APPROPRIATION AND MANIPULATION OF "WOMEN'S WRITING" IN THE NATIONALIST DISCOURSE IN SERBIA IN THE NINETIES

NEVENA IVANOVIĆ

Introduction: Women and Nation/alism

Communities...

In his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson put forth an influential definition of the nation as an "imagined political community." A more sophisticated version of Gellner's *invention* of nations by nationalism and a groundwork for subsequent studies of the processes of *imagining* particular nations, Anderson's definition established the nation as a system of cultural representation, which enables identification with the larger community through an *imagining* of a shared experience.[1] What he sees as instrumental for this system of representation are the media of novel and newspaper, and it is the convergence of "capitalism, print technology and the fatal diversity of human language" that provides the basis for the emergence of the nation as an imagined community.[2]

For his postulation of the "modular" nationalisms of the Americas and Western Europe, he has, however, been criticized by those who view the anti-colonial nationalist movements of Asia and Africa as having a particular national(ist) imagination of their own. In her essay, "Whose Imagined Community?", Partha Chatterjee voices this discontent by terming the implication of the exclusive availability of "modular" nationalisms as the perennial colonization of colonial people's

1 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1983, p. 6. Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," Feminist Review 44 (1993), 61.

2 Anderson, p. 46.

imaginations.[3] Criticism that has more relevance for my essay, however, is the questioning of Anderson's neglect to consider the gendered nature of the constructed national imaginaries, and the possibly different ways men and women come to imagine themselves part of a nation (imagined community). Different feminist scholars and scholars of nationalism have in the years following the publication of *Imagined Communities* theorized the relationships of gender and nation, women and nationalism, feminism and nationalism, and written extensively on their particular regional and historical manifestations.

... and Imagining

In the context of what Rada Iveković calls extreme nationalisms of the former Yugoslavia, and against the background of particular discussions of other nationalisms and nationalist discourses, I will consider the novels of Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović as a particularly interesting example of women's contribution to the nationalist discourse in Serbia. This journalist-turned-author, whose personal and political 'credos' shall be elaborated later, has used women's *themes* (in the words of a critic, themes "that touch the women readers' nerves") and a "woman-centered" (moreover, a professedly autobiographical) narrative to formulate and produce what some newspaper-"literary"-critics (and the author herself, no doubt) like to think is an example of "*žensko pismo*"[4] and what I will read as, ultimately, a patriarchal-nationalist text that is constructed through an appropriation and manipulation of the concept of women's writing and the use of the trivial romance genre and the populist aesthetics of the (new) historical novel.[5]

The text functions as the ideological mechanism enabling women's participation in the (extreme) project of Serbian nationalism,

3 Partha Chatterjee, "Whose Imagined Community?," in *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 5.

4 Neither *l'ecriture feminine* nor the Anglo-American 'women's writing'—of which, in academic use, this is a translation—convey the exact implications of the Serbian phrase when used in its popular, journalistic or scholarly-misogynist sense, which can express alternatively both denigration of any work which is somehow *women's*, in its content or form, and an ignorant valorification of a work *because* of the same thing.

5 Much as Svetlana Slapšak's comments on Dragojević's film *Lepa sela lepo gore* ("Žensko telo u jugoslovenskom filmu: status zene, paradigma feminizma"), my reading is not intended as literary analysis, but as a reading of the ideological, gendered models and constructs which, although nominally "giving voice" to women/women's sensibilities, are ultimately deeply patriarchal, in their dual commitment to extolling of women's (sexually defined, essentialized) qualities and occasional misogynist outbursts, and as such, constitutive of and participating in the dominant nationalistic discourse.

but it also invites the postulation of a specific *female* nationalist text. Whereas the greatest part of the nationalist discourse is bound to be produced by men, and can, from our point of view, be criticized for its objectivization of woma/en, or her/their use as "symbolic capital,"[6] her texts are an example of a woman speaking/writing, as a subject. But this is only to *mimic* the discourse, work through and function as a part of the same mechanism. In the specific case of Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović, it is the extolling of the essentialized 'otherness of woman' that serves as her starting-point: she manipulates the concepts of *femininity*, *female*, *women's*, fixes them, to assign them one and only possible meaning – the one prescribed by the dominant nationalist discourse, masking it as an affirmation of the "feminine."[7]

