (Trifković, “Pred licem i fenomenom bosanskohercegovačke literature: biti ili ne” 6).<sup>50</sup>

Trifković also perceived the problem of addressing the BiH canon in complete deference to the political and national definitions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The “problem” of the BiH canon, for Trifković, is not in the literature itself, and yet this problem is still “a power that, like blood, runs through its veins” (9). He defines BiH literature as a union, not only affected by common space and time, but also by

fate and connectedness to the land; united and joined not only by the same language with which its peoples have been communicating for centuries, not only by that resistance to conquerors of different colors and flags, but by a union that is even deeper than any gulf that divides [BiH]: something that is human essence, blood, temper, mentality. Sometimes it is simply defiance, *inaad*, sometimes something else, but always common, together, one feeling, one deeper dependence (Trifković, “Pred Licem i Fenomenom Bosanskohercegovačke Literature: Biti Ili Ne” 8).

Blood, temper, mentality are, arguably, the building blocks of “national essence,” but Trifković’s argument stops just short of that conclusion. Instead he chooses to take the existence of a specific BiH literature as a given, reframing the original problem into one of BiH literature’s *relationship* to the Serbian/Croatian ones. And here is when Trifković, almost unintentionally reveals the greatest failure of the national(istic) definitions of literature not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina, but for all of Yugoslavia, specifically, the question of what criteria ought to be used in delineating between these three (or more) canons within a common state. In dismissing the birth place of the author as a possible criterion for inclusion in the canon Trifković says:

The principle of birth in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a criterion of belonging to its literature [has] already been today overcome and deemed unsustainable. (*We should not forget that this principle, mechanistically applied, creates complete mayhem of the order and hierarchy of our literatures.* According to that logic we have to migrate Ćamil

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<sup>50</sup> Benjamin Kallay was the Austro-Hungarian Chief Secretary for Bosnia, while Kosta Hörmann was the Department Chief of the Austro-Hungarian government in the capital Sarajevo.

Sijarić – which V. Krnjević did staying true to this principle – but Begić didn't do the same in his essay on the novel, but then he did, and I can agree with it more, adopt Antun B. Šimić, etc. Where would we put Hasan Kikić then? And a series of such questions automatically open up) (Trifković 16, emphasis mine).

But this is precisely the problem. If you define literatures nationalistically, then you can only have canons based on the author's supposed ethnicity. But even if you refuse this definition, but agree with the national principle, you are left with “mayhem” in nationalist definitions of literature, primarily due to the fact of innumerable migrations back and forth between the national republics. Trifković has no other choice but to return to a definition of BiH literature as regional, but only for so long as to dismiss “regionalism” as the manner of “proper” literature (Trifković, “Pred Licem i Fenomenom Bosanskohercegovačke Literature - Biti Ili Ne” 22).

Miodrag Bogićević attempted to frame the BiH canon within the already existing national canon categories. Bosnia is not a one-nation state, therefore BiH literature can stand on its own only if it is expressly qualified as belonging to “other” canons: Croatian and Serbian, and possibly Muslim. As Ivan Lovrenović convincingly argues in a 1984 article “Old Horizontal and New, Vertical Coordinates,” the name “Literature of the Nations and Nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Bogićević's position) is a result of a political vocabulary imposing itself onto the literary-cultural field. He says:

The application of [cultural, historical, spiritual, traditional, aesthetic, typological, idiomatic, linguistic] criteria is necessary even in considerations of Serbian or Croatian literary-national problematic, because, not even there can we perform the literary-national equalization smoothly and completely, using the national criteria alone. And the Bosnian-Herzegovinian case only more radically shows how the ideological provenance and basis of the traditional national conception [of literature] is inappropriate for the being of literature; requiring from within, from the state of facts, with its own literary-historical immanence, the primacy of applying these other criteria. When, in such a light, this literature begins to appear as a phenomenon that as a whole has a number of specifically differentiated characteristics, then [this definition of literature] does not stand in opposition, but in complement of national compositeness of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

which, in the political vocabulary requires the title: the literature of nations and nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina (I. Lovrenović 38).

In other words, it is when the national(istic) literary-historical understanding of literature imposes itself at the expense of all other approaches or conceptualizations of literature, that the case of Bosnian and Herzegovinian literature requires the further specification: “literature of the nations and nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina.” For, what could Bosnian and Herzegovinian literature denote, but precisely the literature of the people who live in it? But, if the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina are defined *exclusively* in ethnic or national terms, then the necessity arises to differentiate between the regional notion of “Bosnian and Herzegovinian” and the national notion of its inhabitants. As Lovrenović, goes on to say: “it is unnecessary to expand the notion of *Bosnian and Herzegovinian literature* into: *the literature of the nations and nationalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina*, just as it is unnecessary to expand the notion *Bosnia and Herzegovina* into: ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina of the nations and nationalities of those who live in it,’ because that is perfectly and simultaneously understood” (39-40)<sup>51</sup>. This is true, except, of course, in Serbian and Croatian nationalist interpretations that see Serb and Croat populations in Bosnia forming a unity with each “home country” respectively, rather than a truly multinational Bosnia.

In this “one nation – one canon” reading, BiH is a problem because it does not conform to the model of “one nation, one state”: it is fundamentally ethnically heterogeneous, containing furthermore, populations with “home” nation-states (Serbs and Croats). The literary canon in

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<sup>51</sup> It is, of course, incredibly prophetic of Lovrenović to point to such absurdities as they would come to shape the postsocialist BiH state, cemented into the Dayton Peace Agreement and the corresponding BiH constitution. These documents define BiH precisely as a country ‘of the nations and nationalities of those who live in it’ as political representation in BiH institutions is of the so-called constitutive nations (Bosniak, Croatian, Serb), not individual citizens. In other words, if one does not belong to these three nationalities, or chooses not to identify himself with them, he does not have a political representative in the executive branch and often, practically, in the legislative branch either.

Yugoslavia, therefore, can be Serb, Croatian, or even Serbo-Croatian, but it cannot be Bosnian because there is no Bosnian nation. On the other hand, if there is a canon to be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that does *not* belong to Serbian or Croatian canons, the only “available” one is a Bosniak-Muslim national one. The sum of arguments against such a Bosniak canon holds that, first, there is no different Muslim language apart from Serbian, Croatian or Serbo-Croatian and secondly, while Serbian and Croatian nations existed “from times immemorial,” the Bosniaks were an invention of the Austro-Hungarians trying to weaken the Serbian state and therefore not a “legitimate” nation. And here we come back to the question of “can there really be a literature without a nation and a nation without a literature?”

Begić’s position, in contrast to Trifković and Bogićević and referring back to Radovan Vučković, points to the fundamental social transformation in Bosnia and Herzegovina following the communist revolution:

[Vučković] correctly sees the existence of different but separated literary units in the BiH past, related to the national-ethnic differences and their respective milieus. ... But Vučković also correctly points out that not only in literature, *but our entire transformation in the revolution, caused, on the republican level, a closer relationship between authors of all nationalities from 1945 to today.* He accepts the terminology BiH literature for that socialist period, understanding it dynamically (*Simpozijum o savremenoj književnosti Bosne i Hercegovine. 5 i 6 Nov. 1970 u Sarajevu*).

Filandra will later identify Begić as standing up for a *Bosniak* literary canon, conveniently ignoring the socialist orientation of his essay and his focus on the multinational features of BiH literature.<sup>52</sup> Begić’s point, after all, was that what makes BiH literature one is the revolutionary moment that broke with (bourgeois) nationalist traditions of the past. The Party held Begić’s

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<sup>52</sup> The “confusion” of Bosniak and Bosnian (and Herzegovinian) designations is, in part deliberate, and stands at the core of Bosniak assertions that Bosnia is exclusively their nation state. On the other hand, the Serb and Croat nationalists follow this conflation and attack any BiH definitions as Bosniak politics in disguise.

position as the correct one: the socialist revolution fundamentally changed the intellectual life in Bosnia and as a consequence one *could* speak of a unified BiH reality, identity, and literature.

The complexity of this position rests in the unwillingness to completely do away with the language-literature-nation formulation, and only affirming the possibility of overcoming this conundrum at some future date. Working towards such a goal, LCBiH recognized that encouraging research would counter the nationalist readings of Bosnian literature, language, and history. However, all this required funds, and as it turns out, funds that the republic was simply unable to provide. Economic conditions in the country in the latter 1970s and 1980s dictated that few funds would ever reach this research agenda.<sup>53</sup>

The nationalistic readings of literature and the canon continued in Bosnia and Yugoslavia, practically unchallenged by official institutions and the Party: there was no funding to encourage research and intellectual development in a different direction, while the national matrices in Croatia and Serbia funded intellectuals on their respective sides. The Bosniaks struggled to keep up, but with the minimal support of the LCBiH, local publishing houses managed to release several texts defining the Bosniak canon.<sup>54</sup>

However, this is not to say that a clear or even identifiable rift existed between “Party” intellectuals and “nationalist” intellectuals. Besides, Party membership was not a deciding factor in understanding ideological disagreements within the Yugoslav intelligentsia. Resembling closely the ideological confusion of the leadership in constructing the socialist “market” and extending it to all things social, the Party also seemed to have had no clear vision when it came

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<sup>53</sup> See especially the heated argument over the failures to reach any of the outlined goals by the end of the following year in CK SKBiH, “Magnetofonski snimak sjednice sekretarijata CK SKBiH i komisije za kulturu i medjunacionalne odnose, od 22.10.1971.”

<sup>54</sup> See for example works by Isaković; Hasandedić; and Rizvić as well as the series *Muslimanska književnost XX vijeka* that published most of its volumes in 1990 or 1991.

to cultural debates. Much of the debate at the very top of the Party lacked any theoretical or practical sophistication and exhibited a high level of divisiveness, even though their official documents represented sophisticated positions and well-researched points. The few Party leaders genuinely interested in advancing the points spelled out in the “Literary Language and Literary-Language Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina” faced disinterest, bureaucratic talking points, and nationalist pushback.<sup>55</sup>

Enver Kazaz identifies two predominant practices in Bosnian literary criticism evident in this period: positivistic and essentialist. The positivistic reading takes “*the nation and its identity* as the main character of the literary-historical narration” while the essentialist critique is always “searching for the *supratemporal essences of a literary text*” (Kazaz, “Terminološka Zbrka (bosanskohercegovačka Književna Historija i Studij Književnosti u Raljama Političkih Ideologija)” 22). The former dominated Bogičević’s position, while the latter was evident in Trifković’s distaste for “regionalism” vis-à-vis some imagined “universal” meaning. Both approaches fail to address “the context in which literature is created, and therefore the entire cultural system and as such the social horizon under which a literary system establishes complex relationships with non-literary systems” (Ibid). The remainder of the current chapter is devoted to examining the BiH canon through some major moments and texts, precisely in this Bourdieuan approach Kazaz outlines.

Analyzing the current situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one is inevitably reminded of Marx’s lines: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages

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<sup>55</sup> One almost perfect example of this dynamic within the Party leadership can be found in the already mentioned meeting of the Central Committee Secretariat for Culture and National Relations (CK SKBiH, “Magnetofonski snimak sjednice sekretarijata CK SKBiH i komisije za kulturu i međunacionalne odnose, od 22.10.1971”).

appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce” (Marx 161). The ideological divisions that fueled the 1970s debates eventually found their “resolution” in bloodshed and violence reminiscent of World War II. Today, these same “world-historic facts” regarding the Bosnian canon are represented farcically on Bosnian “convertible” currency. Today, the only existing canon of *Bosnian and Herzegovinian literature* (as opposed to the national ones) resides in the monetary system: each bill features a literary figure from the 19<sup>th</sup> or the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nirman Moranjak-Bamburać provides an excellent analysis of this phenomenon created not by the “natives” but as with the asymbolic flag, and the wordless anthem, by the “international experts” who flooded BiH post-Dayton:

The anonymous World Bank expert developed his monetary-political project by including in its management the political disagreements over state-making and its cultural base. So, with some subconscious cooperation from the ruling political oligarchies, an entire conflict-ridden past of establishing canonical authors of BiH literature was included in the “currency model.” The chronology was dismissed, but in return, all the numerous solutions offered in long-lasting and tiring polemics as a way out of a historical dead end were included in the selection of authors: belonging according to birth, life in Bosnia, national criteria, contemporary inter-state divisions, the good old communist “key,” etc...” (Moranjak-Bamburać 49).

The calls for changing this conflict-ridden paradigm for reading BiH literature are coming from Bosnia itself as well as the large diaspora strewn across Western metropolitan centers.<sup>56</sup> The remainder of the current chapter is devoted to answering this challenge. The “positivistic” and “essentialist” readings of BiH canonical texts Kazaz outlines still dominate criticism today. Their ideological origins lie, as we have seen, in idealist, nationalist readings of language, literature, identity, and nation, and as much as Europeans would like to distance themselves from the violence this implies, these are ideologies that are fundamentally based in Eurocentric historiography. Such readings hold the Eurocentric ideology as well as its particular perceptions

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<sup>56</sup> See Zvonko Kovač. "Kanon u 'međuknjiževnim zajednicama' i interkulturalna povijest književnosti (u tezama)." *Sarajevske sveske*. 8-9 (2005): 87-101. and Nirman Moranjak-Bamburać. "Nevolje s kanonizacijom." *Sarajevske sveske*. 8-9 (2005): 49-73.

of Bosnia as true, while focusing on either what text belongs to what nation or in discriminating between “regionalism” (barbarism) and “universality” (civilization).

In what follows, I analyze three crucial “moments” in the Bosnian literary-cultural life that establish a paradigm for reading this literature and this canon through a “cultural theory dealing with imperialism.” Each moment is centered around a literary figure or text(s): Ivo Andrić, Meša Selimović, Mak Dizdar and Miroslav Krleža on medieval Bosnia. I argue that the Yugoslav canon demonstrates a fundamental deference to the Eurocentric intellectual model, especially in terms of BiH literature. It is not coincidental that all of these key texts are historical fiction, engaging one way or the other various historiographies of Bosnia and by extension Yugoslavia. Narrating the engagement with this Eurocentric model allows us to see a history of Bosnian and Yugoslav culture beyond the national(istic) conflictual paradigm.

## **Ivo Andrić as a Point of Departure**

*Andrić's readers are divided into those who still know how to delineate between reality and fiction and those who are lost in the murkiness of such distinctions, oblivious to what has happened to them. After all, many of them were guided merely by the unyielding, benevolent human desire to bring whatever order one can to the chaos around them, to understand the past and the present.*

*Haunting these two types of readers, on the prowl for the former and pushing the latter further into the gloom, are the third kind of readers whose disdainful Mephistophelian snickering can be heard echoing above. These are the readers who intentionally transformed Andrić's literary oeuvre into a magical mirror that any naive and confused Alice can use to enter the Wonderland and come out the other side (when she gets bored) self-confident and assured that she has finally understood all that had eluded her before. The ruins and the graveyards she saw on the other side were part of a quite convincing stage design, while inhabitants were merely characters in one charming novelistic plot.*

*The prop master is to be congratulated: the blood was like the real thing.*

Ivo Žanić “Pisac na osami: upotreba Andrićeve književnosti u ratu u BiH”

It is difficult to overstate Ivo Andrić's stature in discussions of any of the Yugoslav literatures. Cited by historians, journalists, even the US military as the infallible "guide" to the Balkans, Andrić had become, especially with the post-Yugoslav wars, both a point of departure for analyzing (post)Yugoslav culture as well as its greatest obstacle.

The Westerners tend to read Andrić as a confirmation of their original suspicions about the Balkans: ethnic, racial, or civilizational miscegenation that exists 'over there' is bound to cause trouble over here; (at the same time and not at all in contradiction) ethnic identities are deeply entrenched and are the cause of permanent violence; history cannot pass – it is ever present (a different way of saying there is no progress); and the Balkans are a bridge between civilizations, a crossroads, and a place that is so backward that it cannot draw any benefit from its hundreds of years of contact with the world's greatest empires. The mere mention of Andrić's name or an apt citation or two at the end of a political observation on the Balkans by Western journalists, diplomats, and historians, magically validates the preceding arguments. In one recent example, former British ambassador to Yugoslavia, Charles Crawford, engaged a younger Bosnian diaspora academic on the question of the war in Bosnia and its aftermath. Crawford's thesis was, unsurprisingly, that the apartheid-like political structures in today's Bosnia were and still are the best solution for preventing bloodshed, supposedly just waiting to resurface. The conclusion of his article reads:

Bosnia represents a fierce ethno-religious identity struggle echoing down many centuries. People in local Bosnian communities form their political allegiances not from DNA tests or the latest fashionable political theories, but via their family memories and instincts for survival.

Who is right? Nobel Prize-winner, Ivo Andric [sic]:

*But what I have seen in Bosnia – that is something different.*

*It is hatred, but not limited just to a moment in the course of social change, or an inevitable part of the historical process; rather, it is hatred acting as an independent force, as an end in itself* (Crawford).

Of course, invariably, the cited passages are words of literary characters – this particular one being Maks Levenfeld, a German Jew born in Bosnia, from a short story *A Letter from 1920*. Unfortunately, as is always the case, the literary nature of this narrative loses out to the strictly political. When such rigidly ideological readings are imposed onto Andrić's texts, the narrative structure is usually overlooked, but in this case it is even simpler – Crawford had simply failed to read the end of the story or to be less generous, its subtlety was lost on him.

Maks' story continues after his long monologue about hatred in Bosnia: he runs away from Bosnia on account of this hatred that makes him unable to do his life's work – practice medicine. He practices briefly in Paris, joins as a volunteer in the Spanish Civil War, and somewhere, in “a small Aragonian town whose name none of our folks could properly pronounce,” in an air bombardment of a hospital, “in the middle of the day, he died, together with virtually all of his wounded patients.” The last line reads: “This is how the man who escaped from hatred met his end.” In the ironic inflection of this last sentence, Andrić reminds us that Maks, a Bosnian German Jew, left the hatred in Bosnia for Europe of 1938 only to be met, as we know, by the industrial genocide in the victory of European fascism at the time. The Bosnian “hatred” is inversed in the Spanish Civil War and becomes European, with deadly consequences for Maks. *The Letter from 1920*, then, is first and foremost, an indictment of Europe in the wake of two world wars, and secondly, a reflection on how conditional and relative (Maks') comments about Bosnian hatred are in light of these wars.

Crawford's error is not surprising in that foreign diplomats' second nature is to hear only the imperialist, orientalist indictment of Bosnia and not search much further to perceive Andrić's

subtle commentary on that discourse. This pattern of ‘reading’ Andrić, buttressed by the Nobel Prize earned him the privileged place in any discussion of Yugoslav history. As I show below, the pattern of Crawford’s misreading holds for many such ideological straightjackets: the narrative’s subtle shifts between “character zones” are regularly overlooked even though the construction of meaning in almost all of Andrić’s prose relies heavily on these shifts.<sup>57</sup>

Character zones are the basic elements of a Bakhtinian approach to the novel as dialogic imagination. Whereas the novel is “a more complex artistic form that organizes the contradictions and orchestrates its themes by means of languages” and whereas “to a greater or lesser extent every novel is a dialogized system made up of the images of ‘languages,’ styles and consciousnesses that are concrete and inseparable from language,” heteroglossia “once incorporated into the novel...is another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions, but in a refracted way” (Bakhtin 324). In other words, language in the novel is not only the means but also the object of representation. As Bakhtin says: “The image of another’s language and outlook on the world, simultaneously represented and representing is extremely typical of the novel” (Ibid 45). Zdenko Lešić compared them to cinematic close ups: moments of the text where the narrator speaks from a position very *close up* to the character without necessarily speaking in the character’s voice, much like a cinematic close up would do (Lešić 141).

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<sup>57</sup> Speaking of Eugene Onegin, Bakhtin describes “character zones” in the following manner: “Although it is part of authorial speech, it is structured in a realm where Onegin’s voice and Onegin’s style hold sway. ... All the images in this excerpt become in turn the object of representation: they are represented as Onegin’s style, Onegin’s world view. ... But unlike Lensky’s song these images, being the object of representation, at the same time represent themselves, or more precisely they express the thought of the author, while nevertheless seeing the limitations and insufficiency of the Onegin-Byronic world view and style” (Bakhtin 44–5).

In Yugoslavia, each ‘national canon’ has its own reading of Andrić, but they surprisingly do not contradict each other much except in their ethical foci. For Serbs, Andrić describes the eternal suffering of the Serbian people and explains why Bosnia cannot but be divided into ethnic enclaves. For Bosniaks, Andrić “orientalizes” Bosnia and anticipates the genocides yet to come (in WWII and in this recent carnage). Croats, as the odd man out in this battle, mostly abandon Andrić and publish only his few early works written in *ijekavica* and get their pound of flesh out of him that way. Ivan Lovrenović talks about this obsession with national “possession” of authors:

[There] was always an enormous collective investment in determining the *national belonging* of important authors, who were insufficiently “clear” in terms of their nationality, and there always was an especially developed sensitivity to this problem. The origin of this sensitivity is, on the one hand, from the fact that the development of national identities was often crucially connected to the characters and engagement of some literati – national ideologues and their soap boxes – who in turn became the logo and the essential part of the nation and its genesis. On the other hand, this sensitivity is linked to the manner in which national belonging of authors is treated here, as a value in itself (*and even more valuable than the literary, so that it is much more important to have an author than to read him*), and an exclusionary value, akin to private property, whose essential point is that something that is *ours* cannot be anyone else’s, especially not of those closest to us...(I. Lovrenović 16).

It is much more important to have an Andrić than to read him – in a way that is reminiscent of Franco Moretti’s notion of the modern epic – an influential, crucial work and a turning point in the canon that is, nonetheless, very rarely read (Moretti 4). For Andrić, the Nobel Prize was the final impetus for *not* reading him while postulating his unsurpassable greatness. Dubravka Ugrešić captures and satirizes this *non-reading* of Andrić that secured him unquestionable status in Yugoslav literature: a character in *Fording the Stream of Consciousness* summarizes succinctly the secret to Ivo Andrić’s larger-than-life stature in Yugoslavia:

The Minister mutters about authors: “What good were they? In fact, he took a dim view of literature in general. With one exception: Andrić. Andrić had won the Nobel Prize; he was world famous; that counted for something” (Ugrešić and Heim 109).

Reflecting on the uptick in the political significance ascribed to Andrić in the recent wars, both within Yugoslavia and with the Western outsiders, Ivo Žanić writes: “It is neither debatable (nor surprising) that Andrić's literary oeuvre, with its *imago* of a country and its inhabitants, translated into many languages, and propped up by the Nobel prize, would become the historical and political manual” both at home and abroad precisely because that *imago*, superficially read, fits with the rest of the intellectual tools at the disposal of Western observers and local nationalists (Žanić 48–57). Parsing out this imagological reading Kazaz adds that:

Ignoring the text itself and transferring the interest of the critique onto the *extra-textual* aspect of literature, ideological readings of Andrić's oeuvre, based either on agreement or disagreement with the *so-called dark-vilayet image of Bosnia*, subject *the fictional nature of literary discourse to the unconditionality and absolute nature of the supposed system of truths in ideological discourse*. These essentially *imagological readings* of Andrić's literature, as Žanić calls them, do not explore the rich fresco of Andrić's textuality, but rather compare *the fictional words of Andrić's narrative with an ideologically supposed image of Bosnian history* (Kazaz 77).

Ivo Žanić describes the appeal of Andrić's texts: they offer sketches of Bosnian “character,” images of its history and present, a way into the mythologies of national cultures in Yugoslavia in general, something akin to an imagology especially of the Bosnian Ottoman period. A particular way of reading these images accounts for Andrić's acclaim and later infamy: a historiographic reading of texts; a way of bypassing completely their fictional nature and their literariness. (In another essay, I show how this confusion of historical fact and Andrić's fiction in one important text goes completely unnoticed, in part because it is shared across national boundaries – Andrić is history, history is Andrić).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Antić, Marina. “Historicizing Bosnia: Kosta Hörmann and Bosnia's Encounter with Modernity.” *Wechsel Wirkungen: The Political, Social, and Cultural Impact of Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (1878-1918)*. forthcoming 2013.

Ivo Žanić and Enver Kazaz have led the way in demystifying the misuse of Andrić's literature in the wars of the 1990s, pointing out correctly that at the heart of the long and troubled relationship between the author and the critics is the *imago* of Bosnia in his works. From Isidora Sekulić's critical response founding this particular reading of Andrić to the reaction by Muhsin Rizvić in *Bosanski muslimani u Andrićevo svijetu* in 1996, the specific *imago* of Bosnia, commonly referred to as *tamnovilajetski* (dark province/vilayet), takes center stage. Images of the constructed Eastern Europe I presented in the first chapter as part of the ideological corpus of imperialist practice also fashion this dark-vilayet *imago*: backward, barbarian province, cut off from Europe and progress by Islam and the Ottoman Empire, with all the orientalist baggage this association carries. This is the territory of those numerous 'balkanisms' I touched upon earlier that I won't rehash here, but suffice it to say that to understand the image of the dark vilayet, we must understand its correlate – Enlightenment Europe – as it appears in Andrić's texts.

It seems prudent to start from the heart of the matter – the dark-vilayet *imago* of Bosnia in Andrić's works. Apart from the analysis of this *imago*, I develop a more thorough reading of Andrić, beyond the restrictive imagological perspective, and including a wider range of leitmotifs, formal elements, and what Zdenko Lešić has called “situational rhymes“ that mark Andrić oeuvre. Such reading focuses on the “structures and senses” that direct us to the “contradictions the text tries to resolve in vain.” This wider reading will focus especially on History and its iterations throughout his texts as a way of understanding Andrić's engagement with Eurocentrism and the “Eurocentric aesthetic idea.”

***Yugoslav Heart of Darkness: Bosnia, the Dark Vilayet***

Zdenko Lešić's excellent study of Andrić's narrative style in the short stories, one that applies equally well to his novels, points out the origin of the dark-vilayet reading of Andrić and his fictional construction of Bosnia. Isidora Sekulić's "Istok u pripovetkama Ive Andrića" ("The East in Ivo Andrić's Short Stories"), published in 1923 was the first of many readings that focused on the particularities of the Bosnia Andrić invented in his early works. As Lešić says:

Isidora Sekulić's [article] contributed to forming and ossifying a critical reception of Andrić's short stories that perceives him as a typical "Eastern" storyteller; one whom the Orient and old Bosnia, 'olden customs and times' gave not only the themes and milieus, but also the basic spirit of his stories. Speaking, for example, of Andrić's power of suggestion, Isidora Sekulić concluded: 'We could say, therefore, that this power of suggestion is not only a matter of Ivo Andrić's personal talent or literary technique, but also something deeper and more indigenous than talent itself. It is the direct offering of that olden Bosnia that won't leave him be, through god knows which ancestor, or through god knows what power of oriental spaces and eastern life.' Since then, many have pointed out Andrić's supposed typically Bosnian rootedness in the East and obsession with it (Lešić 174).

This reading of Andrić occurs in a cultural moment Zoran Milutinović aptly names *Getting over Europe*. His thesis, much like my own, is based on an understanding of deep and fateful engagement of Eurocentric ideas by the Serbian (or in my case, Yugoslav) intelligentsia. Milutinović analyzes the construction of 'Europe' in Serbian culture, the internalization of the European gaze, and the resistance to it. His conclusion about Andrić is that, unlike his predecessors who could not properly answer Rastko Petrović's dictum to "get over Europe and learn to speak European," Andrić represented a break, a moment when "the occidental/orientalist paradigm, and modernization perceived as Westernization were overcome" (Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture (Studia Imagologica, No. 18)* 26). Advancing this claim on the basis of Andrić's ability to 'speak' European, or in other words, offer a critique of Europe from a decidedly modernist,

internal point of view is a bit premature. I would say, rather, that Andrić had overcome the Eurocentric paradigm only inasmuch as the European modernists did so – that is to say, not very much. However, much of Milutinović’s argument stands as I will show below.

The *imago* of Bosnia feeding this reading of Andrić is based on a number of his short stories and, naturally, his two major novels, *Bosnian Chronicle* and *Bridge on the Drina*. The former is constructed much like a house of mirrors. A true Bakhtinian novel, constructed of many voices and perspectives, all reflecting each other to compose a whole. This novel comments directly on what Milutinović aptly called a “phenomenology of image production and mechanism of their exchange” (3). *Bridge on the Drina*, on the other hand, slowly builds up a mosaic or bricolage of Višegrad in modern times, digressing into stories only to tie them into the whole. I will begin with the dark vilayet image in the *Bosnian Chronicle* as the novel as a whole takes on the phenomenology of image production as one of its primary themes.

If we look at its overall construction, the multiple narrative positions function much like mirrors of each other, always repeating some feature of the *other’s* perception while also changing, multiplying or distorting it. We can gather multiple narrative positions in this novel into four distinct groups: Westerners (French, Austro-Hungarian), Ottomans (foreigners including the Vizier and his service) natives (be they local Ottoman aristocracy, Serbian Orthodox, Catholic, or Jewish characters), and translators/hybrid characters (Davna, Rotta, Cologna)<sup>59</sup>. The narrative flows back and forth between these individual characters in what Lešić calls “close-ups.” There is also a central narrator (or narrative consciousness): the narrator-as-chronicler that appears occasionally to provide guideposts for the reader: either as a reminder

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<sup>59</sup> Andrić makes a distinction between the Ottoman rulers and the local Muslim aristocracy – the latter were rebelling against the Ottoman central authority for much of Bosnia’s history under the Ottoman Empire and specifically during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the novel describes.

that these are “unusual and eventful times,” or to give a sense of the timeline in question, or just to point out how the unusual events are actually part of a pattern – often in reference to Western experience in the Orient. More than in many other Andrić’s texts, humor and satire help build this narrative position.

The dark vilayet imago is built from many different narrative perspectives, even the natives’ position at times, but most forcefully in the internal struggle of the young French consul Des Foses. His first encounter with Bosnia is an encounter with darkness and silence:

[H]e stopped at a rocky pass above Klis and looked at the wild barren land opening out before him and at the grey crags, dusted with sparse, drab vegetation. And, from the Bosnian side, he caught a whiff of the hitherto unknown silence of a new world. The young man shuddered, trembling more at that silence and the starkness of the landscape than at the fresh breeze blowing through the gorge. [...] stepped out into that new world of silence and uncertainty. Bosnia could be sensed, a taciturn land, and one could feel in the air an icy suffering without words or obvious reason. [...] That was how young Monsieur Des Foses had entered Bosnia. It had kept its promise and realized the threats of his first encounter with it, enveloping him increasingly in its sharp, cold atmosphere of poverty, and particularly in its silence and tedium with which the young man would wrestle for many a sleepless night, when there was no help to be had anywhere (Andrić, *Travnička Hronika: Konsulska Vremena* 70).<sup>60</sup>

After many sleepless nights Des Foses understands this silence to be the ultimate expression of savagery, fear, and death: “In the very brutality of these people, which was considerable, and in their violent outbursts, he saw fear of true expression, a crude and special form of silence” (115).

While Des Foses is tortured by the silence he encounters in Bosnia, his senior colleague Daville is obsessed with darkness. Often we find him peering into the darkness of Travnik late at night with only two sources of light to orient him: the windows of the Austro-Hungarian consulate and Abdul-paša’s grave. The story of Abdul-paša indicates that even Ottoman officials, and even those of Bosnian birth, find Travnik’s silence and darkness unbearable. The “illness” of

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<sup>60</sup> All translations from *The Bosnian Chronicle* are either mine in full or modified translations of Andrić, Ivo. *Bosnian Chronicle: A Novel*. Trans. Hitrec, Joseph. Arcade Publishing, 1993.

Westerners in the Orient seems to infect the locals and the Ottomans as well. And Daville often finds solace in that bleak but only source of light at night.

However, the chronicler-narrator paints a slightly different image of Travnik that undercuts these observations of a “deaf and mute” dark vilayet. The town is much like “a half-open book”, merely a fortified passage with “virtually no straight road or any flat place where a man might step freely. Everything is steep and uneven, crisscrossed and intricately interwoven, linked or interrupted with private paths, fences, blind alleys, gardens, and side entrances, graveyards or places of worship” (14). In short, Travnik is a fairly complex and complicated place, not the dark emptiness or simple barbarity the foreigners perceive in it.

The townsfolk are also not simply barbarous, but rather “immune and up to the challenge, proud, slender, picky, discriminating and shrewd, reserved, cautious, inclined to sneer, not saying much but enjoying gossip, [...] passing on to the generations their *innate ability to understand the whole world*” (14). In essence, these are natives who are wise to the position of their town and many of the worlds’ empires passing through it. They above all subscribe to the credo: “May god protect us from fame, important guests and big events” (15). Key natives in the novel embody this description: Sulejman-paša Skopljak, fra Ivo Janković, and Solomon Atijas. With fra Ivo Janković we see that “being impossible” is precisely the strategy natives employ to shield themselves from empires. Daville proclaims: “Unlike all the other nations of the world, this people has some kind of incomprehensible, perverse hatred of roads, which are actually a sign of progress and prosperity.” But Des Foses explains:

I was complaining to [fra Ivo] about the road from Travnik to Dolac ... The friar gave me a mocking look, as though I didn’t know what I was talking about. Then, closing one eye, he said in a whisper: ‘Sir, the worse the road, the rarer our Turkish visitors. ... And as for ourselves, whenever we need to use any road, with a little effort we always get through ... In fact, we thrive on difficulties (Andrić, *Travnička Hronika: Konsulska Vremena* 61–2).

Des Fosses concludes that the same holds between Ottoman Empire and Europe – the fewer the roads, the fewer the “hostile influences”: “After all, Monsieur Daville, we French have swallowed half of Europe and we shouldn’t be surprised that those countries we haven’t yet occupied look with mistrust at the roads our armies construct on their borders” (62).

The dark vilayet imago is also challenged by the particular self-deprecating humor often associated with Bosnian literary and popular culture. The quintessential “silly Bosnian” is David Štrbac from Petar Kočić’s drama *Jazavac pred sudom* (*Badger before the Court*), whose dialogue with the court contains much more openly hostile native’s rebellion against the Austro-Hungarians than one can ever find in Andrić. But the tradition of self-deprecating humor itself reaches much further into the popular culture. And as Srđan Vučetić argues in “Identity is a Joking Matter”: intergroup humor, usually consisting of inter-Yugoslav ethnic groups and Westerners, overwhelmingly tends to portray Bosnians as the butt of the joke, stupid or primitive, uncouth, sexually promiscuous, etc. (Vučetić). If we were to continue the Bakhtinian line of analysis we can also claim an essential subversiveness in the parody and the grotesque of such humor, often indicating a form of popular resistance to the “civilizing mission” of Western Europe, as I describe further in the concluding section, especially as it relates to popular discourse.<sup>61</sup>

Traces of this intergroup humor can be found throughout this novel, and with Vučetić, I argue that this kind of humor in itself functions as an identifier of a community and a moment of identification with the said community. Much like with Kočić, the superiority of the Other vis-à-vis Bosnians is often undermined by the heavy dose of irony, making identification with the

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<sup>61</sup> My thanks to Prof. Tomislav Longinović for pointing out this element of popular resistance in Andrić’s humor as well.

Bosnian native into a self-affirming moment, i.e., the butt of the joke was actually shrewd.

Secondly, as Vučetić argues, some of the self-deprecating joking is about Bosnians telling jokes about themselves to themselves: “Their self-mocking style emerges perhaps from a preoccupation with physical and social security, which is discussed in a non-threatening, humorous vein” (Vučetić 13). In short, the self-deprecating humor, even if not perceived in this way by outsiders, can in fact mark a moment of identity being affirmed. Structurally, Alexander Kiossev makes a similar point when he argues that “Balkan” is both an identity and a process of identification. In recognizing someone else as Balkan, one has to be able to stand outside their own Balkanness and therefore identify as the Other, while in being Balkan himself, identify that someone else as *the same* as he (Kiossev). Andrić’s humor, I argue, also operates as identity affirming, even when that identity is one of suffering or poverty. With regards to the orientalist imagery of Bosnia and Bosnians, the humor operating in such scenes in the novel is a self-affirming acceptance and satirization of that image.

For example, one of the most humorous moments in *Bosnian Chronicle* is the Westerners’ reflection on Bosnian singing, repeated throughout the text:

I have heard these people singing and I have seen that they put into their songs the same savagery and unhealthy frenzy they put into every other aspect of their material and mental existence. ... Their song was more like the whining of dogs than signing. ... I find far less spite and insensitivity in the whining of dogs than in the singing of these people when they are drunk or simply carried away with their frenzy. I have seen them rolling their eyes as they sang, grinding their teeth and beating their fists against the wall, either because they were drunk on brandy or simply driven by an inner need to wail, draw attention to themselves and destroy things. ... It is simply a way for them to express their hidden passions and base desires to which, for all their lack of restraint, they could not otherwise give rein – for nature itself would prevent it. ... ‘Das ist ein Urjammer’ [the Austrian consul] said. It is, quite simply, the fury of savages who have lost their simplicity (113).

The wailing and frenzy the older French consul detests so strongly, the younger Frenchman Des Fosses had tried to explain on the example of Musa the Singer. Musa is the Greek “enlision” – the person who broke the basic social law, an outcast, and is thus regarded with almost religious respect, fear, and pity while he wails in sorrow. But Musa is only an exception that confirms the “remorselessly strict laws of society, religion and family” in a patriarchal, primitive society such as Bosnia. Either way, Bosnian singing is a sad affair. The Austrian consul calls it “ancient primeval sorrow.” However, the humor in the above description fits well with the self-deprecating Bosnian tradition. The wailing, sorrow, and frenzy are all fairly accurate if more than a bit exaggerated aspects of the overly dramatic oral poetry and ballads in Bosnian tradition. For example, the Bosnian *sevdalinka* – Turkish-influenced, emotional ballad most similar in its substance to the blues tradition in the United States – one could imagine here often fueled not only by unrequited love but generous doses of alcohol.<sup>62</sup> Alternatively, the epic genres could be even more grating to the Western ear with minimal instrumentation on a five-tone instrument, but even more pronounced drama. In both forms group performance and particular social bonding and cohesion experience is central. In other words, behind the humorous descriptions of Bosnian singing by the Others, there is a moment of identification among the natives – an *aha*

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62 “The word *sevdalinka* derives from the Arabic word *sawda*, literally “black” that comes to Bosnian via its Turkish rendition as *sevda*. The term seeks to explain pathos in physiological terms, because it is believed that love sickness generates symptoms akin to black bile. Whereas one “feels blue” in English, in this case one “feels black” when tormented by unrequited love” writes Amila Buturović in *Stone Speaker: medieval Tombs, Landscape, and Bosnian Identity in the Poetry of Mak Dizdar*. “Specific urban genres such as the Bosnian *sevdalinka* and Greek *rebetika* emerged that are characterized by so-called oriental musical feature: modal melodic and rhythmic organization, elaborate ornamentation, improvisation, and the presence of Turkish-derived words regardless of the language used for singing” writes Donna Anne Buchanan in *Balkan Popular Culture and the Ottoman Ecumene: Music, Image, and Regional Political Discourse*. An encyclopedic entry also reads: “*Sevda* (or *sevda*, *sevdahlenka*, *sevdalenka*, *sevdalinka*, *sevdahlinka*): An urban folk song from Bosnia and Herzegovina, usually a love song, which employs Turkish musical folk articulations (modes with a flattened sixth and raised seventh degree, for example) combined with various ensembles, usually containing an accordion, but also guitar, sometimes percussion and synthesizers. The lyrics are invariably very dark, referencing longing and despair” in Ian D. Biddle *Music, National Identity and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local*.

moment as Kiossev calls it – a moment when one both identifies with and over and against the stereotype of Bosnians. The link implied here between the oral poetry (be it ballad or heroic) and the sense of communal belonging is treated much more directly in *The Bridge on the Drina* as I will explain below.

Zdenko Lešić also provides an excellent analysis of the use of humor in the short story *Put Alije Đerzeleza*. Far from being a denigration of Đerzelez, as national(istic) readings hold, the story is a transformation of the title character from epic hero to buffoon to tragic hero and finally modern man. A somewhat similar technique that uses humor as a way to evoke sympathy for the initially buffoonish character is at work in the scene of verbal violence and disrespect the townsfolk show the French consul upon his arrival in Travnik. In the changing narrative perspectives the interpreter d’Avenat transverses the path from buffoon to victim. The scene is Daville’s first ride through the *çarsi* towards the Vizier. (A *çarsi* is the correlate of the contemporary “Arab street” – an orientalized image of public space, with collective potential for violence always lurking in the background). As the men in the *çarsi* retreat into their shops, women and children shriek, yell, spit, and gesture violently towards Daville. Initially the violence is described from Daville’s perspective and the “oriental” suggestions are clear: fanatical hatred, veiled women, cursing, sexual innuendo, and death threats. But then the narrative viewpoint changes into one observing Daville and d’Avenat who

urged his horse closer to [Daville] and, without moving or changing his expression, began to implore Daville in an excited whisper: ‘I beg your Excellency to ride calmly on and pay no attention to any of this. Wild people, uncouth rabble, hate everything foreign and greet everyone like this. It is best to ignore it. That’s what the Vizier does. They’re just barbarians. I beg your Excellency to continue’ (19).

The narrative perspective changes back and forth from Daville’s inner thoughts to d’Avenat’s pesky but humorous urging on forcibly calm and yet full of bile: “I beg your Excellency to ride

on and pay no attention. These are Bosnian barbaric customs and ways. Keep calm and carry on!” (29). But Daville “found d’Avenat’s insistent whispering loathsome. In it he began to glimpse what it must be like for a man from the West to transfer his life to the East, linking his destiny to it forever” (19). Unexpectedly but not surprisingly, we learn Daville despises the Westerner “broken” by life in the Levant that he sees in d’Avenat, who, in turn, earns some of our sympathy.

Andrić takes us from the orientalist image of the townsfolk aligned with Daville to laughing at d’Avenat from the position of the Bosnian rabble (the more upset he gets, the more ridiculous he seems and the more sympathy for the rabble is evoked). But then Andrić complicates that image in that Daville’s loathing reminds us of d’Avenat’s pathetic and tragic position where in trying so hard to not be “oriental” he fails to be “European” – rejected by the masters he serves. Fear, laughter, and pity are built into the complex imagery of this scene.

Much like in these examples, virtually every scene in the novel engaging the dark-vilayet image of Bosnia also undercuts or complicates it, be it with changing perspectives, mirroring, humor, or the chronicler-narrator’s commentary. But, the image of (Enlightenment) Europe as a correlate to the dark vilayet Bosnia is also not as homogenous as one might expect. And neither is the supposed radical separation of Eastern and Western empires. I agree fully with Milutinović that the oppositions one would expect in the novel (East vs. West, French vs. Austrian, European vs. Ottoman) actually dissolve and real differences come from within all these communities.

Daville and the first vizier Mehmed-paša often find common ground in reflecting on the barbarity of the locals. In their very first encounter:

The Vizier made the point of stressing the savagery of this country, the crudity and backwardness of the people. The land was wild, the people impossible. What could be expected of women and children, creatures whom God had not endowed with reason, in a country where even the men were violent and uncouth? Nothing these people did or said

had any significance, nor could it affect the affairs of serious, cultivated men. ‘Curs may bark, but the caravan moves on’ concluded the Vizier (24).

After this conversation, Daville and Mehmed-paša “parted as close acquaintances, each equally convinced that he would be able to carry weight with the other and each well pleased with both his partner and himself” (26). Finding some common ground as civilized men in an uncivilized land, the Western consuls find allies and friends in the Ottoman administration in Bosnia. Or, to put it another way, Daville and Mehmed-paša are generally in agreement as to their position as not only civilized but *civilizing* men of empire sent to appease the local unruly natives.<sup>63</sup>

Andrić goes a step further to suggest that the difference that does exist between Eastern and Western empires is merely a cosmetic one. At the very first encounter of the Westerners and the Ottomans, an allegorical image of Bosnia is proposed: the two Divans. They are a “stage” divided in two: the lower, ground level, “dimly lit,” sparsely furnished only with floor-level seating and the “the Imperial emblem, the Emperor’s monogram inscribed on green paper in letters of gold” and the upper, with even less furniture but with walls of glass – windows Mehmed-paša ordered from Austria, unknown in all of Bosnia that make the upper divan “more pleasant, with more light, green foliage or blossom, a breeze, and the sound of water, the chirruping of birds, peace for repose and quiet for reflection and reaching agreements” (22-3). The lower divan is clearly identified with Islam and the Ottomans, the upper with Europe. The crucial conclusion, however, is that in the upper divan, much like in the lower, “many a difficult and terrifying decision was made or approved here, but somehow, all things, when discussed here, *seemed* easier, clearer, and more humane than on the first floor Divan” (33). In other words, from the very beginning, Andrić proposes an only *seemingly* different empire in the

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<sup>63</sup> There is also always a contrast being drawn between these men and their clear cut identities and the local hybrid “barbarians” as I will show below.

Western one, and one that only *pretends* to more humanity than the Ottoman. This line of thought, however, is much more dominant in *The Bridge on the Drina* as I show below.

Similarly, the purported difference between the East and West in terms of brutality and violence is demystified here as well. The new Vizier, Ibrahim-paša, shocks Daville and von Mitterer with a presentation of heads supposedly beheaded in Zvornik quelling a peasant uprising. The two Europeans can hardly recover especially when they learn the beheadings were a random massacre of the Bosnian, not Serbian peasantry. Daville “felt tormented by the realization that he never would succeed in finding a *rational* way of assessing *these* people and *their* actions” (175, emphasis mine). The next few lines, however, reveal that the violence against the Bosnian natives was helped in part by the Westerners: von Mitterer helps lure Ahmed bey Cerić (a local commander siding with Daville) into Travnik to be executed. There is hardly any moral ground for them to stand on in their judgment of the supposedly “Oriental” violence.

In the same vein, the brutal scenes of the *çarski* rebellion at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are buttressed by commentaries challenging the perception of “Oriental brutality.” The chronicler-narrator first explains the general sense of betrayal the Bosnian Muslim elite felt as the origin of the uprising and the melding of the ruling elite and the lumpen proletariat in the brutality of the rebellion itself:

In *an accurate presentiment* of the upheavals and damaging changes to come, these people felt betrayed from within and threatened from the outside. ... And so their energies spun about and were spent on the wind. And in the congested towns, among the high hills, where different faiths and opposing interests lived in their adjoining quarters, a tense and explosive atmosphere built up, in which nothing was impossible, in which blind forces clashed and frenzied brawls kept breaking out.

[...]

Feeling clearly that this rebellion in Serbia threatened what was closest and dearest to them, that this Vizier, like all the Ottomans, was not protecting as he should, and that they personally no longer had the strength or the will to protect themselves, the more prosperous Bosnian Turks fell into a state of *morbid irritability typical of a group of people under threat*. And they retaliated with quite arbitrary cruelty. Their example

was often followed by the town's poor as well, the very lowliest who had nothing to lose (246).

With the context set, Andrić, never shying away from displaying the graphic scenes of arbitrary violence – here as much as in the most notorious scene of impalement in *The Bridge on the Drina* – describes the torture and execution of random Serbs in the town square. Des Fosses is the only foreign witness to these brutal executions. He forces himself to watch because of his rational commitment “to see and experience everything.” He is dumbstruck by the terror he’s seen and can only “faithfully and factually, [enter] a special paragraph about the way ‘sentences of death are carried out in Bosnia on the rayah and rebels’ in his book on Bosnia” (250). Des Fosses is not privy to the contextualization the “good” chronicler provides above, and takes the brutality he’s witnessed as some particularity of the Bosnian Oriental or exotic otherness. The sarcastic comment on this European “shocked” by the violence of a *çarsi* rebellion, at a time when “battles of unprecedented scale and horror and of still not fully understood historical consequences were being waged in Europe” comes from Anna Maria, who, in one of her irrational fits calls her husband Robespierre, only to remind us of the Revolutionary terror that ought be the context of Des Fosses’ thoughts on violence. In addition, the terror in Travnik occurs during the largest battle in European history up to that point – the Battle of Wagram – and the bloodiest battle of the entire Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars up to that point. Von Mitterer, as the narrator says, receives a letter from Daville, “on that same summer day – it was July 5<sup>th</sup> 1809 – the beginning of the battle of Wagram” (292). The binary pitting civilized Europeans against barbaric Orientals is challenged once again while the final note on violence and Europe will come from Solomon Atijas at the very end of the novel as I explain below.

Among themselves, Europeans are far from uniform or homogenous. But their differences are not the readily apparent: French vs. Austrian, for example. Despite the official hostile attitude imposed onto the Austrian and French consulates by their home politics, von Mitterer and Daville are, in fact, quite similar. The narrator often points out this basic agreement about life in Bosnia that the two men have but that only rarely, when the two empires are *not* at war, they feel free to express. Except for those rare moments of peace, they are “imitating, like two obedient puppets on long strings, the movements of the great distant battle whose ultimate aims were unknown to them” (83). They scheme, spy, and attempt to undercut each other in whatever way possible, most of the time wasting time and effort on inconsequential matters. As the narrator warns us: “We shall not be able to avoid many [of] those consular storms in a teacup and all their battles and schemes, many of which were comic, some pitiful and the majority trivial and pointless” (82). At the same time they are but mirrors of each other:

But even then, the strong, invisible thread between the two Consuls, the ‘two exiles’ as they called one another in their letters, was not broken. ... During the nights, when Travnik would already have sunk deep into darkness, [...] Monsieur Daville or Herr von Mitterer, leaving his work for a moment, would go up to the window and gaze out at the solitary light on the hill opposite, by which his neighbor and adversary was forging unknown traps and plots, endeavoring to undermine his colleague from across the Lašva and thwart his intentions. [...] one or the other Consul, or both at the same time, would be staring into the darkness at the feeble ray of his opponent’s light and thinking of the other with sympathy, deep understanding and sincere compassion (83-4).

Their feverish scheming is made particularly humorous by the contrast of their high, bureaucratic language in their official reports and the lowly positions they hold, on the outskirts of empire: “endeavoring to undermine his colleague from across the Lašva,” as if this small river in Bosnia were the La Manche. The central narrator, in a chronicler’s voice (“it would be lengthy and superfluous process to recount all those consular storms...”; “We shall not be able to avoid”),

speaks of these similarities and differences between Daville and von Mitterer, with clear disdain for both: “They ended up slandering and maligning each other like two quarreling women” (82).

Their storm in a teacup is also revealing another, much larger point: just about all of the typical “difficulties” a Western man encounters while traveling the Orient and that the Europeans in the novel lament frequently – missing papers, postponed arrivals, and general mayhem whenever one tries to accomplish something – are, in fact, not the inherent nature of the Orient, the Ottomans, or Bosnia, but rather their very own scheming, slandering, and practice of bribing local figures to prevent the other consul from accomplishing the task he set out to do. For example, Von Mitterer’s very arrival into Travnik was delayed by none other than Daville and d’Avenat who work tirelessly hiring spies, bribing local officials, even installing a double agent in von Mitterer’s service only to delay the inevitable but humiliate his opponent. In conclusion of this episode, the narrator says, once again with an inescapable dose of irony:

So the Austrian Consul General experienced what virtually always happened to foreigners coming to Turkey on business with the Turks. Such a man would be from the very first annoyed, wearied and humiliated by the Turks, partly willfully and consciously, and partly unintentionally, by sheer force of circumstance. As a result he approached the work he had come to do with already diminished strength and weakened self-confidence (78).

And then, the narrator proceeds to tell the story of von Mitterer’s scheming and spying on the French Consul. Buttressed by explanations of these many delays and troubles encountered in Bosnia as results of Westerners’ own rivalry, this stereotypical description of “Oriental troubles” challenges the very notion that “Oriental” is anything other than European imperial rivalry itself.

In contrast to the ‘old guard’ Daville and von Mitterer, Des Fosses is as different from both men as is possible. In fact, much of the conflict between the two Frenchmen revolves

around the basic conflict in French (and European) society following the French revolution and Napoleon's rise to power. The narrator treats Daville with obvious scorn and, typically for Andrić, criticizes his writing. Andrić often offers examples of "bad" chroniclers; Daville and Des Fosses in the *Bosnian Chronicle*, Muderis in *The Bridge on the Drina* among others. In the brief history of Daville's life we find that he cried for Luis XVI as much as for Mirabeau; that he was simply swept up in the Revolution; he realized that "every step and every thought was filled with superhuman grandeur and dignity;" and that the Revolution was a "general explosion of divine justice over the whole of humanity." However, Daville's infatuation with the Revolution was not ideological but rather petty and personal: "as the weak always are intoxicated when they succeed in finding a common and generally recognized formula which promises to satisfy their needs and instincts at the price of other people's ruin, and which at the same time frees them from pangs of conscience and responsibility" (48-9). Daville's "Bohemian stomach" could not take the Revolutionary terror and soon he found himself "among the more moderate." Daville runs away to escape prosecution but, upon his return, rises in the ranks of the Foreign Affairs due to personal connections. Once again we see that Daville's most damning flaw is his weakness of character and the way he gets swept up in any social change as long as he can find himself a comfortable spot. Daville thus initially supports Napoleon but with ever more nations "infected with this restlessness ... falling into that *ring dance of exulted, whirling dervishes*" Daville's support wanes (52, emphasis mine). In all, Daville is fraught with many flaws including weakness and infatuation with each historical change, but the betrayal of principles is perhaps his worst.

Des Fosses, on the other hand, is a child of the Revolution. For Daville, “the Monarchy, Revolution, and Napoleon were fundamental issues by which he measured himself and others,” while for Des Fosses:

The Monarchy was a fairy tale, the Revolution a dim childhood memory. The Empire was life itself, life and career, the straightforward, natural scene of unlimited possibilities, actions, exploits and glory. In fact, for Des Fosses the order he lived in, that is the Empire, represented the one and only completely coherent reality, stretching in a spiritual and material sense from one end of the horizon to the other and including everything which life itself comprised (54).

In this context, Des Fosses’ commentary about the non-French world shying away from roads leading to France (as natives in Bosnia do) is far from a moralistic one; he is, after all, a perfect man of Napoleonic empire: “for him the order he lived in, that is the Empire, represented the one and only completely coherent reality, stretching in a spiritual and material sense from one end of the horizon to the other and including everything which life itself comprised” (54-61). This is not to say that Des Fosses does not have moments of weakness as we have already seen, but rather that Des Fosses’ rationality and enlightenment are one with the Napoleonic order.

For all of Des Fosses’ attempts to “understand” the Bosnians and for all his astute observations about Bosnia (the archeology of civilizations and the roads, the singing, and the role of the Franciscans in education), Des Fosses is not the “free citizen” in all its perfection. Much like Daville, Des Fosses often walks up to the window at night, looking out into the darkness and silence over Travnik. They’d often see little else but their own reflection in the window, while their Austrian colleagues, on the other side of town would be the only other light visible in Travnik. Andrić often transitions from the French onto the Austrian set of characters through this gesture of seeing oneself in the window as if it were a mirror at night, suggesting each time, how fiercely opposed and yet identical the two Western consulates are.

Des Fosses embodies Enlightenment and rationality: “young man with a keen gaze, cold and sensual, light and self-confident, unencumbered by doubt or consideration for others.” But as we can see in that last line, Des Fosses also illustrates the failure of self-assured Enlightenment Europe. For all his research, for example, Des Fosses is superficial in his “examinations” and the chronicler-narrator comments as derisively about Des Fosse’s book on Bosnia as on Daville’s epic *Tauride*: “The material for his book on Bosnia was ready. He was pleased that he had got to know this country and glad that he was able to leave it. He had struggled with its silence, its many deprivations, and now, unbeaten and cheerful, he was leaving.” The “gentle irony” Lešić and others describe as the hallmark of Andrić’s style appears once again here to suggest the young Consul’s research is not as complete as he thinks, nor his observations followed through to the end. After all, his stay in Bosnia was limited to a few months.<sup>64</sup>

Des Fosses’ “research” and book ought to remind us of the numerous colonial and imperialist texts about “Others” that share in the superficiality and the mistaken self-assurance of their often incomplete or outright incorrect conclusions. His “native informants” provide his best remarks: fra Ivo on the archeology of the roads and their destruction by natives, or the townsfolk about Musa the singer among others. But, nothing is as illustrative of Des Fosses (and Enlightenment Europe’s) fundamental shortsightedness as his encounter with Ludi Švabo (Crazy Kraut), a mentally ill town’s fool. Andrić confronts here two ways of dealing with fools: the Islamic, Ottoman one of tolerating the mentally ill in their midst with the exaggeratedly rational,

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<sup>64</sup> Also, as Tejumola Olaniyan reminds me, Des Fosses’ longer stay in Bosnia would hardly help matters considering his ideological outlook – one that does not change according to empirical evidence, at least not as much as Des Fosses imagines. Tomislav Longinović also reminds me that Des Fosses is, in part, a reflection on the brutality of revolutionary practices and personalities, something Andrić knew first hand as a member of the Young Bosnia movement, and something he metacritically mocks here: his own youth and absolutism in viewing the world. This tempered hostility towards the figure of the revolutionary can be found in many other places in his oeuvre, among them in the portrayal of Radisav in the *Bridge on the Drina* as I show below.

European way of dealing with irrationality. The town's idle youth and the khavaz decide to play a joke on the "young consul": they egg on the mentally ill man into a confrontation with the Des Fosses. Before the khavaz could intervene as planned, Des Fosses tackles Ludi Švabo and proceeds to lecture the madman:

The madman, his face contorted, looked from his aching arm to the young foreigner who wagged his finger reproachfully at him, *as at a child*, and said in his clipped, bookish accent: 'You are naughty. You mustn't be naughty.' (60, translation modified).

The patronizing tone and the attempt to teach the fool proper manners demonstrate the extent to which Des Fosses "rationality" is theoretical and not equipped to deal with the everyday. In the end, the Ottoman way of "letting the madmen be" seems far superior to Des Fosses' lecturing this poor fool in literary Turkish not even the Vizier himself could understand. Contrary to Zoran Milutinović's reading of Des Fosses as embodying an European identity that is "benevolent, without disdain, willing to learn more about [Bosnia]," I believe that Des Fosses illustrates the colonizing rationality of Enlightenment, both in his acceptance of (Napoleonic) empire as the natural order and in the failures of rationalism (or its superficiality) in the service of that same empire.<sup>65</sup>

As Zoran Milutinović also points out, and as these examples show, the "Orientalism" in the novel is not coming from Andrić as the authorial voice as many readings have held (whether in approval or in opposition to it). The narrative style, the changes in narrative perspective, and the use of humor and "gentle irony" all contradict such a flat reading of Andrić's narrative. As Lešić says, Andrić was "experimenting with the possibility of narration from a removed perspective and with multiple points of view" (257). Even in the few examples cited here we can

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<sup>65</sup> This is not to say, however, that rationality or even Enlightenment are being dismissed in toto, but rather that their limits and ideological undertones of imperialism are being exposed here.

see the narrative tone and language change according to character zones. The consular storm in a teacup is narrated with highly bureaucratic diction while Daville's understanding of the Revolution as a reflection of his overall character is full of unfortunate metaphors: "Revolution was a general explosion of divine justice over the whole humanity."

Reflecting on the overarching theme of misunderstandings, Milutinović's conclusion is that this novel is "Andrić's address to that Europe with the same message of hope in an eventual meeting and understanding. ... *Bosnian Chronicle* wants to be an interpreter between Bosnia and Europe" (Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture (Studia Imagologica, No. 18)* 22). I argue that considering carefully the construction of meaning in the novel, we will find Andrić far more skeptical and critical about Europe than Milutinović suggests. The novel as a whole attempts to undermine the "European" perception of Bosnia and reevaluate the notion of its backwardness. The central theme in the novel – the perception of otherness – questions the very divisions and perceptions at the heart of the dark-vilayet imago and Orientalism as such. Portrayal of Europeans and the breakdown of the Orientalist paradigm in the novel offer, in turn, translation and hybridity as a new paradigm to which I now turn.

### ***The Eternal Interpreters***

*One can apply to them the words written by the great Jelaludin, Jelaludin Rumi, six centuries ago: 'For I cannot recognize myself. I am neither Christian, nor Jewish, nor Parsee, nor Muslim. I am neither from the East, nor the West, neither from the land, nor the sea.' That is how they are.*

*Bosnian Chronicle*

Lešić describes a particular notion of character self-consciousness becoming the consciousness of the story itself *about its own meaning*. In the *Bosnian Chronicle* it is the

translators, but especially Cologna, that function in this manner. But, while these are consciousnesses or models beyond the character itself, it does not mean that “Andrić is formulating them as a conclusion, a point one is to draw from his story as its lesson. On the contrary, he constitutes this consciousness *as part of what is happening in the story and what is revealed as the meaning of events, rather than some final truth about life*, one that could be abstracted from the story as a nut from a shell” (Lešić 243, emphasis mine). The vast majority of Andrić’s characters in this novel as in most of his works are hybrid characters. They are the typically Mediterranean medieval mixtures of Venetian, Arab, Turkish, Balkan, and Italian origins, indicating first and foremost the influence of empires on the lives of the people in the Balkans. Especially prominent examples are d’Avenat – in the novel referred to as Davna in a slavicized form of his name. D’Avenat’s origins are in Piedmont, but he was born in Savoy and *chose* to be French. His original name was Cesare Davenato, but he somehow ended up in Istanbul where he was assigned his third and final name: Davna.

We know him from the beginning of the novel as a man “dark, bitter and onerous to himself and others, servile at all times and despicably small in the face of power, state, and riches, insolent, truculent and merciless towards all that is weak, poor, and imperfect. The only thing that made him better was love for his son” (41). Similarly, d’Avenat’s archenemy, Nikola Rotta, a translator for the Austrian Consul, is a mirror image of d’Avenat: “supercilious, haughty, in surly silence, dark eyes, short yet full of himself, except in front of important folk when his eyes turn towards the ground but remain insolent, condescending and beyond reach” (111). Rotta was originally from Trieste, son of a shoemaker – Giovanni Scarparotta [Torn Shoe] – but he spent most of his life trying to escape his origins. He married a “Levantine” woman whose father was from Istanbul but originally Croatian while her mother was Greek (116). Both were

translators and while Rotta supposedly spoke ten languages, his “best ware was his ability to shut up his opponent” (111). Encounters between these two are humorous but they are painted as small, poor men who desired to move up and away from their origins, to “make something of themselves” or at least make their children live more comfortably, but ultimately failed in both. They are as much indicative of the hybridity empires produce as they are cautionary tales like many of Andrić’s translator characters. Rotta eventually arrives at a conclusion that “life appeared as a continuous, infinite path, with nothing eternal or reliable, a perfidious play of an infinite number of mirrors in which ever new, but equally sly perspectives open up ever farther away” (116). He began to acquire “the dry and insolent tone that all men in service and translators in the Middle East have and which is only an outward expression of the inner desolation” (116). Having escaped his origin, Rotta was left with only a path that, in his case, ended in a house of mirrors with no clear way out. D’Avenat (the Amendment) is equally off course, as he is returned to Istanbul after the closure of the French consulate.

The third “translator/healer” character is the ultimate hybrid: Venetian father, Dalmatian mother, born on the island of Cephalonia, (the home of Odysseus), spent his childhood in Greece, youth in Italy, most of his life on the Levant, in both Turkish and Austrian service (242). But, even more than that, Cologne is as “undetermined” as the borderlands in which he has spent his life: “undetermined age, undetermined origin, nationality, and race, undetermined beliefs and views and equally undetermined knowledge and experience. Overall, there wasn’t much that could be determined more precisely about this man” (242). He is strange in appearance, and “not only his facial expression but his whole appearance changed constantly, and changed fully and beyond belief” (242). But his changes of expression and his movements, apart from marking him as a devilish or even otherworldly character, are also explained by his “feverishly fast brain

processes.” Recalling his origin in Cephalonia, Cologna was “a man of contemporary beliefs, a ‘philosopher,’ free and critical spirit, free from all prejudice,” a skeptic whose interest in religion is marked from the very beginning (243). He doesn’t have much of a stable name either, adding Epirota (from Epirus or after Pyrrhus) or *dottore illyrico* to his name, or even more suggestively Bartolo d’Epiro [Dr. Bartolo (of the Barber of Seville) in Pyrrhic victory].<sup>66</sup> Unlike d’Avenat and Rotta, Cologna is not just a hybrid or a translator of cultures, but a fully committed philosopher: “These inner, spiritual victories were his true world and that is where he had inspiration and true experiences. But that is also what separated and alienated him from people and society and that brought him into conflict with logic and healthy sense of the rest of the world” (245). Von Mitterer’s wife, Ana Maria, once again correctly although completely illogically calls Cologna Chronos – a “character” we encounter even more directly in *The Bridge on the Drina*.

In only two significant appearances in the novel, Cologna becomes that consciousness that moves beyond the character and becomes a commentary on the narrative as a whole. First, he describes the impossible life on the border – Andrić’s frequent topic:

For [a Westerner] to live in Turkey means to walk along a knife-edge and to burn on a smoldering fire. I know this, for we are born on that knife edge, we live and die on it, and we grow up and are burned out.

No one knows what it means to be born and to live on the brink, between two worlds, knowing and understanding both of them, and to be unable to do anything to explain them to each other and bring them closer. To love and to hate both, to hesitate and waver all one’s life. To have two homelands, and yet have none. To be everywhere at home and to remain forever a stranger. In short, to live crucified, but as both victim and torturer at once. [...]

That is the fate of a man from the Levant, for he is ‘*poussiere humaine*,’ human dust, drifting painfully between East and West, belonging to neither and beaten by both. These are people who know many languages, but none is their own, who know two faiths, but

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<sup>66</sup> While it may seem somewhat far fetched to read into the names of the characters to this extent, Andrić’s characters often have such overdetermined names, including the archaic sounding original title of his novel, the *Bridge on the Drina*, which is an anagram of his own name, as many have suggested.

are steadfast in neither. These are the victims of the fatal division of humanity into Christians and non-Christians, eternal interpreters and go-betweens, but who carry in themselves much that is hidden and inexpressible; people who know well East and West, their customs and beliefs, but are equally despised and mistrusted by either side. One can apply to them the words written by the great Jelaludin, Jelaludin Rumi, six centuries ago: 'For I cannot recognize myself. I am neither Christian, nor Jewish, nor Parsee, nor Muslim. I am neither from the East, nor the West, neither from the land, nor the sea.' That is how they are. They are a small, separate humanity, choking under a double burden of Original Sin, needing to be saved and redeemed anew, but no one can see how or by whom. They are people from the frontier, spiritual and physical, from the black and bloody line which was drawn, after some absurd misunderstanding, between people, God's creatures, between whom there should not and must not be any boundaries. They form the narrow edge between the sea and the land, condemned to perpetual movement and unrest. They are the 'third world', where all malediction settled as a result of the division of the earth into two worlds. They are...' (240-41).

Milutinović also calls attention to Cologna's monologue, indicating that Bosnia is much like these Middle Eastern interpreters and that the third world Cologna paints here is "a meeting in mutual understanding which awaits us at the end of the wandering, where nothing is wasted, nothing is lost, everything is connected with everything else, and everything contributes to the wholeness and unity of human culture" (22). Milutinović sees this monologue as an address not to the (old guard?) consuls but "Europe of Enlightenment and good will" with the hope of an eventual understanding and meeting of Europe and Bosnia (22).

Contrary to Milutinović's analysis, I find that Cologna's monologue is explaining Bosnia as a borderland and its people as the only ones who *understand both* Europe *and* the Orient. I see here a critique of the Orientalist division of the world into "two worlds": "These are the victims of *the fatal division of humanity* into Christians and non-Christians, eternal interpreters and go-betweens." As that consciousness of the story about itself, Cologna reflects on the absurdity of European ideology of Orientalism that made Bosnia into a borderland from which one can judge that "black and bloody line" of division. He despairs at that condition but also hopes that there will be a resolution and unification of humanity. In that sense, Cologna pronounces the final

judgment on the house of mirrors that has been the story of the consuls in Travnik: enemies who are friends, and friends who become enemies, and the silent natives, sometimes in fear and sometimes in rebellion. All of that will be once resolved in a “joyous meeting, a glorious, redeeming surprise” (264). The reconciliation he hopes for against all hope is the one between Europe and non-Europe that would unify the absurdly divided world.

But Cologne’s death is a particularly complex commentary on that hope. Contrary to Milutinović and others, I don’t see Cologne’s death as a negation or a qualification of the utopic element he represents. Rather, his conversion to Islam and his violent death embody the “black and bloody line” he speaks of. His conversion to Islam is not actually forced nor is it somehow a lessening of a character premised on multiplicity and hybridity. In a moment of utter chaos in the *çarsi* rebellion, Cologne justifiably claims that he is a better Muslim than the mob. Unlike Sulejman-paša – a “good” Bosniak – the crazed and fanatical youth were executing innocent Christian men, and Cologne attempts to stop them by appealing to Islam, the Sultan, and order. He appeals to the law and threatens with punishment that would follow, and in the mob that forms around him, Cologne correctly condemns them: ‘Thieves, brigands, thugs! You are disgracing the Sultan’s honor! Brigands! Renegades!’ With the imams calling to prayer in the background Cologne responds when someone suggests he cursed Islam:

Who, who cursed the Faith? Cursed the Prophet? *I know Islam better than you, you Bosnian bastard!* I am... I am ...’ screamed Cologne tearing himself away, foaming at the mouth and completely beside himself. [...] Cologne’s indistinct words could be heard, like the gasp of a suffocating man: ‘...A Muslim...I am, a better Muslim than you...’ (255, emphasis mine).

In the context, Cologne actually responds as we would expect him to – from within his philosophical moral consciousness guided by his strict moral compass: we know he is as Muslim as he is Christian much like his beloved Jelaludin Rumi says. He also *knows* Islam, in the sense

of having studied the Koran and Islamic saints in detail, as we learned earlier. And he certainly behaves in a more moral manner expected of true believers than the mob he confronts. The repetition of “I am ... a Muslim” three times in the description of the event clarifies the question of forced conversion. The problem arises not with Cologne but with the Christian community in town who cannot explain his conversion by any other means than force or insanity. Rotta visits him and declares him mad because “as soon as a man starts talking about God and the Devil he must be mad” (256). Rotta is referring to Cologne’s citation of two hadiths in his final words:

On his old face, or rather only in his eyes, there appeared a *significant, triumphant* smile. And *as though he were revealing some important secret*, he said quietly, shaking his finger:  
 ‘Aleikhiselam says: ‘The Devil runs through the human body like blood.’ But Aleikhiselam also says: ‘You will truly see your Lord as you see the moon when it is full.’

The first hadith is a comment on the overwhelming presence of evil in human beings, especially warning men of the way the Devil enters them through evil thoughts (Sahih Bukhari 33:251), while the second one confirms once again that truth and justice will prevail in the end. (Sahih Bukhari 93: 531).<sup>67</sup> The first hadith speaks to Rotta’s own shock and dismay at seeing Cologne confirm his conversion. (The hadith describes Muhamed warning his disciples not to think ill

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<sup>67</sup> Sahih Bukhari 33: 251: “Narrated Ali bin Al-Husain: Safiya, the wife of the Prophet told me that she went to Allah's Apostle to visit him in the mosque while he was in Itikaf in the last ten days of Ramadan. She had a talk with him for a while, then she got up in order to return home. The Prophet accompanied her. When they reached the gate of the mosque, opposite the door of Um-Salama, two Ansari men were passing by and they greeted Allah's Apostle . He told them: Do not run away! And said, "She is (my wife) Safi'ya bint Huyai." Both of them said, "Subhan Allah, (How dare we think of any evil) O Allah's Apostle!" And they felt it. The Prophet said (to them), "Satan reaches everywhere in the human body as blood reaches in it, (everywhere in one's body). I was afraid lest Satan might insert an evil thought in your minds."

Sahih Bukhari 93: 531: “We were sitting with the Prophet and he looked at the moon on the night of the full-moon and said, "You people will see your Lord as you see this full moon, and you will have no trouble in seeing Him, so if you can avoid missing (through sleep or business, etc.) a prayer before sunrise (Fajr) and a prayer before sunset (Asr) you must do so." (There are many references in the hadiths to this particular line but they all address the end of the world and the reunification of the true believers with Allah).

thoughts based on assumptions.) But the Christians in town are bound to see Cologna's conversion as something evil and impermissible. The second hadith reaffirms what we know Cologna already believes about this divided world: that there will be a "joyful surprise" and that the good will prevail. This is why he smiles a "significant and triumphant smile" and why he is revealing a secret in his words to Rotta: that all shall be reconciled. Rather than taking something away from Cologna's message, his last words as well as his death, reaffirm his message about the "absurd misunderstanding" at the core of the division of the world on the basis of faith. He dies precisely because the dividing line is absolute.

Cologna describes Bosnian destiny as that of eternal interpreters. This concept, more than any other in his oeuvre, summarizes the complex and at times conflicting relationship Andrić has with Bosnia. Educated in the West and in many ways belonging to Western modernism in his philosophy of history as much as in his literary works, Andrić was also a member of a true bilingual intelligentsia bringing home ideas of liberation and emancipation from foreign rule. I also understand his "eternal interpreters" as an "interpretive allegory" in a Jamesonian sense – in that it captures the eternal desire not just to "bridge" (as many have noted) but actually make commensurate the East and the West. But, translation and interpretation as endeavors of commensuration (equivalence between texts) always carry within them the very impossibility of final or absolute equivalence.<sup>68</sup> Hence the always implosive end to Andrić's narratives: Cologna,

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<sup>68</sup> As Translation Studies since the 1970s teach us, whether we expand the field upon which translation enforces "equivalence" between two idioms from word to text to discourse to culture or we collapse the very concept of equivalence in the Derridian *differance*, translation is always caught up in the impossibility of complete equivalence. For an introductory overview on these ideas in translation studies see Alessandra Riccardi eds., *Translations Studies: Perspectives on an Emerging Discipline*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; Susan Bassnett *Translation Studies*, New York: Routledge, 1988; and Jeremy Munday *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications*, New York: Routledge, 2012. For text-level theories of translation see Christine Nord *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997; for discourse-level theories of translation see Mona Baker *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, London: Routledge, 2011; for the 'cultural-turn' in translation studies, see especially Susan Bassnett and Lefevere, Andre eds. *Translation*,

Alihodža, and the bridge all die (the latter anthropomorphized). There is a distinct sense of impossibility in these interpretive allegories, a point at which such characters die but hold onto the hope of transcendence. Cologna still believes in the apocalyptic justice, Alihodža dies denying the ungodly destruction of the bridge, and even the bridge, with its broken arches, longs to be made whole: “in the distance the pier cut short like a gigantic tree-trunk and scattered in a thousand pieces and the arches left and right of it brutally cut short. *And the broken arches longed painfully towards one another across the break.* (Andrić, *Na Drini ćuprija* 311–12). In some sense then, the desire to be made whole is part of that which remains after translation: the “irreducible differences” that are “always already present before [translation] begins” and whose negotiation carries meaning in itself (Riccardi 12). The “irreducible differences” are then the impossibility of being made whole and in the eternal desire to do so, or in short, the interpretive move *as identity*.<sup>69</sup> So while Cologna believes in the possibility of the final unification of the world, Andrić is far more pessimistic.

The final word then is not a denial of Cologna’s utopianism but rather the suspicion and mourning of its impossibility. Structurally this is reminiscent of the modernist logic: the yearning for and a deepening awareness of the impossibility of the unification of subject and object. This is why Milutinović claims that Andrić’s narrative “lacks a modernist or avant-garde strategy of redemption,” and instead focuses on the “Faustian dynamism and its ‘bad infinite’” (Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture (Studia Imagologica, No. 18)* 222). But in seeing the undying hope and the bridge’s anthropomorphized longing to be

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*History and Culture*, London: Pinter, 1990. For the deconstructionist collapse of the notion of translational equivalence, see Jacques Derrida, “Des tours de Babel,” in Joseph F. Graham ed., *Difference in Translation*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 165-207.

<sup>69</sup> For a specific study of the notion of Cultural Translation in the present context, see Tomislav Longinović “Fearful Asymmetries: A Manifesto of Cultural Translation” in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 35, No. 2, (Autumn, 2002), pp. 5 – 12.

whole, we can still find traces of that “good eternity” modernists were after. Here we can identify one aspect of Andrić’s social context, that is, the contradiction awaiting resolution in his work and that is the typically modern desire for unification, for wholeness, and the increasing skepticism in its realization. In Andrić’s context, this teleological move is inextricably linked with the division of the world into European and non-European and the meditation on the Bosnian identity that is both seeking to unite the two sides and is aware of the impossibility of a perfect unity at the same time. In short, Andrić’s meditation on the Bosnian identity in this novel is a meditation of that Western educated bilingual intelligentsia torn between identifying with the modernist European philosophy of history on the one hand, and seeing its failures on the margins of Europe, on the other. Or, alternatively, Bosnian identity is one that cannot reconcile the “imperial” and “native” spaces as the bridge stands for just such a desire in Mehmedpaša (see below).

But Andrić can hardly be optimistic about Europe observing it from his Belgrade shelter in 1942. In a highly unusual move, Andrić signed the end of *Bosnian Chronicle: 1942*, inviting us to consider the context of both the narrative and the time of writing. The final section of the novel, after Cologna’s death, relies in great deal on this contextualization. The literary technique is simple: chronicler-narrator who “knows more than is needed to tell the story” relies on such knowledge in the reader to connect the seemingly disparate moments in the final pages of the narrative. An interpretive thread appears between several independent actors whose statements draw a direct line from the time of the consuls to the carnage of two world wars. The first allusion to the world wars comes from the teftedar representing the waning Ottoman Empire:

Tahir Bey bent his head slightly and looked at Daville with a bright, slightly squinting look, a look you see in weasels and martens, nimble creatures that slit throats and drink blood but do not eat the flesh of the animal they have killed. [...] “There has been perpetual war between the Christian states for centuries. [...] Christian nations condemn

to such an extent that they always accuse the other side of being responsible for every war. Yet while condemning it, they never cease to wage it. [...] So it could perhaps happen, that in the very place where you and I are now discussing the possibility of a Turkish-Christian war, a hundred or two hundred years from now Christians, liberated from Ottoman domination, will be slaying one another and shedding each other's blood" (304-5).

The narrator points out that the only "victor" in Travnik in these times of inter-imperialist rivalry on the outskirts of the Ottoman Empire is von Paulić and Austria-Hungary, alluding not coincidentally to Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia following the Berlin Congress. The colonial takeover of Bosnia through the cotton trade and other exports of raw materials is depicted as one of the real reasons why the consuls ever came to Travnik. Daville consoles Fraysinnet, a young man tasked with establishing the commercial agency *Les Frères Fraysinnet* in Sarajevo:

'Yes, conditions are difficult, we all know that from personal experience, but we must be patient. French reason must in the end prevail over their hastiness and arrogance, we must just ...'

'We must get away from here, Monsieur le Consul General, and as soon as possible [...]' Daville continued to soothe him, assuring him that they must be patient and wait; the business could not simply be abandoned. Sarajevo played an important role, unrewarding but important, in the great Imperial plan [...] 'That is our bitter lot and we must accept it, however hard we find it. Even if we do not see the sense and purpose of the plan we are helping to realize, that does not mean that it will not bear fruit...' (320-1).

Daville's newly found conviction is reminiscent of the "white man's burden" – the hallmark of justifications for colonialism. The Bosniak community, on the other hand, is utterly unprepared for this colonial takeover and much that would follow: Musa and his friends are drinking themselves slowly to death, indulging in the crumbs falling to Bosnian natives from the cotton trade that the colonial powers are running. One of Musa's drinking buddies tells the story of how his uncle made money on cotton:

'Carrying for the French?'

‘Hell no, buying up and reselling the cotton you ‘find’ in the villages.’  
[...] Everyone’s picking at Bunaparta’s cotton and plucking it from the branches as though this was Egypt ...’ (296).

Reeling Hodja continues daydreaming how he could meet Napoleon one day: “If the two of us could only have it out, damn his infidel soul, and let the best man win” but his “senseless words were lost in absolute silence.” After arguing some more with his friends, Reeling Hodja concludes:

‘Ah, I keep telling you, one fine day you have to get off your backside and go into the world, instead of just wasting away and rotting in this Travnik bog, and either you win some glory or die once and for all. How long have I been telling you, but you two keep on: don’t, not yet, later, tomorrow. And here we are ...’ [...] So the time passed, while Musa lay, silent and motionless, hovering and flying with the wind and warm earth, freed, at least for a moment, from the laws of gravity and the chains of time (298-9).

But the chains of time, much like the laws of gravity condemn these idle town youth to failure.

The Serbian community, at the same time, is “smoldering” beneath the landowners’ rule, waiting for their moment in World War I. In an epic mode, their prophet Marko also predicts the Second World War, even though his epic tone is ridiculed by the narrator:

At first just a few incomprehensible words and then increasingly clearly. ‘Ah, woe to Christians, poor Christians!’

This was one of those general prophecies which Marko would utter from time to time and which were later spread from person to person among the Serbs: ‘They have trodden in blood. There is blood to their ankles, and it is still rising. There will be blood, from today, for one hundred years; and half another hundred [mid 20<sup>th</sup> century]. So much I see. Six generations passing down to each other handfuls of blood. All Christian blood. There will come a time when every child will know how to read and write; people will speak to each other from one end of the world to the other and they will hear every word, but they will be unable to understand each other. Some will grow arrogant and acquire treasure such as no one has never known, but their riches will vanish in blood and neither speed nor skill will help them. Others will grow poor and hungry, so that they will eat their own tongue for hunger and call on death to dispatch them, but death will be deaf and slow. And whatever the earth brings forth, all nourishment will grow sickly with blood. The cross will turn black. Then a man will come, naked and barefoot, with no staff or bag, and he will dazzle everyone’s eyes with wisdom, strength and beauty, and he will save mankind from blood and violence and bring comfort to every soul. And the third of the Three shall reign’ [...] (372).

Marko also goes on to predict that the Russian consul will not arrive as the Serb merchants had hoped and that the current ones will leave and “the main road will turn away from this town.” The merchants shall be selling and buying from each other (372).

The narrative connects all such threads, from the new vizier who comes to pacify Bosnia (and as the reader knows, does it in the bloodiest of all such pacifications), to the arrival of colonial trade in cotton, to the Austro-Hungarian victory in this inter-imperial rivalry, to the “smoldering fire” that resides in the Serbian peasantry in Marko’s prophecy and their eventual rebellion against foreign rule at the beginning of World War I, all the way to the bloodshed of World War II, first mentioned by the teftedar but in the very last words on the novel, embodied in Solomon Atijas and his plea for justice. These moments at the end are a summary narrative of Bosnian experience with imperialism from the days of the inter-imperialist rivalry in Travnik in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century all the way to World War II. The political indictment of Europe from Napoleon to Auschwitz is clear, especially when Atijas, or rather, the narrator gives voice to the Jews, silenced both then and in 1942:

[Atijas] felt increasingly strongly the need to say something else to this foreigner, about himself and his people, something urgent and secret, from this Travnik pit... something that would be a message directed he did not himself know to whom, to some better, more orderly and enlightened world out there, to which the consul was returning (387).

Atijas’ desire and need to communicate this weighty message about his people actually ends up stifling him, preventing him from finding “the right way and the words he needed to express briefly but adequately what was now stifling him.” Daville misunderstands Atijas’ emotionally charged and unconnected words for an expression of gratitude. But the narrator takes over, speaking for those whose voices were being silenced across Europe:

It will never be possible to say what it was that was stifling Salomon Atijas at that moment, what was driving tears to his eyes and an agitated trembling through his whole body. Had he known how, had he been able to speak at all, this is roughly what he would have said:

...  
 ‘Painful things and great upsets have taken place in your country. But it is a noble and powerful country and it must all change for the better. ... It is we who remain here who are to be pitied... You have seen the life we lead, and you have done us every kind of good a man may do a man. ... That is why we dare to ask also this of you: to be our witness in the West from where we ourselves once came and where people ought to know what has been done to us. For, it seems to me, if we were sure that someone knew and acknowledged that we are not what we seem, that we are not as we live, then everything we have to endure would be easier (388).

There is a genuine belief here in what the French Revolution brought about in the world and a hope that Atijas’ humanity can be recognized by Daville and even to be advocated for there “in the West.” The historical parallel with the Holocaust is inescapable: to endure “what has been done” to them would be made easier by an acknowledgment of their humanity just as the Holocaust was made particularly horrific by the bystanders refusing to acknowledge the victims’ humanity.

Returning to the narrative time frame, Atijas’ predicament as a Sephardic Jew in the Balkans is indistinguishable from Colonna’s description of Bosnians. The narrative of the better, “third” world reappears:

‘More than three hundred years ago we were lifted out of our homeland, our one and only Andalusia, by a terrible, senseless, fratricidal whirlwind, which we still cannot understand today, and which has yet to understand itself. ... and our torment lies in the fact that we were unable either completely to come to love this land to which we owe the fact that it took us in and gave us refuge, nor were we able to come to hate the one that drove us unjustly away, exiling us like unworthy sons. We do not know whether it is harder for us to be here or not to be there. ... I know that we were changed long ago, we no longer remember what we were like, but we do remember that we were different. ... We cannot free ourselves of this, nor of the feeling that, despite everything, we belong to such a world, although we live, persecuted and miserable, in its opposite. There, that is what we should like for them to know over there. That our name should not perish in that brighter, higher world which is constantly darkened and disrupted, constantly shifting and changing, but is never destroyed and always exists somewhere, for someone. That this world should know that we carry it in our hearts, that we serve it

even here, in our way, and that we feel at one with it, although we are forever hopelessly separated from it (389-90).

There is a hope for Europe being expressed here from the margins, a belief or conviction that despite the current horrors, in particular the Holocaust, Europe can survive in some fashion and still represent a better world. Despite its constant “disruption,” the idea of Europe is never destroyed as Atijas’ yearning for it demonstrates. Despite being able to see that this same Europe is “constantly darkened and disrupted”, Atijas, a Sephardic Jewish character in a novel written in 1942, speaks for the ideal that Europe represents not only to Europeans themselves, but to those who are on its margins, both literally and symbolically.

The narrator endorses this imagined monologue:

But all that was far from being completely clear and precise in his consciousness, and still less ripe for expression. It lay in him vivid and heavy, but unspoken and inexpressible. And who does ever succeed in expressing his finest feelings and best impulses? No one, virtually no one” (390).

And if Atijas’ yearning for Europe and the West is the finest of feelings and best of impulses, one has to reconsider Andrić’s engagement with Europe in this novel. Rather than being just an indictment of all that is inexcusably immoral about European colonialism, the novel reveals, through Salomon Atijas, an undying belief in Europe, and that for which it stands - a “brighter and higher world.” The expression of this belief demonstrates not only Atijas’ nobility but also a bitter indictment of Europe in the Holocaust. As the utopian element in this belief is contextualized, however, the idea of Europe might seem unrealistic if not outright suicidal (at least for Atijas). But Andrić’s own stance towards Europe lies precisely in this indeterminacy, an acknowledgment and indictment of Europe for colonialism, imperialism, and fascism, and yet, an

undying belief in its possibility, at least as seen from its margins, where the torment lies in not knowing whether it is “harder for us to be here or not to be there.”

### ***Chronicler of Olden Bosnia, Poet of Modernity***

While the *Bosnian Chronicle* focuses on the translation between two bitterly divided worlds through their intermediary in the Balkans and while its narrative spans the early modern period in Bosnia, *The Bridge on the Drina* focuses not so much on the 500-year history of the town of Višegrad, (or the Ottoman “yoke” as is often claimed), but rather, on the processes of modernization and Westernization and ‘Europe’s’ arrival into Bosnia. The dark-vilayet *imago* read *into* this novel is a key misrepresentation used by national(istic) analyses on either side. An analysis of the western, Austro-Hungarian modern empire rooted in capitalism, rather than the Ottoman “Asiatic” one, dominates reflections of empire and plays a more deciding role in the novel. In what follows, I’ll show how Andrić’s modernism and rejection of epic narrative norms also dismisses the orientalized imagery. In the end I will reflect on the overarching theme of this novel – the philosophy of history as witnessed by Višegrad.

The master of composition, obsessed with structural inversions and anagrams, Andrić divides this novel into 24 chapters, 10 chapters on the Ottoman period of over 300 years, one chapter devoted exclusively to presenting the nature of the modern, capitalist state, a middle, transformative 12<sup>th</sup> chapter standing alone with its cautionary Mephistophelian tale about the arrival of modern, money economy, and the remaining 12 chapters on the 36 years following the

Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia.<sup>70</sup> The twelfth chapter, much like the *kapija* [gate in the middle of the bridge] on which it mostly takes place, is a particularly symbolic and transcendental moment as the Devil makes an appearance and is not very subtly identified with modernization and especially the greed of finance capitalism and the modern money economy.

The two-sided narrative, separated by the symbolic and transcendental chronotope of the *kapija* – the central point of the bridge and a floating centerpiece, hovering over the ravine both literally and symbolically – functions in many ways as a comparison of the medieval and Ottoman period on the one hand and the modern, Western period on the other. Traditionally, *kapija* and the bridge were often read as a metaphor for Bosnia – hovering above the ravine, unstable, and unfixed, somewhere between East and West. But in the text, the bridge is not a link between East and West, but rather a link between the periphery and the center of Ottoman Empire. As such it foresees the theme of empire that orients the entire novel.

One of the defining moments and figures in the text is Mehmed-paša Sokolović – the Christian-born Grand Vizier who built the bridge. Most positivistic interpretations focus on the moment he is taken by the Janissaries as the moment of origin for the Serbian suffering in the Ottoman, dark-vilayet Bosnia. A closer look at Andrić's narrative structure and the narrative "close ups" will show how the tragedy of this scene is qualified by a more existential moment of (artistic) motivation. The narrator first describes this particular scene from afar:

The chosen children were laden onto little Bosnian horses in a long convoy. On each horse were tow plaited panniers, like those for fruit, one on each side, and in every pannier was put a child, each taken from their parents' homes (Andrić, *Na Drini ćuprija* 24; Andrić and Edwards).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> For anagrams and structural elements in Andrić see Wayne S. Vucinich *Ivo Andrić Revisited: The Bridge Still Stands* (Research Series (University of California, Berkeley International and Area Studies)). Univ of California Intl &, 1996. Web. 26 May 2013.

<sup>71</sup> As earlier, translations are either my own or with reference to the Lovett Edwards translation of the novel.