That this appropriation of the supposedly marginal, "other," *back* into the dominant, is executed *as* bad "women's" literature (which, in another act of self-deception and self-congratulation, ubitiquous in contemporary Serbia, claims for itself the status of art) is not to be read back as "all bad "women's" literature is nationalist." But it is important to carefully read through this bad literature that is *also* marked and coded *as* specifically "women's" to discern the ways of appropriation at this level, to expose them for what they are. The reading should lay bare this ideological mechanism which appropriates (we could say *sucks in*) all forms of discourse-production – the "low" and the "female" in this case – in order to homogenize the public and popular discourse, and restore, maintain, and reinforce the patriarchal order. What it should also do is demonstrate nationalism's constitutive reliance on gendered, sexualized imagery, the control of (women's) sexuality, and the ideals of sacrifice, purity and respectability – all of which figure prominently in the three novels of Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović *Ana Maria Didn't Love Me*, *Iva*, and *Female Lineage* (*Ženski rodoslov*).

Gender and Nation: The Difference of Implications

The work of Nira Yuval-Davis in particular recognized the invisibility of women in most nationalist discourse as well as in theories of nationalism, which often concentrated exclusively on the formation of *male* national identity and men's incorporation into the

6 Rada Iveković, "(Ne)predstavljivost ženskog u simboličkoj ekonomiji. Žene, nacija i rat nakon 1989." ("The (Un)Representability of Woman in the Symbolic Economy. Women, Nation and War after 1989.") Text written for *Women's Studies* (Belgrade), December 1998.

7 In an interview: "I believe that women make up the better, stronger and more creative half of the humanity. That it is a much more beautiful and fulfilling experience to be a woman..."

national community, without considering either the differential implications of the national/ist projects for men and women or the inevitable genderedness of structures of nationalist discourse.[8] In an attempt to bring out this hidden element in the construction of "Andersonian 'imagined communities'" she differentiates between three kinds of nationalist projects/ideologies (*Staatsnation*, *Kulturnation* and *Volknation*), in order to analyze their connection with and dependence on a certain modality of male-female relations.[9]

In the discussion of gender relations and citizenship, Yuval-Davis dismisses the 'evolutionary' model of citizenship rights when it simply sees women as "late comers to citizenship rights....Their exclusion was part and parcel of the construction of the entitlement of men to democratic participation which conferred citizen status...upon men in their capacity as members and representatives of a family."[10] In many cases (countries which respect Muslim laws) it is from the private sphere, defined by the state, that women's access to rights in the public sphere is derived. The differences are not restricted, however, to the 'private' sphere – women's citizenship is often predicated upon their racial and ethnic background, and finally, the legislative practices of a state can differentiate between men and women, to women's disadvantage more often than not.[11]

In the cultural constructions of national communities, the role gender plays is instrumental, from female bodies posing as symbols of the Nation, to women's behavior being supervised and prescribed as "proper" for "our" community. Women, writes Yuval-Davis, "symbolize the national collectivity, its roots, its spirit, its national project....[Their role is to transmit] cultural traditions, songs, customs, cuisine, and...the mother tongue."[12] In cultural communities which are struggling to maintain their "essence" or "spirit" in the medley of "multiculturalism," it is both the dominant/majority culture's request and the wish of the traditionalists within the minority culture to attain homogeneity (of that minority culture), which is most often manifested in at-

8 Nira Yuval Davis, "Gender and Nation," Ethnic and Racial Studies 16 (October 1993), 621-632. With Floya Antheas (eds.) *Woman-Nation-State*. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989).