Then he moves very closely to the perspective of the children's mothers:

A little behind the last horses in that strange convoy straggled, disheveled and exhausted many parents and relatives [...] The mothers were especially persistent and hard to restrain. Some would rush forward not looking where they were going, with bare breasts, and disheveled hair, forgetting everything about them, wailing and lamenting as at a burial, while others almost out of their minds moaned as if their wombs were being torn by birth pangs, and blinded with tears ran right onto the horsemen's whips... (24).

Here the national(istic) reading stops. The brutality of the Janissary system, the "stealing" of children, ripped from the mother's (nation's) womb as described here are inevitable points of focus in such readings. But the narrative continues, changing perspective yet again to that of the young boy who is to become one of the most important and influential Grand Viziers in Ottoman Empire:

He was to remember that stony bank overgrown with sparse, bare and dull gray willows, the surly ferryman ... 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, where desolation and despair were extinguished and remained on the stony banks of the river, across which passage was so difficult, so expensive and so unsafe. It was here, at this *particularly painful spot in that hilly and poverty-stricken district, in which misfortune was open and evident, that man was halted by powers stronger than he and, ashamed of his powerlessness, was forced to recognize more clearly his own misery and that of others, his own backwardness and that of others* (25).

That pain described here is his powerlessness against brute forces of nature and the backwardness of his home that becomes the inspiration to build the bridge:

In one of those moments he felt that he might be able to free himself from this discomfort if he could do away with that ferry on the distant Drina, around which so much misery and inconvenience gathered and increased incessantly, and bridge the steep banks and the evil water between them, [...] and thus link safely and for ever Bosnia and the East, the place of his origin and the places of his life (26).

In that moment, the Grand Vizier sees, in his mind's eye, the "firm graceful silhouette of the great stone bridge" (26). In the shifting of perspectives I've quoted here at length we can see the

way in which the initial, tragic scene is qualified by the boy's perspective – he is not despairing over being taken away from Bosnia or even for being forced to convert to Islam as the mothers are, but rather mourns the poverty, backwardness, and death itself personified in the ferryman and the crossing of the river.<sup>72</sup> His inspiration is born out of pain and offers itself as a resolution to his conflicted life in the imperial center far away from his provincial, desolate homeland. Finally, in his imagination the bridge arises also as an art form, graceful and firm (as opposed to purely utilitarian) and hints at a frequent theme in Andrić's texts: art in confrontation with death. We will see this theme again in this novel in Ćorkan's transcendental crossing of the bridge parapet, dancing, much like Aska in front of the wolf in his earlier short story.<sup>73</sup>

The scene with the mothers running after their children who are being taken to serve an imperial army repeats itself in the second half of the novel:

A far greater commotion than that made by the recruits themselves was made by the women, mothers, sisters and other relatives of the young men who had come from distant villages to say farewell, to see them for the last time, to weep, to wail and to give them some last gift or final sign of love. [...] In vain it had been earlier explained to them in their villages that the young men were going neither to war nor to slavery, but that they would serve the Emperor in Vienna, and be well fed [...] All that passed over their heads like the wind, foreign and completely incomprehensible. They listened only to their instincts and would only be guided by them. These ancient and inherited instincts brought tears to their eyes and a wail to their throats, forced them persistently to follow as long as they could and try to get a last glance at him whom they loved more than life and whom an unknown Emperor was carrying off into the unknown (170).

This situational rhyme works two ways: first to suggest that much as the mothers in the second scene were overreacting so were the ones in the first scene, and second, to suggest that while the mothers were being reassured that their children now, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, will come to no

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<sup>72</sup> There are numerous hints about death and crossing into the otherworld in the passages describing the ferryman. Andrić references several mythologies and their respective ferrymen controlling the afterworld: like Charon in Greek mythology he is in a foul mood, gigantic and strong, unkempt, and cranky. Like Malik in Islamic mythology, Jamak never smiles, like Dea Tacita in Roman mythology he is the personification of terror of obscurity. Blackness alludes to Ancient Slavic Chernobog, while the name itself – Jamak – refers to Persian mythological character, a God of death and hell in Hindu, Persian, and even Buddhist traditions.

<sup>73</sup> The theme of art vs. death is well developed in Andrić's short story *Aska and the Wolf*.

ill in being conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army, they do have much more in common with those Ottoman-era mothers in that their children are taken away to serve in a foreign, imperial military to be maimed or die doing so. At first the mothers seem simply irrational, guided by “ancient instincts,” and much as we were identifying with the tragedy of the mothers at the beginning, here we laugh at their unreasonable and overly dramatic send off. The first, as Lešić argues, would be a scene with high mimetic tonality while the second one would be one with low mimetic quality. However, soon enough, we’ll witness these same recruits being taken to war and their mothers’ “ancient instincts” confirmed by reality. Naturally, we, as readers, already “know” this – and this is where Andrić’s narrative takes on another level of ironic suggestion, a quality Slavko Leovac describes: “It is a position of a chronicler; the one who knows (and knows *much more* than is necessary for the story he tells)” (Leovac 194).

Qualifying that initial, tragic narrative and epic tone through the individual perspective, developing the irony in the situational rhyme, and positing artistic inspiration as a way to overcome the tragic experiences of empire as the above examples show, hints at the way Andrić will challenge the epic narrative form throughout this novel. Modern forms, themes, and preoccupations drive this novel and present a move away from the model of literature based on the oral epic and the “nation as character” model that dominated the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that is fundamentally linked to an orientalized view of Bosnian history.<sup>74</sup> In that most basic sense, Andrić is not only a chronicler of ‘olden’ Bosnia as is often postulated but also a poet of its modernity. Ironically, positivistic readings fail precisely in reading these modern elements.

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<sup>74</sup> We shouldn’t forget that there is a fundamental link between the orientalized image of Ottoman Bosnia and the influence of the West in the codification of the oral epic tradition. In the context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century national revivals led by the bilingual intelligentsia educated in the West, under the strong influence of, at this point, orientalized anti-Ottoman sentiment prevalent in Europe, oral epic tradition as we know it today is created. Historically conditioned villains of epic poetry – the Ottoman Empire and its servants – get further filtered through the Western anti-Ottoman sentiment. This is evident in the codification of the poetry into “male” epic and “female” ballads as well as a selection process focused exclusively on the epic poetry of the Christian population.

Orientalist imagery proper, in the words of an unnamed foreigner, opens *The Bridge on the Drina*. Once again, ideological frames of reference usually reserved for colonial and oriental discourse compose this view: The townsfolk are defined by their geography and their bridge as a symbol of transcendence: they suffer melancholic improvidence and have affinity for meditation, day-dreaming, and pleasures, thoughtless and frivolous folks, careless with their possessions; a town in which only foreigners are prudent and lust-free (17-18). The narrator humanizes these “orientalist” characteristics offering alternative explanations. For example, the carelessness with their possessions and improvident, thoughtless attitude of the townsfolk are a matter of “being born with an open hand and outstretched fingers,” i.e. being honest, generous, direct, and not miserly. But a much wider point is being made about the typical Orientalist construction that uses geography or nature to explain human characteristics, in this case, the bridge explaining melancholy:

And yet, it is difficult to say to what extent such opinion is correct. As in so many things, here too it is difficult to say what is the cause and what the consequence. Did the *kapija* create the townsfolk as they are or is it rather that *the kapija was imagined in their spirit and understanding and built to suit them and their needs and habits?* A vain and needless question. *There are no incidental buildings, standing apart from society in which they appear, apart from the needs, wishes, and understandings of their society, just as there are no arbitrary lines or figures without a cause in building.* All the while, the creation and lifetime of every big, beautiful, and useful building, just as its relation towards the town where it stands, carry within themselves complex and mysterious dramas of history (18).

Andrić here inextricably links the town and the bridge, but returns the agency not to the geography or climate (as in orientalism), not to the townsfolk or the foreigners, not even the bridge as such, but to History itself, only *embodied* in the “line of the stone bridge with eleven arches, with *kapija*, like a crown, in the middle” (19). There is a structural parallel at play here: just as all the lines and figures of a building are constructive of its meaning, so is the art/bridge

structurally a part of the social fabric of its time. And furthermore, art or the bridge, inasmuch as it is structurally defining and defined by the social fabric, also carries within itself the inscriptions of history. It is that History (or rather philosophy of history) the rest of the novel attempts to engage.

Two key features of the dark vilayet image of Bosnia are the despotic (“Asiatic”) mode of production, with all the brutality it implies, and the mythical, legendary resistance it encounters among the Serbian peasants, linking again the Orientalist baggage with national(istic) readings. Misreadings of the peasant rebellion in the novel are perfectly embodied in the recent construction of an “Andrićgrad” – a stone “city” built by the bridge in Višegrad to honor the author as a “great Serb.”<sup>75</sup> First, I discuss the character Radisav and the particular scene of his impalement that seems to fuel national(istic) readings of Andrić’s oeuvre, (as Žanić points out<sup>76</sup>) and second, I discuss the Asiatic mode of production presented in the novel through the building of the bridge itself.

The Ottoman “yoke,” the “dark-vilayet,” and other ideologically fueled and national(istic) tropes for interpreting Bosnia under the Ottoman rule focus on the brutality of the empire, the near slavery of the Christian population, and the ultimate sacrifices Serbian epic heroes make to defend the nation. *The Bridge on the Drina* certainly engages all of these images

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<sup>75</sup> Recent comments include: “I am amazed at the monumental grandiose project being built by Kusturica. The idea this great artist is realizing on the right bank of the most Serbian, legendary river Drina has an enormous civilizational importance for the general cultural, social and ethnic space of Balkans as a whole, in which for centuries, different faiths and cultures are intermixing” Radoš Bajić cited in RTS Bajić i Kusturica kroz ‘Andrićgrad’ (Bajić).

President of Republika Srpska noted at the grand opening of Andrićgrad: “This stone city ought to change the image of the entire county, but it will also send a clear message that the Serbian people do not want to renounce their heroes and that the Serbian people are prepared to build even such structures as this one, that will be a remembrance to the great work of a Nobel Prize winner” Poskok.info International Edition “Dodik: Kad imam vremena čitam Andrića da lakše shvatim život u BiH” (Poskok.info).

<sup>76</sup> See Ivo Žanić “Pisac na osami. Upotreba Andrićeve književnosti u ratu u Bosni i Hercegovini.” *Erasmus* 18 (1996): 48–57.

of the despotic Ottoman Empire and mostly through the character of Abidaga, the first Vizier's Trustee to supervise the building of the bridge. He is at the center of an analysis of power not only of the Ottoman state over the Serbian peasants but also the power of real and petty tyrants everywhere.

The third chapter introduces both Abidaga – the corrupt, unhealthy, and mythically evil Vizier's Trustee – and Radisav – his nemesis, a rebellious Serbian peasant who dared to stop the construction of the bridge, Abidaga's only task. The medieval peasants as well as the townsfolk have little understanding for the construction of the bridge, especially because of the immense need for labor and resources. The peasants are desperate to end the construction lasting already three years with no sign of the bridge that is to span the river. They have almost completely abandoned their fields and are starving. The townsfolk and landowners are actually in agreement with their peasants: while the promised bridge is a "great endowment" by the Grand Vizier who's originally from their town, the "chaos, turmoil, labor and expense" are turning them against the whole thing. And as one would expect of a medieval populace, they cannot quite understand the building process on such a grand scale. The townsfolk think:

Their town turned into hell, a witches' Sabbath of incomprehensible activities, smoke, dust, screams, and commotion. Years have passed, the construction expands and grows, but one can't see their end or their purpose. This looks like all kinds of things, but a bridge? No (30).

This agreement of the natives against the building of the bridge, that is to be repeated at other times in the novel, begins to blur the lines between the evil Abidaga and the heroic Radisav and their respective communities. The Muslim townsfolk and landowners have much more in common with the Serbian peasants than with the strange folks surrounding this alien construction. Important to note here is the tone of the narrator "who knows more than is

necessary to tell the story” here, one that is easy to identify with (the narrator and the reader are “in the know”, privy to a modern understanding and familiar with history that is to follow) and therefore easy to follow into the symbolic minefield that is Radisav.

The oral epic form makes its first direct appearance here: a Montenegrin with the traditional gusle instrument communes a circle around him of poor and overworked peasants who are mesmerized with his songs of great Serbian victories and quests against the Ottomans:

The peasants pressed closer and closer around the singer but without making the slightest noise; their very breathing could be heard. They half closed their eyes, carried away with wonder. Thrills ran up and down their spines, their backs straightened up, their breasts expanded, their eye shone, their fingers opened and shut and their jaw muscles tightened (34).

With the “close up” of the peasants in a mythical epic poetry circle, the narrator brings us to the edge of the epic, heroic set up: the building of the bridge is, like much else, oppressing the peasants beyond their breaking point and in the mythical circle, the idea of resistance is born. The scene has been prepared for Radisav – the epic hero.

Radisav’s physical description, as is often the case in Andrić, reveals his immediate characterization not as a hero like Czar Stefan from the Montenegrin’s song, not even a warrior, but a rather pathetic, small, everyday peasant: “smallish man, dark-faced, with restless eyes, a little bent, and walked quickly, spreading out his legs and moving his head and shoulders from left to right, right to left, as if sowing wheat” (34). Much like that first appearance, Radisav is revealed to be neither a mythical force (as children’s’ memories would have it) nor a great martyr (as the Christians in town believe) but rather a revolutionary, and at that, not a proto-national one but a proto-socialist one. Radisav tries to convince his fellow peasants to join him in secretly destroying the bridge overnight and spreading rumors that witches are to blame:

You can see for yourself that this building work will be the death of all of us. ... For us this work means extermination and nothing less. A bridge is no good to the poor and the *rayah*, but only for the Turks; we can neither raise armies nor carry on trade (35).

In addition, much like a good Party organizer, Radisav was neither

as poor as he appeared to be, nor as simple as he made himself out. ... This small, bowed Radisav had been [...] sowing revolt and had insinuated himself among the peasants like an eel, whispering and counseling with only one at a time (34).

Andrić also makes sure we don't forget this clear signal of Radisav's revolutionary and class-oriented nature many chapters later when the first socialist in town – student Herak – turns out to be from the Radisav family line, just some 350 years later.

Stripped of any heroic characteristics, painted as a peasant calling for an uprising against labor exploitation by the landowners and the state, and even somewhat repulsive (an *eel*), Radisav makes his way to the executioner. There, in the most graphic and violent scene in all of Andrić's oeuvre, Radisav is impaled and left to die a torturous death. This is where Radisav is transformed into a quasi-epic hero, a metamorphosis based on the *distance* between him and the people, not his conduct or appearance: "he seemed to all those there too wretched and too insignificant to have done the deed which now brought him to execution" (47). The readers are afforded a privileged point of view – high above and up close to the execution itself – one that is not available to the people who are witnessing the execution as the narrator stresses repeatedly.

There can hardly be any mistake about the brutality of the execution – the very thing both on display and hidden from the audience. The execution itself is conducted in the space of the future *kapija*: "There, high above the water was a boarded space about the size of a small room. On it, as on a raised stage, they took their places, Radisav, Pljevljak and the three gypsies, with the rest of the guards posted around them on the staging" (48). In a parallel to the cross that

becomes the symbol of the act of crucifixion in the Bible, the impalement (stake) becomes the symbol of Ottoman oppression in the Serbian epic. Parallels with Christ are obvious in other ways, but especially in the myth of Radisav's resurrection. However, there is also a strong accent on how the execution itself, the martyrdom, makes Radisav into someone he is not: his face becomes a mask, his body a statue:

Since the man could no longer control some of his facial muscles, the face looked like a mask. [...] he seemed to the people like a statue hovering in air, on the very edge of the scaffolding, high above the river (49-50).

The theatricality of the execution also signals its social role as Foucauldian analysis would point out. But the focus on the brutality of the act, the sounds and the sights of the impaling of a human body take something away from the would-be solemn nature of martyrdom. The methodical, scientific, almost medical description of the stake passing through Radisav's body stands in clear contrast to the manner in which epic poetry deals with impalement as a symbol of Ottoman repression. The naturalistic and scientific description represents the opposite of and disrupts the symbolism of this scene. And in this case, the execution itself is revealed as a consequence of the avalanche of fear that motives everyone, from Abidaga to Pljevljak to the executioner. The entire scene builds up to a demystification of martyrdom, not its celebration.

Even more importantly, Radisav is also not fulfilling the role epos and mythology dictate: a human sacrifice that the bridge, like all great human endeavors "requires." That is reserved for the young African, a "distant echo" of empire and imperial expansion embodied in a typical medieval Mediterranean hybrid character. He, not Radisav (who *intentionally* starts the mythical immurement story as part of his rebellion), becomes that symbolic sacrifice as an accident immures half of his body into the center stone of the bridge – the kapija. It is only after his death

that the bridge becomes finally recognizable as a bridge: “At the same time, that formless mass of crisscrossed beams and pieces over the river started to deflate and thin, so that through it, now, the true bridge made of beautiful white stone, was becoming more clearly visible (65).”

The mythical immurement stresses the victims of empire, not the Serbian peasant but the young African, from a family “lost” in Ulcinj, signaling the global reach of the empires and their distant echoes in Bosnia. The narrative references empire, in fact, from the very beginning of construction, as the funds for the bridge come from Mehmed-paša’s Hungarian lands. These moments belong to a connecting thread in the novel about the echoes of empire that the natives in Bosnia can barely perceive or understand but that, in one way or another, influence the town in fundamental ways.

Here then is Andrić’s qualification of the Radisav myth: a kernel of historical truth, filtered in many ways, trickles down to us as myth. The story of Radisav, much like the short story *Put Alije Đerzeleza* that Lešić analyzes, represents Andrić’s deconstruction of the oral epic form and style. Radisav starts out as a small man, “like an eel,” but ends up, and not on his own accord, an epic hero. Đerzelez travels in the opposite direction: starts out an epic hero and ends up a modern, ironically inflected, “everyman” character.<sup>77</sup>

Abidaga, at the same time, is a corrupt, petty tyrant who passes his fear onto those around him, including Pljevljak, his subordinate. Abidaga’s life is miserable mostly on account of his position and the fear of losing it. In another close up, the narrator speaks Abidaga’s thoughts:

Then it might chance that he might fall into disgrace with the Vizier. That was what prevented him from sleeping, and even when he did fall asleep he trembled in his dreams. His food seemed poison to him, men seemed odious and his life dark when he even thought of it. Disgrace – that meant that he would be exiled from the Vizier’s presence that his enemies would laugh at him (Ah! Anything but that!)... (42)

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<sup>77</sup> See Zdenko Lešić *Pripovjedači: Ćorović, Kočić, Andrić, Samokovlija, Humo*. Sarajevo: Veselin Masleša, 1988.

That fear motivates Abidaga to be as cruel as he knows how toward his subordinates but, tellingly, in a very intimate way:

Listen, blockhead, you are clever with these sons of swine, you know their language and all their trickeries, and yet you are incapable of finding out which vile one dared to spoil the Vizier's work. And that's only because you are as vile as them, and the only worse one is whoever made you leader and chief and has found nobody to reward you as you deserve. ... If all damage to the works does not cease within three days... (37).

Threatened with his own impalement, Pljevljak passes on the brutality:

'Blind good for nothings!' raged the man from Plevlje, as if he were already placed alive upon the stake and yelling in the face of each of those guards. ...I will massacre all of

you; not a single one of you will keep his head on his shoulders if in two days this business does not end and if you don't seize and kill these bastards! (Ibid).

And the fear and brutality are passed down the line of command until they reach their intended end in Radisav. The passing on of brutality between Abidaga and Pljevljak – two men who hate each other otherwise – is also inflected with irony and presents a rare moment of humor in these scenes.

The search party section of the chapter is as fine an analysis of how brutality operates in just about any power structure as one can get in just a few paragraphs. In the above cited passages we also have a good example of the “ironic smirk” Leovac identifies in Andrić's narratives, where behind the brutality of the historical moment and the *seemingly* objective narrative, ironic commentary on Abidaga vs. Pljevljak applies in quite a general way to humanity as such: our primary motivation is always fear. Towards the end of the novel, Andrić will recall this early reflection on tyranny, when he adds “But a man has lords other than his own fear” as the first Austro-Hungarian order comes through ahead of the troops' entrance into Višegrad

(133). It's not surprising that for a modernist like Andrić the only other "lord" more forceful than fear is the modern state.

Abidaga's behavior in contrast to Arifbeg – his successor – qualifies this early portrait of Oriental despotism as well: Arifbeg is as reasonable and as merciful as anyone in that situation could be. So while the heroic Serbian resistance to such conditions – the stuff of epic poetry – is revealed to be motivated by class concerns, not national motivations, Oriental despotism itself seems to hang on the personal, criminal and corrupt behavior of Abidaga, comparable to many modern tyrants. In addition, the myths introduced as the guiding signposts in the first chapter of this novel are historicized in the process while their epic narrative forms are challenged by the modern, ironically inflected narrative.

As we could see above, references to empires are present from the opening pages of the novel, but in the second part of the novel the narrative focuses on the Austro-Hungarian modernizing, capitalist Empire. The old hybrid Mediterranean characters are replaced with equally hybrid Central European ones, and the town, having been in the declining Ottoman empire for some time ("the rotten-ripe Turkey of the 19<sup>th</sup> century"), is initially impressed with the Austro-Hungarian modern, imperial military. The seemingly impressive Austro-Hungarian military commander, however, is dethroned the moment he gets off his horse:

As soon as his feet touched the ground, the colonel was transfigured. He was a small, undistinguished, overtired, unpleasant and aggressive man, behaving as if he alone had fought for all of them. Only now could it be seen that he was simply dressed, disheveled and ungroomed in contrast to his pale-faced smartly-uniformed officer. He was the image of a man who drives himself mercilessly, who continually overtaxes himself. His face was flushed, his beard untrimmed, his eyes troubled and anxious ... Walking with legs apart like a horseman he came closer, swinging his riding crop (131).

And much like the colonel who up close displays all the ills of a modern man, anxious and overtaxed, so the new capitalist order only *appears* to be fundamentally kinder and better system.

The new state is only seemingly gentler as the townsfolk notice the foreigners are establishing an “invisible but all the more palpable web of laws, orders, and regulations” with which they seek to “embrace all forms of life, men, beasts and things, and to change and alter everything.” But, unlike the Ottomans “all this they did quietly and without many words, without force or provocation, *so that a man had nothing to protest about*” (135). The older natives somewhat inadvertently but accurately diagnose the curse of modernity afflicting the men of empire:

Who and what were these strangers who, it seemed, did not know the meaning of rest and respite, knew neither measure nor limits? What did they want? With what plans had they come? What is this *restlessness* which continually drove them on, *like some curse*, to new works and enterprises of which no one could see the end? (137, emphasis mine).

An important inversion of roles also comes from this bewilderment at the restlessness of modernity, the one linked directly to empire, where the natives assume the adult roles and the foreigners behave like children:

Just when they thought that all this incomprehensible energy had come to an end, the newcomers started some fresh and even more incomprehensible task. The townsmen stopped and looked at all this work, *but not like children who love to watch the work of adults but as adults who stop for a moment to watch children's games* (139, emphasis mine).

The resistance to change portrayed here in Šemsibeg is fundamentally futile and self-destructive, but Alihodža on the other hand, will come to represent a more moderate and reasonable skepticism towards all that is modern. The narrator is aligned with Alihodža from the start as this old curmudgeon repeatedly foresees the true nature and purpose of the foreigner's activities: to destroy the bridge, to gather information in a census to recruit men into their army, etc.

The critique of capitalism, modernity, and empire culminates in the fourteenth chapter:

Such were those 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).

Most of the chapter covers the precise nature of this *fata morgana*, such as the only seemingly more bearable state power (impersonal and indirect), but hiding “all that was cruel and predatory” behind the “dignity and glitter of traditional forms.” This new life was not “in any way less subject to conditions or less restricted than in Turkish times”, and the state “got as much or more, even more swiftly and surely” (175). Equally deceiving were the possibilities offered in the new system: wealth was on display, and “the mass of the people could see something of its glitter, even if only in its trash.” The circulation of money on the other hand, “even in the poorest man, induced the illusion that his poverty is only temporary and therefore more bearable” (192). And finally, even the desires and gratifications that were now exposed and in public and thus seemed more easily obtainable, were in fact producing “even there more restrictions, order and legal hindrance; vices were punished and enjoyments paid for even more heavily and dearly than before, but the laws and methods were different and allowed the people, in this as in all else, *the illusion that life had suddenly become wider, more luxurious, and more free*” (176). Towards the end of the novel we’ll also see the dark side of this capitalist illusion of comfort and possibility when the market crash affects the town and the entire systems seems like “a crazy and perfidious game which more and more embittered the lives of more and more people, but in which they could do nothing for it depended on *something far away, on those same unattainable and unknown sources whence had come also the prosperity of the first years*” (211). In other words,

just as the arrival of the capitalist empire brought about the illusion of happiness and wealth so did the economic crash in the center bring about the economic collapse in the provinces including Bosnia. The larger point being made, of course, is precisely the distance between that center where all the decisions were being made and the periphery like Bosnia.

A very large portion of the novel is therefore devoted to meticulous observations about capitalism and imperialism, about the invisible web of the modern state and the underbelly of Enlightenment that hides the “unforeseen changes and catastrophes that nations can’t seem to do without, and ours especially” (190). Maintaining the seemingly distant narrator while also infusing these observations with irony captures some of the opacity of capitalist relations as well: where everything is only *seemingly* so. Andrić’s privileged figure – the simile – fits this ironic mode perfectly. Importantly, however, these observations are only small parts of the larger structure of this bricolage narrative, where a single digression cannot stand for the whole and the structure of the whole is only observable through the narrative itself. In other words, while the critique of capitalism and modernization is very much on display in the voice of the narrator in more than half of the novel, we cannot take any single one of these as the “true” meaning of the text. And while they are important in dispelling the myth of the epic hero and the orientalist conviction that the Ottoman Empire was infinitely worse than the Austro-Hungarian one, they are truly just pieces of a much larger image being constructed by the narrative.

Zdenko Lešić describes the structural features of Andrić’s short stories, but his conclusions apply equally well to the novels. He refers to his narratives as kaleidoscopes, not mosaics because the focus is often on small events or digressions in the passage of time. In such a structure, one has to pay attention not only to the new stories, digressions that ultimately form

the whole, but also to the changes and transformations of the role of such digressions. So

Lešić, for example, concludes that

Such motivational extensions of the story can remind us of the classical epic narrator who doesn't neglect a single thing in his path and, in fact, enjoys precisely such lingering and retardation of his story. However, Andrić is a modern narrator and his retardations cannot be interpreted as a traditional epic method. ... They have multiple functions. ... Those developed particularities, purposefully enter the signifying 'web of relations' that holds the entire narrative structure of the short story together. And that is, generally speaking, the character of Andrić's narrative structure: a mosaic, built by many seemingly separate details but in such a way that their overall impression is a very coherent and meaningful whole (171-2).

I would add that Andrić's narrative technique invites a reflection on the form itself. Reminiscent of Frederic Jameson's discussion of History as the absent cause accessible to us only through narrative form, Andrić's philosophy of history is also communicated through the narrative form itself. As Jameson says:

History is therefore the experience of Necessity, and it is this alone which can forestall its thematization or reification as a mere object of representation or as one master code among many others. Necessity is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the *inexorable form of events*; it is therefore *a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative political unconscious* which has been argued here, a *retextualization of History* which does not propose the latter as some new representation or 'vision,' some new content, but *as the formal effects* of what Althusser, following Spinoza, calls an '*absent cause*.' Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its 'ruses' turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intentions. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them (Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* 88).

In other words, it is not the 'historical' content that defines Andrić or limits its interpretations, but rather, in true narrative fashion, Andrić's narratives are the effects of the absent cause that is History itself.

### *Remembrances of Things Eternal*

Contrary to national(istic) readings, Lešić points out that “in most of Andrić’s short stories, Bosnia, as that which is narrated, doesn’t have the characteristic of literal reality, nor does it portend to be understood as that which truly *was*, what is indeed *past* and what is, therefore, real in the most literal sense” (175). In other words, Andrić’s “historical” narrative is not about history as the sum of past events in time. However, his narrative is fundamentally engaged with History as a subject of the narrative that is beyond itself as Jameson would say. As we will see, Andrić’s concept of history is unmistakably modernist, Hegelian and idealist, but all the same aware of the narrative as the only vehicle through which history is accessible to us.

In the very beginning of *The Bridge on the Drina*, Andrić establishes a dichotomy he negotiates over and over again in the novel between those “who love the act of imagination, hate irony, and believe that by careful observations one could really see and experience something” and those “sneering and cynical friends (there’s always at least one of those)” who ruin the game (13). The bridge as a symbol of art and beauty and the stories we tell each other capture the promise of imagination as the redemptive power in a modern world defined by irony. This interplay between irony and redemption-in-art is a continuous feature of Andrić’s narrator: on the hand the mosaic composed of many (sometimes mythical) stories and on the other, the ironic reversals that hold the entire narrative together and define the work as a modern epic. As a signal of History, this narrative dichotomy speaks to Andrić’s ambivalent attitude of resignation and serenity before the “tragedy of history”:

*resignation* (before the unrelenting descent into the past of all that is individual and human) but also a *serenity* (before the immense expanse of time that passes irrespective of every pain and tragedy and which in its passage repeats much of what has already happened: *that is how it was before* Andrić says frequently) (Lešić 192).

Lešić also speaks of a “higher plane” to which all kaleidoscopic elements of Andrić’s narratives relate in their own way, representing “that which, as a whole, cannot even be sensed: the meaning, the form and the expanse of the eternal mosaic of life” (146). (This is very much like History, as Jameson indicates, the structure or metanarrative). He points to the digressions that always, in part, reveal their link to the “whole.” One example is the “retextualization” of history with grammatical tenses: the switch from the preterit to the historical present that often occurs in the dramatic digressions:

He revokes all chronological designation of the event in relation to the narrative moment. In fact, the present indicates that the event has ascended from the depths of the past and exposed itself to our direct experience. Of course, the event thereby has stopped being *past* but did not in turn become *present*. The event simply lost all chronological designation and thereby became only an event in a narrative, whose “veracity” belongs exclusively to the veracity of the narrative itself and is no longer subject to corroboration by history. ... The outer, historical time is subject to the inner narrative time (177).

In other words, the historical present is here understood as an allegorical element, one that emphasizes the narrative essence of history as presented in Andrić’s works. In turn, this chronological allegory points to the cyclical and teleological sense of History that Lešić correctly calls resignation and serenity before the tragedy of history.

Kaleidoscopic narrative, composed of the many digressions that all foretell and signify the “whole,” is reflected in the “mythic consciousness” of the town of Višegrad:

In their blood they carry a sense that true life is composed only of these lulls and that it would be crazy and in vain to unsettle such rare lulls looking for some other, firmer, and more steadfast life which doesn’t exist (104).

In other words, life is all composed of digressions, moments of unusual calm, surrounded by the sea of unsettled and dangerous times. Here is the connection between the Bosnians’ unconscious

sense of History and the larger teleological narrative communicated by the entire narrative structure and form of the novel.

Andrić's supposed narrative objectivity "only appears to be the function of a traditional epic narrator, one that sees all and knows all and one that from somewhere up high, on a narrative Olympus, passes judgment of and about people" (Lešić 177). Through character close-ups Andrić constructs the kaleidoscopic effect, resulting in a narrative liberated from the epic, "objective", and distant narrative stand. He delegitimizes the epic narrative and the epic hero and reconstructs them as modern men, subject to history and time as we have seen in Alija Đerzelez, Radisav, d'Avenat, etc.

But in a narrative whose content is history, Time cannot but be the main hero Lešić reminds us (191). We are all subject to it and nothing but the bridge (but only seemingly) can resist it. However, as Leovac says,

this Chronos is not a Moloch whose actions are terrifying, with large, heroic, warrior victories and losses, but rather, in its essence, it is that calm, unrelenting time, with small but tragic events, that affect all human beings equally, but most often the little and the little known (Leovac 281).

The situational rhymes, as we have seen, also open up a window onto the eternal and again, onto the unconscious philosophy Andrić identifies in his characters. The most repeated such leitmotif is the one about small, insignificant men as the first and most common victims of historical tragedies. All the translators and hybrid characters in the *Bosnian Chronicle* are precisely such broken men, swept up in the "maelstrom of history," as are the many random victims of both Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires in *The Bridge on the Drina*. Lešić goes as far as to call this "fear before big events, before the grinding down of men by history" "an obsessive complex of many of Andrić's characters" (186). In *The Bridge on the Drina*, even the foundational

character – Mehmed paša Sokolović – affirms the tragedy of history as he metamorphosizes in death into the same poor, small, insignificant Serbian peasant that he was at the beginning of his Ottoman life:

Soon after the bridge was finally finished, just as the karavan-saraj opened up, and the bridge earned its prestige around the world, Mehmed-paša felt once again that “black razor” pain in his chest. And this was the last time. [...]

Next to [his murderer] lay the great Vizier, his long shirt undone on his chest and his coat thrown aside. The last few years of his life he lost weight, rounded in his shoulders, and became somehow withered and coarser in his face. And now, *just like that*, undone and bareheaded, bent and sunken in, *he resembled more an aged and beaten down peasant from Sokolovići than a slain dignitary who up until a minute ago ruled the Ottoman Empire (72).*

Much like Rotta and d’Avenat who continuously and feverishly try to escape their poor and peripheral origins, Mehmed-paša Sokolović dies the poor and beaten down peasant he was despite his lifetime of glory in the Ottoman Empire. In other words, even success in the center that Rotta and d’Avenat dream of does not resolve their peripheral “fate.” This is the effect of that merciless and unrelenting Time that may sweep up the poorest and most insignificant men into the “maelstrom of history” first but that, nonetheless, also takes the most powerful ones as surely as it does the least of them. This is the source of that resignation Lešić identifies as well as the source of comfort and serenity that Time is the great equalizer of men, historical injustices, victims and their torturers.

Written during the Second World War, it is not surprising that Andrić’s novels invoke the “tragedy of history” as many of his fellow European intellectuals did the same. This resignation before the terrors of history and the serenity before Eternity of Time are somewhat reminiscent of Walter Benjamin’s *Angel of History*:

A Klee painting named *Angelus Novus* shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread... His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon

wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward (Benjamin et al.).

Benjamin's last major work, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, from which the above passage is taken, was written sometime at the beginning of WWII, conveying the same sense of resignation before the horrors of the Holocaust we have seen in the *Bosnian Chronicle*, especially in Salomon Atijas' final plea to Daville. Andrić was clearly also actively contemplating the most violent inter-European war yet. Benjamin's *Angel*, however, shows a more actively tragic fate of humankind as the *Angel* at least attempts to stop and "awaken the dead." Andrić, on the other hand, has already given up on any hope of intervention in the tragedy of history. And like most modernists, he finds that redemption exclusively in art.

In much of Andrić's fiction and most forcefully in *The Bridge on the Drina* and the short story *Aska and the Wolf*, opposite this tragedy of history and the unrelenting passage of time stand art and beauty. In the novel, it is the permanence if not eternity of the bridge that returns again and again as the only possible transcendence into the eternal "whole" of life. As Lešić says about fra Marko – a character from a series of Andrić's short stories on the Bosnian Franciscans:

Andrić opened up a window not only into [fra Marko's] soul but also into the depths of an almost mythical consciousness, one that, *spiting the historical world*, corresponds with the transcendental. ... The chronological passage of time is contradicted by the sum of life experience and the synthetic order of subjective time... [the story's] entire narrative structure is carried by a transcendental arc of an idea, or rather, of a particularly Andrić-like "remembrance of eternity" (209-11).

This "transcendental arc" was embodied in the bridge quite literally. Two holy fools in the novel cross the parapet of the bridge and experience that connection to the eternal in a transcendence of

their small, insignificant lives on the border. Both Murat/Muta and Ćorkan (Dumb and Blind by name) cross the parapet in a trance:

There were shrieks from the children, startled cries from older people, but [Muta] as though under a spell, with outstretched arms and head flung back, walked on the narrow stone slabs, step by step, as though he were not hovering above the water and the depths, *but taking part in a most wonderful dance* (67, emphasis mine).

And then Ćorkan does the same in another situational rhyme:

Being in this dangerous position Ćorkan separated himself from others and was *now like some gigantic monster above them*. His first steps are slow and sluggish. His heavy clogs slip every so often on the stone slabs covered with a thin sheet of ice. It seems to him that his legs are running away from under him, that the depths beneath him are irresistibly drawing him in, and that he must take off and fall, that he is already falling. But that unusual position and the grave danger that was so near gave him new strength and *hitherto unknown powers*. Struggling to maintain his balance, he kept jumping up ever more lively, and bending in his waist and his knees. *Instead of walking, he himself did not know how but he began to dance, in small steps, without a care in the world, as if he was on a wide open green field and not on the narrow parapet and ice*. And suddenly he became light and skillful, like a man is sometimes in dreams. *His heavy set and spent body is now weightless*. The drunk Ćorkan was beginning to dance and float above the ravine *as if on wings*. He felt as if his body was releasing together with the internal music to which he was dancing, *a torrent of joyful power that provides security and balance*. *The dance was taking him down a path he could not walk*. And not even thinking any more about the danger and the possibility of falling, he leapt from one foot to the other and sang, hands outstretched as if he was accompanying himself on the drum... (117-8).

And the narrator concludes:

In that exceptional and dangerous position, exalted above all others, he was no longer the merry fool Ćorkan from the town and the inn; underneath him is no longer the slippery and narrow stone parapet of the well known bridge where he contemplated a thousand times while chewing on his bread, *a sweet death in the waves*, falling asleep in the shade of the kapija. No, *this is that distant and unattainable voyage of which they had spoken to him every night at the inn, with coarse jokes and derision, and to which he has now finally set out*. This is that *bright, long-desired path of great exploits*, and there, at the distant end of it is the imperial city of Brusa, with real riches and lawful inheritance; and there, somewhere is the sun that has set and the beautiful Paša with a male heir, his wife with his son (118).

The link between this transcendental reality, the “whole” of life and God is extremely tenuous as Milutinović observes. He says:

the final perspective of *the Bridge on the Drina* is conditioned and ironically reversed: it rests on a character's faith in the presence of God's love on earth. If we bracket faith in God's love as the guarantee of redemption, the narrator's irony disappears. Then the final perspective would read: 'Anything could happen' (224).

But we know that Alihodža is the heir of the original administrator for Sokolović's vakf for the bridge, quite literally, the guardian of the exceptional artistic *intervention* in history. Allah's love of the world, in Alihodža's mind, is embodied in the bridge. This is Andrić's *Angel*:

When Allah the Merciful and Compassionate first created this world, the earth was smooth and even as a finely engraved plate. That displeased the devil who envied man this gift of God. And while the earth was still just as it had come from God's hands, damp and soft as unbaked clay, he stole up and scratched the face of God's earth with his nails as much and as deeply as he could. Therefore, the story says, deep rivers and ravines were formed which divided one district from another and kept men apart ... Allah felt pity ... so he sent his angels to help men and make things easier for them. When the angels saw how unfortunate men could not pass those abysses and ravines to finish the work they had to do, but *tormented themselves and looked in vain* and shouted from one side to the other, *they spread their wings above those places and men were able to cross*. So men learned from angels of God how to build bridges and therefore, to build a bridge is only second to building a fountain in the eyes of God and the greatest sin is to harm it because every bridge, from that tree trunk over a mountain creek to this Mehmedpaša's creation has its own angel that cares for it and protects it for as long as God has willed it to stand (229).

In this passage the artistic (the bridge) and the transcendental (the angels) are one. Andrić quite literally unites the redemption-in-art with Alihodža's religious feeling. In the end, as Alihodža is dying with the bridge, his last thoughts are:

Everything can happen. *But one thing cannot*: it cannot be that great, thoughtful, and spiritual men who build *eternal buildings for the love of God*, to make the earth more beautiful and to ease and better man's life on it, *will forever and completely disappear from the world*. If they disappeared that would mean that God's love will extinguish and disappear from the world. *That cannot be* (350).

Andrić is not returning to the "anything and everything can happen" as Milutinović reads this. Rather, he is describing art and beauty as being in a service of a higher purpose. In Alihodža's

mind, this higher purpose is Allah, but in Andrić's entire narrative, this higher purpose is that eternal unity and wholeness accessible to us only through art and in this case, through narrative form. In that sense, the bridge becomes a symbol of redemption, which is possible for as long as there are *artists* willing to create. The disappearance of that artistic impulse is what Andrić denies in "That cannot be." In other words, art in Andrić is that "modernist strategy of redemption" Milutinović seeks.

If we then extrapolate from these hints an image of History in Andrić, it is a modernist one, where the "real history" lies beyond the material world, in the idea of some eternal whole, a place of unification of subject and object, whose traces we can find in stories, in narratives we share with each other. The "maelstrom of history" that surrounds us is inescapable and mostly incomprehensible; its victims are usually those least guilty and least important, but Time, Benjamin's storm coming out of Paradise, is the great equalizer, in the end taking away both good and bad alike. The only intervention in history and the only redemption for humanity lies in art and the artistic impulse to "dance before death" like Ćorkan and Aska dance (and Scheherazade narrates).

A modernist disappointment in humanity is in Andrić slightly more accentuated as disappointment in Europe. Despite that disappointment he always leaves open the possibility and articulates a belief in the future of the idea of Europe (in Atijas' monologue, for example). On the other hand, Andrić never moves beyond a particularly demoralizing sense of natives wise to the ways of empire yet unable to intervene, and unable to translate the differences between East and West only they seem to be able to understand. From the margins of Europe, Andrić casts his Bosnians as eternal interpreters, always failing in the essentially transcendental hope of translation, of uniting the world and making it "whole." And while Andrić's critique of Europe

is so crucial to his works, the sense of Bosnia as the marginal, liminal space of interpretive (and transcendental) failure is haunting.

Modernism from the periphery we find in Andrić is almost a stereotypical description of the bilingual intelligentsia as defined by Benedict Anderson. Here we see the same interplay of forces between ideas and attitudes acquired in the center and their qualifications and modifications in the peripheral perspective. As *Alihodža*, *the bridge*, and *Cologna* all die and Andrić's novels implode under the liminality of this position, we can see the basic dialectic of his generation: how to reconcile all their European experience with the anti-imperialist sentiment against those very same European nations in whose centers these intellectuals came of age? From a member of the Young Bosnia movement in his early career to his devastatingly pessimistic view of human agency in his war-time novels, Andrić has attempted to negotiate that basic conflict: the modernist rejection of capitalist and fascist Europe in favor of the individual and artistic ideal, further tempered by the liminal experience of the Bosnian cultural elite. Periphery and center here establish themselves as basic referents in Bosnian modernity, not least because of Andrić.

In Andrić we have seen a modernist, idealist focus on the spirit of History, Time and Eternity as the repositories of meaning. Andrić posits art itself as the uniquely human ambition of reaching for the eternal, standing above and beyond the tragedy of history; tragedy particularly visible from the periphery. However, Andrić's critique of Europe is still bound by the basic premises of the uniqueness of European civilization, standing on its own, as if without any need of or input from the periphery and the promise of a European miracle marked most forcefully by Solomon Atijas' internal monologue. In this vein, we never see Andrić's Europe engage or use contributions from non-Europe, therefore justifying its unique and hopeful siren's

call. Even his critique of capitalism does not posit any utopian hope of overcoming its hellish conditions, except, of course, in the artistic impulse that overcomes everything. Placed in the context of Andrić narrative innovations, especially the particularly modernist, measured irony that pervades his works, his undying belief in the idea of Europe completes an image of this reluctant proponent of modernization and europeanization. But in that, as I already mentioned, he might speak from within Europe, but his text is unable to move past it in the most literal sense: we still see a desire of the periphery for European acknowledgment. As we will see in the remainder of this chapter, to move past that desire is a task Yugoslav literature will struggle to accomplish well into the present.

## Entering the Heart of Darkness: Meša Selimović

*Selimović sympathetically cites Andrić's third space:*

*'We are separated from both hostile worlds, worlds that live without Cologne's hope that they will ever meet and understand each other, but we are hostile within ourselves, dramatically crucified between self and other, conquered by both and not recognized by either; with an understanding for all that is theirs, but without a desire to be melded or manipulated. This is neither providential condemnation nor tragedy, but that which belongs to us, what life and history determined. And yet we openly and solemnly recognize this isthmus of life as ours, and as essentially possible, and moreover we refuse to renounce that which we are in our very being.'*

*To our mono-national, philological theorists it would seem paradoxical that the above mentioned intercultural hermeneutic valorizes precisely such a position of non-belonging, cultural crossings, and a decentered subject that does not speak from a comforting intra-cultural position (comforting in that it often makes one's national identity into an ideology and the only possible methodology) as the intellectually and scientifically superior position. There is no mono-national truth; objectifying epistemology is achieved with the Other's gaze, while Selimović's stance seems to identify these complementary gazes, and the simultaneous otherness and singularity as a new quality, a new dualistic identity.*

Zvonko Kovač "Dramatically Crucified between Self and Other"

*[Ahmed Nurudin's] attitude towards events, his reaction to misfortunes and injustices is much too often interpreted with moralistic reasoning, within the psychology of the character. One ought to begin interpreting him as a representative novelistic character, as a form that determines psychology. Because, in drama we also see a succession of events, the line of waves, but they*

*all lead to one event, one wave, that one moment in which the 'Birnam forest comes to Dunsinane.' In a novel, there is no such moment. In it the succession of events is that which gives the text meaning. Or if we are speaking of a succession of moments of misfortune and injustice – then the Absurd, rather than 'meaning'. And how does man relate to the absurdity of history? Exactly as Ahmed Nurudin does.*

Tvrtko Kulenović "Time in Novel and Drama"

Meša Selimović represents a key turning point in the Bosnian (and wider Yugoslav) canon primarily because he advances the novelistic form beyond the "modern epic" – at the time in Andrić still the apex of the Yugoslav novel. Another historical novel, Selimović's crowning achievement – *Death and the Dervish* – is decidedly contemporary in form. While in Andrić we could still follow a recognizable historiographic impulse, in Selimović's novel historiography and writing as such take center stage. While Andrić's narrator still fashions the complex kaleidoscopic image of history, Selimović surrenders the narrative voice to the title character, capitalizing on the unreliability of his narrator to 'cunningly' lead us away from the 'facade' and towards the "essential." Tvrtko Kulenović describes this effect as fundamentally postmodernist: "The postmodernist novel does not discourage the reader from participating in the conversation [as the modernist might] but it also does not accept him as an equal: cunningly, it leads the reader to pay attention to a theme, story, unimportant facade all the while leading him towards the true theme" (Kulenović 122). Whether we agree in classifying this effect as postmodernist or not, Selimović's intradiegetic narrator builds just such a complex structure that hides while revealing the inner logic of the text.

Selimović's narrator reflects on the fundamental existential questions as he confronts a world suddenly made alien to him by his brother's imprisonment and death. His narrative, at the same time, has a uniquely lyrical rhythm that helps foreground his psychological portrait and casts dervish's ethical dilemmas in terms of inner, existential struggles. And yet, the novel as a whole, with the help of at first seemingly secondary character Hasan, also reveals a particular

philosophy of literature and History that is focused not on the inner, psychological realm but primarily on the textual and the social realms.

Like Andrić, Selimović also takes up the question of art or writing in liminal situations, in the face of death as the title suggests. But Selimović's narrative also opens up the question of one's relation to the text, the text's social existence, and the role of the reader in the construction of meaning. All the key characters in the novel are writers and readers: scribes Harun and Mula Jusuf (who is also a calligrapher), the narrator Nurudin, the historian Hafiz-Muhamed, the reader Hasan, Marija's husband author of the spy report, etc. Their relationships to texts turn out to be fundamental pieces of the plot as Aleksandar Jerkov points out (Jerkov).

While Andrić's signature figure is the measured, ironic simile, Selimović's text abounds in metaphors, often extended into permanent symbols, or dissolved in complex parallelisms and antitheses.<sup>78</sup> This fact has often misled critics to read Andrić's reserved tone as more "objective" and Selimović's more figurative expression as less "objective" or "historical." Selimović also reaches out into the Islamic poetic tradition and its Bosnian variations to produce a highly lyrical narrative. The unreliable narrator's language is enriched by the particular use of gnomic and poetic phrases to construct this stream-of-consciousness, confessional novel.

In Andrić we have seen a modernist, idealist focus on the spirit of History, Time and Eternity as the repositories of meaning. He posits art as the uniquely human ambition of reaching for the eternal, standing above and beyond the tragedy of history. In Selimović, on the other hand, intervention in the tragedy of history is precisely the point. The plot of *Death and the Dervish* is driven by a series of such interventions or engagements: Harun's decision to react to

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<sup>78</sup> For an analysis of formal elements of style in Selimović see especially Thomas J. Butler. "Literary Style and Poetic Function in Meša Selimović's *The Dervish and Death*." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 52.129 (1974): 533.

the pre-manufactured confession; Nurudin's decision to intervene in the young orphan's life; Hasan's decision to intervene in Marija's husband's flight; even Nurudin's rise to power is premised on the *çarsi* intervention in Hadži-Sinanudin's unjust imprisonment. Agency is defined in Selimović's novel as *intervention*, a social responsibility towards self and others, always premised on a basic sense of existentialist humanism as I will show below.

The critical reception of *Death and the Dervish* was positive if a little unsure in its interpretations. In Yugoslav cultural institutions it was taken for another guide, an extension to Andrić's introduction to Bosnia (this time with a focus on Bosnian Muslims), while abroad the novel was read, translated, and disseminated (especially following the break up of Yugoslavia) as a dissident text, a thinly veiled allegory of Yugoslav 'totalitarianism'. Predrag Palavestra sums up the former:

Meša Selimović's novel, with its murky Islamic fatalism is in many ways a particularly modern oriental tale: hushed enchantment and story weaving, the whisper of deeply hidden secrets. ... [The] symbolism of the exotic spaces, covered with a patina of legend and magic expresses the anxiety of a modern man in an enchanted circle of its own alienation. As some modern allegorical tale, full of deeply hidden meanings and messages, his novels rest on a contemporary experience of the oriental spirit (Palavestra in Lagumdžija 214).

The domestic reception of the novel as an introduction to the life of Bosnian Muslims was inspired in part by Ivo Andrić's unfortunate phrasing: "I have brought literature to the doorstep of the Bosnian home; Selimović took it inside, peeked into the intimate part of its life."<sup>79</sup> Such readings rest on the same premises of fundamental otherness of Islam (and therefore Bosnia) that guided Isidora Sekulić's reading of Andrić, i.e., Bosnia as the dark vilayet. Within these parameters, Selimović's novel is read as the voice of the 'others' that are taken to be missing from Andrić's accounts of Bosnia. In the context of his own texts, however, Andrić's words, as I

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<sup>79</sup> As quoted in Asim Peco. "U funkciji djela (Turcizmi u romanu *Derviš i smrt*)." *Djelo Meše Selimovića u književnoj kritici*. Ed. Razija Lagumdžija. Sarajevo: NIŠRO "Oslobođenje," OOUR Izdavačka djelatnost, 1986. 351.

read them, point out Selimović's development of that "third space" as cited in the epigraph, an extension of that theme we encountered in Andrić. However, the mainstream criticism took this quite literally to mean Bosnian Muslims.

Reception of the novel in the English speaking world followed the same folly in considering the novel a mono-ethnic portrait of Bosnian Muslims or rather, Bosnia itself. This is illustrated well by Henry R. Cooper Jr.'s introduction to the only translation of *Death and the Dervish* into English:

Selimović's Bosnia is extraordinarily uniform. In this regard it bears no resemblance whatsoever either to the colorful variegatedness of Andrić's Bosnia, or to the reality of the country, which was once celebrated as a multiethnic, multicultural, multireligious society and now is being punished for it. Selimović's Bosnia is precisely what the ethnic cleansers, the sectarians, the fundamentalists, the dogmatists hope to achieve: one people, under one code, bowing to one authority (Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey xvi).

Much like placing the responsibility for the ethnic cleansing in the Bosnian war of the 1990s with Andrić, this is an almost unimaginable misreading: not only are there non-Muslim characters in the novel, but the plot is resolved in the end with the help of a Dubrovnik spy, who happens to be a friend of the second most important character in the novel, Hasan, whose entire life is defined by his love for a Christian woman and his rejection of provincial definitions of identity. And in the same breath, this mono-ethnic misreading is followed by another essentialist reading the novel as anti-communist:

Selimović's Ottoman Bosnia is a microcosm of post-World War II Yugoslavia, and postwar Yugoslavia was (it is no more) a microcosm of life in this century. *Death and the Dervish* was received in Yugoslavia as an antitoxin against the fears and hatreds of both the war and the postwar regime, and it can function that way as well for those who do not know Yugoslavia at all (Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey xvi).

Within the post-socialist literary market in translation, *Death and the Dervish* was successfully marketed as a dissident text: it was one of the first few titles in the Northwestern University Press series *Writings from an Unbound Europe*, suggesting that its first appearance in

English 30 years after publication in Yugoslavia was a product of the cordoned off Second World and its restrictive literary practice. Nothing could be further from the truth: Meša Selimović was not only one of the top three authors in socialist Yugoslavia but also a committed communist and member of the Party until his death in 1982. Not only were his books “not bound,” they were awarded the highest literary honors and his name went into consideration for Yugoslavia’s nomination for the Nobel Prize in literature. The anti-communism read into the novel alluded to in Cooper’s commentary rests on a biographical reading of the plot and a confusion of Selimović’s anti-totalitarian and anti-Stalinist politics with a critique of communism as such.<sup>80</sup> If nothing else, the Yugoslav split with Stalin in 1948 makes Selimović’s anti-Stalinism an expression of Yugoslav Party dogma, not its critique.<sup>81</sup>

In all these interpretations simplistic allegories (national, orientalist, or anti-communist) become the norm for reading this masterpiece. I propose here a more nuanced reading, focusing on both form and subject as Kulenović suggests, while also placing *Death and the Dervish* into the context of engagement with the Western, Eurocentric historiographic paradigm. Once again, I’ll focus on the ways in which the center-periphery theme appears in the text and the ways in which the narrative form reveals a particular philosophy of History.

*Death and the Dervish* is a confession of dervish Ahmed Nurudin, told sometime in 17<sup>th</sup> century Sarajevo. The narrative starts a couple of months after Nurudin’s brother’s untimely imprisonment and death at the hands of the state and follows Nurudin’s push back against those responsible for his brother’s fate. The latter part of the novel details Nurudin’s complex revenge

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<sup>80</sup> The biographical inspiration for the novel was identified by the author himself as the death of his own brother, executed by the military court during World War II.

<sup>81</sup> But as I was once told in relation to the *Writing from an Unbound Europe*, subtleties of history do not sell books.

against the town's kadi (judge), including assuming his position, but soon succumbing to the reach of those above him. In the end, he is executed by the order of the Sultan, but not before betraying the only friend he ever had – Hasan. The intradiegetic narrator's unreliability is underlined throughout, not least in his own ethical and existential vacillations that begin the moment his faith is challenged, which, as Muharem Pervić points out, is also the moment when he begins writing: "Nurudin's metamorphosis is a metamorphosis of a man who lives and writes. And the moment his conscience came to life so did his need to write" (Pervić 96).<sup>82</sup>

As Tvrtko Kulenović points out, Nurudin's narrative has almost always been read as a study in psychology: how does the dervish deal with the death of his brother, with an obvious overreach of power from the state and thus with a betrayal from within his own ideological "home." Nurudin has never been read systematically as a literary, novelistic character and an unreliable narrator – a fact that, as Kulenović points out, in the end determines his psychology, not the other way around. Hence the majority of critical works on Selimović, especially before the break up of Yugoslavia, focus on Nurudin's psychology, often finding value in the novel only in so far as it overcomes the "regional" identity and speaks to universal, human values and conditions that we are to read in Nurudin's ethical trials and failures.

But if we follow Kulenović's call and foreground Nurudin as a narrator, we can begin to unpack not only Nurudin's ethical positions and existential challenges, but also the role of writing and the role of other characters in the novel. Only recently, Zvonko Kovač and Zoran Milutinović have correctly identified Hasan (Nurudin's friend) as the "hero" of the novel, or at least an ethical center of gravity whose answers to the existential dilemmas facing the dervish

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<sup>82</sup> All translations of secondary literature in BCS are mine.

become the consciousness of the text as a whole.<sup>83</sup> As Aleksandar Jerkov points out, the text ends with Hasan's notation: "I did not know just how unhappy he was. Peace to his tormented soul!" written presumably upon Hasan's discovery of the manuscript that is the novel. Jerkov explains:

The note at the end written by Hasan extends the life of the text even after the narrative source is extinguished [Nurudin dies]. Hasan does not narrate, but in reading and understanding the discovered manuscript a specific relationship towards the story as such is established. Having known Hasan from the story Hasan has also now read, the readers are drawn into a game of text's silences: the dervish's story is now to be read once again, from the perspective of Hasan's understanding of the narrative and his position as a character in that story" (Jerkov 83).

In other words, the story is just now beginning. If we read the novel once again but his time inflected through Hasan's character, a somewhat different sense of liminal spaces, existentialist politics, and humanist intervention in the tragedy of history develops. In short, where Nurudin fails, Hasan succeeds.

Enver Kazaz, Kovač and Milutinović all point to *hasanism* (Milutinović's phrase) as a particular "working principle of humanizing reality."<sup>84</sup> This humanizing principle rests on an intercultural perspective on the one hand and "inconsistency and instability" elevated to a principle of life on the other. Such a principle in turn is nothing other than "an awareness of the contradictory nature of the world", except, of course, in "elementary situations" where Hasan abandons this liminal position and always acts to save the particular human being caught in the tragedy of history (Milutinović, "Šta je derviš ispovedio o smrti: *Derviš i smrt* Meše

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<sup>83</sup> See Zvonko Kovač. "'Meša Selimović u međukulturalnom prostoru'." *Međunarodni naučni skup "Književno djelo Meše Selimovića"*. Eds. Zdenko Lešić and Juraj Martinović. knj. 9 Vol. Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 2010. 13. , Zoran Milutinović. "'Šta je derviš ispovedio o smrti: *Derviš i smrt* Meše Selimovića'." *Međunarodni naučni skup "Književno djelo Meše Selimovića"*. Eds. Zdenko Lešić and Juraj Martinović. knj. 9 Vol. Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 2010. 51.

<sup>84</sup> See also Enver Kazaz "'Mrvljenje identiteta u *Dervišu i smrti* Meše Selimovića'." *Međunarodni naučni skup "Književno djelo Meše Selimovića"*. Eds. Zdenko Lešić and Juraj Martinović. knj. 9 Vol. Sarajevo: Akademija nauka i umjetnosti Bosne i Hercegovine, 2010. 35.

Selimovića” 196–7; Kazaz, “Mrvljenje identiteta u *Dervišu i Smrti Meše Selimovića*” 58). I

will expound on this below, but for now, keeping Hasan’s significance in mind, I turn to how the image of Bosnia has been read in Selimović.

### ***The Saddest Vilayet in the World, the Most Wretched People in the World***

The question of Bosnian identity in Selimović’s masterpiece was first taken up critically by Zvonko Kovač in 1990 and then in 2010. In both pieces he focused on the intercultural spaces in *Death and the Dervish* that, in Kovač’s estimation, help define Bosnia in the text. Unlike the national(istic) interpretations of Selimović’s reflection on Bosnia that either focus on the supposedly exotic Islamic fatalism or the conflicted shame and guilt for apostasy, Kovač attempts to map the geopolitical references of the novel and on that basis concludes that

The final result of that search for personal identification ... is the “loose diversity” or “hybrid identity” rather than a firm sense of self and those to whom one belongs, some certain self-realized identity, not represented by Nurudin but by Hasan (Kovač, “Meša Selimović u Međukulturalnom Prostoru” 16).

Kovač cites the key passage from the novel that is worth repeating here:

Once, he [Hasan] showed me the cripple, Džemal, who was pulled by children from place to place in a cart and who would hobble into his tailor shop on two canes, dragging his lame, withered legs. While he was seated he astonished everyone with his beauty and strength, his masculine face, the warmth of his smile, his wide shoulders, strong arms, and an acrobat’s strength. But as soon as he would stand up all of his beauty would disappear and a cripple would hobble towards his cart and it would become impossible to watch without pity. He crippled himself. While drunk, he had stabbed himself in the thighs with a sharp knife until he severed all of his tendons and muscles; and even now, when he drank he would drive the knife into the withered stumps of his legs, not allowing anyone to approach him. No one could restrain him, either; his arms were still incredibly strong. ‘Džemal is our true Bosnian image’ Hasan said. ‘Strength on stumps. One’s own executioner. Abundance, with no direction or meaning.’  
 ‘So what are we then? Lunatics? Wretches?’  
 ‘The most convoluted people on the face of the earth. Not on anyone else has history played the kind of joke it’s played on us. Until yesterday we were what we want to forget today. But we haven’t become anyone else. We’ve stopped halfway on the path,

dumbfounded. We have nowhere to go any more. We've been torn away from our roots, but haven't become part of anything else. Like a tributary whose course has been diverted from its river by a flood, and no longer has a mouth or a current; it's too small to be a lake, too large to be absorbed by the earth. With a vague sense of shame because of our origins, and guilt because of our apostasy, we don't want to look back, and have nowhere to look ahead of us. Therefore we try to hold back time, afraid of any outcome at all. We are despised both by our kinsmen and by newcomers, and we defend ourselves with pride and hatred. We wanted to save ourselves from it, but we got so lost we no longer know what we are at all. And the misfortune is that we've come to love our deadened tributary, and don't want to leave it. But everything has a price, even this love. Is it a coincidence that we're so overly softhearted and overly cruel, so sentimental and hard-hearted, joyful and sad, always ready to surprise everyone, even ourselves? Is it a coincidence that we find shelter in love, the only certainty in this indeterminacy? Are we letting life pass over us for no reason, are we destroying ourselves for no reason, differently than Džemal, but just as certainly? And why do we do it? Because we're not indifferent. And if we're not indifferent, that means we are honest. And if we are honest, let's hear it for our madness! (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt*; Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 408)<sup>85</sup>.

Should one read this passage from within the established national(istic) positions, Hasan's words serve well to illustrate the particular sense of illegitimacy that Bosniaks were ascribed in Serbian and Croatian national historiographies. "Shame for apostasy" is where this reading starts and ends. Valorized differently from within the Bosniak national reading this passage illustrates the troubled relationship Selimović had with Bosnia in the latter part of his life and his 'orientalizing' attitude towards his homeland.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> I rely on Bogdan Rakić's excellent translation of the novel, but I do modify it frequently. In that case, I will cite first the original and then the translation pages of the text.

<sup>86</sup> Here is a brief summary of the controversy regarding Selimović's move to Belgrade: Selimović left Sarajevo for Belgrade after the political attack launched against him following his unwillingness to sign onto the Bosnian Party's condemnation of the Serbian Literary Community's (SKZ) leadership. However, his leaving had nothing to do with nationalism as such but rather with what he perceived as betrayal by his comrades in the Central Committee (Selimović was a member of the Central Committee for years in various posts on subcommittees). From the recently published manuscripts it is clear that Selimović left first and foremost because he was devastated by the reaction his Central Committee comrades had to the trumped up charges. He was invited to a "conversation with comrades" regarding two points: 1) his statement at the meeting of the Communists' Active Group in the Serbian Literary Community (not completely clear as to what was discussed) and 2) his supposed refusal of Central Committee communiqués. He recalls: "The committee members Tanović, Palac and Horozović were very polite, civilized, open minded even though they clearly insisted on my guilt. This made the conversation calm even though the situation was not an easy one at all. Only Mladen Oljača was unpleasant, sardonic, cynical, insulting, in one word – unbearable so I kept clashing with him. I couldn't believe anyone could act that way. ... The information regarding the first problem [SKZ statement] I took not too seriously, a silly misunderstanding and simply rejected the whole thing [both points] as a notorious lie. However, when I came home and read the entirety of the Memo and the

Alternatively, Alma Denić-Grabić provides us with a somewhat simplified

“postcolonial” reading of Hasan and the image of Bosnia based on this same passage:

In this novel, Bosnia is shown within the parameters of East and West: the voice of empire coming from Istanbul (this is the political that is identified with the metaphysical, because power resides nowhere, it is a network) that is revealed in the image of the foreigner (the Mufti did not speak our language, he is from Antioch, and Ahmed asks himself where is this Antioch, or the Dubrovnik spy network). ... On the other hand, Džemal and Ahmed’s narrative become a parable on marginalized, colonized cultures within the Western or Western European culture, pointing out the entangled relations between Culture and cultures. ... In the narrative, meanwhile, an anti-heroic narrative of Bosnia and Bosnian and Herzegovinian identity develops as a colonized one, but also self-colonized, unmasking the historiographic narrative about those who’ve won: “Džemal is our true Bosnian image.” [...] (Denić-Grabić 83).

This reading is a fairly programmatic reading of Hasan’s words: Džemal as self-colonization. It wouldn’t be hard to uncover the Western or Western European center in these passages (Hasan rejects the imperial capital’s narrative of progress and civilization that fits more with Europe than with Ottoman Istanbul). But, while Hasan’s comments here are a critique of his compatriots, the

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documents of the Information Service of the Central Committee, I was simply stunned! Only then did it dawn on me that the comrades from the group had much too easily accepted my casual defense, without insisting on a thing, without asking for a better explanation, without wondering, without any reserves whatsoever, even though the second accusation was much more serious than the first. ... Why did my comrades so magnanimously forgive me for such a serious infraction? Because, a man that refuses to accept the materials sent by the Central Committee and therefore refuses to attend any meetings, has, in essence, left the League of Communists and at that, left it in the most unacceptable manner. One should not forgive something like that. Or did my comrades think the accusation was not believable at all so they were uncomfortable insisting on something so ugly and illogical? ...But after I read the Memo I realized they should have acted quite differently [if they found the accusation not believable], (or to not bring it up at all if they find it unconvincing and insulting to the dignity of the man it was directed against)” (Selimović, Lagumdžija, and Šipovac. *Rukopisi Meše Selimovića*. Sarajevo: Književna zajednica "Kultura" : Muzej književnosti i pozorišne umjetnosti BiH, 1991). Selimović is therefore shocked that his comrades could believe such lies about him or if they believed him that they would have mentioned it in the first place. He is further embarrassed and horrified at the thought that everyone was informed of this: “the Central Committee President, the Secretary of the LCBiH, including comrade Škoro and all the members of the Secretariat.” Nothing in his notes in any way indicates that he was in disagreement with the Party or its Bosnian wing, that he was rejecting it for some political reasons. Rather, he became disillusioned with his closest comrades in the Central Committee. And came to realize that opportunists like Mladen Oljača wanted him ousted at any price. Selimović therefore leaves the Central Committee and subsequently Bosnia not because he breaks ties with the League of Communists or on account of some nationalist issue per se (he calls that part of the accusation a misunderstanding) but rather, on account of an ugly political ploy used to defame him, most likely a result of Oljača’s own personal vendetta. (Mladen Oljača was consistently the “enforcer” of Party policy even when the Party did not need it or want it enforced) For a sample of Oljača’s other such enforcement efforts and clashes with the Party’s intellectuals see, for example, the already cited meeting of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of LCBiH and the Commission for Culture and National Relations in October of 1971 (CK SKBiH, “Magnetofonski snimak sjednice sekretarijata CK SKBiH i komisije za kulturu i medjunacionalne odnose, od 22.10.1971”).

image of Bosnia as well as the image of the positively valorized identity within such a peripheral space is more complex.

Kovač focuses on this uniquely destructive image of the self that is nonetheless, *positively accentuated* in the end:

image of the self that the narrative voice in this dialogue with hardly distinguishable sides realizes in a two-fold, complementary image of one's tragedy: the images of self-mutilation and the ever-living tributary. These are united by a sense of a dubious strength on stumps, shame, rejection, and indeterminacy, the feelings of pride and hatred, settled by love and the too-high a price we pay for it, a madness that we approve of only if we are honest, if we are not indifferent. In this *seeming* discord of emotional instability and *relativity that is not indifferent*, we can see that strength (of the subject, the people, 'identity') that will, *should we have honest intent, be positively accentuated* (Kovač, "Meša Selimović u Međukulturalnom Prostoru" 16, emphasis mine).

Important to note is not so much the "self-hatred for apostasy," but *relativity that is not indifferent*; the particular sense of conflicted self that is the product of the historical predicament but that is nonetheless positively marked, mainly through Hasan.

In particular, Kovač emphasizes the cross-cultural spaces that define Hasan: Dubrovnik, Istanbul, the Mediterranean, and most importantly, his love for Marija – the embodiment of Hasan's yearning. Kovač calls Hasan's position "cognitive biculturalism" or "intentional interculturalism" and presents it as a result of Hasan's ability to identify with the Other, or, as the case may be, fall in love with a woman from Dubrovnik. Kovač says:

after [Hasan] returns home, gets married and then shortly divorced, his own *self* is impressed upon him fully only in love and critical reflection that might as well be Marija's. In the narrator's words, the painful lack of understanding and acceptance of otherness is here mirrored as the unrefined image of the self; a self that one loves and reproves at the same time, but such that one cannot love any Other without it (Kovač, "Meša Selimović u Međukulturalnom Prostoru" 23).

Kovač reads the encounter between Hasan and Marija as that self-realization by means of the *familiar* other: they fall in love in Istanbul when they hear each other speaking their common language. Their love unfortunately fails to develop because Marija is already married and

because upon return to the region, one of them always becomes a stranger wherever they are:

Hasan in Dubrovnik and Marija in Sarajevo.

But Kovač is missing here a crucial element of their story subsumed under the notion of a ‘familiar other.’ True, Hasan falls in love with Marija because he hears her speak his language in (intercultural) Istanbul, but he does so at a moment when he is fundamentally disillusioned with Istanbul, seeing in this imperial city only a thin patina of culture and progress hiding the same squalor and misery he left in Bosnia. All the while he must also endure “their” denigration of his homeland:

They mocked him and spoke scornfully about his remote, backward vilayet. ‘What are you talking about?’ he would ask with surprise. ‘Not an hour’s walk from here there is a vilayet so backward you can hardly believe your eyes. Here, in your own back yard, not far from this Byzantine splendor and wealth, which is hauled in here from the whole empire, your own brothers live like beggars. But we are no one’s; we’re always on some divide, always someone’s dowry. Is it then surprising that we’re poor? For centuries we’ve been trying to find, trying to recognize ourselves; soon we won’t even know who we are, we’re already forgetting that we’ve even been striving for anything; others do us the honor of letting us march under their banners, since we have none of our own, they entice us when they need us, and reject us when we’re no longer any use to them; the saddest vilayet in the world, the most wretched people in the world; we’re losing our likeness, but we cannot assume another, foreign one; we’ve been severed from our roots, but unaccepted; foreign to everyone, both to those who are our kin and those who don’t take us as their kin. We live at a crossroads of the worlds, at a border between peoples, in everyone’s way; always to blame for something by someone. The waves of history crash against us, as against a reef. We’ve had enough of force, and we’ve made a virtue out of distress: we’ve become noble-minded out of spite. You’re ruthless on a whim. So who’s backward? (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 330).

While Hasan falls in love with a beauty from back home at a moment of rebellion against the imperial capital, Marija, on the other hand, falls in love not because Hasan is “noble, refined, educated, but because he was *all that and he was a Bosnian*” (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 331; Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 304). In other words, they fall in love because they see in each other a negation of the stereotype about their common place of origin, even if in Marija’s case she’s reacting against the Christian Dubrovnik’s stereotypes about Muslim Bosnia. That they are

beautiful, noble, and refined, i.e., civilized and *kulturan* [cultured] and yet Croatian in her case, and Bosnian in his, becomes far more important than any possible differences between them. They find in each other an affirmation of their marginal identities over and against the imperial center(s). Once they return home, however, that self-identification is not strong enough to realize their forbidden love, but also not weak enough to let it die. They are, in a sense, ahead of their time.

In this context, the image of Bosnia is more complex than just Džemal: Hasan rages against the self-mutilation he sees in his fellow Bosnians, the ways in which Bosnians cripple themselves when they are equal if not better than those who rule over them. But Džemal is compared to a *pehlivan* (defined in Selimović's own words in the notes as an acrobat on a tight rope). If it wasn't for Bosnians' self-destruction, they could perhaps do a better job balancing between powers, between the center and periphery, and ultimately between Eastern and Western empires. But while he scolds his Bosnians for being stuck, unable to advance, a cut off tributary, he also stakes out what is noble about what Bosnians have become in that situation: *noble-minded out of spite*, taking shelter in love, the only certainty in this indeterminacy, because they are *not indifferent*. Nobility in the face of tragedy is what ultimately defines Hasan as well as *hasanism*: "And why do we do it? Because we're not indifferent. And if we're not indifferent, that means we are honest. And if we are honest, let's hear it for our madness!"

More than just this particular judgment, Hasan's character and as Kovač argues, the spaces associated with him, construct a more affirming image of Bosnian subjectivity. While he might scold his fellow Bosnians for self-sabotage – in essence, an argument for national liberation, - Hasan also embodies a wider principle of conviviality, and much more convincingly and positively than Colonna did in Andrić.

As Kovač points out, Nurudin is a prisoner of the tekke “as any other ‘holy’ space.” Hasan, on the other hand, operates in the intercultural spaces that are “immeasurably wider and more interesting, especially those tied to Istanbul and Dubrovnik, as Hasan’s two closest points of Eastern and Western hemispheres” (Kovač, “‘Meša Selimović u Međukulturalnom Prostoru’” 22). But Kovač misses the fundamental point about both of these major cities of the Mediterranean: they are, in themselves, embodiments of that particular early modern Mediterranean “hybrid” culture.<sup>87</sup> These are places that produce Andrić’s translators: Rotta, D’Avenat, and Cologne.

While in recent years, the concept of the Mediterranean, especially in the pre-modern period, has come to carry meanings of a certain ahistorical multiculturalism,<sup>88</sup> works of social anthropology had often enough defined the area in classic orientalist terms. In a critique of such approaches, Michael Herzfeld calls such discourse *Mediterraneanism*, and its adoption among the natives “an ironic posture of a self-demeaning stereotype”:

‘What do you expect? We had the Turks for 400 years!’ This adoption of an elite and Eurocentric cultural hierarchy of cultural value doubly exposes the Greeks [in the current example] to western European hegemony: it demeans their culture in terms that are themselves demeaning of the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, in which, after all, Greeks played numerous important and constructive roles; *it retrospectively casts a multiethnic symbiosis – whose last gasp arguably took place in Sarajevo – as a nationalist conflict* (Herzfeld in Peressini and Hadj-Moussa 29).

Artemis Leontis argues in the same volume that a culturalist reading of the Mediterranean recasts the original orientalizing stereotype into a hybrid, inter– or multi– cultural one:

Today’s discussions on human identity as it is dispersed in space frequently run aground in contemplating the relations between identity and territory. There is a habitual course, which despises patterns of inhabitation that aim for a perfect correspondence between

<sup>87</sup> See for example Stephanie L. Hathaway and David W. Kim. *Intercultural Transmission in the medieval Mediterranean*. London; New York: Continuum, 2012.

<sup>88</sup> See for example, the very recent book Philip Mansel. *Levant: Splendour and Catastrophe on the Mediterranean*. New Haven Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011; 2010.

identity and territory. It searches the topoi of ‘deterritorialization’ in the pockets of minorities that represent a territory’s concealed interior (Leontis in Peressini and Hadj-Moussa 245).

But Leontis reads these particular *topoi* of the Mediterranean hybridity as cosmopolitanism:

Human society comes together in cosmopolitan port cities. The cities’ separate neighbourhoods are tentatively joined together in a fragile union. The single common interest of keeping things in circulation is the cities’ glue. There can be no fully isolated minority enclaves – the economy will not support this. It is a world not of boundaries that separate but routes that connect. At its centre is not a sovereign power that subordinates pockets of difference, but dark, fluid water, the medium of dangerous though fruitful passage, which continuously feeds an inwardly undulating, outwardly radiating circumference (Ibid 243.).

These recent approaches to the Mediterranean and especially the topic of its cosmopolitan port cities like Istanbul and Dubrovnik (in our case), comes from scholarship critiquing and evaluating the current historiography of the Mediterranean.<sup>89</sup> What truly defined these Mediterranean port-cities was the unique experience of coexistence mandated not by a state or an empire but the very logic of mercantilism and world trade as Leontis suggests. It was the particular set up of international, mercantile exchange within the Ottoman Empire that allowed for these relatively non-segregated communities to develop, mostly in order to facilitate trade. One such material product was the legendary *lingua franca*, another are the myriad of translators and interpreters permanently settled in these ports. This particular living arrangement produced what we now call cosmopolitanism. As Kolluoğlu and Toksöz point out, however:

Contrary to the common understanding of the term, a cosmopolitan is not a ‘citizen of the world’ or ‘belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants’ but a ‘citizen of a city’, a city that embodies the former. [...] To put it differently, cosmopolitanism should *not be conceptualized merely as an intellectual*,

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<sup>89</sup> For a good overview of the Mediterranean port cities from the pre-modern to the present see Carola Hein. *Port cities: dynamic landscapes and global networks*. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York: Routledge, 2011.; for an overview of methodological and theoretical frameworks as well as empirical studies see Mauro Peressini and Ratiba Hadj-Moussa. *The Mediterranean Reconsidered: Representations, Emergences, Recompositions*. 79 Vol. Gatineau, Québec: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2005.; and for a good economic history and overview of the city ports in the Ottoman period see Biray Kolluoğlu and Meltem Toksöz. *Cities of the Mediterranean: from the Ottomans to the Present Day*. London ; New York; New York: I.B. Tauris; Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

*aesthetic, or cultural stance but as a spatial phenomenon* that mediates between the local and the global. Cosmopolitanism should be employed in this place-bound understanding, with *cosmopolitan sites seen as sites that tie together the flow of people, goods, and capital within the larger world in which they are embedded*. ... These terrains are conceptualized as cosmopolitan not simply because of their multiconfessional, multi-ethnic, and multilingual populations, and dense and variegated cityscapes, but also because *they occupied relatively autonomous spaces* that mediated between different worlds (Kolluoğlu and Toksöz 8, emphasis mine).

In addition, the people who made these new urban communities from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward were not cut off from the hinterland (as many studies seem to imply) but were connected by family and other social ties. This connection between the hinterland and the port cities continually fed into the new (cosmopolitan) communities emerging in the process (Ibid 9).

In these accounts, multiculturalism or hybridity of these cities' inhabitants comes closer to what I call, following Paul Gilroy, cosmopolitan conviviality. The difference is that the accounts focused on hybridity tend to focus on the uniqueness, even singularity of the cities' *inhabitants* (as Westernized Levant or, in our case, Cologne) or on their cosmopolitanism as an "intellectual, aesthetic, or cultural stance," while the more nuanced scholarship explores the manner in which these communities existed in space: within a larger structure, connected with the hinterland as well as the larger global economy and yet maintaining a high degree of conviviality.<sup>90</sup>

In some sense we can associate Andrić's presentation of Mediterranean "hybrids" with the former: an intellectual stand (Cologne) rather than the latter: a spatial phenomenon (Hasan). While Andrić captured the sense of not-belonging in his interpreters, Selimović speaks of what is

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<sup>90</sup> While theories of multiculturalism tend to affirm the divisions of communities as the natural state of things from which we are to deviate into hybridity, Gilroy's concept of conviviality focuses on empirical exploration of actual states of conviviality from which one can then make theoretical conclusions. It seems to me that the scholarship of Philip Mansel belongs in the former while that of Hein and Peressini in the latter, not least in their research methodologies. See Paul Gilroy. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.

particularly positive in that cosmopolitan conviviality. In Selimović, such convivial spaces are liberating and produce in Hasan a particular type of relationship to his origin and to others:

He found a thousand things to criticize about [Bosnians] and yet he loved them. Loved and scolded them. He began to drive caravans to the East and West, partly out of spite, to show his scorn for the positions he had held, angered by the reproach of distinguished people, and maybe most of all to take a break from the kasaba and his countrymen, so he would not begin to hate them, so he would long for them again, so he would see bad things in other countries as well. And it was this continual circling, with one point on the earth that gave meaning to that motion, which made it leaving and coming back and not just roaming around, which meant freedom to him, real or imagined, it was all the same in the end. ‘Without that point which you’re bound to, you wouldn’t like any other place either; you wouldn’t have anywhere to go, because you would be nowhere’ (Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 338).

In other words, Hasan and the spaces he occupies suggest a concept beyond multiethnic co-existence and towards a true cosmopolitanism: belonging not just “nowhere” like Cologne but always tied to a point of origin, always returning home. Hasan’s cosmopolitanism is as much about belonging as Cologne’s is about not belonging: belonging to a space that embodies “belonging to all parts of the world; not restricted to any one country or its inhabitants.” Cologne, on the other hand, embodies the negatively defined cosmopolitanism: belonging nowhere.<sup>91</sup>

I would argue that this passage, more than the one about Džemal, defines Hasan’s understanding of his own identity: defined not just by one’s origin or one’s encounters with others, but produced in the process of such exchange. In that sense, rather than narrating a history of “colonization and self-colonization” as Denić-Grabić suggests, offering the “good news of Noble Bosnia (nobility out of spite, or powerlessness?!)” in Džemal’s image as some ethical corrective to the imperialist center, Selimović’s novel posits one’s willingness to take up new spaces and positions while always pegged to one particular place as home as the most

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<sup>91</sup> The question of cosmopolitanism is a rather large one, but here I focus on the limited sense of cosmopolitanism as it was produced in the Eastern Mediterranean in the early modern period as both Andrić and Selimović explicitly reference it.

genuine experience of the self. Augmenting Kovač's argument about the spaces associated with Hasan, the particular sense of modern(izing) cosmopolitanism that defines the port cities (beyond their hemispheric location) coupled with Hasan's exposition on why and how he travels, point to an identity not "dramatically crucified between self and other" but rather rooted in a conviction that the self is best understood within the process of interaction with the other, a process made possible by one's implicit connection to one particular geographical point we usually call home.

Following the analysis of cosmopolitanism as a particular spatial phenomenon, it might be useful to think through Hasan and the discourse of identity in different spatial terms as well. David Harvey identifies a matrix of sorts in understanding space, consisting of six separate but dialectically engaged notions: the first three of his making: (1) absolute space (an existence separate from matter, a container of sorts), (2) relative space (relationship between objects), and (3) relational space (contained in the object in so far as it contains and represents itself within relationships with other objects) superimposed onto Lefebvre's tripartite division into (4) material space (experience and perception), (5) representation of space (space as conceived and represented) and (6) the spaces of representation (lived space of sensations, imaginations, meanings, etc.) (Harvey 122–31). These different conceptions of space relate to each other dialectically and we can see this on our example as well. The cosmopolitan cities' physical, material existence is within the material space of the ports and their integrated neighborhoods. But it is the relational space as well as the spaces of representation that truly define the sense of cosmopolitan community as such. In other words, these communities exist within an absolute and material space but their identity is defined within the relations of individuals, classes, and markets and the lived space of sensations, imaginations, and meanings they attribute to such

spaces. The developing colonial markets and the first stirrings of capitalism are also definitive of these spaces in that relational sense: they do not exist apart from how they relate to themselves and other spaces within the global mercantile world order at the time.

From within this paradigm, Hasan's conception of his true self – one who travels but is always connected to the one spot on earth (one space) that defines him and that he defines as home – can be understood as a different conception of space than we have encountered previously. If Andrić's representation of identity is best captured by the bridge (both as a material object in space but also as a symbol of representation of space as such), Selimović's representation is far less material or even located in absolute space, for Hasan is a trader and he travels – both activities that rely heavily on the relative and relational sense of space. His identity is precisely in the refusal to be bound by one material spatial and temporal point, denying the primary nexus of identity and absolute space. This is another way of expressing this same spatial sense of cosmopolitanism for even the port city spaces are always constructed relationally to the hinterland as well as to other such cities in the world. There is something truly modernizing and liberating in this conceptualization of identity, as Hasan says. For us, its most important element is the separation from the absolute dimension of space as determinant of identity (the black line that cuts Mehmed paša Sokolović, for example), and towards a more relational space and spaces of representations (as the imagined sense of self in relation to others).

And finally, the foregrounding of this particular cosmopolitan space also brings forth the historical context of 17<sup>th</sup> century Bosnia: within a weakening empire whose influential trading position is fading with each new colonial development and whose own position within the future capitalist global exchange will resemble that same Bosnian “cut off tributary.” Rather than elevating *hasanism* into an ahistorical value (as hybridity in Kovač or somewhat nihilistic

relativism in Milutinović), I believe Hasan's successes like Nurudin's failures must be understood within this larger, global, imperial context. In such a context, Hasan's identity as a trader, his association with cosmopolitan conviviality, and his love for Marija all point to the promise of these early modernizing moments.<sup>92</sup> In that sense, the "regional" is not abandoned for the universal but rather, compared to the urbanizing center, the regional (Bosnian) can serve as home to which one always return but from which one must depart if it is to have any meaning at all.

References to cosmopolitanism and the historical context of its production in early modern Mediterranean, speak to the fundamental questions of Bosnian identity within Yugoslavia: the binaries that define it vis-à-vis other Yugoslav regions as rural rather than urban, backward rather than civilized, ethnic rather than cosmopolitan. In these binaries we still see the Eurocentric historiography at work. Within that context, *Death and the Dervish* offers an intervention in this discourse, an attempt at overcoming these binaries, however unsuccessful it might be in the final analysis. Hasan is one step closer than Cologna towards such a resolution. The only (but truly significant) intervention is the positive valorization of that peripheral position and a hint at different spatial definitions of identity.

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<sup>92</sup> It is rather telling that even some contemporary accounts, in claiming cosmopolitanism as part of the (unique) European heritage, tend to "explain" the developments of these port cities by European influence. (See Mensel's *Levant*, for example) The weakness of the Ottoman state, as the story goes, explains why that society succumbed to European pressures for these trading zones. While that might all be historically accurate, it still does not explain why the stronger European states could not allow Muslim inhabitants within their city limits or the establishment of such zones. While Istanbul and Dubrovnik cannot compare with Alexandria or Izmir (Smyrna), there are some references in the novel that seem to hint at this: Hasan's teacher is from Smyrna, and Hasan and Marija come closest to realizing their love on the boat, travelling somewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean.

***Historiographic Objectivity vs. Lyrical Ahistoricism: Narrative, Style, and Paradigms of Reading***

Dominant readings of Selimović's oeuvre have always claimed a certain ahistoricity to his prose. Similarly, comparisons of Andrić and Selimović have almost exclusively focused on Andrić as the more objective 'voice of history' and Selimović as a poet '(mis)using' history as a backdrop or an allegorical veil. Kasim Prohić's comparison of these two authors indicates (but doesn't overcome) this error. If we compare Andrić's and Selimović's works with regards to the theme of Bosnian history, Prohić argues, even if we move beyond an abstract differentiation of two artistic views of the same place, we would still "stay at the level of twinning of the so-called *historical* (Andrić) and *lyrical* (Selimović) style, or rather, the outlining of one's greater or lesser degree of respect for historical, 'factual' truth" (Prohić, *Činiti i Biti: Roman Meše Selimovića ; Apokrifnost Poetskog Govora : Poezija Maka Dizdara* 126). Prohić abandons such a project, but still claims that the "East and Islam in Selimović's novels are not understood literally in their historical existence of historical specificity. [...] The East and Islam are symbols" (Prohić, *Činiti i Biti: Roman Meše Selimovića ; Apokrifnost Poetskog Govora : Poezija Maka Dizdara* 129–30). As with Andrić, the "surface" of the narrative rather than its analysis dominates the reading of Selimović as 'lyrical' and therefore 'ahistorical.'

However, not unlike Andrić's *Bosnian Chronicle, Death and the Dervish* is based on several historical sources and its plot is a fictional account of a series of historical events in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Sarajevo. I will briefly outline the sources and events in question as no one has done so to date and then turn to the question of Selimović's lyricism and style.

The first part of the novel deals strictly with the several days before and the period of a month or so of Ahmed Nurudin's imprisonment, the sheikh of the Mevlevi tekke, for attempting

to get to the bottom of his brother's arrest some ten days prior. The plot of the second part of the novel is the story of Ahmed's revenge and final downfall. The revenge seems to be, in part, the story of a Bosnian *teftedar* (provincial financial manager) Mahmut-efendija Zeničak who replaced the provincial governor Salih-paša Mostarac in 1636 in Sarajevo. Zeničak was initially a scribe for the previous *teftedar* Osman, but came to occupy the post having killed Osman in a conspiracy. He was protected from Istanbul by the sultan's *silahdar* (armory chief) Mustafa-aga Hadžisinanović, son of an influential Sarajevo merchant Hadži-Sinan. Zeničak was responsible for a series of intrigues, starting with the removal of the Sarajevo *kadi* (supreme judge) Mustafa-efendi Travnjak and ending with Zeničak's last minute effort to stall his death at the hands of Šahin-paša (who was sent to get to the bottom of these intrigues that were reaching Istanbul almost daily). In the meantime Zeničak caused in-fighting among Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Bihać, and the *Krajina* officials, indirectly caused a massacre on the river *Vrbas* that took the life of Halil Hrnjica and Tale Ličanin (well-known, future epic heroes of the Bosniak tradition). However, the *teftedar*'s last ditch effort – a letter to the sultan slandering Šahin-paša – was intercepted and the *teftedar* was finally executed in Sarajevo seven years after the beginning of his reign (Bašagić 69–72).

The novel keeps most of this plot of the *teftedar*'s rise and fall from power, as the story of Ahmed Nurudin's revenge and demise. Hadži-Sinan and his son Mustafa appear as they are in historical sources. Another source provides Nurudin's name and position in the novel: a particular *çarsi* rebellion against food shortages in Sarajevo led by a dervish *Hasan Kaimija*

resulted in the deaths of the town's kadi Omer-efendija as well as his replacement *Ahmed-efendija*.<sup>93</sup>

The merchant Hadži-Sinan's good friend Hasan Kaimija (or Kaimi-baba) was a fairly popular poet and dervish of the Kadiri order at the time who returned to Bosnia after his studies abroad.<sup>94</sup> He wrote primarily in Turkish or *alhamijado* (Bosnian written in Arabic script) and his two major works (*Diwan* and *Varidat*) contain much intrusion of local Bosnian jargon into the literary Turkish. Safvet-beg Bašagić – the foremost 19<sup>th</sup>-century authority on this literary tradition - has hardly anything good to say about Kaimi-baba's poetry. He mostly laments Kaimija's popularity even at that time of writing. Bašagić is mostly concerned, however, with the intrusion of Bosnian language into the traditional Turkish forms, but such qualities might not be as severely judged today.