9 Yuval-Davis, pp. 623-24.

10 Ibid., p. 625.

11 Ibid., p. 626.

12 Ibid., p. 627.

tempts to curb women, control their behavior.[13]

But it is ultimately in their role as reproducers of the nation that women's subjugation is most clearly manifest: in the regulations (either legal or stemming from local or religious custom) that seek to define and delineate the family unit, its beginning and end, and to determine the legality and national "membership" of children. In communities which harbor the myth of the common origin, an outsider's only chance of getting 'in' is by intermarriage. The preoccupation with racial or ethnic purity has always been associated with the obsession with sexual relationships between members of different communities. Whether a child (of 'mixed' parentage) will be included in a community or not depends on an intricate web of laws and regulations which seek to determine its "value" to the race/nation. States confront women inevitably, as the (re)producers of the nation, with various techniques of controlling birth-rates, which in many cases depends on their ethnic, racial or national belonging. Moreover, these techniques can be either encouraging or discouraging, as states may want more or fewer offspring "produced" by different groups.[14]

In her account, Nira Yuval-Davis stresses the importance of gender as a factor in differential behavior and policies directed *to* women by their collectivities, but also insists, at the end of her essay, that women "may be parties to these ideologies, as the active participation of women in various religious fundamentalist and fascist movements clearly show."[15] This issue, the issue of women's participation, is what is elsewhere explored in more detail, and women's *differential* involvement has been emphasized in the form of a questioning of Yuval-Davis' conclusions.[16]

Women and Nation/alism: The Difference of Involvement

It is exactly the gendered nature and symbolic structure of national identities that, in the opinion of some, implies a necessary limitation or difference in the assumption by women of a national identity. One scholar has shown how the American national identity was constituted through a process of exclusion and the erection of boundaries between the white *man* and others: the new nation was first defined in opposition to white American women, black men, black women,

13 Ibid., p. 628.

14 Ibid., pp. 628, 630.

15 Ibid., p. 630.

16 Sylvia Walby, "Woman and Nation," in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed). *Mapping the Nation* (London: Verso, 1996)., p. 238.

Indian men and women.[17] The metaphors of home, the familial-patriarchal language of the nationalist discourse, and of the nation as female are all claimed to show nationalism as an ultimately masculinist discourse. National histories and constitutive historical narratives and myths are said to "often marginalize or demonize women,"[18] and nationalist movements have "typically sprung from masculine memory, masculine humiliation and masculine hope.[19] Sylvia Walby goes so far as to assert that there could be different (better?) nationalisms if only women's experiences, and not only men's, were taken into account in the "building of this culture and project."[20]

This brings up the question of whether it is really possible to "temper" these community/national identities – whether it is not the 'male principle' that lies at the very foundation of the national idea, which would then be taken to mean that the nation exactly *is* the "apex of patriarchal organization"?[21] This would in turn have to be questioned – following postcolonial criticism's efforts to undermine the ('eurocentric') idea of patriarchy as the universal (most important) relation of domination, a theoretical stand some see as just-another-imperialist obstacle to the liberation movements of colonial peoples. While insisting that the alleged "greater pacifism of women" is another element of gender ideology, Walby still maintains the argument for a "different extent to which women share in the same group identity as men."[22] In this she stands opposed to Yuval-Davis and Antheas' position that women are "*as* committed [to the national/ist project] but in different ways."[23] Walby suggests that the history of feminism and nationalism (mostly in the Third World) could be used to prove the possibility of the 'tempering' of (and thus the differences between men's and women's) nationalist projects: it is when women struggle for their interests to be incorporated in the nationalist project that they are also more likely to support it, *because* they have contributed to its formulation.[24]

Without trying to determine when women are "more likely" to support a nationalist project or to assume to a lesser or greater extent some national identity, I will move to more specific discussions of women and the contemporary nationalisms in the former Yugoslavia and (the former) Eastern Euro-

17 Carol Smith Rosenberg, "Captured Subjects/Savage Others: Violently Engendering the New American," *Gender and History* 5 (Summer 1993), pp. 177-195. In her essay on the "forgotten" Serbian writer Jelena Dimitrijević, Svetlana Slapšak cites the same process as constitutive of the identity of the ancient Greek man (as well as the modern Balkan man, she claims): it is in relation to the outside, in the opposition to others – women, slaves, barbarians, animals, nature...that this man comes into possession of an identity. "Cogito er-

pe, and the way that the legacies of socialism, 'first' Balkan nationalisms and state-building processes, and of *zadruga*-based patriarchate have coped and intertwined with the "oldest" difference: how this sexual difference is incorporated, expressed, made fundamental in the dominant nationalist discourses in the countries once ruled by differing degrees of socialism.