Sarajevo's popular culture, on the other hand, kept the legend of Hasan Kaimija as a veritable Robin Hood, taking from the rich and serving the poor, fighting for the Bosnian cause against the Ottoman hierarchy, etc.<sup>95</sup> During his life in Sarajevo, Hasan Kaimija was also the first sheikh of the Hadži-Sinan tekke, built by Hadži-Sinan's son Mustafa-aga in honor of his father. The tekke is still in existence in Sarajevo (the only one to have survived intact from that period) and still bears the majestic calligraphies on its walls. Hasan Kaimija was exiled from the city

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<sup>93</sup> This is one of the summaries of Hasan Kaimija's life: "The reasons for sheikh Kaimija's exile or move to Zvornik are veiled in secrecy and are based less on facts and more on assumptions. Namely, in 1681, in Sarajevo, there was a peasant uprising caused by the extremely difficult situation in the country. There was a draught, hunger and plague were present not only in Sarajevo but all over Bosnia. It is presumed that Hasan Kaimija also participated in this rebellion that culminated in the deaths of kadi Omer efendija and his replacement naib Ahmed efendija, although there are no historical sources confirming this. Some even consider him the leader of the uprising as he was well respected and appreciated by the poor." See Mubina Moker "Sejrisuluk šejha Kaimije u svjetlu njegova odnosa prema ženama-sufijama" at [www.ibn-sina.net/bs](http://www.ibn-sina.net/bs).

<sup>94</sup> See Edin Kukavica. "Sveta povijest i duhovno viteštvo u Bosni i Hercegovini (tekije, evlije, sufije, ratnici, pjesnici)." *Behar: Časopis za kulturu i društvena pitanja* XIX.95 (2010) and also Fehim Nametak. *Divanska književnost Bošnjaka*. 21 Vol. Sarajevo: Orijentalni institut u Sarajevu, 1997.

<sup>95</sup> See "Sufije.com Nakšibendijska Tekija".

most likely in 1680 and died in exile in 1691 or 1692 having been involved in a rebellion of the Muslim peasants and Sarajevo residents mentioned above (“Sufije.com Nakšibendijska Tekija”; Kukavica).

Selimović’s character Hasan is based almost surely on the poet and dervish Kaimija. His reputation for confronting the Ottoman elite and standing up for his fellow Bosnians as well as the story of his exile are crucial elements of the literary character Hasan. The final novel in Selimović’s trilogy that was to be titled after Hasan begins with Hasan’s exile, or rather, escape from Sarajevo, having just helped his Dubrovnik friend escape. A part of the summary for this novel Selimović left in his notes reads:

/Hasan and Mula Jusuf leave Dubrovnik for Austria, to the Sava river, the town of Gradiška, the border between Turkey and Austria/

Mula Jusuf is completely attached to Hasan.

Hasan, without faith or any particular conviction, begins to feel emptiness in his soul. Religion does not interest him, he’s lost god completely, the love for his homeland is gone, the rest? ? He’s searching but not finding it.

Adventure as a project of saving the spirit.

He laughs, but his life is empty.

The Austrians offer him service as their spy, he is insulted, wants to physically fight the official. He is thinking how he lost his homeland, but not because he left Bosnia, but because he lost the thing that can support him. He has nothing to prop himself on. ...

[The Dubrovnik friend says]: Bosnia needs civilization, and not this dirt.... Hasan agrees that Bosnia does not need Turkey, but doesn’t need Austria either.

The Problem of Bosnia. ...

Jusuf’s unconditional love for Hasan, including for him as a man. He guards and protects him when danger is present. ...

They offer him again to serve as an Austrian spy, he refuses, they arrest him for suspicion he is a Turkish spy. Jusuf offers to serve as their spy if they let Hasan go. They let him go. Jusuf goes back to Bosnia. He returns: everything has changed. Hasan can return freely. He escapes across the Sava.

- Humiliated in exile (Selimović, Lagumdžija, and Šipovac 85–6).

The most interesting parts of the proposed novel *Hasan* relate once again to the problems of friendship, love, betrayal, and attachment to others – topics that are crucial to Hasan’s role in this first novel as well.

This same historical period is also captured by Evlija Čelebija (Çelebi) whose travelogue about Sarajevo contains the following paragraph about the Mevlevi tekke, the final piece of information that seems to have inspired Selimović:

The Mevlevi tekke is located on Miljacka's river bank, in a place as beautiful as the heavenly gardens. This is the vakf-tekke of the Jelaludin Rumi. [...] The tekke's sheikh is *an educated dervish whose prayers God answers and fulfills*. The sheikh in charge of the tekke's musicians (najzenbashi), *calligrapher, dervish Mustafa has a delightful handwriting style*.

[...] Of the fruit known to this city, ... the cherries of the Mevlevi tekke, [etc.] are good (Čelebija 124–34).

The novel expands on these two characters, Ahmed Nurudin – “the light of faith” – and Mula Jusuf, the calligrapher.

Selimović was particularly interested in travelogues and memoirs. The second novel of the so-called trilogy on Bosnia - *The Fortress* – was originally planned as a narrative about one of Sarajevo's most famous memoirists and historians: Mula Mustafa Bašeskija, as Selimović says in his own memoir.<sup>96</sup> The crucial element in *Death and the Dervish* that spells the final fall of Ahmed Nurudin, the letter Hasan's Dubrovnik friend (and Marija's husband) writes about the conditions in Bosnia, is very reminiscent of the various Dubrovnik and Croatian travelogues about Bosnia from the period, even in the use of proper historical idiom.

This is not to say, however, that we ought to read the novel historiographically. Rather, I provide these details as a counter example to analysis that claims historicity for Andrić's narratives and ahistoricity for Selimović's. What is of particular interest to me here is the reasons why previous criticism has not identified these source but rather maintained this historiographic division between the two. The answer, I believe, is to be found in the style and genre that provide

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<sup>96</sup>See in particular Meša Selimović. *Sjećanja*. 9 Vol. Beograd: Sloboda, 1976.

a particular reading paradigm only to turn it on its head with Hasan's final words and thus reopen the hermeneutics of the text at the very end.

*Death and the Dervish* is a confession. The intradiegetic narrator speaks in all sixteen chapters, except for the very last lines of the novel which are in Hasan's voice, as mentioned above. As others have noted, all that we learn of Hasan as well as all other characters and the plot itself is always refracted through Nurudin's voice and point of view. But even more importantly, the emotional register and the highly poetic language of Nurudin's confession, his reversals and doubts that are especially noticeable in the first part of the novel, all work to produce a narrative that plays up the psychological portrait of the confessor, subsuming the many important aspects of the life he narrates into the background, or to stay in the paradigm of the narrative – into the narrator's subconscious.

On the question of genre, Milutinović compares *Death and the Dervish* with Augustine's, Rousseau's, and finally Camus' confessional narrative, *The Stranger*, following the transformations of the narrative hero in all four:

Unlike Augustine, Rousseau sees his life before his 'enlightenment' as a state of innocence. Both confessions are exemplary, in the sense that on one example of life they reveal two different philosophies of history. And while Augustine's confession leads us from a sinful life to redemption in faith, and transforms a negative hero into a positive one, Rousseau's leads from original innocence to sin, from positive hero to a hero entangled in the world's negativity, never abandoning, however, the basic understanding evident from the start, that he is still, nonetheless, innocent [...] In the end, it seems that *The Stranger* is not that far from Augustine's *Confessions*, at least when it comes to the key points of the genre. Meursault develops from a negative into a positive hero: from an ethically indifferent negligent murderer into a preacher of a new faith in life, faith that values immanence over transcendence (Milutinović, "Šta Je Derviš Ispovedio o Smrti: Derviš i smrt Meše Selimovića" 53–5).

Milutinović correctly concludes that Ahmed Nurudin's confession follows a similar pattern when it comes to this genre: there is a progression from unknowing to knowing and a chance at redemption. Nurudin, much like Meursault, traverses the path from not knowing (period of faith

before writing) to knowing (period of doubt when he begins to write). Throughout the novel, Milutinović says, there is really only one path, however, from the negative into the positive and that is Hasan: “He appears like someone who knows the secret that Nurudin is after. Let’s call that secret *hasanism*” (56). A “metaphysical trader” of sorts, Hasan embodies the principle of love for those around him, which, in turn, as Kazaz says, “suggests the working principle for humanizing reality. Nurudin’s action is motivated by hate and revenge, having replaced love and faith, but Hasan’s action is motivated by absolute humanism, with no benefit for the self, but with understanding that one must save the particular human being caught in the absurd chain of evil” in the world (Kazaz, “Mrvljenje Identiteta u Dervišu i Smrti Meše Selimovića” 196–7).

The most obvious example of an opportunity for Nurudin to redeem himself is the appearance of, quite possibly, Nurudin’s own son the night before his execution. Milutinović interprets this as the “last chance” Selimović gives Nurudin to redeem himself, to remember and recoup his humanity, much in the way Hasan would and did (sending money to the boy’s family). As Milutinović says:

Selimović offered Nurudin the opportunity to transform into a *hasanist* in the face of death ... *Hasanists* pass on the adherence to and love for life to the one they love: they invest their love for life into love for their loved-ones’ lives. *That is how death becomes less meaningless*. That could have been Nurudin’s last realization, his conversion at the end of his life, his transformation into *hasanism* that must be confessed so as to pass the good news to others (Milutinović, “Šta je derviš ispovedio o smrti: *Derviš i smrt* Meše Selimovića” 59, emphasis mine).

We should also note that even Nurudin’s “last chance” was provided indirectly by Hasan: if it wasn’t for Hasan sending money to this family, they would not have reason to believe that Nurudin would indeed help the boy. So, even the boy’s mother’s faith in Nurudin is in the end unjustified. In short, Nurudin’s confrontation with death and the world that has become alien to him, practically overnight, gives birth to his need to write, to confess, and to share “the good

news,” but where Meursault succeeds, Nurudin fails. Hasan, on the other hand, offers that alternative path of redemption: unconditional love for others, investment of one’s love of life into the lives of others so that death becomes less meaningless. If Meursault finds meaning in the Absurd, Hasan offers it in Love as a principle of life.

If we read Nurudin as a tragic hero, the fatal flaw that leads to a life in which he “misses [the mark] in everything” as he says once of Hasan, is first and foremost pusillanimity (*malodušnost, petty spirit*), especially in love, as Selimović noted elsewhere.<sup>97</sup> Reconstructing the story of Nurudin’s life chronologically shows this trait at work from the very beginning: in his relationship with the young woman after she marries Emin Bošnjak all the way through to betraying Hasan at the end.

The story of Nurudin’s life begins with his love for the unnamed woman (now married to Emin Bošnjak) whom he leaves, in ideological and religious fervor, to join the war.<sup>98</sup> He reminisces several times about his naive and “pure” belief in the “good cause” that was shattered in the war. He is disillusioned first by death and dismemberment of his comrades like Kara Zaim who transformed from the bravest of heroes into a lowly servant and invalid. Second, he is further disillusioned by the rape and murder of Mula Jusuf’s mother for the sin of having fed and sold her body to the opposing army in the same way she did with them. Nurudin takes the young boy away from the scene of his mother’s rape and execution and brings him to the tekke to study and become a dervish. Nurudin ignores the hurt and hatred the boy felt towards all of them, including Nurudin, and that failure (as Hasan says, “you could have been a brother to him”) will become one of the reasons Mula Jusuf betrays Nurudin by reporting Harun to the kadi. Upon his

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<sup>97</sup> See Meša Selimović. *Sjećanja*. 9 Vol. Beograd: Sloboda, 1976.

<sup>98</sup> See Asim Peco “U funkciji djela (Turcizmi u romanu Derviš i smrt)” for an account of the significance of personal names in the novel.

return home, Nurudin finds that his former love has just married Emin Bošnjak. In the one last day with her, he cannot overcome his feelings of betrayal and leaves her for the solitary life in the tekke, taking Mula Jusuf with him to Sarajevo.

For some twenty years, Nurudin lives seemingly peacefully and blissfully ignorant of the world around him, closed off in the tekke and his sense of his own “ideological purity.” When his brother Harun is betrayed by Mula Jusuf and murdered by the state, Nurudin stands up for Harun and is punished himself. For one brief moment he has a chance to become the honorable brother that he failed to be while his brother was alive. But shortly his desire for revenge and the hatred that fuels him leads him to play out a complex intrigue, sacrificing Hadži-Sinan in the process, but operating on the principle of ends justify the means. Once he comes to power, Nurudin seems to forget all that he has gone through since Harun’s imprisonment and interprets his rise to power as a sign from god that he is truly exceptionally “pure” and “correct” in his actions, thus briefly restoring his faith.

His final undoing comes when he fails to protect his one friend, his surrogate brother Hasan, and hands him over to be executed for associating with the Dubrovnik trader who is discovered to have been a spy. Mula Jusuf, at this point in love with Hasan, saves him by forging Nurudin’s signature, which nobody realizes is a forgery. This gives Nurudin yet another glimpse of the respect he would have earned for just one good and honest deed as the *çarsi* believes he rescued Hasan and shows him love and respect for doing so. As Pervić says: “Nurudin was mistook [by the *çarsi*] for a hero for his one ‘ugly deed.’ One can’t say it with more irony and cynicism than that” (Pervić 110). And, as I already mentioned, all the moments in which Nurudin fails, Hasan succeeds, saving Marija’s husband, saving countless others in the rebellion in the

North and even trying to save Nurudin. But not even Hasan can, in the end, save Nurudin from himself.

The narrative only allows us to piece together all of this at the end, but hints about love, sensuality, and women abound from the very first pages. They are the undercurrent to the entire confessional narrative or, from within the narrative frame, they are part of Nurudin's subconsciousness. In this sense, sensuality and love (romantic or among friends) is the underbelly of Nurudin's (failed) asceticism. Thus, love is opposed to ideological purity as one of the fundamental contradictions of the text. For example, Hasan identifies this ideological purity as the "dervish way of thinking":

O wretched dervish! Will you all ever stop thinking like dervishes? Act according to a determined line; determine lines according to god's will, saving justice and the world! How is it that you don't choke on such big words? Can't something be done by man's will too, and not to save the world? Leave the world be, for the love of god, it will be better off without your concern. Do something for a man whose name you know, who also happens to be your brother so that he doesn't perish completely innocent in the name of that justice you uphold (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 130–31; Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 120–22).

Nurudin's response to Hasan's words is to offer himself the existentialist choice: to kill himself or to "turn against that world, which would no longer be mine" (Ibid 131, 123). He does, in fact, "turn against the world" but he still fails to resolve that confrontation, in existentialist or humanist terms like Hasan. The conclusion of Nurudin's narrative is precisely an account of his emptiness before death, his failure to resolve the contradiction of meaninglessness of life and death: "The living know nothing. Teach me, dead ones, how to die without fear, or at least without horror. Because death is meaningless, as is life. ... I call to witness time, the beginning and end of all things – to witness that every man is always at a loss (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt*; Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 455).

The tekke is a “holy space” that defines Nurudin: “the tekke, its fame and holiness – that was me. I was its foundation and roof. ... I loved it and still love it. It is quiet, clean, mine. ... I also love it because I made it what it is, and because it knows secrets that I have never revealed to anyone, that I have hidden even from myself” (Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 7–8). The tekke is also fundamentally determined by the binary of sensuality and ascetism. The building is a former harem Hasan’s father (and the kadi’s father-in-law) has given to the Mevlevi order to serve as the “meeting place for dervishes and a shelter for the poor for they are ‘brokenhearted’” (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 12; Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 6). Nurudin tells us that despite the rituals performed to make the tekke a holy space, the ghosts of young women still roam the house at night: “the tekke acquired the fame of a holy place, although we never rid it entirely of the shadows of young women. At times it seems that they pass through the rooms, leaving their fragrances to linger behind” (Ibid).

Nurudin’s encounter with Alijaga Džanić’s daughter, kadi’s wife, which he describes as the moment when “it all began” is one of the most sensual passages in Bosnian literature, once again revealing this sensual undercurrent of the entire narrative in a description of her hands:

While she held the veil with prescribed, fixed gestures that restricted their possibilities, they were separated and unexpressive, hardly perceptible. But when she let go of the fabric and put them together, they suddenly came to life and became a single being. They wouldn’t start out on their missions rashly or move briskly, but in their hushed restfulness or weightless wandering there was so much power and some unusual meaning, that they riveted my attention. It seemed like any moment they will do something important, something crucial, creating an intense expectation, constant and exciting. They would rest in her lap, together, in an embrace, as if they were smothering each other in hushed longing, or keeping one another from wandering away, from doing something unreasonable, motionless in an incessant, barely perceptible rippling, like a restless quiver or a tranquil spasm of excessive power. Then they parted without haste, as if by agreement, and just for a moment hovered in air, looking for one another, and then tenderly falling, like amorous birds, onto the satin knee, again embracing, inseparable, blissful, in their silent togetherness. It lasted for a long time, and then one moved, began to stroke the satin beneath itself and the skin beneath the satin with fingers that slowly and passionately convulsed, while the other lay on top of it, collapsed, hushed, listening to the smooth silk rustle inaudibly on the round, marble knee. Only sometimes they

would break apart and one would start out on a solitary mission, to barely touch the earring at the end of the ear lobe, coyly hidden underneath black hair with a reddish luster, or would halt in mid air, to hear some word and then would retreat, without much interest for the conversation, to come back to the other one that is silent, offended at that minor lack of attention.

I followed them, surprised by the expressiveness of their newly independent life, as if they were two small creatures that follow their own path in life, their own passions and their love, their jealousy, longing, and lust, and I, first delighted then frightened by the crazy thought of the isolation and senselessness of that petty life, so similar to every other, but it was a quick and harmless thought, a momentary beat of a different life within me, one I did not wish to awaken (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 24; Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 20).

Nurudin continues to lust after her even more directly, “discovering her like an unknown land,” starting from her wrists, fingers, eyes, neck, etc., only to conclude: “She only had the body, all else was overpowered by it.” But then adds: “She didn’t awaken desire in me, I wouldn’t allow myself, I would have stifled it at the very beginning,” showing how even his judgment of his own psychological and emotional states is as unreliable as his judgment of the world around him (Ibid. 25). The rhythm of the passage as well as the sexually laden imagery betrays him even as his words explicitly deny his arousal. This sense of self that denies the passion the kadi’s wife aroused in him is, in part, why he rages at the sensuality of St. George’s night and feels isolated from it, feels that he has “missed something, as if I had made a mistake somewhere, although I did not know where, or how” (33). At the very end we will find out that he attempts to satisfy this desire for the kadi’s wife, even after everyone knows full well that he is responsible for the kadi’s death. At the beginning he is blinded by desire he cannot acknowledge while in the end he is blinded by the power he believes he yields as the new kadi even over her. In that sense, we see this denied infatuation of an ascetic frame the entire narrative as well.

Nurudin’s “remembrance of childhood” as he calls his frequent turns to nature, is also, in many ways, a memory of his lost love, passion, and suppressed sexuality. The passages when he

references nature are tied together in the end when he reveals those last moments with the boy's mother, when he refused to run away with her:

‘Allah be with you,’ I said in farewell. ‘I won’t let you haunt me like a ghost. You’ll always be standing between these hills, like the moon, like the river, like an alem on a minaret, like a shining apparition. You’ve filled this place with yourself, like a mirror, filled it with fragrance, like a bed. I’ll go out in the world. You won’t be there, in that other place; not even your image will be within me.’... I’ll go away so I won’t hate you, so I’ll stop caring. I’ve scattered your image along distant roads; the winds will carry it away; the rains will wash it away, I hope. My hurt will erase it from within me (449-50).

Even the implied violent sexual scene that is his last interaction with her ends with nature, as he sees her

reborn, strangled, white on the grass, which was green, like bile; she was transformed into a white river pebble, grown into the ground, a bear’s foot bloomed from her armpit, snowdrop bloomed from between her thighs, catkins from a poplar drifted over her light skin, ... Should I have lain down beside her and turned into spring grass and willow branches? (451).

He doesn’t stay with her, however, as that would mean to “spite the whole world.” Rather he retreats into the safety of his gnomish generalizations about the world: “Man is cursed; he always regrets all the paths he never took. But who knows what would have awaited me on others?” (452). The Bosnian *spite* here appears again as the foundation of Hasan’s moral code, in contrast to Nurudin’s faint-heartedness, pusillanimity that makes him withdraw from the love that could have defined him and redeemed him in the end.

If Nurudin’s fatal flaw is his inability to love and his faint-heartedness when it comes to confronting the world in the name of that love, portraying him as a dervish of the Mevlevi order is yet another ironic twist to his story as this dervish order, more than any other, draws its inspiration from love elevated to a cosmic principle. Selimović turns to the Sufi mystical tradition as it particularly focuses on love in its contemplation of divinity.<sup>99</sup> *Death and the*

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<sup>99</sup> This notion draws, first and foremost, on Jelaludin Rumi himself but also many of the mystical thinkers that Nurudin criticizes in the second chapter of the novel. See p. 38-9.

*Dervish* is, therefore, also particularly inflected through the *textual* tradition of Islam and Sufi mysticism.

Selimović's references to Islam, the Qur'an, the dervish orders, etc. have been at the heart of the initial debates about his work. Serbian national(istic) readings hold up Selimović as a "native informant" of sorts on Islam – the true Serbian Other. Bosniak national(istic) readings lament Selimović's "orientalism" in dealing with Islam. Both seem to overlook the fact that this is, once again, a literary text, not a religious, historiographical, or anthropological one. In the controversy that ensued following the publication of the novel as the Islamic Community hierarchy expressed dislike for the way Islam and the Qur'an are portrayed in the novel, Selimović himself had expressed regret that his novels were read with the idea that they present an Islamic philosophy or some intentional portrayal of Islam or the Qur'an. He says in one interview:

As far as oriental philosophy, I already said elsewhere that I did not attempt to explicate it in my novel. Even if it exists there, it is from a few citations of the Qur'an, which could be just a coincidence ... But, the thing is not that serious. I positioned myself ironically towards the quotations from the Qur'an. ... In any case, it seems to me that my way of thinking, even my philosophy, if you will, is closer to the contemporary, western one, and its essence is in an ironic skepticism towards human relations, and in humanism as a way out of the prehistoric primitivism (Selimović, *Pisci, mišljenja i razgovori* 305).

However, the *textual* tradition of Islam, rather than its religious message, is present in his work and, as I show below, is a crucial influence in the narrative form and the voice of the confessional. First and foremost among such texts is, naturally, the Qur'an to which I turn next.

*Intertextuality, the “Sound Vision” of the Qur’an, and Existentialism*

Many Islamic scholars and poets are referenced in *Death and the Dervish*: Raghīb Isfahani, Ibn-Sina, Al-Gazhali, Jelaludin Rumi, Abu’l Faraj, and others. Selimović specifically mentions these in his footnotes at the beginning of the text. Intertextuality is complex in the novel, involving often oral narratives, 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century transcriptions of oral narratives, and as we have seen, memoirs, travelogues, including Safvet beg Bašagić’s history among others. I will focus here especially on the Qur’an as the often cited unique poetic style in the novel is best explained as engagement of the Qur’anic textual tradition.

Most analyses of the Qur’anic citations in the novel (each chapter begins with lines from the Qur’an) tend to focus on what particular sura the line is taken from and how it differs from the traditional translations of the Qur’an.<sup>100</sup> In other words, if Andrić was “fact-checked” against history, Selimović is “fact-checked” against the Qur’an. Often unfavorably, of course, as none of the citations are taken word for word from the text nor do they appear in a mainstream translation from Arabic. The most important difference in his citations of Qur’anic text is that, almost invariably, Selimović removes the conclusion to the sura: be it the interjections or direct speech from god. To put it differently, initial contradiction set up in the sura is resolved by some reference to the transcendental and this resolution is what Selimović omits. Quite literally then, he often removes god from the Qur’anic text.

Unlike the Bible, the Qur’an is not a linear narrative because, first and foremost, it is not a narrative at all. The Qur’an is a collection of poetry, individual verses (ayats) form suras, sometimes wrongly referred to as chapters. Suras are not distinguished by the chronology of their

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<sup>100</sup> See especially Nadija Rebronja. *Derviš ili čovek, život i smrt: religijski podtekst romana Derviš i smrt Meše Selimovića*. Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2010; 2010.

subjects, but rather thematically and by place of revelation: Meccan or Medinan. As poetry, the Qur'an functions on a level of sound, what one commentator calls the "sound vision" of the Qur'an that is often brought out and cultivated in Qur'anic recitation.<sup>101</sup> The suras one begins to learn as a child, much like Selimović did in his youth at the maktab (religious school), are the early Meccan suras, hymnic in nature, addressing the day of reckoning. As Michael Sells explains in his commentary on the Early Revelations

In the Qur'anic context, the lyricism is related to the use of oaths involving a key set of what the Qur'an considers 'signs (ayas), clues to the mystery of reality. These signs include the patterns of day and night, male and female, odd and even, singular and plural.  
...

There is a sense of directness and intimacy, as if the hearer were being asked repeatedly a simple question: what will be of value at the end of a human life? ... The premise of these passages is that the human being avoids the ultimate question through self-delusion and avoids acknowledging his own mortality ... A second premise of this ultimate question is that humans tend to hide, from others and from themselves, what they really are, but that Allah, the one God, sees into the inner being of each person ...

Human beings are not born sinful, but they are forgetful. This forgetfulness can be countered only by reminder (dhikr), which the Qur'an calls itself (Sells 16–18).

*Death and the Dervish* in some manner engages all of these ideas present in the Early Meccan suras. Thematically, the novel begins as Nurudin's confrontation with his brother's death and ends with his own. The ethical dilemmas that haunt him arise precisely from the question of *what will be of value at the end of life*. As he says upon learning of his brother's death, his two choices are to kill himself or to become estranged from the world. In Albert Camus' words, the only authentic response would be to accept the Absurd as definitive of the human condition, engage in metaphysical revolt like Sisyphus but do it with wit, grace, and compassion like Hasan.<sup>102</sup> In

<sup>101</sup> See Michael Anthony Sells. *Approaching the Qur'án: The Early Revelations*. 2nd ed. Ashland, Or.: White Cloud Press, 2007.

<sup>102</sup> See Albert Camus and Justin O'Brien. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. 1 Vintage international ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1991; 1955.

short, removing god from consideration as he does in his direct citations of the Qur'an, Selimović experiments with an existentialist rather than religious confrontation with death, asking the same question: what will be meaningful in the face of death?

Risking reductionism of Jean Paul Sartre's notions of bad faith and existential authenticity, the Qur'anic idea of self-delusion, is again here reworked into an existentialist experiment.<sup>103</sup> From the very start of his narrative, Nurudin reveals just the extent to which he is deluding himself not only about the world around him, but about himself. As noted above, the sensuality, passion, and romantic love, or rather, Nurudin's denial of these, undercuts him long before his brother is imprisoned. If we are to follow the tradition of reading Selimović psychologically, we could say he has repressed this aspect of himself to the point of self-destruction.

I think it might be more useful, however, to look at Nurudin's self-delusion as an act of Sartrean *bad faith*; that is to say, as a self-delusion in which one is fully aware of deluding himself or more precisely in which "I must know the truth very exactly *in order to* conceal it more carefully" (From *Being and Nothingness* in Sartre and Priest 208). Nurudin's writing reveals just the extent to which he *knows* his failures and yet reasons them away: "She didn't awaken desire in me, I wouldn't allow myself" or "missed something, as if I had made a mistake somewhere, although I did not know where, or how." But we know that she did awaken desire in him and that he did make a mistake in abandoning his love and I would argue that he knows that too. This interplay of self-delusion and rationalization makes his narrative seductively psychological, in the sense that so many readings of this text have stayed within that narrative frame, reflecting on the ethical and existential choices Nurudin presents.

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<sup>103</sup> For an overview of these ideas see the selection from *Being and Nothingness* in Jean-Paul Sartre and Stephen Priest. *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2001.

But Nurudin does not leave his beloved and swear off the world because of some inner passion, be it jealousy or even a sense of betrayal. Instead, he cannot bear to stay with her because to do so would be to stand up against the social norms that mark her as “defiled,” to spite the world, as he says. His motivation even in this original moment of pusillanimity is social, conditional, rather than strictly personal as he would lead us to believe. In that sense, Nurudin is deluding himself mostly about his own *freedom* (in the Sartrean sense) to act (against the restrictive social norms), i.e., to run away with the woman he loves even if she has been another’s wife. To do that, however, Nurudin would truly need to revolt against his own world and his own ideological code.

Nurudin’s narrative speaks almost obsessively of revolt, even to the point of its embodiment in the almost imaginary rebel Isak (Is-haq). But the revolt Nurudin truly needs is a metaphysical one, as Albert Camus, would put it. The revolt against the political system that Nurudin foregrounds in his confession and that most analyses take up (often read as a critique of communism in Yugoslavia), is not nearly as crucial to Nurudin’s story as this more fundamental position of revolt, here referred to as Bosnian *spite*. Camus calls it a philosophical or metaphysical revolt:

One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. ... It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. It is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope. That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it. ... The revolt gives life its value. Spread out over the whole length of life, it restores its majesty to that life. To a man devoid of blinkers, there is no finer sight than that of the intelligence at grips with a reality that transcends it. The sight of human pride is unequalled. ... The absurd is his extreme tension, which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth, which is defiance (Camus 536–7).

The nobility out of spite, the defiance embodied in Hasan, and the day-to-day struggle with contradictions of life guide Hasan’s defense of human dignity and revolt against oppression of

any kind. In that, Hasan's character and the ethical code he represents draw on Camus' understanding of man's primary mode of being: *in defiance*.

One of the most common problems with early criticism of *Death and the Dervish* has been the extent to which Nurudin's unreliability was not recognized. But unreliability is key to understanding his character. Much like the Qur'an says of man in general, Nurudin is steeped in self-delusion and hides his true self from himself as well as from others. The second part of the novel is an especially powerful rendering of that element of Nurudin's character. He deceives not only himself as we've seen, but Hasan, Hadži-Sinan, Mula Jusuf, practically his entire environment by hiding the hate that guides his actions at that point. He passes for a man in mourning when he is actually plotting his complex scheme of revenge. But there is no divine intervention, *remembrance* (dhikr) like the Qur'an to reveal Nurudin's inner self, but there is the text that, without necessarily wanting to, opens up Nurudin's "true self" to Hasan at the end. If god intervenes in the Qur'anic text as the "reminder," in *Death and the Dervish*, this role is reserved for the text itself.

Nurudin's primary fault is his pusillanimity, but his other major fault was forgetfulness – the primary sin of mankind in the Qur'an. The remembrance (dhikr) in the Qur'an, the text and the message itself, given by god to serve as the reminder of the metaphysical reality to which man ultimately belongs. In *Death and the Dervish*, Nurudin's confession serves a similar function. It is only in the act of writing that Nurudin has any chance for redemption. What he tries to forget (his past love) and what keeps coming back to him almost involuntarily as he writes the narrative is the same. Many times in the novel Nurudin recalls the memory of that woman "from long ago" only to deny it power, significance or reality. Nature, kadi's wife, and finally his own son, weave through his confession as a thread of such reminders.

Aside from these thematic similarities between the Early Meccan suras and the text, the Qur'an had influenced Selimović's lyrical style in this novel. Perhaps for the very first time even in the wider European literature he introduces the stylistic qualities, the "sound vision" of the Qur'an into a literary text. Specifically, the contradictions or binaries of the Qur'anic ayas form a central stylistic device in the novel.

The binaries and contradictions are powerful syntactic reminders of the unreliability of Nurudin's narration. For example, Thomas Butler points to this syntactic tension in the section cited above when Nurudin is enthralled with kadi's wife. Butler says:

Sometimes the syntactic structure imposes itself on the words to such an extent that we perceive shapes beneath the locution, whole pages become a single metaphor for a single mood, and the syntax itself may either reinforce or contradict the message of the speaker. ... Thus, not only do the dervish's own words contradict him but the structure of the sentence, the syntactic tumescence, climax, and detumescence also convey the message that within the dervish is concealed a passionate nature (Butler 538).

As Butler also correctly points out, Selimović relies on other poetic devices such as rhythm. He especially uses antithesis, parallelism, variation, and repetition to build the poetic quality of the text. For example, the first few pages of the novel can easily be rewritten in verse form:

Počinjem ovu svoju priču, nizašto,  
 bez koristi za sebe i za druge,  
 iz potrebe koja je jača od koristi i razuma,  
 da ostane zapis moj o meni,  
 zapisana muka razgovora sa sobom,  
 s dalekom nadom  
 da će se naći neko rješenje  
 kad bude račun sveden,  
 ako bude,  
 kad ostavim trag mastila  
 na ovoj hartiji što me čeka  
 kao izazov.

I begin this story, for no reason,  
 without benefit for myself or for others  
 from a need stronger than benefit or reason,  
 to leave a text, mine, about myself,  
 a chronicle of anguish within me  
 with a vague hope  
 a solution will be found  
 when all accounts are settled  
 if they are ever settled  
 when I leave my trail of ink  
 on this paper that awaits me  
 like a challenge

(Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 9; Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 3)

The pace and meter in these lines, but also repetitions (“for no reason, without a benefit, stronger than benefit or reason, when,” etc.) build the tension of the sentence, interjecting doubt in the line: “if they are ever settled.” From that point he brings us back to the calmer beginning, the text still waiting to be written down: “begin a story / paper that awaits me like a challenge.”

The complex metaphors that often start as similes only to develop into complex symbols, also recall the poetic quality of Qur’anic text. Moon, stars, night, dawn, rain, trees, sky, all become symbols that build throughout the text. Spring develops into a complex and important symbol of Nurudin’s passion and sensuality:

I breathed in the fresh May night; it was young and effervescent. I love spring, I thought. I love springtime, it is unwearied and unburdened, it wakes us with cheerful, lighthearted call to begin anew. It is the deception and hope of each new year; new buds sprout on old trees. I love springtime, I shouted inside myself stubbornly. I forced myself to believe in it; for many years I had hidden springtime from myself, but now I was calling it, offering myself unto it. I touch the blossoms and smooth, new branches of an apple tree at the side of the path; sap rushed in its countless veins. I felt their pulsing, I wished it would enter me through my fingertips, so that apple blossoms might sprout from my fingers and translucent green leaves from my palms, so that I would become the tender scent of fruit, its silent carelessness. I would carry my blossoming hands before my astonished eyes and extend them to the nourishing rain. I would be rooted in the ground, fed by the sky, renewed by the spring, laid to rest by autumn. How good it would be to begin everything anew (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 96).

Much like the descriptions of St. George’s night, the passage begins innocently referencing the common symbolism of spring: new beginnings, rebirth, and revival. But then Nurudin begins to add to this, first in the notion that he “had hidden springtime” from himself, personifying it: “calling it, offering myself unto it.” From this point the symbolism of youth, new beginnings, and renewed life is complemented by an earlier motif of a physical desire (and its suppression) to become one with nature, revealing a sensuality and passion in Nurudin that, as we will learn at the end, harkens back precisely to the only woman he ever loved:

Surprisingly, my senses seemed pure and innocent, as long as I did not burden them with the violence of my thoughts and desires. They freed me as well, returning me to peace, to some distant time that might never have existed, a time so beautiful and pure that I did

not believe in its previous existence, although it still remained in my memory. The most beautiful thing would have been the impossible – to return to that dream, to naive childhood, to the secure bliss of that warm and dark primeval spring. I did not feel the sadness or foolishness of such a longing, which was not a desire, because it was unattainable, even as a thought (41).

This primeval spring is not the one of his true childhood, as Butler reads it, but the spring of his return from war, when his life falls apart:

This solitude hurt pleasantly; it made me sorry, but I would not have traded it for anything. The ground smelled of the warm moisture of spring. ... A familiar place, familiar colors, familiar sounds. I looked around: it was mine. I smelled the air: it was mine. I listened: it was mine. Mine was also what was empty, what was not there [i.e., his lover] (448).

The more directly Qur’anic binary symbols, “clues to the mystery of reality,” ayas, also appear regularly in the text. Dusk or twilight, much like dawn are moments of crisis, existential uneasiness: at dusk on his way to see kadi’s wife or to speak to the musellim, or at dawn his betrayal of Isak and his own death in the end. The moon is also a frequent symbolization of liminal moments: Isak is exposed by the moon when Nurudin sees him in the garden. This is the same moonlight Nurudin calls fragile and silky, then icy with a scent of sulfur, the moonlight that “exposes” Mula Jusuf, just as it “betrays” Nurudin moments later, makes him feel “naked” in the light as he talks to Isak, etc. The entire scene of his encounter with Isak can be analyzed through the role of the moon and moonlight in it. For example, moments before Isak appears in the tekke garden, Nurudin speaks of the remembrance (dhikr) that the moon inspires in him, using the grammatical gender to develop a particular rhythm, much like in the Qur’an:

The night [feminine] overpowered me with the gentle violence of hushed sounds, drowsy and self-important, with the shimmering darkness [masculine] that quivered in barely perceptible motions, in the unusual shadows [feminine] and shapes [masculine], in the scents that were penetrating deep into my blood and becoming a part of me; it smelled of life, life that is weaving out of tiny voices and movements something powerful, more powerful than I would want, inseparable from me, the same as me, still undiscovered but wistful; I forgot how a moment ago the moonlight [feminine] was icy and that it smelled

of sulfur, that was only my fear [masculine] of it [her], now gone, and the peaceful light [neuter] that is above me and above the world [masculine], a vestige of something in me, something that could have been and something that was, something that will be if I persist in this empty state, without defense or protection, since the floodgates [feminine] of my habit [feminine], consciousness [feminine], and will [feminine] had been opened. Or else unknown desires [feminine] would burst out of the dark cellars [masculine] of my blood, and it will be too late when they come out, never would I be able to think them dead [feminine] or tamed [feminine], and never will I be what I had been [masculine] (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 37).

The same interplay of noun genders as in the Qur'an is at play in Selimović, especially striking in personification or metaphors in general. Butler notes a brilliant use of gender in Nurudin's description of his thoughts:

I feel how they stand piled up in the warehouses of my brain, and they pull one another along, because they are linked, not a single one lives for itself alone, and yet there is some kind of order in that crowd; always one, I don't know how, jumps out from between the others and comes out into the light to show itself, to whip or to comfort. (Selimović 13)

As Butler argues, the grammatical gender makes this personification doubly effective, especially as the feminine gender for "thoughts" is maintained throughout and suggests these thoughts are: "troublesome females, as ready to torment as to console" (Butler 545). Or even more sexually intoned in the original: "to whip or to comfort."

Selimović also cites the Qur'an directly in epigraphs to each chapter and often within chapters. The crucial moment when Selimović departs from the Qur'anic *ayas* is in the omission of the "resolution" that comes after the binaries that begin the Early Meccan suras. For example, the *ayats* that open and close Nurudin's narrative and that many have taken as the "moral" of Nurudin's story is that "every man is always at a loss." This citation from the Qur'an reads in full:

Bismilahir-rahmanir-rahim! [In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful]  
I call to witness [By the] the ink, the quill, and the script,  
which flows from the quill;

I call to witness [By the] the unsure darkness of dusk  
and the night and all that it brings forth;

I call to witness [By the] the moon as it matures and dawn  
when it whitens;

I call to witness [By the] the day of reckoning, and the soul that  
chides itself;

I call to witness [By the] the time, the beginning and end  
of everything – man is always at a loss. (Selimović 9)

The most obvious omission, once again, is the one in closing that comes after “that man is always at a loss”: “Except those who believe and lead a righteous life, and exhort one another to uphold the truth, and exhort one another to be steadfast” (103:3). We can also see the invocation of the *ayas* here: day and night, moon, sun, male and female (in original Serbo-Croatian). But when these binary patterns are invoked in the Qur’an, there is always a resolution in the final lines. In the first of five *ayas*, the missing line is: “You have attained a great blessing from your Lord; you are not crazy.” (68:2) The second and third: “This is one of the great miracles. / A warning to the human race. / For those among you who wish to advance, or regress. / Every soul is trapped by its sins. / Except for those on the right.” (74: 35-39). The fourth: “Does the human being think that we will not reconstruct his bones? / Yes indeed; we are able to reconstruct his finger tip. / But the human being tends to believe only what he sees in front of him. / He doubts the Day of Resurrection!” (75: 3-6).

This pattern of presenting only the contradiction without offering a resolution is a permanent feature of Selimović’s narrative and it appears in many different variations, even apart from the Qur’an. Another example would be in the Slavic antithesis, a form unique to Serbo-Croatian oral poetry, consisting of a question, possible answers that are negated, and finally the correct answer that is stylistically, rhythmically, and lexically different from the first two

elements. A famous example is the opening lines of *Hasanaginica*, a well known oral ballad,

here in its first written version of 1775:

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Scto se bjeli u gorje zelenoj?  | What is so white in the verdant forest ?    |
| Al-su snjezi, al-su Labutove?   | Is it snow or are those swans gathered?     |
| Da-su snjezi vech-bi okopnuli;  | If it were snow, it would have melted.      |
| Labutove vech-bi poletjeli. (a) | If it were swans, they would have departed. |
| Ni-su snjezi, nit-su Labutove;  | It's neither snow nor swans,                |
| Nego sciator Aghie Asan-Aghe    | but rather Hasan-aga's tent ...             |

(“Modro Jezero: The Ballad of Hasanaginica”)

Hasan's speeches about Bosnians have some of these markings. For example, as already cited above:

Are we letting life pass over us for no reason, are we destroying ourselves for no reason, differently than Džemal, but just as certainly? And why do we do it? Because we're not indifferent. And if we're not indifferent, that means we are honest. And if we are honest, let's hear it for our madness! (Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 350).

As in the above example, the repetition of the simple question is followed by answers, in the negative (we are not indifferent / if we are not indifferent then ...), while the final line breaks the pattern to offer the conclusion: “let's hear it for our madness!”

One of the key passages in which Nurudin defines his existential dilemma immediately following his brother's death uses the very familiar set up of the Slavic antithesis, only to withhold the resolution in the last line:

What am I now? A stunted brother or an uncertain dervish? Did I lose love of humanity or did I damage the basis of my faith, thus losing everything? I'd like to weep for my brother, whatever he is, or to be a firm defender of the law, even if my brother is in question, even regretfully. But I can do neither. What is it, Isak, you rebellious martyr, who have taken one side, and don't know indecision? (Selimović, *Derviš i smrt* 94)

In both cases Selimović leaves out the resolution which is, in the Qur'an as in the Slavic Antithesis, a teleological one. In the Qur'an, the resolution is in god, in the Slavic Antithesis the resolution is often an epic hero or villain, extraordinary in some fashion and hence stylistically

separated. In the above passage, Nurudin clearly sees the rebel, Isak, as that intervention, the resolution of his internal contradiction, but sees no path to him, neither metaphorically nor literally. As Pavičević points out, Nurudin at one point runs out of Hadži-Sinan's store to go after Isak he thinks he sees but instead finds the musellim who awakens hate in Nurudin who then "follows his path of hate" rather than Isak's path of rebellion (Pavičević 286–7).

This stylistic device of removing the teleological resolution or transcendental intervention in the name of god, fits well with the narrative whose premise is Nurudin's confrontation with his own mortality. In this, Selimović's novel is an existentialist text par excellence. Masterfully, the style itself expresses this same idea: the contradictions of existence can no longer be neatly resolved by divine intervention. This is the essential inspiration for Nurudin's writing.

At the same time, the highly lyrical prose, the frequent use of metaphors, complex parallelisms, antitheses, etc. produce a narrative seductively focused on Nurudin's inner states. The paradigm that the text offers from the start is precisely the intimate, confessional genre, with powerful psychological portraits and a myriad of self-analytical passages. However, rereading the text after Hasan's intervention uproots this perspective and changes the focus on the social elements subdued by Nurudin's narration. In considering Hasan and his role in the text anew, *hasanism* as a model of how to engage the world emerges.

***Hasanism: "Sarcastic acceptance and calm rejection of the painful swirling of life"***

Despite the removal of divine intervention, *Death and the Dervish* is not a nihilist or relativist narrative in any sense. Selimović offers an alternative to the teleological resolutions through Hasan. Selimović contrasts the religious, teleological pattern of thought with Hasan's

when Hasan challenges Nurudin to resolve the love triangle among Hasan's servants.

Nurudin, not unexpectedly, reaches for the proscriptions of the Qur'an. Hasan's answer is important:

'Life is larger than any principle. Morality is an idea, but life is what we live. How can we fit it into this idea without damaging it? More lives have been ruined in attempts to prevent sin than because of sin itself.'

'Should we live in sin then?'

'No. But prohibiting it doesn't help at all. It creates hypocrisy and spiritual cripples.'

'So, what should we do?'

'I don't know.'

*He laughed, as if that made him glad.* (Selimović, Rakić and Dickey 124)

And in some sense Hasan truly is glad that there are no easy solutions, no easy *deus ex machina* in stories *or* in life. Hasan tells several stories in the second part of the novel that illustrate this.

In the story about two soldiers who met in the woods, fought until they were exhausted, then rested and while they were resting, spoke, connected with each other, but then got up and "finished each other off," Hasan says:

'That friend of mine from the dungeon ring was cheerful and he *made me laugh* with this sarcastic parable. He made me laugh and *gave me courage*. Maybe someone else would've said that the soldiers in the woods parted as good friends. And *that would've been a shameful lie, even if it had happened that way*. Like this, the story's bitter ending was truthful, maybe mostly *because I was afraid they would be portrayed better than they were*. But again (I've never been able to explain this conclusion to myself convincingly), maybe it was precisely *because the end was so cruelly truthful that I was left with a childlike idea, a stubborn hope that they nevertheless made peace with one another*. And if not those two soldiers, then maybe some others, because it almost happened that way in this story (317).

The idea here is that only complete, brutal truthfulness can allow for the creation of meaning out of the Absurd. But Hasan also finds inspiration and courage in the sarcastic brutality of the tale because its truthfulness inspires a utopic ideal in him that the connection, conversation, and community do intervene in the brutality of social circumstances. His friendship with the man who tells him this story while they are both in a dungeon confirms that such an outcome is possible and worth pursuing.

In another one of Hasan's stories he cheers up a Višegrad widow with conversation the same way his "soldier from the dungeon" did with him. The outcome is at first sight positive: the widow has stopped wishing for death and instead wishes to speak of her love, finding in that preoccupation with love rather than death happiness and usefulness in life. First Nurudin says:

'And so, everything ended well and everybody was happy, like in a fairy tale,' I said, mocking Hasan's narrative.

It seemed that this tale and its moral was intended for my ears, to serve as an example for me: I was probably supposed to gather children and boys around me, and to instruct them how to lead a happy life [as the widow had done in the story] ... *But he had studied well in the school of the old soldier from the dungeon.*

*He smiled. Not quite victoriously, but not faint-heartedly either:*

'Well, not exactly everything ended well. ... (Selimović, Rakić and Dickey 318-9)

And as Hasan summarizes how all the good will and money from the widow might have led to some enlightenment among the village children, but the result was that the villagers began to drink the money left over from prior expenses now covered by the widow, began to beat their wives; the makteb teacher was not very good so the children did not learn much, etc. Nurudin asks again:

'So everything turned out badly?'

'No. Why? *She died waiting for a friend of her son, don't you understand? Full of pretty words, eager to speak about her love, she wasn't thinking of death.* The villagers ended where they began, without liquor or assistance, since her heirs divided the estate. And there were only nice memories of the widow in the village; everything else was forgotten. There remained a story: in this house there once lived a strange but good woman. *No one, of course, is the better for it, but it's beautiful.*' (Ibid)

Hasan foregrounds storytelling as a way to respond to mortality: the widow died not thinking of death but of her son because of Hasan's stories. That is what he calls 'beautiful.' But Nurudin is disturbed above all by Hasan's reaction: "Hasan's sarcastic acceptance or calm rejection of the painful swirling of life, to which man must adapt if he is not to go crazy" (Selimović, Rakić and Dickey 321). This is Hasan's philosophy then: that it just might not be so good to be certain of everything. And, importantly, that there might not be fully positive (or negative) resolutions to

contradictions of life but that one must be able to see their progression as, we could say, a dialectical process of sorts.

Perhaps in the Adornian sense of a negative dialectic we can qualify Hasan's positions as the narrative's answer to the theme of contradictions without clean or teleological resolutions. The traditional dialectical synthesis that would produce a positive outcome (progress) is here denied. Theodor Adorno claims that even the "famous Hegelian triad" ends in a synthesis that is

actually something like a movement, a movement of thought, of the concept, but one that turns backwards and does not look forward and produce something complete to be presented as a successful achievement on a higher plane. Hegelian syntheses tend ... to take the form that the thesis reasserts itself within the antithesis, once this has been postulated. ... And the negation of the negation is in fact nothing other than ... an acknowledgment that, by conjoining two opposing concepts, I have on the one hand bowed to a necessity implicit in them, while on the other hand I have done them a violence that has to be rectified (Adorno and Tiedemann 29–30).

Dialectics, for Adorno, begins with the concept itself, the "untruth of its identity" in the sense that the process of identification (as in objects that are subsumed into a concept necessarily leave something out) is itself a contradiction and a fundamental one.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps, in a somewhat bastardized form, the conceptual certainty that Nurudin exhibits in his ideology is precisely the lack of certainty that Hasan exhibits in his. In this way Hasan is thinking "dialectically," focusing on "acknowledging the violence that has to be rectified" or the remainder that persists even in the dialectical "synthesis." This "dialectical" dimension of Hasan's philosophy is what Milutinović called the "inconsistency and instability" raised to a principle of life. It seems to me that rather than inconsistency and instability, Hasan represents a particular dialectical ideal of thinking, always cognizant of what is suppressed or excluded and what is contradictory as a priori conditions of life, but always resisting the impulse to "positively" synthesize a "resolution" violently like Nurudin does or wishes to do.

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<sup>104</sup> See also Theodor W. Adorno. *Negative Dialectics*. New York: Continuum, 1983.. 1973.

In a minor digression here I need to point out that this particular point about dialectical thinking that Hasan represents is the strongest aspect of Selimović's criticism of Yugoslav socialism. Nurudin's confrontation with authority and especially the two conversations he has with the musellim and the kadi are excellent critiques of Stalinism, in action and thought respectively, but this subtler point about dialectical thought and the need to resist patterns of necessarily positive synthesis in analysis speaks to still persistent problems in Yugoslav theory and praxis, especially the vulgar Marxist positioning towards culture (unlike Stalinism already at this point well established as a deviation and critiqued incessantly in the media and Party materials).<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> For example, the musellim is very reminiscent of a Stalinist figures in power, or a Party "enforcer" blind to all but a servile understanding of his ideology. The exchange is worth citing here:

'What do I want?' I said, startled at myself, aware that what I was saying was inappropriate. 'You shouldn't have said that. Is it a crime to inquire about one's brother, whatever he's done? That's my duty, according to the laws of both God and men. People would spit on me if I neglected my right to do so. And we would all deserve to be spit upon if that right were ever questioned. Have we become animals, or worse than animals?'

'Your words are serious,' he said in the same calm manner, only his heavy eyes narrowed somewhat. 'Who's right in this affair? You are defending your brother, and I the law. The law is strict. I serve it.'

'If the law is strict, must we then act viciously?'

'Is it vicious to defend the law, or to attack it, as you do?' (Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 88)

The conversation with the kadi is especially poignant as the kadi, reminding Nurudin of what his position as sheikh requires of him ideologically (subservience to the state), uses only verses from the Qur'an in the conversation with him:

When I said why I had come, he answered with a passage from the Qur'an:

*Those who believe in God and the Last Judgment do not associate with the enemies of Allah and His prophet, even if they are their fathers, or their brothers, or their kindred.*

I cried out: 'What had he done? Will anyone tell me what he has done?'

*You who are faithful, do not ask about that which might cast you into distress and despair if it were told to you openly.*

'I'll be indebted to you as long as I live. I've come to have it told to me openly. And I'm already in distress and despair.'

*They walked the earth proudly and plotted wicked intrigues.*

'Whoever you are talking about, I can't believe he's my brother. God says that of infidels. My brother is one of the faithful.'

*Woe to those who do not believe* (Selimović, Rakić, and Dickey 145–6).

But Hasan also speaks to the role of stories: they might not be right or wrong or very useful but they are beautiful. If Hasan's *sarcastic acceptance and calm rejection of the painful swirling of life* is answering the challenges of contradictions, perhaps his stories here offer us another glimpse at a dialectical resolution to contradictions. Hasan, most of all, revels precisely in those moments and details that disturb the clean, positive resolution. His stories always foreground this fundamental contradictory nature of reality. Writing in liminal situations accentuates this fact.

### ***Writing as a Liminal Situation***

Aleksandar Jerkov and Zoran Pavlović discuss the role of writing in the novel in two different ways: Jerkov focuses on the status of the text in the novel, while Pavlović focuses on the status of writing as such. Pavlović, like many other critics, remains trapped within the psychological and lyrical narrative – the devil's work – as Nurudin himself says of his writing. In other words, he takes Nurudin at his word and says:

The gnomic expressions and lapidary judgments in the poetic structure of the novel tend to focus the confession's utopia and elevate the status of facts to a higher artistic level. In the multitude of misfortunes and evils that have beset the dervish, utopia stands out as a salvation in life and in writing, resting on everyday human faith, the myth of hope, the most elementary roots of humanity. Writing as utopia is one of the most important elements of the poetic dimension as well as the immanent meaning of the novel (Pavlović 400).

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And so on for the remainder of the conversation. The kadi replaces god or the prophet with himself and the state. He compares his rendering of justice with god's. This kind of ideological conviction that they are "saving the world" as Hasan would say, translates quite well into the errors of sectarian communism and, as Selimović would say, etatisme of the Stalinist variety. The irony is, of course, in the fact that Nurudin was a "true believer," much more than the kadi but the kadi defeats him precisely with the words of the Qur'an, the very ideology Nurudin was subscribing to so earnestly. This line of critique is especially strong in the second novel of the proposed trilogy – *The Fortress* and its student Ramiz.

Pavlović can then conclude that Nurudin's writing is a "perfect example of writing the human dimension of the story amidst inhumane conditions." And this leads to a common conclusion about Selimović's "universal" message that "Letters are not much, but they are the only weapon man has invented in defense of one's dignity" (Ibid 401).

I find it hard to classify Nurudin's narrative as utopic, although the novel certainly is. This is where Jerkov comes closer to the point. He argues that the liminal situations in the novel always occur within the context of writing or text. Harun and Mula Jusuf are scribes, Hasan's Dubrovnik friend writes as well, Hafiz Muhamed is also a writer, a historian, Nurudin writes his confession, even Hasan writes at the end. But even more importantly, Jerkov points out that what seems crucial in all of these situations is the particular *relationship* one has towards the text. Therefore, "the key moral dilemma cannot bypass the question of the text's status in private as well as public life" – Harun dies because he does not remain "neutral" as a scribe should, but rather reacts to the confession written before the man has even been jailed. Mula Jusuf, on the other hand, remains true to his profession: he reports Harun to the kadi which results in Harun's death (Jerkov 71–3).

Nurudin begins his writing only at the point when he gives up on the religious, mystical intervention in his life: "As soon as he embarks on the existential rather than a religious path, the story of his life has already begun to leave traces in reality" (Ibid 72). In other words, the very act of writing is, for Nurudin, a sign of the loss of faith, a confrontation with one's own mortality, an existentialist process of coming to terms with the world that is indifferent. And it is in the act of writing, or rather narrating, that the liminal situation of writing itself is revealed:

In *Death and the Dervish*, beauty is not in the text as such but in the existence of the book, in narration and not in what is narrated. ... This turn aligns with the aesthetic of the liminality of writing: beauty is not determined by the drama of what is written nor even the confrontation with the inevitability of writing, but rather, *beauty comes from the very*

*situation, condition of writing*. Beauty is not understood as a stylistic addition, but as the *ontological characteristic of writing* (Jerkov 85–6).

Jerkov's analysis here connects well to my analysis of Hasan and his stories. Beauty in his stories is also not one of moral certitude as Nurudin would like, not a lesson to be learned as Nurudin understands the Višegrad widow story, but rather in the very act of narration. Speaking, connecting with others, communication is in itself beautiful. For Hasan, storytelling is the home of utopia.

But this is not to say that Selimović here resembles Andrić's modernist conviction, as Pavlović has it, that art is the only intervention in life, in history. Quite the opposite, the story, while beautiful, does not leave anyone better off, as Hasan says. A part of that humanistic message is that communing in storytelling is the utopia Hasan hopes for, i.e., that, in another story, the soldiers will stop the fighting and part as friends. In this sense, storytelling is a social act of a different order; its beauty and its purpose lie in serving as that which connects us to others. Hasan's close association with this philosophy of literature also establishes a clear distinction between interventions in tragedies of history – those “elementary” situations as Milutinović calls them, when indecisiveness, pusillanimity is unacceptable, and where one must decisively interject oneself in the circumstances to save the particular human being caught in the whirlwind of history as Andrić would describe it. In those situations, rebellion rather than writing, art, and storytelling are the primary vehicles of human expression.

Selimović's contribution and role in the history of Bosnian and Yugoslav literature is quite significant, whether we think of his narrative as postmodernist or not.<sup>106</sup> I have tried rather to propose a different category for *Death and the Dervish* (but also *The Fortress*, and the

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<sup>106</sup> Enver Kazaz especially insists on Selimović's postmodernism. See Enver Kazaz, *Bošnjački roman XX vijeka*. knj. 2 Vol. Zagreb ; Sarajevo: Nakl. Zoro, 2004.

unwritten novel *Hasan*). Through *Hasan*, the status of the text, as well as the intrigues that revolve around texts (confession, spy report, order to release *Hasan*, etc.), and the existentialist project itself, Selimović is urging a critical relationship towards reading narratives, differently and more powerfully than Andrić. While Andrić was challenging the epic narrative, Selimović turns a critical eye to narrative as such, and especially to those that have a teleological resolution, whether a theological one or a Hegelian dialectical one.

But Selimović does not move in the direction that postmodernism takes from this critique of metanarratives, if you will. Rather, he turns to a Marxian reading of text and language – a communicative, humanistic potential of storytelling. In other words, rejecting metanarratives does not result in rejecting narratives as such. Complementing this “philosophy of literature” in *Death and the Dervish*, as Jerkov calls it, is also a much more directly socially responsible ethic of intervention in history: *Hasan*, Hadži-Sinanudin, Harun, and in the end even the reformed Mula Jusuf all guard human dignity by intervening in the concrete circumstances of human suffering and oppression. In this Selimović is once again close to Camus and to some extent Sartre in attempting to bridge a critique of Stalinism (as one teleological model) with a leftist, socialist politics.

Unlike Andrić, Selimović engages more than the modernist tradition in European letters. He also carves out a positive space for Bosnians and their ‘rebellion,’ first in the critique of center-periphery relations through *Hasan* and secondly by positing rebellion as a fundamental protector of human dignity. And yet, Selimović’s novels still read within the well known orbits of European versus non-European. Even when he stakes out the positive space in Bosnian identity, he still defines it from within the orientalist stereotypes of doing things out of spite (“we’ve become noble out of spite”), being emotional rather than rational (“but we love our dead

pond and don't want to leave it"), obstinacy (Hasan's personal life), even if inflected positively, "if the intent is good", as he says.

On the other hand, *Death and the Dervish* also offers valuable interventions in several aspects of contemporary Western European critical thought. First, the commentary on urbanization and development of cosmopolitanism is rooted in a historical record which would serve well to demystify some of the European discourse on civilization. Selimović reaches for the historical sources in Bosnia but also Dubrovnik, Istanbul, as well as the literary and philosophical texts of Islamic and Ottoman culture. In a sense, he opens up another point of departure in considering the contributions of the "Orient" in the formation of what at the time is still considered a fundamentally European modernity.

Secondly, Selimović capitalizes on two contemporary trends in thought in general: psychological analysis and existentialism. In former Yugoslavia, as elsewhere, existentialism was "on everyone's minds," if not always acknowledged as such. The psychological portrait he offers of Nurudin, combined with the existentialist narrative experimentation in the face of death, masterfully lead the reader into a particular reading paradigm that Selimović implodes at the end with Hasan's words. As much as contemporary critique missed this crucial aspect of the novel's ending, recent works by Kovač, Jerkov, Milutinović and others are finally analyzing this important element. In this, Selimović offers not only a critique of reading and the status of the text, but also hints at the shortcomings of the psychological as an explanatory paradigm for the world or the individual. With Hasan's rebellion and with Nurudin's flaws of pusillanimity and fear, Selimović foregrounds the social in this text.

And finally, Selimović's critique of metanarratives – a topic for a larger study in itself – opens up a new chapter in Yugoslav literary and critical tradition. This is especially important

since Selimović does not abandon the social nor deny the humanistic potential of narratives in order to do so. In addition, Selimović's text also does not critique socialism and communism in the manner often interpreted even by current critical works.<sup>107</sup> Rather, it attempts to preserve the notion of the social, the imperative to intervene in history, and the tradition of rebellion at the heart of the Yugoslav revolution, all the while providing a critique of the trends of ideological purity, vulgar Marxism, and the necessarily positive synthesis of progress in dialectics. As we will see in the following section, Miroslav Krleža and Mak Dizdar build upon the theme of rebellion in their exploration of the Bosnian "question" as well.

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<sup>107</sup> See especially Enver Kazaz's "Mrvljenje identiteta u *Dervišu i Smrti* Meše Selimovića."

## North-South or East-West: Mak Dizdar's *The Stone Sleeper*



*These necropoles [at Kalinovik] also feature the ever-present, lonely nespina [treasurer, lit. no-sleep] extending his hand towards the sun. Their hands are enormous, outstretched, fan-like, ghastly, standing in the mountain wilderness.*

*The Bobovac excavations recovered many fragments and examples of an affluent culture and civilization from mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, confirming that the Bosnian court of that time did not lag behind similar courts in Europe. ... In the stećak iconography, researchers found the previously overlooked beauty, sometimes naive and graceful, and sometimes overwrought with deep symbolism of eschatology and cosmogony. The epitaphs and other inscriptions on the lapidary monuments seem to have spoken in a new tongue in an ancient and deep sense, in which pain could sometimes rise to ecstasy, and wisdom to a deeply human expression, in which resignation is candid and straightforward. ... Even in remote places men could reason and incisively mark their cries!*

*Mak Dizdar*

*And the only question that remains [in nationalism] is whose granddaddy lies underneath the stećci...*

*Miljenko Jergović*



*Upper: Stećak detail in Radmilja necropolis. Photo credit: Mirza Popovac 2009.*

*Lower: Dejčići necropolis. Photo credit: Mirza Popovac 2009.*

The subject matter, diction, and form of Mak Dizdar's monumental collection of poetry *The Stone Sleeper* is drawn from the epitaphs recorded on the unique Bosnian medieval headstones (stećak, pl. stećci) as well as the larger corpus of medieval Bosnian literature. Since 1966 when Dizdar first published *The Stone Sleeper* and well into today, the question of medieval Bosnia moved ever more forcefully from the realm of historiography into a realm of mythology. Before I can properly place *The Stone Sleeper* in the context of its production I first

have to address the heavy dose of nationalist mystification of the Bosnian medieval past and the impact this ideological discourse has had on readings of Dizdar's poetry. Almost as powerfully as the nationalist, historiographic reading of Andrić had conditioned our approach to his texts, the mythologizing reading of medieval Bosnia and consequently Dizdar's poetry had determined the position Mak Dizdar came to occupy in the canon. In what follows I hope to recover some of the literariness of Dizdar's poetry and place its production within the narrative of Bosnian identity and Eurocentrism beyond the national(istic) paradigms that have often defined it.

Srećko Džaja, a prominent contemporary historian of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in an article quoted earlier in this chapter, lays out the fundamental problems and causes of mythmaking about the Bosnian medieval period. They are, in essence, the focus of nationalist historiography on that period, for different reasons on all three sides, but for the same purpose: placing the origin of the current political project in the medieval period thereby proving the exclusive and fundamental right to Bosnian territory in the present. The circular logic of national(istic) historiography is evident in all three cases and Džaja describes it as one that

understands the nation as a primordial and quasi eternal category. Nation as a primordial category originates in the mythic distance of time and moves through the historical continuum as a stable and closed system. So, for example, on the Croatian side, the Herzegovinian Franciscan and historian fra Dominik Mandić (1889-1973) elaborated the *history of Croats* as a history of a nation that came to its current territory already formed, in a word, a travelling state (S. Džaja, "Tri Kulturno-političke Sastavnice Bosne i Hercegovine i Moderna Historiografija" 49–50).

Dubravko Lovrenović gives a concise overview of all three nationalist historiographies on the question of the Bosnian medieval state. Serbian nationalist historiography, focused as it is with the pre-Ottoman period and especially the battle of Kosovo in 1389 as its ultimate point of origin, found it quite easy to include the Bosnian medieval state within the ranks of "Serbian

lands.” Lovrenović cites V. Ćorović who claims medieval Bosnia “as a political entity was a product of its separation from Serbia under Časlav Klonimirović in the first half of the tenth century.” Consequently, “the Serbian name from that period remains the permanent mark of this same origin and same characteristics” (D. Lovrenović 74–5). The “renegade” Bosnian state in turn is to blame for the apostasy of Bosnian populace as it was “bitterly divided by religion; deprived of any feeling of true state independence on account of strong Hungarian pressures and the workings of Rome; lately also divided by class...with family and any other morals under attack.” As a result, Bosnia “fell [to the Ottomans] as an example of a state that had *no conscious historical mission nor some clear leading idea*” (D. Lovrenović 74–5, emphasis mine). In this account, it isn’t hard to guess that Bosnia was short of the “historical mission” of the Serbian medieval kingdom, its true home. Needless to say, concepts such as “historical mission” and “leading idea” do not come actually into play until the arrival of nationalism as an ideology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that creates this understanding of the nation-state traveling through history on a “mission.”

Unlike Serbian historiography that took the Bosnian medieval state as a priori Serbian, and therefore spent less energy proving what was already taken for granted, Croatian historiography invested quite a bit more effort in claiming the Bosnian medieval state for its own. The first monograph on this subject actually appeared in Rome in 1967 by the above-mentioned Mandić titled *Ethnic History of Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Mandić argues for the fundamentally Croatian *ethno-national* origin and character of the Bosnian medieval state. The first iteration of similar arguments in Yugoslavia was by none other than Franjo Tuđman (Croatia’s first nationalist president in the 1990s) who appropriates Bosnian “Bogumils” (the

name ascribed to members of the medieval Bosnian Church) and even Bosnian Muslims as

Croatian as early as 1965 claiming that

Bosnia existed mostly within the old Croatian state and the Muslim populace had in great numbers been of Croatian descent as confirmed by its ikavian dialect (Tuđman as qtd. in D. Lovrenović 67)

As Lovrenović comments:

The myth of *Croatia all the way to Drina* [easternmost Bosnian border] – although Mandić was not its originator per se, he did give it “scientific” pedigree – played a catalyst role in modern Croatian political thought, one that following Ante Pavelić, got its Rider of the Apocalypse in the historian Dr. Franjo Tuđman (D. Lovrenović 66)

In Tuđman’s argument, the majority of contemporary Bosnians are Croatian because *as of 1463*, according to Tuđman: “the populace was 83% or so Croatian Catholics, [sic!] 10% Croatian Bogumils, 2% Croats converted to Orthodoxy, 2% non-Slavic Vlachs mostly Catholics, and therefore around 3% true ethnic Serbs.” (Ibid). The argument is circular in that any ethnic non-Serb identification he mentions he simply prefaces with the adjective “Croatian” thereby establishing only two identifications that matter: Croatian and Serbian. As with Serbian nationalist historiography, we see the typically anachronistic use of these “national” labels to mark states and group identities in the medieval period. And as nations are the imaginary travelling states in this type of historiography, anything that might have occurred *since* 1463 is of no consequence to the present.

Finally, the Bosniak nationalist historiography comes to the question of medieval Bosnia mostly during its “Second National Revival” to use Filandra’s term for the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but especially in post-Dayton Bosnian historiography. Unfortunately the same anachronistic logic applies to these works as well. From Enver Imamović’s *Origin and Belonging of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s Inhabitants* to Salih Jahman and others, Bosniak historiography focuses on two key arguments about the Bosnian medieval period: first, the thesis

that Bosnians predate Slavic invasion of the region from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century (and that they therefore *predate* and are fundamentally different from Serbs and Croats); and second, the thesis of similarity between Bogumils and the new Islamic order (thereby establishing continuity necessary for Muslim national rootedness in medieval Bosnia). Imamović can then claim that having escaped the Slavic tribes in their migrations, “Bosnia kept its native (aboriginal) population ethnically fully compact all the way to the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, having a very strongly expressed consciousness of national and territorial unity” (Imamović as qtd. in D. Lovrenović 62).

Especially important for the Bosniak mythologized view of the Bosnian Church and its members are the concepts of *Noble Bosnia (Plemenita Bosna)* and *Good Bosnians (Dobri Bošnjani)*. Both are terms found very often in the medieval historical documents. Most Bosniak nationalist historiographers use them as shorthand for the supposed unique and distinct moral character of the inhabitants of medieval Bosnia which is then explicitly tied to their national or ethnic characterization. But Srećko Džaja points out the fallacy at the heart of the notion that “Good Bosnians” is a characterization of the inhabitants’ ethical qua ethnic character. He clarifies in a comparative study of Bosnian medieval documents that *Good Bosnians* stand for *Boni Homines* – a Latin designation in medieval Europe for qualified witnesses in matters of the law (*testes idonei*). Džaja concludes that

The syntagm *good Bosnians* does not appear in any historical document as an ethnic category, but rather in its most general sense always as a social and ethical category. In other words, the concept does not signify the entirety of the Bosnian ethnos, but only the class of free men, that is, aristocracy in the feudal social hierarchy. ... the term also had a narrower *functional meaning* in Bosnian medieval feudal establishment. Within that context, *good Bosnians*, as members of the aristocratic estate, appear as legal *experts, witnesses, jury members, guarantors, member-judges of appeal panels, and diplomats*. In that sense, the term *good Bosnians* is a Bosnian word for good people in medieval

Europe, that is, an adequate translation of the Latin syntagm *boni homines in Bosna* (S. Džaja, “‘Dobri Bošnjani’ i ‘Boni Homines’” 125).

Similarly, *Noble Bosnia* as it tends to appear in journalism, popular culture, and as we have seen literary and cultural studies (the “message of Noble Bosnia” in Denić-Grabić’s article on Selimović),<sup>108</sup> is once again taken out of its historical context to imply some ethical definition of the Bosnian ethnos. Instead, as it appears on the sepulchral monuments and other written documents, *plemenita* refers to land inherited through service to the state, as in many feudal aristocracies. Etymologically it refers to that quite literal sense of ‘nobility,’ i.e., aristocratic status.

Clashes between these three national(istic) “interpretations” of this history have caused the question of the medieval Bosnian state (i.e., the Bosnian Church and its heresy if any, as well as any further research into the literary culture of that era), to become the most heated and debated questions in former Yugoslav and especially Bosnian historiography. As Lovrenović summarizes,

It is impossible within this article even in a summary way to list all the various examples that would uphold [the argument against Mandić] – that task is for a separate analytical study – but it is crystal clear that we are dealing here with a recidivism of the so-called *national revival* rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which S. M. Džaja summarizes ‘is a reconquering of the entire cultural and political history. medieval period is accepted as the landmark epoch while language and South Slavic ethnic relations are the criterion by which it is judged.’ Having escaped the bottle, the evil spirit of the reconquista is haunting the desert panoramas of history (D. Lovrenović 69)

As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain any semblance of rational discussion let alone scientific discourse on the question of medieval Bosnia. From today’s standpoint, any discussion of the cultural heritage of that period, even as a linguistic and cultural source for

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<sup>108</sup> See Denić-Grabić cited above.

Dizdar's poetry, which is decidedly modern, gets lost in these nationalistic fogs of war. As Jergović says in the epigraph above, the only question that seems to remain then is “whose granddaddy lies under the stećci.”

Unfortunately, the only book-length analysis of Dizdar's poetry in English by Amila Buturović is also beholden to the nationalistic interpretations of Bosnia's past. The translator of Dizdar's poetry included in her study, Francis R. Jones, follows her interpretive move as well. The latter makes his political allegiance clear in an article on the topic of translating Dizdar in 2001:

But Dizdar is also describing modern political reality. He knew first-hand experience [sic] the brutalities *his* people underwent in the Second World War – brutalities which were *repeated* on an even bloodier scale twenty years after his death, in the genocidal attempt to crush Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence in the 1990s. Thus the *krstjani* also represent the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina – persecuted *down the centuries for their impure or inconvenient faith*, yet always somehow surviving. This, the most subversive message of all, that *those whose only power is faith will outlive those whose power resides in the gun, the knife, and the lie*, has made *Kameni spavač* [*Stone Sleeper*] into a crucial symbol of Bosnian identity (Jones 68, emphasis mine).

This seemingly acceptable statement positions Dizdar into a confrontation with the Serbian nationalist regime of the 1990s which is a politically (and nationalistically) motivated misrepresentation of Dizdar's poetry. First is the equation of WWII and Dizdar's participation in it as a Partisan with the war of the 1990s – a hallmark of closed nationalistic interpretations of the conflict (static nations in history fight the same battles). Second, there is a conflation of *krstjani* (the members of the Bosnian Church) with contemporary Bosnians in that they [Bosnians as a nation? Bosnians then and now?] were ‘persecuted down the centuries for their impure or inconvenient faith,’ implying a connection between the Crusades against the Bosnian Church and the Serbian aggression against the Bosnian Muslims, often couched precisely as revenge for Islamic apostasy. As for the Crusades, they were sent to Bosnia before the arrival of

Islam and therefore have little to do with the “religion” of today’s Bosnia. But even more importantly, to categorize Serbian nationalist regime’s genocidal crimes during the Bosnian war as faith persecution is to willfully ignore the historical reality on the ground and to equate national regimes with faith. Third, to suggest, on top of all of this, that Dizdar’s poetry speaks for a faith-based conception of reality is to seriously miss the mark on reading *The Stone Sleeper* as I show below.

Jones goes on to clarify that he sees his task as a translator as “that of expressing the original poet’s words (and wider cultural aims) in form which the target audience can understand and appreciate” (Ibid 70). He concludes that his

stance towards what I regard as [Dizdar’s] party, namely Bosnian culture, is also far from neutral. I see Bosnia as a complex but distinct cultural, geographical, and political space, whose distinctiveness lies in its very complexity. More than this: though I mourn the passing of Yugoslavia, I feel that Bosnia’s fragile and endangered quest for nationhood should be respected and supported. And one way in which the translator of Bosnian literature can support the concept of Bosnia’s nationhood is to communicate the fact that Bosnian literature is capable of producing works of world-class ‘big C’ worth (71).

Why one would assume that Bosnian culture is not capable of producing ‘big C’ culture is unclear, but his association of Dizdar with what is surely a Bosniak (rather than Bosnian) national project is well beyond a translator’s task or role. For one, Jones identifies Bosnian culture with Bosnian nationhood, a misnomer as there is no ‘Bosnian’ nation (in the sense in which there clearly are concepts such as Bosniak, Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian, Slovenian, and Montenegrin nations). But there is a tendency to construct Bosnia as the nation-state of Bosniaks only, making Bosniaks more “constitutional” than Serbs or Croats in BiH (in post-Dayton Bosnian jargon “more equal” than others). This conflation of Bosnian and Bosniak has become typical of nationalist historiography. And yet, subscribing to the ethics of multiculturalism as definitive of Bosnia makes little sense if the state is construed as a Bosniak nation-state.

Amila Buturović's study has similar ideological markers that damage an otherwise well done overview of Dizdar's poetry. In the historical summary on the question of Bosnian identity, Buturović says:

Bosnian Muslims lost national possession of Bosnia by being elevated into a Muslim nation. Paradoxically, then, though given national rights, the Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina were deprived of any claim to territory, much like the Jews or the Gypsies: a community in political but not geographical space. Officially speaking, 'Bosnianness' remained a regional sentiment, and 'Serbness,' 'Croatness,' and 'Muslimness' national. Giving unified Bosnian nationhood [sic!] a chance in the political cartography of modern Bosnia-Herzegovina seemed to have been sealed once and for all (Buturović 30).

Here she privileges the role Bosnian Muslims play in the multicultural unity she otherwise finds definitive of Bosnia; apparently Bosnian "nationhood" was theirs to lose. In other words, Bosnians who declared themselves Croat or Serb did not thereby endanger the national project she has in mind, but Bosnian Muslims doing so did. It is a little difficult to parse out what she means by nation, or rather, how one can have a multicultural nation (especially today when culture has come to stand in for race and ethnos).

Instead, in defining the multicultural nation Buturović relies on Homi Bhabha's and Partha Chatterjee's ideas about the postcolonial nation (cultural criss-crossings, the 'spiritual' domain of national consciousness as a form of preservation against colonial domination). She describes Dizdar's poetry as aligning with "the poetry of postcolonial recuperation and national self-affirmation" arguing for the authenticity of the multicultural Bosnian nationhood in contrast to the "singularly" defined Croat and Serbian nations (20-1). But then the question arises as to what particular colonial domination is being challenged by this "spiritual" domain? In other words, whom are the Bosnians resisting in their multicultural "nation"?

More implicitly than Jones, Buturović references contemporary Serbian and Croatian states as the "colonial power(s)" in question, not foreign empires as I will claim. Even though in

her history of the stećak she references Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires as those that

“erase” the memory of the stećak, in the analysis of Dizdar’s writing she says:

In treating the stećak as a reservoir of aphorisms that evoke cultural unity *despite an ongoing political pressure to disunite*, Dizdar extends the stećak’s metonymic function. ... It is a dynamic cultural text, rich with visual and linguistic signs whose decoding can be decisive *for the reunification of national selfhood* (Buturović 82).

The references to “political pressure to disunite” and the “reunification of national selfhood” in the timeframe of Dizdar’s writing can only mean to identify the non-Bosnian ethnic and national outsiders, i.e., Serbs and Croats, as the colonizers in Dizdar’s anti-colonialism. For what political pressure to disunite was there from any outside powers? But, as we have seen in the arguments regarding the BiH literary canon, there undoubtedly were cultural pressures from Serbian and Croatian nationalist intelligentsia against Bosniak national definition as well as a non-national definition of Bosnia. The jargon of “colonies” and “anti-colonialism” entered this debate in Party’s documents. In the definitive 1971 document on the Literary and Cultural Politics, the Party in fact stated: “Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be anyone’s linguistic colony!” (CK SKBiH, “Književni Jezik i Književnojezička Politika u Bosni i Hercegovini”). But, confusing this justified or unjustified use of such jargon with actual colonialism and anti-colonialism in Dizdar’s take on medieval Bosnia is unjustified. Buturović’s crucial error then is a confusion of Dizdar’s critiques of Yugoslav cultural policy with regards to Bosnia with the anti-colonial message of his poetry. As I argue below, the slippage from considering Papal, Ottoman, and Austro-Hungarian empires as the “colonizers” to considering Serbian and Croatian “colonizers” in reading Dizdar’s poetry is both historically unfounded and inexplicable from within Dizdar’s own work.

Buturović also offers a puzzling interjection of Bosnian multiculturalism into Dizdarević's poetry. Her argument in the introductory historical section is that the Bosnian Bogumils were defined by their ethics of tolerance that was echoed in the similarly tolerant Ottoman millet system [sic!] and in that form persists until today, thereby establishing a continuity of Bosnian/k nationhood. However, even if this argument could stand up to historical scrutiny which it certainly cannot, there is not a single reference to multicultural tolerance in Dizdarević's poetry. Buturović does not provide one either as for her multiculturalism is inherent in the Bosnian medieval culture so that any reference to that culture is automatically a reference to multiculturalism.

The question of multiculturalism as the defining characteristic of Bosnian identity (what she calls nationhood) has been further complicated by ideologies of nationalism in the 1990s and the Western involvement in the Bosnian war. It is no secret that the Bosniak nationalist elite in the war and the post-war period built their national narrative, as outlined above, with references to Bosnian medieval times, the *ethnicization* of "tolerance" and "goodness" of Bosnians, and that the primary appeal of their regime rested on a supposed "defense" of multicultural Bosnia. The ease with which this "defense" of multicultural Bosnia transformed into a formalized representation of Bosniaks only in the Dayton constitution only indicates further just how dubious this "defense" was.

However, there is no doubt that many Bosnians not only believe in, but live the multicultural realities, even today. There are also ample examples of Bosnians of all ethnic and non-ethnic identifications supporting the notion of a unified Bosnian state, based precisely on an

endorsement of its multicultural, anti-nationalist experience.<sup>109</sup> It is especially encouraging that such non-nationalism is still a marked feature of Bosnian political life despite vehement attempts to deny and destroy it in the post-Dayton ethno-apartheid. However, in the war itself, the Izetbegović government used the rhetoric of multiculturalism to promote its agenda, which was in truth a monoethnic, Bosniak one, rather than multicultural one.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the Western intelligentsia's endorsement of Bosnia's multiculturalism (and the consequent endorsement of the Izetbegović government during the war) further fractured this discourse as Western morbid fascination with the destruction of just such multiculturalism spoke more loudly than their ardent defense of it.

The liberal intellectuals in the West caught onto this thinly veiled propaganda not so much because they were familiar with Bosnia or Sarajevo, but rather precisely because they weren't.<sup>111</sup> In discussing media coverage of the Bosnian war Phillip Hammond offers a concise summary of the surreal focus on Bosnia and Sarajevo as an embodiment of multiculturalism:

Bosnia came to be seen as an 'ideal Western self' – a romanticised embodiment of the values of the West. Visiting intellectuals projected onto Bosnia their own notions of 'multiculturalism', variously understood to be an American or a European ideal (P. Hammond 50).

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<sup>109</sup> See for example, the social movement in the most recent BiH census that drew thousands of mostly younger participants to declare themselves Bosnian and Herzegovinian rather than Bosniak, Croatian, or Serbian. The movement had reached a critical mass as the Bosniak political machine began running ads with a simple message: "It is important to be Bosniak." See coverage at FENA. "Tokić: popis stanovništva za Bošnjake najvažnije pitanje proteklih 100 godina." *Klix.ba* 24 Feb. 2013. Web. 4 June 2013.

<sup>110</sup> The details of this rather controversial topic are beyond the scope of my analysis here. For a good overview of the developments of the Bosnian war see especially Susan Woodward. *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1995. as well as Petras, James, and Steve Vieux. "Bosnia and the Revival of US Hegemony." *New Left Review* 1.218 (1996): 3–25. Alexander Cockburn's writings on Bosnia from the period are also germane, although his assessment of the war in general was far less accurate in the long term.

<sup>111</sup> For a perspective from inside the war-time Sarajevo and the ways in which authentic Sarajevo 'multiculturalism' continued functioning during the war even when and if it was exploited by the propaganda machine, see Larisa Kurtović's chapter in Bilic, Bojan, and Vesna Jankovic. *Resisting the Evil: [Post-]Yugoslav Anti-War Contention (Southeast European Integration Perspectives)*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2012.

A part of this fascination was with the destruction of multiculturalism rather than the espoused desire to save it, as the project of multiculturalism, however weak or strong theoretically, was being slowly but surely abandoned in the West. And while Bosnian conviviality continues to exist in one of the most segregated societies under direct Western control, multiculturalism seems almost an antiquated concept in the West.

As Paul Gilroy argues, today it is seen as “an aspect of the clash of integral and incompatible civilizations” and has been reduced to the “dry dogma of a ready-mixed multiculturalism” (Gilroy 22). This ready-mixed multiculturalism has much in common with the

highly abstract considerations of tolerance, relativism, and humanism that have recently become fashionable in scholastic circles. These have seldom been registered in critical theory as anything other than the detritus of impotent or disinterested bourgeois reflection (Gilroy 50).

From within that context, Gilroy argues for a different approach to the actually existing multicultural society:

Rather than lament the end of the various initiatives that have discredited the wholesome dream of multicultural society ... I argue that the political conflicts which characterize multicultural societies can take on a very different aspect if they are understood to exist firmly in a context supplied by imperial and colonial history (Gilroy 22).

This holds equally well for our case as we must turn to the actual imperial history of the region to understand the failures of the so-called Western intervention to save Bosnian multiculturalism as well as the organic and authentic conviviality that persists despite such failures.

In Buturović, however, multiculturalism appears precisely as part of this appeal to the West for support of the Bosnian “cause.” Francis R. Jones considers this task – convincing the West that the Bosnian national project is deserving of support because it is so fundamentally

“multicultural” – his primary task as an interested rather than disinterested translator of Dizdar’s poetry. And Buturović says from the outset:

One of the starting arguments of this chapter, to be sustained throughout the book, is that Dizdar’s success in transforming the space of medieval geography – specifically the stećak burial grounds – into a place of contemporary identity formation marks a turning point in Bosnian historical imagination. *The mastery of bringing together these two components – geography and nationhood – transcends the issue of poetic originality and inspiration.* Although their interdependence had been pondered before him, Dizdar’s courage to disrupt the conventional patterns of their association and representation allowed him to refashion the myth(s) of belonging and introduce a paradigm that was ardently embraced by a wide Bosnian readership (Buturović 17).

In short, Dizdar’s poetry is subservient to the nationalist project of bringing together geography (territory) and nationhood, forming essentially an argument for a nation-state. Buturović’s claim that stećci represent or signify in some manner the cultural interpenetrations is rather tenuous and even within her analysis, not supported with textual evidence from the originals or Dizdar’s poetry. Rather, the Bosnian “nation” she attempts to define (and then posit Dizdar as its primary mythmaker), is based on the ideology of multicultural Bosnia (in ruins) that rests on the historically inaccurate conflation of the pre-Ottoman medieval Bosnia with Islam thereby establishing the necessary national continuity for Bosniaks. Just as the official, elite discourse on Bosnia’s multiculturalism in the 1990s kept running up against actual conviviality on the ground, so does the attempt to define this identity in “national” terms. Buturović starts from this contemporary redefinition of Bosniak/n “nationhood” and then attempts to trace this “nation” in Dizdar’s work. While her project, on the surface, might seem similar to my attempt to trace discourses of Bosnian identity in the literary canon, I focus rather on the context “supplied by imperial and colonial history” to shine a light on a discourse on Bosnian identity defined by the Eurocentric historiographic paradigm. In order to do so, I must first properly contextualize the

“anti-colonial” language in Dizdar’s critical works on stećci as well as situate Dizdar’s critique of Serbian and Croatian paternalism in culture within its original context of the late 1960s.

### ***Of Linguistic Colonies and Kulturträgers***

Mak Dizdar published early and often on the topic of the medieval necropoles in several leading journals of the 1960s, especially *Život* and *Izraz*. He was not the first Yugoslav intellectual, however, to find the medieval necropoles especially significant and inspiring. As early as 1954 Miroslav Krleža published an essay “Bogumil *mramorovi* [stećci]” which established a pattern of reading the necropoles and stećci, one that directly influenced Dizdar as well. The key interpretive points Krleža makes are: 1) Contrary to European perception of a people “half-civilized, primitive, and wretched, illiterate and backward”, these are the remnants of a rich civilization that disappeared in the whirlwind of hundred-year-long wars; 2) This architectural, artistic, and sculptural tradition stretches in continuity from Ravenna and Lombard period all the way to the Cinquecento; 3) Bosnia was a “refugium haereticorum” of the western Manichean world; 4) These monuments are proof of a “powerful artistic and moral nonconformism, lasting for centuries;” 5) Stećci “symbolically represent the eternity of life’s ebb and flow, in spite of every stupefying thought of death”; 6) The outstretched hand is a central motif “that testifies to having been iron-strong and defiant for they did not want to fold before the inquisitors who have been damning Bosnia for centuries;” and finally 7) as such, these hands are a monument “to the daring challenge to all moral authorities of their time, not recognizing any moral hierarchy in a much more radical form than Wycliff, Huss or Luther, and two or three

hundred years earlier” (Krleža 57–63). Dizdar spoke highly of Krleža’s essays on the Bogumils in his 1966 review of a collection of Krleža’s essays:

[Krleža] is especially determined in insisting upon one imposing moral characteristic of our medieval man: *his resistance to foreign cultural supremacy*, whether originating in the Greek East or the Latin West; he insists on our medieval man’s nonconformity that is obvious even in the most difficult phases of our national history. This phenomenon of permanent nonconformism is a leitmotif of these medievalist-themed essays; it is a key concept in Krleža’s struggle against dull, nihilistic cosmopolitanism, nationalistic proselytizing, and a cannibalizing bourgeois historiography (Mak Dizdar, “Hronika: Peta Knjiga Eseja Miroslava Krleže” 96).

Krleža’s and Dizdar’s positioning vis-à-vis Europe here is especially interesting. Dizdar identifies the two medieval “foreign cultural supremacies”: Byzantine and Roman empires, while Krleža focuses much more on placing the Bosnian medieval period in context of Western Europe proper. He compares the Bosnian heretics to Wycliff, Huss, and Luther, positing Bosnia as “European before Europe” mostly in response to the familiar Western trope of Slavic backwardness for lack of Reformation and Renaissance. Krleža also situates the artistic heritage clearly within Europe (to quote in full): “in continuity from Ravenna, Lombard and Carolingian period, onto the Neo-Hellenic, Byzantine phase of fresco painting in 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries all the way to Dubrovnik, Dalmatian, and Slovenian painters, sculptors and builders in the Quattrocento and Cinquecento” (Krleža 59). Similarly, in Krleža’s account, Western Europeans, (represented by the Papal hierarchy), are the hegemon against which medieval Bosnian necropoles speak of a heritage of defiance, spite, resistance. As we have seen already, these themes are present in both Andrić and Selimović as characteristics and moral values of Bosnians, especially in their resistance to foreign empires (Franciscans in Andrić, Hasan in Selimović). Dizdar follows this theme of resistance in his oeuvre as well. Once again, it is important to note the fundamentally non-ethnicized nature of these categories in Andrić and Selimović, as well as

Dizdar. Buturović is therefore, not wrong in identifying these qualities in Dizdar's work, but rather in contextualizing them within an ethnicized/nationalized form, as being Bosniak resistance against Serbian and Croatian nationalism, rather than foreign empires.