While it seems/will seem evident that the resurgent nationalisms in countries such as Hungary, Poland or Romania grounded themselves in a "return to traditional values" (that is, the (re)establishment of traditional male and female roles) and their extreme counterparts of Serbia and Croatia easily shifted between the ("modular") instrumentalization of women as symbolic capital, as the means of "self-preservation, self-legitimation, confirmation, propaganda, normalization and the imposition of a certain order, a certain hierarchy [of values]"[25] and the extreme of rape, women in these countries did not reject nationalism *en masse*. Iveković's insisting that "while women can be, and are, nationalists, nationalism does not offer them the same possibility of homogenization as it does to men,"[26] even if fully assented to, may be less interesting than the actual exploration of *how* women do use *this* ("lesser") possibility to quite an impressive extent, and what the reasons, motivations (fantasies?) behind this may be in different countries in question.

Women, Nation/alism, Socialism: Continuities & Excesses

While supporting the idea of differential involvement and integration of women into the nationalist project, one theorist finds it is the contradictions of the gender agenda of specific nationalist projects that make it pos-

go sum" means nothing to him, he has not achieved the "internalization of identity." "Haremi, nomadi: Jelena Dimitrijević," *Pro Femina* 15/16 (Fall 1998), p. 144.

18 Catherine Hall, "Gender, Nationalisms, and National Identities," *Feminist Review* 44 (1993), p. 101.

19 Walby, p. 241.

20 Ibid.

21Iveković, "(Ne)predstavljivost ženskog...", p. 3.

22 Walby, pp. 242-43.

23 And Yuval-Davis and Antheas have criticized the notion of the state as an expression of male interests.

24 Ibid., pp. 244-45.

25 Iveković, p. 5.

26 Ibid., p. 3.

sible for women to both "participate actively in, and become hostages to, such projects."[27] Every state must embody a "gender regime," and it is through the nationalist histories and identity-politics of states that this regime is transformed, created anew.[28] In socialism, a peculiar gender regime is thought to have been produced, a regime that indeed 'contained' to a great extent an ambiguity: the ambiguity of "women's emancipation." Katherine Verdery writes about the gender regime of socialism, as well as about the Romanian national/ist discourse under socialism (or more precisely, under Ceausescu) to investigate the legacy of the official ideology, which, while not exactly "solving" (as it sought to) both the 'national' and the 'women's' questions, had actually reshaped *them* both, as well as their interconnections.[29]

She describes a prominent characteristic of a socialist society, its 'familiarism': the Party was the paternal power, the wise patriarch, while the society was not merely "like a family, but…itself a family."[30] She connects this to the historical legacy of the *zadruga*[31], and extends this to label the socialist state the "*zadruga*-state." The ideological commitment to the equality of women and men was concomitant with the project of full employment and rapid (labor-intensive) industrialization: moreover, the latter very much depended on it. The assumption by state of one part of housework and child-care activities (formerly women's tasks) on the one hand and of decision-making on the other contributed to a shift in the balance of authority in single family units – so that the division into gendered 'public' and 'private' spheres of 19th-century Western European capitalism was significantly altered in these *zadruga*-states. The private, or domestic sphere was increasingly the sphere where both men and women "realized pride and self-respect" while "resisting socialism."[32]

Also writing about this "unofficial elevation" of the private sphere (in the countries of Eastern Europe), Barbara Einhorn stresses,

27 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation," in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*., p. 378.

28 She adopts "gender regime" from R. W. Connell ("The state, gender and sexual politics: theory and appraisal," *Theory and Society*, 19, 5, 1990, pp. 507-44).

29 Katherine Verdery, "From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe," *East European Politics and Societies* 8 (Spring 1994), p. 225.