Dizdar, a prolific essayist, spells out several other objections to how the medieval past had been handled in Yugoslavia. In 1966 we already see Dizdar identify three separate intellectual currents that stand opposed to such an interpretation of Bosnian medieval past: the "dull, nihilistic cosmopolitanism," nationalism, and bourgeois historiography. The nihilistic cosmopolitanism is referring to a pattern of Europhilia in Yugoslav intellectual circles, following in the footsteps of socialist modernization that seeks to hide if not destroy any and all tradition(alism). The nationalist historiography, as we have already seen, at this point tends to either deny the relevance of the Bosnian medieval past or tear it apart according to the principle of "belonging." Both interpretations were part and parcel of "bourgeois historiographies" that have "cannibalized" the medieval period for their national mythmaking.

But, the problem for Dizdar predates Yugoslavia. He identifies the so-called *Kulturträgers*, referencing first and foremost the Austro-Hungarian specialists such as Moritz Hornes who were the first to publish on the medieval necropoles in Bosnia. As part of the curious Austro-Hungarian "colonizing" project in Bosnia, Hornes qualified stećci as inspired by the "primitivism and illiteracy of these crude Bosnian brutes" (Dizdar, "Ovjekovječeni medievalni Fenomen" 115). He says that Hornes' work is "common for relations between the metropolis and colonies." Comparing Bosnian medieval to other "primitive" art, and arguing for the recent re-evaluation of native art in the moment of decolonization, Dizdar argues against such "positivistic" valuation of stećci (Ibid).

Having established these basic cultural references in Dizdar's writings on the *stećci*, we can finally turn to the question of the relationship of Serb and Croat nationalism to the medieval Bosnian culture that Buturović implicitly puts in the same category with the Ottoman or Austro-Hungarian "colonization." In Dizdar's editorial work on general cultural topics apart from the medieval question, we can see the crucial role he plays in asserting the existence of Bosnian culture and literature within the Yugoslav cultural sphere. The canon debates of the 1960s and 1970s led Dizdar into a confrontation with those same nationalist and bourgeois historiographers he so harshly criticized in relation to the medieval past:

It has been quite clear for a long time that Bosnian cultural heritage is inherently tied to the traditions of its neighboring states, to Serbian and Croatian lands even before the era of national awakening (completed by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). But it is just as clear that Bosnian cultural heritage cannot be exclusively Serbian or exclusively Croatian. The idea that it is primarily and significantly Bosnian ... was all too easily and tendentiously tied to Kallay ... and it could have seemed not only unacceptable but quite heretical. So it had to be confirmed as vital and healthy by the united struggle of all peoples of Bosnia and Herzegovina for a liberated republic during the National Liberation war. That is why it is possible today to have an approach to the problem of Bosnian cultural heritage independent of different nationalist myths of different nations and in principle (at least!) not have to suffer the reaffirmation of surviving nationalistic forms of thought and consciousness. ... Because, any sort of hegemony in culture simply has no place today, as it has no place in politics either (Mak Dizdar, "Marginalije Na Temu o Kulturnom Nasljeđu" 120)

The confrontation Dizdar had with the national(istic) historiography coming from Serbia and Croatia is not in the same category as that of Austrian *kulturträgers*. If anything, Dizdar acknowledges that the Serbian nationalistic reading of Kallay's support for Bosnian culture could have seemed correct in that moment, precisely because he agrees with the idea that Kallay was using Bosnian culture as part of his (and wider Austro-Hungarian) colonial policies. But, like Begić, Dizdar finds the National Liberation struggle and the revolution that followed to be events of historical significance that helped redefine equality among the Yugoslav nations and regions. Having booted the Austro-Hungarian rule, and having defeated fascists in the National

Liberation Struggle (of which Dizdar was an active and prominent participant), Dizdar finds Serbian and Croatian paternalistic attitudes to the idea of a Bosnian culture no longer acceptable. There was no longer any foreign imperial design at play in assessing what is Bosnian so the previous objections to a recovery of distinctly Bosnian forms of culture are no longer valid. And he specifically identifies the nationalistic historiography as a form to be overcome, undercutting any suggestions that Dizdar is engaging in national(istic) mythmaking. But there can be no doubt that he worked hard to help further a non-national definition of Bosnia and its culture.

So while Buturović is quite correct in identifying in Dizdar a strong support for Bosnian independence in cultural matters, the problem arises in equating that critique with Dizdar's critique of foreign imperialism. The Bosnian resistance embodied in the *stećci* so praised by Krleža and Dizdar is squarely directed at foreign empires. This is evident in, among other details, Dizdar's use of North/South axis rather than the West/East one as the paradigm of Bosnian confrontations with the "Other."

### *Iz znanog kama znamen stamnog plama*

#### *[From a famous stone, the mark of a permanent flame]*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| (Na kraju valja i ovo reći s pravom mjerom u izrazu i glasu – | (In the end we ought to say this as well, with a<br>suitable expression and voice – |
| Ako nam glas i nije stigao duboko do neba                     | Even if our voice did not make it up to heaven                                      |
| Vrisnuli smo bar  | At least our scream   |
| Kako treba)   | Was not a dream)  |
| <br>  |   |
| Sa velikog stola časti neka i meni na kraju ostane nešto –    | Off the big table of honor let there be for me a crumb<br>or two –                  |
| Čast velika da skažem kmetima i kmetićima i ostalim svima     | Great honor to tell serfs both big and small and others<br>too                      |
| <br>  |   |
| Kako podjela časti bi   | How the partition of honor was so   |
| Mudra i   | Wise and  |
| Vješta  | Crafty  |

Mak Dizdar's masterpiece collection of poetry *The Stone Sleeper* was published in three editions, starting in 1966. I reference here not the final edition but the most inclusive one published posthumously in Dizdar's collected works. The collection is divided into four entitled parts *Word on Man* (five poems), *Word on Heavens* (twenty three poems), *Word on Land*, (twenty six poems) and *Word on Word* (twenty six poems), framed by an introductory poem *Roads* and the concluding poem *Message*. The final edition published during his lifetime excluded the poems in *Word on Word* as well as the introductory and concluding framing poems (For more on this see Duraković). In what follows I will focus mostly on *Word on Man* and *Word on Land* but not to suggest that the other parts of the collection are somehow divergent from the narrative I offer here.

The most striking feature of Dizdar's poetry is the uniquely tight rhyme structure in most of his poems accomplished with complex alliterations, consonances, half-rhymes, and anagrams, often written in his signature inverse pyramid form, whose first lines (the longest) tend to be either in the decasyllabic or even more often the alexandrine meter, both strongly evocative of the Serbo-Croatian oral poetry tradition. Dizdar's diction relies heavily on the Bosnian medieval idiom, but he includes translations of less known terms as well as extensive notes often situating the poems in the historical or theological context of medieval Bosnia, explicitly pointing the reader to secondary literature in an almost pedagogical historiographic manner. As far as the forms sourced from medieval literature, several poems like the second one cited in the epigraph above rely on norms and formulae of surviving documents, mostly legal scripts, trade agreements with Dubrovnik, marginal notes on scriptures, and finally the lapidary epitaphs. In terms of the latter, Dizdar especially draws on two norms: a warning spoken in the voice of the deceased to not step on his/her bones, often ending in: "for you will be here where I am now, but

I cannot be where you are now,” and the curse directed at those who disturb graves. Similar curses can also be found in legal documents as punishment for breaking the agreement, be it between the living and the dead or between trade partners such as Bosnia and Dubrovnik.

As Dizdar notes in his introduction to the collection of medieval Bosnian texts published in 1969, the epitaph’s particularly inspiring lyricism is severely limited by the space on the headstones and the skills of the stone engravers. And yet, the power of these epitaphs rests precisely in the condensed form of some of the most powerful expressions of grief, loss, and hope in all of Bosnian literature. Often no longer than two lines, they are striking works of verbal art. We will see Dizdar in his own poetry aims for precisely this kind of condensed form of expression. For example, one of the most evocative epitaphs is the following couplet:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Bože, davno ti sam legao<br>i vele ti mi je ležati... | God, long ago lied down I did<br>and they say, lie still I must...<br>(Mak Dizdar, <i>Stari Bosanski Tekstovi</i> . 26) <sup>112</sup> |
|---|--|

Dizdar’s reworking of this epitaph is in the collection *Word on Heavens*:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Davno ti sam legao<br>I dugo ti mi je<br>Ležati  | Long ago lied down I did<br>And lie still<br>I must  |
| Davno<br>Da travi mi kosti<br>Davno<br>Da crvi mi meso<br>Davno<br>Da stekoh tisuću imena<br>Davno<br>Da zaboravih svoje ime | Long ago<br>That grass my bones<br>Long ago<br>That worms my flesh<br>Long ago<br>That a thousand names I got<br>Long ago<br>That my name I forgot |
| Davno ti sam legao<br>I dugo ti mi je<br>Ležati  | Long ago lied down I did<br>And lie still<br>I must (Mak. Dizdar 42)   |

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<sup>112</sup> All translations of poetry are mine.

Already we can see Dizdar's development of the expression beyond the original couplet in the middle stanza that explicates on two possible themes resting in the silences of the original: the materiality of death (grass my bones, worms my flesh) on the one hand, and the erasure of memory on the other (That a thousand names I got / Long ago / That my name I forgot) on the other, as another material effect of death. The theme of being lost in history and yet speaking in the silences of the stones guides much of this collection.

In search of that perfectly condensed lapidary expression Dizdar constructs rhyme schemes that, in combination with medieval diction, make his style immediately recognizable and as I will argue definitive of his work overall. For example, the phrase "kolo bola" that appears in the very first section and repeats throughout the collection is an excellent case in point. I translate this phrase as "train of pain" in an attempt to capture the unusual rhyme (*kolo bola*) as well as the contrasting consonant sounds: in English /t/ vs. /p/ while in BCS (voiced) /k/ vs. (voiceless) /b/. In combination the phrase embodies in its sounds the interconnectedness of the contrasting concepts of dance (*kolo* being a pagan, pan-Slavic circle dance) and pain. In the rhyming of the internal syllables and the half rhymes, the eternal, endless, circular quality of the space-time of the *kolo* is intricately bound with corporeal and emotional pain. The pain, on the other hand, qualifies *kolo* in such a way as to foreground the paganistic or ritualistic nature of the dance and the sense in which it continues no matter what, with no regard for pain or much else in its eternal rhythm.

This particularly textured phrase appears several times in this collection including in a poem by the same title (The following translation doesn't attempt the reproduction of the poem, but rather just a crude translation of the syntax while I point your attention to the original to see the particular rhythmic texture I have in mind):

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Koliko kola od dola do dola<br>Koliko bola od kola do kola      | How many <i>kolos</i> from valley to valley<br>How much pain from <i>kolo</i> to <i>kolo</i> |
| Koliko jada od grada do grada<br>Koliko greba od brega do brega | How much misery from city to city<br>How many graves from mount to mount                     |
| Koliko krvi od usudnih rana<br>Koliko smrti do suđenog dana     | How much blood from fated wounds<br>How much death till the fated day                        |
| Koliko kola od dola do dola<br>Koliko bola od kola do kola      | How many <i>kolos</i> from valley to valley<br>How much pain from <i>kolo</i> to <i>kolo</i> |
| Kolo do kola od bola do bola                                    | <i>Kolo</i> to <i>kolo</i> from pain to pain (46).   |

As we can see in the original, the complex phrase *kolo bola* is expanded into a complex rhyme structure with an anagram phrase (greba / brega) but also with a repetitive consonant pattern in the first and second to last couplet. Dizdar also uses alliteration, consonance (k, d, l) and assonance (o) as well as anaphora (koliko) and epistrophe, soft and hard rhyme, etc. to build this intricate structure. Beyond what I already mentioned about the phrase itself, the poem's repetitions and contrasts also set a fast pace to the couplets, which with the assonance of the vowel /o/ perfectly embody the frenzied rhythm of the *kolo bola* he has in mind.<sup>113</sup> Phrasing of this complexity can be found throughout the collection.

The poems framing the collection speak to an “anti-colonial” sentiment in Dizdar. The speaker in both *Roads* and *Message* is not identified by diction as one of the medieval *krstjani* that speak in much of the collection. In contemporary diction he is addressing the invader “from the North or from the South” and “from the left or right” focusing especially on the contrast between the values the invader is beholden to and values the speaker lives by. This is evident in the following four stanzas in the latter part of the poem:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Ti ne znaš zakon raskrsnice<br>između svjetlila | You do not know the law of the crossroads<br>Between light |
|---|--|

<sup>113</sup> See also Prohić, Kasim. *Apokrifnost poetskog govora: poezija Maka Dizdara*. Sarajevo: Veselin Maslesa, 1974. and Duraković, Enes. *Govor i šutnja tajanstva: pjesničko djelo Maka Dizdara*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1979.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| I<br>Tmice   | And<br>Dark   |
| Jer najmanje znaš da u svome žiću<br>Najteža rvanja su<br>I ratovi pravi<br>U samome<br>Biću   | You know least of all that in one's own living<br>The most difficult struggles are<br>And wars real<br>In the very<br>Being   |
| Ti ne znaš dakle da zlo si moje najmanje<br>između mnogih<br>Mojih<br>Velikih<br>Zala  | You do not know thus that evil the least you are<br>Among many<br>Mine<br>Great<br>Evils  |
| ...  |   |
| (Shvatam te :<br>Čovjek si u jednom prostoru i vremenu<br>Što živi tek sada i ovdje<br>I ne zna za bezgranični<br>Prostor vremena<br>U kojem se nalazim<br>Prisutan<br>Od dalekog jučer<br>Do dalekog sutra<br>Misleći<br>O tebi | (I get it :<br>You are a man in space and time<br>That lives but here and now<br>Knows not the limitless<br>Space of time<br>In which I'm found<br>Present<br>From the far yesterday<br>To the far tomorrow<br>Thinking<br>Of you |
| Ali to nije sve)   | But that is not all)  |

(Dizdar, *Izabrana djela* 13–4)

The most literal understanding of these lines suggests that Dizdar contrasts here the materialistic, here and now worldview of the invaders with the natives who focus on the metaphysical, inner struggles of existence: “the wars real [are] in the very being.” But he is also invoking the larger theological concepts at play – the hegemonic Papal Inquisitors who quite literally attempt to defeat Evil in the Crusades with the Bosnian Bogumils who eschew their earthly existence and whose battle with Evil is more existential than literal. This contrast also brings out the “ethical characteristic” of the medieval Bosnians, who, in response to hegemony opt for heresy rather than subjugation. Krleža and Dizdar were both captivated by this heretic quality in the admirable

resistance and defiance of the insignificant medieval Bosnian Church against the Papal hegemony.

There is an ominous tone in the ending of this poem where the speaker stands apart from the world of the invader, in the “space *of* time,” communicated in part by the rhyme structure that breaks down in the lines “thinking of you” as if to warn of the consequences. “But that is not all” with which the poem ends functions as a type of caesura in the rest of the poem, a moment to stop and rest between three distinct sections of the poem. First, the speaker addresses the invader directly: “You intend for me to disappear at all cost / You intend to, at all cost, destroy me,” explaining that “you do not know the true road to me.” Roads from the title, we learn here are the invaders’ roads into Bosnia, but also, importantly, the spiritual ones that are unknown to them. After the first caesura “But that is not all”, the “roads not seen” are contrasted with the invader’s idea of entering Bosnia from “the North or the South”:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Zavaravaš se stalno da do mene treba ići | Under a delusion that to reach me you must go |
| Smjerovima sličnim                       | In similar directions                         |
| Sa sjevera                               | From North                                    |
| Ili                                      | Or  |
| Juga                                     | South (12)                                    |

Following another “But that is not all” the next two stanzas address the speaker’s inner state, suggesting his place under the ground “From the roots of the ground where the darkness has settled.” The final section cited above follows and speaks to the contradictions actually constituting the speaker, the struggles that are his own, within his Being, spiritual wealth that is not of the here and now, and most importantly, not accessible to outsiders. Finally the suggestive ending inverts the roles of the invader and the speaker as he seems to not just lie in the ground but lie in wait. That final “But that is not all” opens the curtains onto the poems in which this speaker does not reappear until the very end in the *Message*.

### ***Word on Man: Historicizing the Krstjani***

*Word on Man's* five poems are explications of the Bogumil dualism as Dizdar understood the Bosnian Church to have subscribed to. In the notes he establishes this point by describing the various beliefs that diverged from the Papal practices at the time. The most important of these for Dizdar is the belief that Earth and the man's body were created by Satan(iel) not God and that one's good life and good deeds will be rewarded by a return of the soul to the realm of God. The sun is a symbol of that heavenly realm and of the desire to be released from the prison of the body (Mak. Dizdar 163). The unidentified speaker in this section is addressing the *krstjani* directly in all five poems, posing different questions about human mortality and their beliefs, developing their dualism over the course of the five poems into an open contradiction, challenging their theological worldview.

The first poem reflects on the sense of imprisonment of the soul in the body and the seemingly unbridgeable distance between heaven and earth: "Space that leads to Heaven / How will you bridge?" (19). The second poem emphasizes the desires that go unfulfilled as the *krstjan* longs for the "bread and wine" of heaven and thus alienates himself from his earthly existence: "You dream that the heavens match with this earth ... / But in this home of yours / When will it be a homeland?" (20). The third poem expands further on this inner contradiction that Dizdar suggests is destructive: "Those two hands of yours, one isn't yours / One as if the other / Wants to slay?" (21). The fourth poem asks how the *krstjan* sees himself in this painful rupture between heaven and earth: "In this train of pain / Last or first?" (22). The last poem then synthesizes all of these doubts and questions to suggest that there is no way to bridge heaven and earth and that the

contradictions constitutive of a belief in divine intervention ultimately alienate man from his true environment, his true home(land) – his physical, material existence here on earth. In that last line, Dizdar will thus ask the [the *krstjan*] to *become* his body and his *body* become his *act*. In other words, he asks for a historicized *krstjan* – a notion he will develop in the rest of the collection as embodied in the *stećci*:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| U tom kolu bola ni potonj ni prvi<br>Igrište si strvi i ročište crvi | In that train of pain, neither last nor first<br>A playground of vultures, for the worms a tryst |
| Zaplijenjen od tijela greb za sebe djela<br>Kad će tijelo samo da    | Hostage to the body a tomb he builds in turn<br>When by itself the body                          |
| Postane djelo ?  | Into act will turn ? (23).   |

These lines also speak in Dizdar's complex rhyme structure with alliterations, repetitions, anagrams, and even interweaving of individual sounds that form this highly textured stanza. This is the first time the phrase "kolo bola" appears as a metaphor for life and death. One rhyme scheme in the first couplet is formed by words First, vultures, and worms, while playground and tryst form another, both emphasized with the rolling /r/ sound in the last word of the first line and all stressed words of the second line (*prvi*, *igrište*, *strvi*, *ročište*, *crvi*). In all but one of these, /r/ functions as a vowel in BCS, further attracting attention to itself. The assonance with /o/ in the first line, flowing much like the phrase "kolo bola" is interrupted by this highly stressed /r/ sound, retarding the pace and audibly marking the space of death.

The next two lines are markedly easier to pronounce but also carry a complex rhyme: *zaplijenjen*, *tijela*, *djela*, *tijelo*, carried over into the last line with *djelo*. The consonants are also paired up in voiced and voiceless and in the consonance of the repeating /l/ sound. They are thus brought together in rhyme to bear upon the meaning of that complex phrase: hostage, body, and act. If the medieval Bogumils believed themselves to be hostages of Satan in their physical

bodies, then Dizdar attempts to disrupt this belief with emphasizing “act” in “body.” The stećci can be taken to be that embodiment that “acts” in history, by its presence, mystery, and message. But Dizdar is also emphasizing here a call for the material body in action, rather than passive existence in the divinely conditioned separation of body and soul.

These five poems emphasize the contradictions between the body and soul, earth and heavens in Bogumil theology (or any other theology for that matter). Dizdar is foregrounding the consequences of that divided self, especially in the image of the hands that turn one against the other. And as Dizdar’s final *Word on Man* is his call to turn to one’s material existence here now and allow it to become the (defining?) act of his being (in history), it is hard to see how Jones can claim that Dizdar posits theology and faith in contrast to the “gun and the knife.” And as I show next, the section *Word on Heavens* completes Dizdar’s non-theological call to resistance.

### ***World on Heavens: Time to Confront Time***

The full explication of Dizdar’s atheism can be found in his *krstjani*’s loss of faith *following* the Crusades, not preceding them as the Inquisition held. This point comes across in the *Word on Heavens*’ concluding poems *Brotnjice* and *Wedding Poem*.<sup>114</sup> *Brotnjice* is too long to cite in full, but a few key stanzas are worth citing:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Čekali smo dugo Vrijeme je da shvatimo kako smo<br>dugo čekali | We waited for too long. It is time to understand<br>just how long we waited. |
| Jedni su bili praznih ruku a drugi ne znaše dobaciti           | Some were empty handed and others didn’t<br>know how to give                 |
| Svi jednako okrenuti suncu ali sudbina raznih<br>...           | All facing to the sun, but of different destinies                            |
| Ruke su još tu al još se ne rukovasmo                          | The hands are still there, but we still didn’t                               |

---

<sup>114</sup> There were two Crusades organized by the Pope in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, both unsuccessful in penetrating Bosnia’s rugged terrain.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>Od opčinjenosti još se ne izliječismo<br/>         Jer lijeka još ne našosmo<br/>         Osim one stare molitve<br/>         Osim one stare kletve<br/>         Osim<br/>         Od Drine do Ukrine i Save od Une i Sane do Rame<br/>         i Neretve</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">shake them</p> <p>We're still ill, enchanted<br/>         For we didn't find a cure<br/>         Except for that old prayer<br/>         Except for that old curse<br/>         Except<br/>         From Drina to Ukrina and Sava to Una and Sana<br/>         to Rama and Neretva</p> |
| <p>Zapreštaju vam dijavole i studeni grade i suhi vjetre</p>   | <p>We curse you with devils and cold hail and dry<br/>         wind</p>   |
| <p>Zapreštaju vam sa vasemim silama nebesnim urilom i<br/>         rapailom i epimilom<br/>         Da ne prihodite ka siemu ka metehu tom silam<br/>         nečastivim pometenom<br/>         ...</p>  | <p>We curse you with all heavenly powers and<br/>         devils Uril, Rapail, and Epimil<br/>         Do not to come to our hearth and our region<br/>         with those unclean powers<br/>         ...</p>  |
| <p>I neće dan imati moći sve do jednog dana<br/>         Sve do dana kad neće bit ni noći<br/>         Za dan taj nek lipte rane vijeka nek kipte rijeke<br/>         srdite ljubavi<br/>         ...</p>  | <p>Day will not have power until that day<br/>         'Til the day that there's no night either<br/>         For that day let the wounds of centuries gush<br/>         bleeding, let the rivers of angry love<br/>         overflow<br/>         ...</p>  |
| <p>Jer<br/>         Na ovom putu<br/>         Sada smo prvi put zastali<br/>         Znajući da je vrijeme da vremenu pogledamo u oči<br/>         Vrijeme je da priznamo kako smo sastanak riječi i djela<br/>         uzalud čekali</p>                        | <p>For<br/>         On this path<br/>         We stopped for the first time<br/>         Knowing it's time to confront time<br/>         It's time to admit that for the union of word and<br/>         deed we waited for in vain</p>  |
| <p>(Na kraju valja i ovo reći s pravom mjerom<br/>         u izrazu i glasu –<br/>         Ako nam glas i nije stigao duboko do neba<br/>         Vrisnuli smo bar<br/>         Kako treba)</p>  | <p>(In the end we ought to say this as well with a<br/>         suitable expression and voice –<br/>         Even if our voice did not make it up to heaven<br/>         At least our scream<br/>         Was not a dream) (69-72).</p>   |

Here the *krstjani* speak in confrontation with the invading Crusaders, specifically the Dominicans who were brutal in their Inquisition of the Bosnian church.<sup>115</sup> The beginning establishes their faith in divine intervention (“All facing the sun but of different destinies”), but soon the speaker qualifies this state as being “ill” and “enchanted.” Their only defense is prayer (which they seem to abandon) and the curse (which the next several stanzas elaborate). All that

<sup>115</sup> Dizdar's notes indicate this reference to Dominicans in the Inquisition.

*krstjani* have against the invading armies are their prayer and their curse, which in Dizdar's poem blend into one as the hope for deliverance is slowly extinguished. And so the time comes to "confront time" and the failure of words and deed to unite, signaling a metaphysical change in the speaker's voice.

Confrontation with time is, in a word, confrontation with history, stepping out of the theological framework and facing time as the only eternal measure. Unity of words and deeds is an interesting concept because it captures both the failure of the Book (divine message) but also that metaphysical unity all theology and teleology requires (in another context this unity is called the unity of subject and object). The divine is no longer there or at least no longer attainable. And when the divine is removed what remains is the text in confrontation with time: the text as a trace of "our scream" that was not in vain. The text, in turn, becomes a vehicle for defiance – a concept we will see rise to a principle of life in this collection. For Dizdar, the *stećci* represent that petrified scream and remind us that *we will be there where they are now*.

*Wedding Poem* finalizes this search for meaning. The poem opens with the line: "With my death my world died as well" but slowly and gradually through the poem this line is reversed as a new life arises from the silences and the messages of the dead:

Sada kroz sudbinske tišine  
Bijeli trak sjećanja  
Probija oklop  
Tmine

Now through the destined silences  
A white trace of remembrance  
Pierces the armor  
Of darkness

Kroz čudno okno tog prozora  
Rodí se neko novo  
Duboko  
Oko

That strange glass in that window gives  
Birth to some new  
Deep  
Eye (73)

In the inverted pyramid, Dizdar marks the "white trace of memory" that breaks up the darkness (but also metaphorically earthly existence as *tmina* or *tmača* is Bogumil symbol for earthly

existence), with a “new / deep / eye.” Once again we see the complexity of the rhyme structure suggest intricate intersections of meaning in glass, window, some, new, deep, and eye. Assonance of the vowel /o/ predominates this rhyme as does the sharply marking /k/ (okno, neko, duboko, oko) that sets the stark rhythm of the stanza. Similar assonance of /o/ links the words marked sharply with the trill /r/ in combination with the equally sharp /z/ (kroz, prozor, rodi). True to its meaning the word “čudno” (marvelous, strange) stands apart from these two rhyming structures. Kroz, prozor, and rodi form another complex symbolic phrase where the liminality of “through” and “window” focus the “birth” of that “new eye” as a product of liminality between life and death. As the assonance links these rhythmically marked words with /o/ it is as if circles of meaning echo from the dead into the living realms through the stones. The miracle of a deeper, metaphorical “eye” emerges out of the window of the white stone with a view onto history.

A cycle of life is further suggested by the tone of a longer exposition in twenty three stanzas on life as observed by the *krstjan* and his *stećak*, and the poem concludes:

|                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Mrtav sam             | Dead I am               |
| Mrtav                 | Dead                    |
| Ali sa smrću mojom    | But with my death       |
| Nije umro             | Didn't                  |
| I                     | Die                     |
| Svijet                | The world               |
| Opet se u nekim očima | Again in someone's eyes |
| Svjetlost             | The light               |
| Zanavjek              | Forever                 |
| Gasi                  | Dims                    |
| U nekim mekim         | In some soft            |
| Tek počinju           | Just starting           |
| Da plamte             | To smolder              |
| Snovi                 | Dreams                  |

|                            |                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Pa preko visokih brana     | So over high gates                   |
| Preko zabrana              | Over the forbidden                   |
| Preko                      | Over                                 |
| Grobnog                    | Grave                                |
| Kamena                     | Stone                                |
| <br>                       |                                      |
| Preko kostiju što sve jače | Over the bones with an ever brighter |
| Svijetle                   | Glow                                 |
| U tami                     | In the dark                          |
| <br>                       |                                      |
| Gorom i dolom              | By mount and by valley               |
| Kićeni                     | Flowery                              |
| Svatovi                    | Wedding guests                       |

Evoking the notion of a cycle of life and death in the two stanzas describing life and death through the metaphor of “light in the eyes,” the *krstjan* and his stećak are tied into this cycle as his bones are glowing “ever brighter” in the darkness (of this world). Especially important are the last three stanzas, the first of which again relies on a highly textured rhythm that calls attention to itself in the sheer difficulty of pronunciation. The interplay of consonants once again works to bring out this quality: /p/, /r/, and /k/ in the repetitions of “preko” (over) set the tone of the stanza, marking the beat. The pronunciation of these consonants gives the sense of crossing boundaries, barriers (prepreka as an implied rhyme), physical but also metaphysical (crossing the gravestone – an act forbidden in the Bosnian Church and a constant warning on all lapidary epitaphs).

The last stanza however, quiets down this beating drum of the fricative and trilling rhythm from “gorom” to “dolom” (/r/ to /l/) and ends the poem in a quizzical “kićeni svatovi” (lit. flowery/adorned wedding guests). Here, as the poem suggests at the beginning of these last seven stanzas, the *krstjan* is dead, but the world *did not stop*, and *doesn't die*, so that his mark, the “bright light” of his bones speaks his *silent* voice into the reborn present of the symbolic wedding party.

*Word on Land: Defiant in Desire, Utopia, and Freedom from Necessity*

In the *Word on Land*, the poem *With a Raised Hand* also speaks to the stećak silent message:

Velim  
Pametaru  
Što gori i plamti  
Kad pohodom čestim ka rukama mojim  
Još uvijek me misli i uvijek se pamti

I say  
To the historian  
That burns and is ablaze  
When in his pilgrimage often to my hands  
Still thinks me and still remembers [himself]

Velim  
A ništa  
Ne zaostaje

I say  
But nothing  
Remains there

...  
I riječ  
Rečena u pustinji ovoj  
Nemušta i nijema gubi se i nestaje

And word  
Uttered in this desert  
Mute and silent is lost and disappears

Samo je moj krik  
Čvrst kao ovaj moj kamen Postojan i stalan  
(83-4)

Only my cry  
As strong as this stone Steadfast and permanent

There is a contrast in these lines between the speech and the cry uttered by the *krstjani*. The speaker tells us his words are mute and silent and disappear in this desert, but his cry is as permanent as stone. In a sense, Dizdar is renouncing the power of the word, the text to speak across the historical silence, perhaps even in the banal differences of idiom, but he does not deny an existentialist message to the monuments nonetheless.

The historian visits “his hands” – that symbol of resistance that burns in him as the historian curiously *thinks him* and remembers *himself*. So even if we lost the civilization that made these lapidary monuments, their existential urgency still marked in the wilderness with bright white gravestones ought to speak to us. Dizdar urges us to listen for and hear the resistance in the silences of the stećci as textual and material witnesses that are still standing, even after the Crusades, the Ottomans, the Austro-Hungarians. But there is no sense in which this resistance or defiance is ethnicized or worse yet, nationalized as some have claimed. In fact,

we would be hard pressed to find any evidence that Dizdar links the notion of defiance or resistance to any nation or even any sense of the multicultural (as Buturović's "alternative nation"). In this collection, such discourses are never evoked. Instead, we find again and again structures that evoke the materialist discourse of hierarchy, class struggle, social justice, and resistance to oppressive practices of those in power.

Dizdar does not limit his social commentary to the "colonial" times or eras of empires, be they Papal, Ottoman, or Austro-Hungarian. He speaks of power and of class, invoking materialist analysis, reading in the silences of the *stećci* a portrait of this other kind of subjugation and hierarchy *krstjani* lived with and resisted. Dizdar dedicates his 1942 *Note on the Five* to Bertolt Brecht on account of their similarity in political outlook and poetic vision<sup>116</sup>. The poem is short:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Četvorica jednog vode<br>Jednog gone četvorica  | The four take one away<br>One is pursued by the four            |
| Četvorica mrka lica<br>Preko vode preko žica    | The four with dark faces<br>Over waters over fences             |
| I od íća i od pića<br>I od ruha i od kruha      | From food and drink<br>From bread and dress                     |
| Kroz živice kroz ižice<br>Od svobode od slobode | From fence to fence<br>From free, from freedom                  |
| I od hiže i od greba<br>I od zemlje i od neba   | From house and grave<br>From land, from heaven                  |
| Četvorica jednog vode<br>Jednog vode četvorica  | The four take one away<br>One is taken by the four              |
| Četvorica jednog broji<br>Četiri se jednog boji | The four take account of one<br>The four are afraid of one (85) |

The focus on the force by which the one man is held and taken away by the four is cleverly inversed at the end, especially accentuated by Dizdar's repetition, alliteration, almost identical

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<sup>116</sup> For the full account of this poem, including its initial *alhamijado* written form see Dizdar's note on this poem in the collection's footnotes p. 170

syntax in the last couplet (četvorica and četiri; jednog and jednog; broji and boji). The all encompassing power of the Four (invoking perhaps the Four Horsemen of Apocalypse), from earth to the heavens, collapses under its own weight as the fear of the one they've pursued defines them. Reminiscent of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, this kernel of truth about resistance expressed in this poem also speaks to Dizdar's own participation in the resistance against the Nazis as he makes clear in the notes. Resistance, in turn, becomes the fundamental orientation of much of the *Word on Land* section.

Dizdar's critique of power continues with a *Note on the Throne*, where the speaker identifies the Pope with the Devil himself. Wealth, another instrument of social hierarchy was in Dizdar's interpretation of the Bosnian Church, shunned and renounced. *Note about Leaving* (as well as the *Note on Fortune*) dwells on the tragedy of a life wasted spent amassing treasure only to realize that there is no treasure in death.

*Gorčin*, on the other hand, begins a series of poems specifically on the aristocratic hierarchy in medieval Bosnia. It is a beautifully condensed story of a medieval knight who served his Lord well in ten wars, but dies of heartache when his loved one is taken into slavery. The emphasis on social hierarchy in Gorčin's service and the way in which he loses his love and his life express the fundamental injustice of the feudal order in medieval Bosnia. For example, Gorčin opens with:

|                 |                |
|-----------------|----------------|
| Ase ležit       | Here lies      |
| Vojnik Gorčin   | Soldier Gorčin |
| U zemlji svojoj | In his land    |
| Na baštini      | On estate      |
| Tuždi           | Foreign (94)   |

Dizdar sets up the contrast between the land and the estate to underline Gorčin's service as a soldier. That service is also poignantly captured:

|                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Bil sam            | I was                     |
| U pet i pet vojni  | In five and five wars     |
| Bez štita i oklopa | Without a shield or amour |
| E da ednom         | Oh that but once          |
| Prestanu           | End                       |
| Gorčine            | Gorčine/Acrimonies        |

The ambiguity of the last line is in the proper name Gorčin which in Vocative case takes the form Gorčine, and equals the Accusative case for “acrimonies.” Is Soldier Goričin raising his longing voice for an end to wars or the end to acrimonies in general? Or does he raise his voice for his own life full of such “bitterness”? His name becomes imbued with this ambiguity, artfully suggesting the soldier’s weariness with the (acrimonies of) wars and his service.

The final lines reveal he doesn’t die from these wars and battles of his service, but from “boli nepreboli” (pain unremedied; a stock phrase of oral epics) of having lost his love to those wars (she is captured and taken into slavery). It is as if Gorčin cannot escape his tragedy any more than he can rid himself of his name. In using the phrase “boli nepreboli” Dizdar is also evoking epic poetry to contrast its verbosity and extensive hero adulation to the simple yet emotionally charged portrait of a tragic rather than an epic hero in Gorčin.

But nowhere is the resistance of the commoners in medieval Bosnia expressed better and with more biting irony than in a *Note on Honor*. I cite here three fragments:

...I da e vidimo vsakome  
komu se podoba...

...Let it be known to all  
to whom it applies...<sup>117</sup>

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Velika čast svakoj vlasti koja je data od gospoda našeg<br>velikoga boga | [We give]<br>Great honor to all power that is given by<br>our great Lord |
| Velika čast svakoj vlasti što stiže nam bilo ma od koga                  | Great honor to any power that comes<br>from anywhere                     |
| Čast kralju našem i svoj vlasteli rusaga bosanskog                       | Honor to our king and all nobility of Bosnia                             |
| Čast neka je kralju otcu i kraljici majci                                | Honor be to our father king and queen mother                             |
| Čast blagorodnoj djeci kraljevskoj i blagorodnoj                         | Honor to their honored princely children and                             |

<sup>117</sup> Opening lines of many legal documents preserved from the period.



At first, the opening formula establishes a paradigm for reading the lines that are to follow. And at first the text follows it: line after line follows predictable listing of all interested parties of medieval society. But the expectation is also that there should be a substantive statement somewhere after the formulaic and context specific ‘honoring’ that opens up such texts. But as we discover, the substance is missing, both literally and metaphorically. Towards the end we learn this is a Charter on Honor, a contradiction in terms, a form that exposes the entire text as self-referential and a fraud. And in that moment the ironic reversal happens: Dijak wants to share this “honor” with the serfs and “all others,” and in doing so, show just the extent of self-glorification and self-adulation of the nobility. But it also suggest that this comments isn’t just about “honor” that is exchanged or defined in this text but power, wealth, and social status, and with it the fundamental class conflict of feudal Bosnia: the nobility and their serfs. Using the symbolic “table and the crumbs” that invokes without naming wealth of which only crumbs reach the serfs, the dijak is ironically inverting the preceding lines making the poem about the meaninglessness of honor. In dijak’s re-writing honor is just an ideological container for landowner-serf relations that define the “honored” nobility.

Dizdar’s typical inverted pyramid form makes an appearance at the end as well, with each new line moving to an ever more condensed meaning, until it is but one very last word: crafty. In that way, the inverted pyramid also draws attention to the inversion of values that each true act of social resistance carries with it. In this poem, it is especially obvious how the very shape of the text changes from the crucial moment of the dijak’s intervention. Prior to it, the text is visually monolithic and roughly square, but dijak’s words take the shape of an inverted pyramid, visually signaling the reversal of the social hierarchy.

*War* in this same section also points to the social hierarchy Dizdar is interested in bringing out to the surface in these *Word(s)* about the *Land*. In this poem a mirror narrative is developed so that on the one hand the succession of Bosnian kings is coupled on the other with the family of commoners who fight the wars for the kings and die for them. King Stipan Drugi is coupled with his servant Vučihna (lit. wolf, with all the names of his descendants also being variations on wolf) who “died in service faithful / for his Lord.” Tvrtko in turn is served by Vuk who’s killed on the Hungarian border, while Jelena Gruba is served by Vukajlo who dies at the hands of the Ottomans, while Vukas, Vukajlo’s son dies at the hands of his own men in 1415.

The last stanza reads:

A potom potomstvo ovo  
 Prema predanju starom ide ovako:  
 Po smrti Vukas svojoj rodi sina Vukana  
 I Vukan onda jedne godi rodi Vukomana  
 Vukoman poslije –  
 I sve tako redom  
 Do današnjeg dana

Sve za vjernu za službu  
 Za svoga gospodina

And then these descendants descended  
 According to tradition in this manner:  
 Upon his death Vukas begat son Vukan  
 And Vukan then one year begat Vukoman  
 Vukoman thereafter -  
 And all like that in a line  
 To day the present-day

All for loyal for service  
 For his Lord (108)

Unlike the romantic or mythologized versions of the medieval past in the national narratives (including those developed *around* Mak Dizdar’s poetry), here Dizdar opens up the most elemental questions of life and death to questions of class and aristocratic hierarchy. The story of “wolves” is never told, their names always blend just as easily into one another as they do here. The only progeny we know are the noble kings, the “good Bosnians” and their “honorable” nobility. Dizdar once again uses biting irony to point to the fundamental class and power conflict that changed so little from their time to ours.

*Word on Land* ends with the most well known and beloved poem *Note about Land*

that condenses all of these various themes of inequality, contradictions, class hierarchy, and wealth disparity, and most importantly resistance/defiance/spite into an image of Bosnia:

Pars fuit Illyrici, qualm nunc vocat incola Bosnam,  
Dura, sed argenti munere dives humus.  
Non illic virides spaciosi margine campi,  
Nec sata qui multo foenore reddat ager.  
Sed rigidi montes, sed saxa minantia coleo,  
Catella et summis imposita alta jugis.

There was a part of Illiria, that now Bosnia is called  
Wild land, but soil rich with silver  
There, no vast worked spacious fields are found  
Nor fields that a bounty large would give  
Only savage mounts, only gloomy, threatening stones  
And tall fortresses on precipitous mounts located

Iani Pannoni Quinque: Elegarium Liber (El. VI)

Iani Pannoni Quinque: Elegarium Liber (El. VI)

Pitao jednom tako jednog vrli pitac neki:  
A kto je ta šta je ta da prostiš  
Gdje li je ta  
Odakle je  
Kuda je  
Ta  
Bosna  
Rekti

Once one was asked by an admirable asker  
And who is this what is this forgive me  
Where could it be  
Where from is this  
Where is it  
This  
Bosnia  
Pray tell

A zapitani odgovor njemu hitan tad dade:  
Bosna da prostiš jedna zemlja imade  
I posna i bosa da prostiš  
I hladna i gladna  
I k tomu još  
Da prostiš  
Prkosna  
Od  
Sna

The asked an answer to the asker quickly gives:  
Bosnia forgive me there was once a country  
Fasting and a barefoot one forgive me  
A cold and a hungry one  
And moreover  
Forgive me  
Defiant  
In  
Desire  
[alternatively Defiant from Dreams]

The most visually perfect inverted pyramid in the collection, this poem is also a perfect example of the complexity of Dizdar's style. Much like the complex phrases "kolo bola" or "duboko oko" the final three lines of this poem summarize the ethics of resistance that dominates Dizdar's poetry. "Prkosna od sna" is a complex interweaving of "sna" (Genitive of "dream") and "prkosna" (Feminine adj. defiant) that, in this combination, happens to contain within itself "dream" in "prko-sna." In the most literal meaning then, Bosnia is defiant because of its dreams and desires that stand in contrast to the bare, cold, hungry land. A more important sense in which

defiance and dream are linked is in the way these two terms qualify each other. This is a “defiance” that *contains* “dream” in the sense that at the core of defiance as an ethical stand resides a utopia, a dream of “freedom from Necessity.” The common thread of all the poems in the collection is precisely this sense of social utopia derived initially from the beliefs of the heretic Bosnian church. From the belief that words would become deeds; to the critiques of wealth, social, and power inequalities that defined the lives of the now silent *krstjani*; to a desire and a dream of something better, in this earthly darkness (*tmina*), such a dream morphs from a theological belief into a social ethic of resistance and defiance in these poems.

This isn't to say that Dizdar offers some easy way out of the contradictions of history and the tragedy of the forgotten, erased Bosnian past, but rather, like Jameson suggests, Dizdar opens up a view of utopia that doesn't *just* allow us to imagine a better world, but rather see its' impossibility of imagination as a critique of the present:

utopia's function lies not in helping us imagine a better world, but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to do so, our imprisonment in the non-utopian present, which in return, reveals the ideological closure of the system in which we are trapped (F Jameson 43).

The prologue to the poem, a brief Western description of Bosnia as a barren, cold, mountainous desert serves to alert us once again to the anti-imperial history Dizdar is reaching out to in his poetry. The first stanza captures the voice of that “Other” so that in the second stanza, in the ironic, bitter repetition of “forgive me,” we can read the exact opposite: that there is no shame but pride (*ponos*) hiding in that phrase “*prkosna od sna*.” This implied rhyme (*ponosna* rather than *prkosna*) adds another layer of subtlety to Dizdar's poetic expression. However, “*prkosna od sna*” much like “*kolo bola*” or other such complex phrases bordering on symbolic neologisms, contains in its form another layer of meaning as well.

Much like Selimović's style and formal elements of his prose that suggest the dialectic as Hasan's way of reveling in life's contradictions, Dizdar's highly textured poetry takes the dialectical move a step further. Selimović focused on the absent synthesis of what I called, in Adornian fashion, negative dialectics, but Dizdar here comments on the dialectic within individual words and phrases, not just at the level of syntax, but on the level of sound. "Prkosna od sna" is just such a phrase: defiance and dream combine to make something that is larger than the sum of its parts. It isn't just that Bosnia has high aspirations and is thus defiant, but rather that the very act of defiance suggests, implies, and contains within it a utopic element, giving a hopeful turn to the phrase, rather than a self-defeating one (compare Hasan's "prkos" [spite] and Dizdar's "prkosna od sna"). Development of such dialectical phrasing that combines meaning in combining or contrasting sounds, the very building blocks of language is further explicated in *Word on Word*, and Dizdar had to defend it against soc-realist attacks for being "nonsense" poetry (Mak. Dizdar 173–4). "Prkosna od sna" also defines what I have been calling the ethics of resistance that Krleža and Dizdar attach to the medieval culture and its monuments. Spite and defiance that are not self-destructive but rather utopic moments in Bosnian identity define this image of Bosnia. Despite poverty, despite imperial conquest, and despite powerlessness, the heretic Bosnian spite defined here as the utopic ethic of resistance stands out in its immediacy.

The end of the collection and the final poem *Message* is also a dialogue marked by irony continued from the *Note on Land* into the present. The diction of the last poem just like the first one, and unlike most others, frames the collection by modern vocabulary and syntax. The threats of invasion by the crusaders from the beginning are now long gone and the speaker of these lines is their survivor. Marked by italicization are two stanzas spoken in the voice of the

Invader, and four stanzas spoken to the Invader. The two stanzas spoken by the Crusader are statements of victory following destruction of “my city”:

|                   |                       |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Uništen je on sad | He is destroyed now   |
| I uništena je     | And destroyed is that |
| Nevjerna          | Unfaithful            |
| Njegova           | Faith                 |
| Vjera (155)       | Of his                |

Two parts compose this stanza and its image: destroyed (uništen, uništena) and un-faithful (nevjerna vjera). But the destruction is not complete so the Invaders from the North and the South come again and again and repeatedly burn down Bosnia in this condensed narrative, each time convinced that they have destroyed it completely. But after four attempts, the speaker says:

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| A ja ću ovako iz daljine           | And I will, like this, from a distance |
| Svoju prastaru                     | My ancient                             |
| I pravu                            | And true                               |
| Istinu                             | Truth                                  |
| Izreći                             | Say                                    |
| ...                                |  |
| Da tavorenje moje na tvrdoj zemlji | That my existence on this tough land   |
| Veoma je kratko                    | Is very short                          |
| Ali opak                           | But diabolical                         |
| Ništeći njegove prave pojave       | By destroying its true instances       |
| Utvrdjuješ ti                      | You are affirming                      |
| Upravo tako                        | In truth                               |
| Njegove                            | Its                                    |
| Jave                               | Realities                              |
| I                                  | And                                    |
| Njegove                            | its                                    |
| Sne (137)                          | Dreams                                 |

Dizdar here posits the notion of eternity but not as the theological heavenly home to which the soul must return, but rather the legacy left behind the destruction by the Invaders. The one “genuine truth” the speaker communicates is that by destroying the “true instances” of his life, i.e., his physical existence and his civilization, the Invader is only cementing his Reality and his Dreams, leaving a mark that never dies. Here again we see the combination of Reality and

Dream as the indestructible traces left by the long lost resistance of the *krstjani*. But the speaker anticipates more invasions, more Crusades:

Čekam te  
Jer te znam  
Doći ćeš opet jednog dana

I wait for you  
Because I know you  
You will come one day again

(Zakleo si se čvrsto na to  
Na kaležu na križu na oštrici mača)  
Pijan od pojanja prokletstva i dima tamjana)

(You swore on it firmly  
On the chalice, the cross, the sword's edge  
Drunk with chanting of damnation and the

smoke of incense)

Pa  
Dođi

So  
Come

Navikao sam davno na tvoje pohode  
Kao na neke velike bolesti  
Što stižu iz daleka

I am hardened to your campaigns  
Like to some great diseases  
That arrive from afar

Kao na goleme ledene i strašne vode  
Što odnosi ih sve jača  
Ova noćna rijeka  
Tmača

Like some enormous cold and terrible water  
Carried away ever stronger  
This river of the night  
Gloom

We see once again the visual separation of the voices from the proper pyramid in which we learn that the Invader will come back again to the inverted pyramid of the final two stanzas. The second stanza in this quote separated by parentheses stands out for its diction that embodies the horrors of the Crusades. Alliteration in “kalež” and “križ” once again slows down the reading, making us dwell not only on the images but the grating sounds of these “holy” words. Similarly, “pijan od pojanja prokletstva” creates that complex image of “drunken with chanting of damnation” working again with bilabial consonants to slow down the rhythm. Drunk with power, in ecstasy of Crusaders’ chants, this phrase builds that image of the crazed fundamentalist intent on purifying his faith on the battlefield. These lines stand then in sharp contrast to the short two defiant words: “So / come.”

The last two stanzas then take on the inverted pyramid shape and a complex rhyme scheme between them: epistrophe in the first lines with “pohode” and “vode” (as opposed to epistrophe in the last lines of the previous two stanzas), with the tightening of the rhyme scheme once again in the last three lines (jača, tmača) and connection between the stanzas in the third lines (daleka, rijeka). The calm tone of these last lines is also in the substance of the message: that these invasions have become almost a natural occurrence and yet a reality that is slowly drifting away as the life (tmača as Bogumil reference to material rather than spiritual life) grows stronger. In light of the collection, these words come as soothing and encouraging, especially in the sense “gloomy earthly existence” is getting “stronger.”

In conclusion, rather than constructing a mythology of the medieval Bosnian man as Muhamed Filipović famously argued and recently Amila Buturović does, I argue that Dizdar’s collection is foregrounding the question of the text as it survived across that abyss of history and now in his poetry speaks once more, but in modern expression.<sup>118</sup> But Dizdar’s poetry is not about recovering the “original” or the “tradition” or the “Bosnian spirit” understood as an ethnos. It is, however, about engaging the text that bridges that historical gap. Dizdar, in the process, offers the medieval text as an inspiration for understanding this history differently, in light of resistance to foreign empires as well as to class and social structures of dominance.

In this, Dizdar offers us the most developed anti-imperial discourse in Bosnian and wider Yugoslav literature. He engages directly the voices of the “Others”: the Pope, the

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<sup>118</sup> Muhamed Filipović’s article “Bosnian spirit in literature: What is it?” was published, not surprisingly, the very same month as the *Declaration* and *Proposal* by Croatian, that is, Serbian intelligentsia as national(istic) manifestos of sorts, as I explained in the discussion on the canon. Filipović’s essay consists of two parts, one is a positivist, nationalist definition of the “Bosnian/k spirit” contra Serbian and Croatian nations while the second part then attempts to read that spirit in Dizdar in an essentialist way almost as if Dizdar’s poetry was medieval poetry rather than a modern poetic expression. See Muhamed Filipović “Bosanski duh u književnosti – šta je to?” *Život* 1967, March 3.

Hungarian Crusaders, the Ottomans, and in claiming a new interpretation of the medieval heritage, the Austro-Hungarians, especially their *Kulturträger*s. But he stops short of finding anti-imperialism in the contemporary moment, a task requiring engagement with the Western material and cultural dominance in Yugoslavia. That task would be one for the post-Dayton literatures as I will outline in the Conclusion.

As I have argued in reference to the particular phrases constructed through a dialectical combination of words, sounds, and meaning, Dizdar also offers a powerful expression of the dialectic in formal elements of his poetry. He builds his poetry out of complex phrases culminating in a dialectical fashion to form, for example, the concept “*prkosna od sna*” as an identifier of Bosnia’s response to imperial challenge. Heretic spite and utopic resistance stand out as the guideposts in history, signaled by the still standing text of the *stećci*. I call this effect dialectical in so far as contrasting but also complementary concepts are merged and enmeshed through sound and form to create new signifiers, in form and in substance.

If we could outline a dialectical approach to text and to history in Selimović, we can see in Dizdar its more fundamental development. At the heart of this particular understanding of history is the utopia contained in the revolutionary resistance Dizdar attributes to Bosnian history. He intimates this idea as much through his poetic form and style as he does in the thematic developments of the *Stone Sleeper*. We have seen that this is resistance to foreign domination as much as it is resistance in class struggle, yet grounded first and foremost in the anti-fascist resistance of the Yugoslav as well as the wider European intelligentsia.

And yet, in Dizdar’s editorial work we can still see the hallmark reactions of a native intelligentsia “stuck” in a Eurocentric paradigm of history: he struggles to “prove” Bosnia does not “lag” behind Europe, to prove “men in remote places could reason” and could create art

(incisively mark their cries), even if he tries to develop a sense of “resistance to foreign cultural supremacy.”

As we have seen with Selimović, the notion of spite/defiance/resistance that Selimović and Dizdar foreground in their meditations on Bosnia still harkens back to an imperialist paradigm of natives: their irrationality and stubborn resistance inexplicable to civilized European masters. They both modify this paradigm into a positively inflected portrait of Bosnian heretics and revolutionaries, in a pattern reminiscent of “nativism” (in the sense of an attempt to recover some pre-colonial tradition as a way of asserting the present identity). However, Dizdar’s as well as Andrić’s and Selimović’s shortcomings are more in the failure to address the contemporary, Western modes of imperialism directly than in the circumspect nativist philosophy implied here.

As I have outlined at the beginning of this study, the major stumbling blocks in applying postcolonial approaches to the region included a failure to distinguish between pre-capitalist empires and capitalist imperialism. In that context, it is important to note that Selimović’s and Dizdar’s reflections on “colonialism” or “empires” when situated historically (17<sup>th</sup> century and medieval Bosnia respectively), fail to account for the contemporariness of their interventions in Bosnian narratives of identity. As I already mentioned, it is not difficult to find references that fit Western Europe better than Ottoman empire in Hasan’s rejection of Istanbul politics as it is perhaps also easy to take Dizdar’s focus on heretic Bosnia to be an interpolation of Bosnian anti-fascist and revolutionary struggle. But, the problem of not addressing what I have identified as actual imperialism – conditions of Yugoslav 20<sup>th</sup> century peripheral position in relation to the West – or at least, not addressing it directly, also signals the extent to which

Western dominance and hegemony in cultural discourse was a matter of unquestioned (and therefore successfully ideological) “common sense.”

## **Conclusions on the Yugoslav Literary Canon, Bosnia, and Identity**

This second chapter presented an argument for an alternative reading of three major canonical texts in Yugoslav literature: Ivo Andrić’s two novels, *Bosnian Chronicle* and *Bridge on the Drina*, Meša Selimović’s novel *Death and the Dervish*, and Mak Dizdar’s collection of poetry *The Stone Sleeper*. I focused on the role and engagement of History in these texts, the forms and literary innovations (which, in part, marked these moments as canonical), and the ways the question of identity in reference to empires and imperialism presented itself in these crucial canonical texts and moments. In the process, my intent was to show the shortsightedness of national canonization and national interpretation of these texts, focusing especially on the nationalistic interventions in reading the image of Bosnia as an orientalized space – a Dark Vilayet. And consequently, I aimed for a contextualization of this interpretive practice within the same history of empires and imperialism that I found these texts to be referencing and addressing, sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly.

In contending the national(istic) interpretations of Ivo Andrić, I outlined the presence of the “dark-vilayet” *imago* of Bosnia in the texts while foregrounding the often overlooked contestation of this image in Andrić’s novels. I analyzed the way Andrić complicates and undercuts elements of this image of backward, silent, and barren Bosnia through mirroring of perspectives and alternative fragmentation of characters in the *Bosnian Chronicle*, the hypocrisy of Western consuls in their reflections on violence, as well Andrić’s overall critique of European

Enlightenment in this novel. I proposed that Andrić in this novel focuses on the figure of the translator as the embodiment of a particularly Bosnian historical situation: the impossibility of being made whole, (i.e., to make Europe and non-Europe translatable/commensurate) and the eternal desire to do so. In Andrić's conclusion to this novel, I read an undying, conflicted belief in the possibility of Europe, even if not in its actual existence.

In analyzing the *Bridge on the Drina*, I focused especially on the narrative form of this novel as it brings out Andrić's philosophy of History and his position vis-à-vis the Eurocentric philosophical and aesthetic outlook. Some central features of Andrić's style include the seemingly distant narrator, distinct character zones, irony, his privileged figure – simile that marks his overall measured, controlled modernist narrative. The primary contradiction Andrić navigates in this novel is the opposition of art and the promise of imagination as a redemptive power in a world defined by irony. In Lešić's excellent phrase, the effect is a feeling of resignation before the tragedy of history and serenity before the immense expanse of Time. The only intervention that Andrić posits in this modernist image of History is Art and Beauty as transcendental ideals of humanity.

From this analysis of Andrić's narratives, I concluded that in his work, the image of History is a modernist one, "real" history lies beyond the material world, in the eternal whole, inaccessible to us in the everyday maelstrom of history, but whose traces we can find in great art, stories we tell ourselves in confrontation with death. But qualified with Andrić's astute analysis of Western modernity, capitalism and pre-World War II Bosnia, this modernist disappointment in humanity is qualified by an undying belief in the idea of Europe, interestingly focused on uniting Europe and non-Europe. At the same time, writing from the periphery, Andrić finds it difficult to offer this resolution in a positive manner. His narratives of the peripheral identity and

even artistic intervention in history always implode: Cologne, Alihodža, the bridge all die violently in the end. In Andrić then, the Eurocentric ideas of European miracle, uniqueness of European civilization, and the unenviable position of non-Europe continue and are hardly mitigated by his decidedly modernist European position that our only intervention in History is through Art as that privileged medium by which we can access the Eternal, Time, spirit of History, and meaning itself.

In my analysis of Meša Selimović, I followed this trajectory set up in my analysis of Andrić's texts and philosophy. I focused especially on the contrasting ideas on human intervention in history between these two authors, finding in Selimović an insistence on actual, everyday intervention in the small and large human tragedies, in the name of human dignity. This philosophy or rather approach to History in Selimović is communicated through the subject and structural role Hasan plays in the reading of *Death and the Dervish*.

Much like in the previous section, here I also contented the national(istic) reading of Selimović that either emphasized some exotic, Islamic essence in this novel or alternatively proposed Selimović's novel as a thinly veiled anti-communist didacticism. In an overview of readings of the image of Bosnia in Selimović, I focused on notions of *relativity that is not indifferent* (in other words, relativity conditioned by intervention in defense of human dignity) and interculturalism as a theme continued from Andrić's Cologne. At the same time, I extracted the elements of Selimović's narrative about Bosnia that focus on the positive articulation of identity that Andrić captured with the allegory of *interpretation*, but that Selimović inflected with more agency into a concept of *nobility out of spite*.

Cosmopolitan conviviality embodied in Hasan suggests a more functional and livable notion of hybridity whereby Hasan's identity is always about belonging (whether here or there)

while Cologna's identity was primarily about not belonging. Especially interesting was Selimović's suggestion of identity as a relational process that carries with it a different understanding of space: Hasan is tied to Bosnia as his home, but in constant movement, travel, exposure to others, Hasan also denies the primary nexus of identity and *absolute* space. In that, Hasan effectively denies the parochialism of national(istic) identity.

My analysis of Selimović also focused on the historical sources that were previously not considered as his lyrical style was regularly taken to stand in opposition to Andrić's supposed objective historicism. But just as I denied this historiographic reading in Andrić, I also provided a reading of Selimović's lyricism that isn't beholden to this binary: objective vs. lyrical. Instead, I traced both the function and the origin of this style in Selimović. I explicated the manner in which Selimović's style draws much on the Qur'anic "sound vision" with binaries and contradiction communicated at the level of syntax and form, especially evident in complex parallelism, antithesis, gender binaries and overall highly rhythmic structure of Nurudin's confession.

While the function of this style on the one hand was to produce a seductively psychological narrative, Selimović also communicates a more fundamental philosophical position with it. Specifically, by removing the resolution to the contradictions set up in the Qur'anic model or the native model of the Slavic antithesis, Selimović removes the possibility of teleological closure, be it metaphysical as in the Qur'an or epic-heroic as in the Slavic antithesis. One of the effects of this refusal of teleology in combination with a confessional form is the generation of a fundamentally existentialist text and politics: from Sartrean concepts of bad faith and freedom in Nurudin's character to the concept of human being in defiance as the primary philosophical position with regards to History.

At the same time, Hasan also plays a role in resolving these contradictions left hanging by introducing a dialectical, or more properly negative dialectics as a principled position towards reality. Through his stories, Hasan communicates that he revels precisely in the “remainders,” the elements of reality that cannot be subsumed or cleanly resolved in a fully positive dialectical progress forward in synthesis. At the same time, Hasan believes in the utopia present in the promise of storytelling – not so much the content of stories, their moral or ethical character or lack thereof, but rather the utopian promise of communion in humanity through stories. Selimović is however, careful to separate this point about stories from Andrić’s modernist idealization of art as the only human intervention in history. Instead, for Selimović, rebellion rather than text signifies man’s fundamental positioning towards history, while stories are the home of utopia.

In this I see Selimović’s attempt at bridging a critique of Stalinism implicit in the novel with a leftist, socialist politics: critiquing a blind, vulgar Marxism, while also maintaining utopia and the fundamentally social ideal of rebellion. In Hasan’s intervention in Nurudin’s narrative, Selimović also critiques the psychological as an explanatory paradigm and urges us to look to the social. He carves out a positive space for Bosnians and their rebellion by positioning rebellion as a fundamental protector of human dignity. However, much like Andrić, Selimović still operates from within a Eurocentric paradigm: his natives are still defined from within orientalist stereotypes of irrationality, emotionality, spite, obstinacy, etc. I trace this same problem in the last author I considered in this chapter: Mak Dizdar.

In mainstream interpretations of Mak Dizdar, the national(istic) mystifications of Bosnian medieval past were especially distorting as Dizdar’s poetry was based on medieval literature, specifically lapidary monuments of the medieval Bosnian (heretic) Church members.

In the only English-language study and the only study to have taken up the question of postcolonial reading practice in relation to Dizdar's poetry, the major confusion arose around what and who are the identified "colonial" hegemony that appear in Dizdar's oeuvre. I argue for a strict delineation between anti-nationalist and anti-imperial positions evident in Dizdar's critical thought as well as poetry, thereby establishing the hegemonic powers as foreign empires, rather than intra-Yugoslav non-Bosnian ethnic or national communities.

Dizdar's use of medieval Bosnian diction as well as historical circumstances functions well to open up the question of Bosnian resistance to foreign domination and to thereby, expand and crystallize the same notion of resistance and rebellion we encountered in Selimović. At the same time, Dizdar's unique poetic expression inspired by the condensed, minimalist form of medieval epitaphs, communicates another version of the dialectical form expressed in this case not only through meaning or conceptualization but through sound and rhyme.

The anti-imperial stance of Dizdar's speakers in this collection is established within two framing poems: *Roads* and *Message*. The first introduces the confrontation between the Crusaders and the heretics of the Bosnian Church who promise to evade their enemies as their understanding of faith and divinity in battle with evil is metaphorical rather than literal (as it is with the Inquisition). The concluding poem continues this dialogue but long after the Crusades when the only trace of the Bosnian heretics are their gravestones, texts that promise a new life and a continuation of the spirit of resistance against hegemony.

In my analysis, I focused on three aspects of the collection: loss of faith coupled with a call to turn to the material body in action, anti-imperial resistance (against the Pope, the Ottomans, and implicitly Austro-Hungarians), and finally evocation of class-based, materialist

analysis as the other feature of this political culture. The loss of faith is marked by a need to “confront time” which is, in a word, to confront history, stepping out of the theological framework and facing time as the only eternal measure. And when the divine is no longer present, what remains is the text in confrontation with time that Dizdar’s summarizes in *Brotnjice*: “Even if our voice did not make it up to heaven / At least or scream / Was not a dream.” The text – the scream is how Dizdar often refers to these traces of medieval heretics – becomes a vehicle for defiance, and defiance in turn, becomes the principle of life for this entire collection.

The anti-imperial resistance as already established by the first and last poem of the collection, is elaborated throughout even as the position of resistance acquires new shades of meaning in *Word on Land*. In this part of the collection, Dizdar especially focuses on class differences in Bosnian feudal society, the contrast between the nobility and the commoners, and the injustices suffered as well as the traces of deeply ironic resistance, such as in the *Note on Honor*.

My analysis of Dizdar’s poetry also focused on an analysis of his style and especially the complex phrase-terms that define it. In addition, I addressed the rhythm and rhyme structures that produce the modern complexity of expression within a fairly limited medieval diction to which Dizdar often limits his speakers. Lastly, the visual presentation of his poetry, the form of his stanzas in either pyramid but more often inverted pyramid shape also suggest an anti-hierarchy he ascribes to the Bosnian medieval society. The perfect combination of all these elements is in the final poem in *Word on Land*, another version of the dialogue between a Bosnian *krstjan* and a foreigner. Formed as a response to the short epitaph Latin description of Bosnia, the poem ends in a Dizdar phrase-neologism: *prkosna od sna*. I take this particular

phrase to embody Dizdar's definition of Bosnia and the position of rebellion and resistance he endorses.

The dialectics of form are also suggested in this phrase as the utopia of "dream" (sna) is contained within the prickly sounding "defiant" (prkosna), combining in their contradiction and complementarity into a new definition of Bosnia, offering as its essence (at the bottom of the inverted pyramid) a social ethic of resistance and defiance against hegemony. In this concept especially, I see Dizdar even more essential definition of dialectics than we have encountered in Selimović, but also a more positive inflection of the concept of spite and defiance than offered by Hasan in *Death and the Dervish*. Rather than self-destructive or at best disruptive (as spite is portrayed in Selimović), prkosna-od-sna intimates a utopian moment in Bosnian identity, as an ethic of resistance and revolution.

If Andrić presented an idealist, modernist philosophy of History, positing Art as the only human intervention in the tragedy of history, and positing Bosnians as the eternal interpreters always failing in the impulse of commensurateness, with hope still residing in the Idea if not the reality of Europe, Selimović presented an existentialist, humanist, socialist philosophy of History in which intervention in the tragedy of history in defense of human dignity is a fundamental ethical orientation, and the dialectic is a negation of teleology be it Stalinist or religious, in which Bosnia is redeemed by its spite and defiance developed out of the impossible historical situation, but in which identity is defined as beyond the national(istic) one to one correlation between self and absolute space. From Andrić's Bosnians as interpreters, we arrive to Selimović's Bosnians noble out of spite. Dizdar's addition to this dialogue is also within an existentialist and materialist approach to history, where he attempts to recover resistance and defiance as identity that confronts history, be it in the stećci as material reminders of Bosnian

heretic resistance or in the contemporary inspiration in engaging them as texts. Selimović's Bosnians are noble out of spite, as if by historical accident, while Dizdar's Bosnians are defiant in their loss of faith and confrontation with Time and History.

Through this analysis of the narratives of identity but also the larger narrative innovations and literary achievements of these crucial texts of the Bosnian and Yugoslav canon, I demonstrated a fundamentally different reading of the canon *as* narrative. Rather than a history of different iterations of different national subject narratives, I presented these three authors as a history of engagements with empires, imperialism, and attempts to define and negotiate the idea of Bosnian identity – as interpretation, defiance, defiance-as-utopia. The following brief concluding chapter will address what particular contradictions of their social situation these texts could not overcome, especially as they relate to imperialism. It will also suggest ways in which this analysis can advance as a paradigm for reading the canon through a postcolonial lens.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude this project of re-reading Yugoslav cultural production with the help of postcolonial methodology, the following is an attempt to change the perspective yet again by taking a more distant view of the subject, as if “zooming out” from the highly focused textual analysis of the second chapter, and towards a more general set of conclusions to be drawn, ending with conclusions on the theoretical implications offered in the first chapter.

The original questions at the outset of this project were two-fold: (1) How and why are we justified in using anti-imperialist concepts and methodologies in approaching the former socialist world, and specifically Yugoslavia; and (2) What, if any, are the advantages of such an approach (i.e., what, if anything new comes into view if we approach the cultural production in the region as fundamentally implicated in the relational view of the world that takes into account imperialism and its ideological correlate, Eurocentrism)? The first chapter addressed the first of these concerns, offering an overview and critique of postcolonial approaches to the region and developing a theoretical basis for expanding and further specifying what we mean when we use the term “postcolonial” in relation to the former Second World. The central claim advanced there was that the postcolonial approaches to the Second World must, first and foremost, examine the role of Western imperialism in the region, before any other “imperial” systems can be addressed. In the second chapter I set out to mark moments in the three key canonical texts that speak to the Eurocentric worldview, tracing the history of engagement with the West in cultural production from Ivo Andrić to Meša Selimović and finally Mak Dizdar as the basis for a new narrative of the Yugoslav canon.

I focused on Bosnia and Herzegovina specifically for three reasons: (1) Bosnia was the case par excellence for assessing the Yugoslav political system on account of its multinational

nature and as the new geographical center of the federal state; (2) In the shift from a peripheral, border province in Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian period towards the geographical center, Bosnia retained an image of the Oriental alter-ego of the entire Yugoslav region while also beginning to signify a metonymy of Yugoslav federalism; and (3) In the post-socialist period, Bosnia further fulfilled its Orientalist imago of a heart of darkness defined as it was by its ethnic violence and the site of the worst crimes of the wars of Yugoslav succession. These three features played a crucial role in the development of the canon as well as its reading in the present. With regards to the first of these, as I showed in discussions of the debates over the Bosnian canon in the 1970s, the fundamental questions of Yugoslav multinational state were being discussed precisely *as* questions of literature and language. Importantly, all national(istic) reading and canonizing paradigms broke down forcefully in the Bosnian canon that could not be defined in any permanent way as national or multinational, specifically *because* of the revolutionary war and the very special role Bosnia and Herzegovina played in the resistance to the Nazi occupation. In Bosnia one could see most clearly the fundamental changes that occurred in Yugoslav society: the conviviality of different national and religious communities, social mobility between the republics, and the changing landscape of national or a-national identifications and identities. Much as the federal state, these features of Bosnian society would perish in flames in the 1990s. But as such, Bosnia presents an excellent case in point on how the Yugoslav canon developed over time.

As to the second reason for considering Bosnia specifically, the Dark-Vilayet imago of Bosnia was repeatedly read into these works while they were actually contested within them in a fundamental fashion: Andrić undermines this image directly in offering explanations for such impressions of Bosnia, by ironically showing the typical “orientalist” moments to be the

scheming of Western rivals, and by undermining the entire epic model of cultural understanding that sustained these dark-vilayet readings. Selimović on the other hand, asserts even more forcefully an acceptance of the historical conundrum of this former peripheral province as one's own, in comparison to the thinly veiled "civilization" and "progress" of the imperial center in Hasan's monologues. At the same time he introduces the literary values of Islamic texts and Ottoman history in Bosnia to emphasize the essentially native rather than foreign definition of this space once again through Hasan and his intellectual orbit in the novel. Dizdar reaches into the history prior to the "Orientalization" of Bosnia to tease out the same rebellion against empire, "nobility out of spite" that Selimović posits up and Dizdar assert as fundamentally poetic and definitive of the Bosnian revolutionary tradition. The most fitting image to capture the history of this imago in the literature I cited would be the silence of Bosnia that Andrić's *Des Fosses* perceives upon crossing the border. This same scene of crossing the border and seeing this dark, cold, impassable, silent land evokes pure joy and ecstasy in Hasan "He was gripped by joy at the sight of the snow on Mount Igman and the Bosnian fog, when he felt the sharp, biting Igman wind, and so he entered the gloomy kasaba crowded by the mountains with a smile on his face" (308). The silence of Bosnia in Dizdar is at the core of the poetic collection: the silence of the *stećci* but the powerful "shriek" left behind by their message of defiance and rebellion at all costs and against all odds. If Bosnia represented the Oriental alter-ego in wider Yugoslav cultural circles, the canonical literature spoke continually and increasingly against this image.

The post-socialist period brought about the contradictions of the orientalized image of Bosnia to the surface in critical texts on these literary works. "Claiming" and "having" an author became much more important than reading him as Žanić says, and inscribing one's political

project into the socialist literature became yet another tool in debates on “whose granddaddy lies under the stećci” in Jergović’s biting words. In my study of these three authors I argued against these interpretations specifically while assessing their role in the canonization of Bosnian literature. I reclaimed Andrić’s literariness and fundamentally Hegelian view of History that has nothing to do with Serbian genocidal attempts to “erase” the Muslim apostasy as these readings hold; I argued against reading Selimović’s Bosnia as an image of “shame for apostasy” or the “Islamic mysticism,” finding instead the fundamentally atheistic, existentialist metaphysics in the intertextuality of *Death and the Dervish*, but also a key attempt to establish a Marxian, dialectical understanding of rebellion and social, humanistic intervention in History; In Dizdarević I argued against reading his project as one of national mythmaking and instead for reading it as an attempt to bypass the national(istic) and speak the language of history and the silences of its imperialist victims in modern, dialectical reflection on the social history of defiance and revolution. In sum, I offered a critique of the wider intellectual history involving canonization of Bosnian and Herzegovinian literature, emphasizing the extent to which these readings were, much more than the literary texts themselves, subject to closed political circuits of nationalistic and thus Eurocentric ideology of race and ethnicity, leaving little room in their readings of the canon for the literary features of these works.

In these three elements, my narrative of the Bosnian and Yugoslav canon recovers the history of empires and imperialism in contestations of the Dark-Vilayet imago, speaks against nationalization of the literary works, and reclaims the significance of the socialist revolution to both the history of the canon and the individual works within it. This story of the canon, in opposition to the conflictual nationalist one, opens up the ability to read the literariness of these works precisely while not avoiding their social context. Following Frederic Jameson, I show how

even the formal features, narrative structures, and senses (like the *Dark Vilayet* one) capture and recall the social context within which the works were created. That context is one of European empires' histories in the region, from Ottoman to Austro-Hungarian to Nazi Germany and importantly the ways in which the natives engaged them: passively like Andrić's Franciscans, defiantly like Hasan, or in insurgency like Dizdar's lost heroes of medieval Bosnia.

As to the specific history of empires, all three works engage specific historical moments: Andrić summarizes Bosnian experience with empires from the early Ottoman years up to World War II; Selimović remains within the Ottoman and Mediterranean early modern period, while Dizdar covers the pre-Ottoman history and the Crusades, connecting often with later empires, especially the Austro-Hungarian and Nazi Germany. However, none of them reach into the socialist period directly, only by inference. In Andrić this isn't surprising since his best works were written prior to the socialist revolution, In Selimović, this skirting of the present is especially evident in discussions of the imperial center and its perception of periphery that fit contemporary Western European ideology far better than Ottoman Istanbul. With Dizdar, the present is engaged strongly by inference in the anticipated return of the Northern Invader but in many other ways his collection still cannot crystallize this position. If we are to find that fundamental contradiction of Yugoslav society that this literature could not overcome or resolve that would most certainly be the question of Yugoslav peripheral position in the socialist period vis-à-vis the West. If Frederic Jameson reads the fundamentals of capitalist social relations in Balzac as the precise moment of that text's limit, for the Yugoslav literary canon, the fundamentals of peripheral relations to capitalist imperialism in Yugoslav socialism play that role. These three key authors, as well as many others I haven't analyzed here, always come up to the very point of this contradiction: a socialist, Second World, founding member of the Non-

Aligned Movement state, defined by its revolutionary overthrow of Nazi occupation, and survival and persistence despite Soviet rejection, finds itself ever more clearly subservient to and in control of Western financial and economic institutions. The seeming finality of the Cold War division of the planet, coupled with long-standing influence of European centers of culture and the ideology emanating from them, offered enough of a veil to obscure the capitalist financial domination of the federal state and to further obscure the connection between the center-periphery relations perceived in cultural matters with actual, historical, capitalist reproduction on the global level. These elements of Yugoslav social reality with which these works engaged implicitly but whose fundamental mystification they could not overcome are definitive of what Samir Amin calls Eurocentrism.

The details of how these works engage the history of empires and imperialism therefore, is also told through an analysis of how they engage what I called Eurocentric historiography or Eurocentrism. To overcome this fundamental imperialist feature of Yugoslav existence, Eurocentric historiography would have to be completely abandoned and an alternative, postcolonial historical analysis taken up. Not only these three authors, but much of Yugoslav cultural elite was nowhere near such a fundamental change in perspective. Eurocentrism inherited from bourgeois nationalism of the first Yugoslavia was being challenged from Andrić on, but it is as if the Second World paradigm and the Cold War as the primary confrontation of capitalism and socialism helped further obscure both the workings of global imperialism in Yugoslavia as well as the Eurocentric ideology that legitimized it.

We can see the deep marks Eurocentrism had left on these authors as well. In Andrić, it is his undying even if highly critical belief in Europe, even from the ultimate marginal position of Jews in 1942 Europe. Selimović's notion of "primitivism" not only as the negative element of

social relations but also in the idea of primitive languages reveals Eurocentric historiography of human civilization. (I did not have the chance to discuss here his *For and Against Vuk* essay that argues contemporary Serbo-Croatian standard is based on peasant primitive language and therefore lacks the fine tuned expression of European languages and literature.) In Dizdar's and Krleža's understanding of medieval heritage as *proof* that "we" are not "barbarians," that "we" had "fine artistic expression" as early as Europe, and fundamentally that "we" too can reason and do it *before* Europe (Medieval Bosnians as the first Protestants) we can see once again the privileged place European civilization is afforded as the standard of human development. In all of these moments we see the effect of not questioning the deeply flawed civilization vs. barbarism paradigm of culture and cultural history that is a definite clue of the belief in Eurocentric historiography.

However, this is not to say that these three authors did not challenge Eurocentrism in their works. In fact, resistance to Eurocentric historiography is also a key feature of this canon. Andrić argues not only against the Europe vs. Non-Europe tragic and nonsensical division of humanity but also articulates a "third space" with Cologna: a space of reconciliation and even if at present still a space of "failed translation," the transcendental promise of translation is offered as an alternative. Couching it in truly modernist terms, Andrić's critique masterfully speaks to Europe "in European" as Rastko Petrović would say. Selimović advances Andrić's "third space" by articulating the native, "translator's" lack of "desire to be melded or manipulated" and a "refusal to renounce" the periphery, affirming instead its existence as "essentially possible". We see this in Hasan who thrives while Cologna, Alihodža, and the bridge all implode or die in Andrić. Selimović also brings to the table the modernizing Mediterranean in contrast to the story of properly "European" modernization, especially the history of multiculturalism and

coexistence. In reworking the Qur'an into this existentialist novel, Selimović also introduces the ultimate European "Other" as poetically and literarily suited to contemporary Europe and what would be considered the height of European, Western philosophy. In this, Selimović is also ironically recovering the fundamental role "non-Europeans" played in European history that is always elided in Eurocentric historiography. In other words, the Qur'an is not only suitable in expression but quite realistically the source of European philosophy, even if this point is still unacknowledged fully today. Dizdar, on the other hand, takes Selimović's (or rather if we are speaking chronologically, Andrić's) "third space" and refashions it into defiance but not out of "irrational spite" that seems to guide Hasan at times, but out of a revolutionary utopia: *prkosna od sna*. Once again, the Eurocentric historiography that has read the medieval Bosnia as particularly "barbaric" is opposed with a peripheral view of this same encounter as defiance, one with the revolutionary socialist struggle that created Yugoslavia.

In analyzing these texts I focused a great deal of attention to their "historicity": not the historical setting of their narratives, but rather the very definition of History as it appears in these texts. Eurocentrism, after all, is a particular historiography that reads all history in a way that amplifies the uniqueness of Europe in progress while obscuring the capitalist mode of production that is at the heart of imperialism and Europe's "progress." A common Eurocentric formulation is History itself: Europe as historical, Africa as ahistorical in Hegel's words. Andrić's philosophy of History built around the two novels, but especially *The Bridge on the Drina* is Hegelian and teleological but with a painful realization of the impossibility of that teleological resolution. In other words, the Hegelian dialectic for Andrić ultimately fails. For him, man's only viable position is to "spite the historical world" with art. Art is an intervention in the tragedy of history that, at the same time, connects us to the transcendental, or at the very least, gives us a glimpse

of its possibility. Selimović's philosophy of History is the exact opposite of Andrić's modernism. His focus is on direct human intervention in the tragedy of history, what Milutinović had called elemental situations where one has to, first and foremost, act to save the particular human being caught in Andrić's "maelstrom of history." This fundamental conviction becomes the principle of humanizing reality in Selimović. The character of Hafiz Muhamed – the historian – is reminiscent a bit of Andrić as a man who knows the general principles of life but fails in engaging the human being in front of him even more clearly than Nurudin. For Hafiz-Muhamed not very many things before him can move him spiritually or intellectually.

For Selimović, art is not an intervention in history as the modernists would have it. Art is neither good nor bad, nor particularly useful but it is beautiful and it connects us to other human beings. In this Marxian view, storytelling is also the home of utopia, Freedom from Necessity as we see in Hasan's reaction to the story of the two soldiers. It is precisely because the story is truthful that it is beautiful and because it is beautiful it inspires in him a belief that still, one day, somewhere, the two soldiers would part as friends. The need for brutal truthfulness, in art as in life, is also part of Selimović's existentialist outlook: he outlines Sartrean "bad faith" in Nurudin's character and posits Camus' metaphysical rebellion as a fundamental position of human beings, outlined in Isak and Hasan. In this, Selimović is unique in Yugoslavia in bridging an anti-Stalinist and existentialist politics with a decidedly leftist, humanist Marxism expressed as intervention in history.

If we can discern a philosophy of History in Dizdār, it is an attempt to further specify this fundamental position of rebellion: "spite" (inaad) that appears in our story from the very beginning, in Trifković's reflections on Bosnian literature ("a union that is even deeper than any gulf that divides [BiH]: something that is human essence, blood, temper, mentality. Sometimes

it is simply defiance, *inaad*,”) and weaves itself throughout our narrative. One could argue that Dizdar is constructing another type of mythology here, not a national one but a non-ethnic, Bosnian one that Trifković sees as well, but I am still not persuaded by such reductions of the poetic text, especially as they can so easily be transferred onto ethnic categories. I would rather see utopia in defiance that marks Dizdar’s *Note on Land* as speaking to the particular human position in History on the imperialist margins. In other words, the dialectical *prkosna od sna* as expressing an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist resistance as such. This is why his “narrative” of sorts about medieval Bosnia can so easily connect to Brecht’s politics and poetics.

In the final analysis, then, the story of the canon is a story of “defiance” in history, be it spiting the historical world with art in Andrić, spiting the peripheral status in Selimović in “nobility out of spite,” or the utopia in defiance as the definitive engagement in history in Dizdar. However, the empires these authors posit in developing the theme of defiance are all long gone and yet the defiance continues. Once again we are drawn to this empty space, the gap in all of these texts, and the only explanation that we can offer for why they are (still) speaking of empires is the workings of imperialism in the present they are implicitly attempting to resolve. Articulation of this position, however, would have to wait for the post-socialist, post-Yugoslav literature.

It could be that the post-socialist literature would have an easier time identifying and speaking to the present moment of imperialism because the workings of Western imperialism in the region have been much more explicit since the end of the Yugoslav state. In direct military interventions or negotiations of peace agreements, the Western imperialist center has revealed just the extent to which former Yugoslavia is beholden to its financial and political institutions. The socialist cultural production saw, on the other hand, a veiled form of imperialist domination,

in financial dependence but seeming political independence of Yugoslavia as a third position between the Soviet Union and the US. And just as it was impossible to imagine the Yugoslav political system in the 1970s rebelling against its status in global capitalism, the cultural production also could not overcome the ideological correlate of that unquestioned Western domination of Yugoslav space. Important to note, of course, is that these two fields are not in relations of dependence but rather in complex interaction of political, social, aesthetic, and other cultural position-takings. The socialist canon texts fully articulated various critiques of Eurocentric historiography and placed the Yugoslav cultural sphere in a position from which it could, one day, open up the question of contemporary imperialism directly.

One possible avenue of further research would be precisely the development of these themes in post-socialist literature and the explorations of those structures and senses that define it. There is no doubt that there are significant differences between these two canons, but unlike in the politicized canonization that emphasizes merely the break with Yugoslav past, we should explore continuities as well as departures from the socialist canon in today's literature. Nenad Veličković, Ferida Duraković, Miljenko Jergović in Bosnia, Vedrana Rudan in Croatia, as well as Dubravka Ugrešić, David Albahari, and Saša Stanišić in Yugoslav Diaspora would be an excellent start for such analysis. These authors are on the very boundary of high literary canon but often dismissed in nationalized canons or overlooked for political reasons.

Another important research question is the position and articulation of the themes identified in the canon in popular culture. Exploring socialist popular culture has been a growing field in the past five to six years and an analysis of how the socialist pop culture in Yugoslavia engaged some of these same Eurocentric ideas or positions, especially those articulations that the high literary canon suppresses, would be an excellent complement to the analysis offered here.

Specifically, the popular understanding of primitive vs. civilized / cultured (kulturan), urban vs. rural, peripheral vs. cultural capital are moments of similar articulations of the story of empires and imperialism in popular culture. Television programming, youth newspapers, and music would be the most attractive research materials for such a study.

Widening the focus one last time, I turn now to the historical and theoretical conclusions and contributions of my work. The narrative of the canon I offered here is based on postcolonial cultural studies, both in terms of historical contextualization of cultural production and in terms of concepts and methodologies used to approach these specific texts. Apart from the specific benefits and achievements of such analysis in approaching Yugoslav socialist-era literature, this dissertation has also demonstrated the significance and import of using postcolonialism in studying Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe in general. Specifically, I have demonstrated that postcolonialism-informed analysis of the region overcomes national(istic) blind alleys and allows us to recover the socialist elements of the Yugoslav past. These two achievements seem to be fundamental in advancing knowledge of Yugoslavia and its legacy in post-socialism.

The analysis offered in the first chapter placed my use of postcolonial cultural studies in approaching Yugoslav literature in the larger context of postcolonialism. In short, I departed from previous analyses that focused exclusively on the “cultural imperialism” or “orientalism” divorced from economic and political elements of postcoloniality by explicitly claiming Yugoslavia’s political, economic, and cultural peripheral status in relation to the West European/US neo-imperialist center. I turned specifically to Yugoslav and Eastern European political and economic relations with Western imperialism to demonstrate that the particular manner of incorporation into global capital that is evident in Yugoslavia and Eastern Europe is very similar to the manner in which postcolonial regions had been integrated into global capital

since the end of World War II but especially since the 1970s. The economic and political result is the effective permanent peripheralization of Eastern Europe with regards to the Western European/US center, *including during the socialist period*.

The historical contribution of this dissertation is, therefore, in demonstrating, contrary to Maria Todorova, that the history of Western engagement with Eastern Europe is one of domination and subjugation *and* precisely in a manner structurally like Western engagement of postcolonial regions. Furthermore, this manner of incorporation into the structures of global capital is understood within postcolonial studies as the very condition of postcoloniality. Therefore if we are to speak of postcolonial studies in Eastern Europe, the very first inquiry must be into these economic, political, and cultural relations between Western imperialism and Eastern Europe.

To do this in Eastern European studies, however, means recovering and acknowledging the Marxist legacy in anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles as well as Lenin's role in developing critiques of imperialism. It also means, importantly, that the history of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe does not fit this paradigm. In other words, introducing postcolonial conceptual framework to examine relations between countries within the Warsaw pact is nonsensical: there was no material exploitation and domination that is at the heart of what we know about imperialism and the ideology of imperialism that such studies analyze in the modern period.

Imperialism as defined in postcolonial studies is a system that cannot be explained without reference to the global capitalist economic system. In fact, one can hardly find a critique of imperialism that is not fundamentally a critique of the capitalist system that defines it. Stretching the definitions of "imperialism" beyond this limit seems to me impossible or at least

unadvisable. Studying relations between the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries as well as the nature of incorporations of the Eastern European region into pre-modern empires are worthy subjects of study, but it makes little sense to call them imperialist or postcolonial. The historical differences between these systems and modern imperialism that is the basis of postcolonial studies are enormous. Intervening in the debates on the use of postcolonial studies in Eastern Europe, I therefore also demonstrate that if we are to discuss postcolonialism in Eastern Europe, *we must focus exclusively on the Western European non-colonial economic and political domination of Eastern Europe and not on pre-modern empires or the Soviet Union.*

The ideological dimensions of imperialism that are the subject of postcolonial cultural studies are, furthermore, the origin of what previous studies of Eastern Europe have identified as Orientalism, Balkanism, or Eastern Europeanness. And importantly, these constructs come from the exact conceptual framework that Europeans constructed for use in their colonies. Rather than a different brand of “misrepresentation” or “invention,” the cultural dimensions of imperialism in Eastern Europe are but a footnote in the larger history of Western European and US imperialism around the globe and they must be examined as such. In this we must avoid the fallacy of Eurocentric historiography that lead us to claim exceptionalism for these structures in Eastern European cultures or origination of such structures in Western invention of Eastern Europe rather than the wider colonial “view of the world.” This larger model of history is what I call Eurocentrism.

This is also the first book-length postcolonial analysis of native cultural production. Unlike previous studies of Orientalism in Eastern Europe, my dissertation looks at how the native culture internalized, challenged, reworked, or reappropriated aspects of the Eurocentric historiography that define imperialist ideology. Nataša Kovačević focused on dissident native

authors in a similar fashion, but I apply postcolonial analysis to the very top of Yugoslav socialist culture.

And lastly, I also draw attention to the position of the Second World in postcolonialism and the still largely unexplored contributions this region made to the complex interactions of modern imperialism with postcolonial regions. In other words, my contribution to the wider field of postcolonial studies is to show the manner in which the Second World was implicated in the same history of relations between the imperialist center and the periphery that was definitive of the “Third World” as well as to draw attention to the importance of reconsidering the role of socialism as well as the specific Second World experience (and their collapse) in understanding the condition of postcoloniality and the state of postcolonial cultural studies today.

One important avenue for further research would be a socio-political and cultural analysis of race and racial ordering of the world in Eastern Europe during socialism and today. Aniko Imre is one of the few who have taken up the question of race, but I find it to be an even more fundamental element of Eastern European societies than what current studies on racial minorities in the region have demonstrated. The very idea of nation, ethnicity, and in today’s parlance, “culture,” is the product of race and racial stratification of humanity. Therefore, if we are to examine race in Eastern Europe, we must turn to analyzing the history of nationalism in the region within the history of colonialism and race on a global level. The contributions of such research would reach beyond Eastern European Studies as the questions of nation and nationalism are still important ones for postcolonial studies overall.

The role of Marxism and socialism in a post-socialist world is also an attractive subject for further research, especially the ways in which Marxist analysis is making inroads into postsocialist Eastern Europe via postcolonial studies, specifically anti-imperialism. For the first

time Eastern Europe is witnessing a renewal of Marxist, economic analysis of relations with Western Europe and the US, in academia but especially in popular culture. How Marxism fared across the postcolonial world is the wider question such analysis could touch upon. In this way, we could perhaps begin to truly assess the legacy of the so-called Second World for postcolonial regions as well as for the future of our post-socialist world.

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