30 Ibid., p. 230.

31 The zadruga, which, according to Charles and Barbara Jelavich, had by the middle of the 19th century become an "inefficient rural collective agricultural unit," was a union of nuclear families assembled into one

however, the contradiction of state's assumption of women's tasks, as well as its inadequacy. The communist state is seen to have enacted a shift from "private" to "public" patriarchy, one indicator being this "perpetuation of [the] existing division of domestic labor": the official ideology did not address the question of sharing, but instead "paid" women to do housework or provided for their replacements.[33] In many cases, the official ideology, one of whose fundamental principles was the "emancipation of women," fit all too easily with the patriarchal puritanism of its protagonists.[34] (This "failure," however, is nothing new in the history of feminism, or the women's movement. But, while the acceptance of women's breaking out of the(ir) private sphere in times of need and their subsequent forced "return" is surely an example of instrumentalization, it should not obscure the fact that the breaking-out has its effects one way or the other).

In the Romanian case, while the new homogenization was to eschew sexual difference, and both women and men were expected to be 'fraternized' into the community (and women also to be ""heroines" of socialist labor"), the state organization and its imagery were deeply masculinist. Even if the *zadruga*-state did strip its men of authority and empower its women, its patriarchy was deep-seated.[35] Regardless of the changes, there was a continuity of traditional values under socialism, as could be seen in the patterns and near-universality of marriage. Still, reasons for this prevalence such as economic and practical, as well as the already mentioned valorization of the family and family life as "refuge" from the oppression of 'public' life, are to be taken into consideration.[36] But in the relegation of "resistance" to the private sphere, it was again women

'family,' strictly guided by the principle of patriarchal authority. In *The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1904-1920*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977)., p. 60.

32 Verdery, pp. 230-32.

33 Barbara Einhorn, "New for Old? Ideology, the Family and the Nation," in Barbara Einhorn (ed). *Cinderella Goes to Market: citizenship, gender, and women's movements in East Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1993).

34 For example, in the Yugoslav case, where, as Milovan Đilas testified, most of the cadre was recruited from patriarchal mountainous regions. In Predrag Marković, "Mesto žene u javnom mnjenju Beograda 1918-1965," in *Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima 20. veka, Položaj žene kao merilo modernizacije.* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1998)., p. 383.

35 Verdery, p. 237.

36 And then, the ubiquity of marriage was accompanied by high rates of divorce, ranging from 33-44 % in Hunary, and the former Czechoslovakia, GDR and Soviet Union.

whose role was seen as vital for the preservation of national values and traditions, inside this family-as-refuge.[37] Thus it was women and the family that became the focus of the new regimes, which, in their revived ethno-nationalism, could become outright misogynist.

The new regimes have often accused socialism of a conscious policy of de-population, or "biological destruction" of their respective (ethno-)nations, connecting this phenomenon to the alleged processes of the "masculinization" of women and the "feminization" of men.[38] Thus it was in the sphere of male-female relations and the relationships in the family that they sought to "restore" the "original," idealized pre-socialist community, by reimposing the traditional gender roles and division of labor. Women were accused of having taken advantage of the 'genocidal' social policies (like the availability of abortion, state child-care, the right to work), and were also accused of being willing accomplices of socialism. The desired reversal of the 'abnormal', 'unnatural' gender divisions of socialism, the return to the 'natural' ways, meant the new essentialization of women and femininity, the insistence they be given (back) their primary nurturing qualities and responsibilities, those eroded by socialism.[39]

Thus the traditional family model and the nurturing qualities of women have become the focal points of the constructions of the new/'renewed' national identities. Women are required to participate in the "return to traditional values" for the good of the nation, as their (traditional) role is instrumental for the restoration of the old imagined community, the homogenous unit from

37 Einhorn, pp. 56-58, 60. And as Deniz Kandiyoti has warned, in most of the cases of the valorization of the "'private' as the site of resistance against repressive states…the integrity of the so-called private is predicated upon the unfettered operations of patriarchy." "Identity and Its Discontents," p. 388.

38 In Hungary, Kata Beke, the HDF's 1990 Minister of Education, argued for a return to "the European model of marriage [which] has proved to be the most successful and resilient, [b]ecause it corresponds to humanity's two-sexed nature." Verdery, pp. 236, 253. In Serbia, the vice-president of the Serbian Radical Party, Maja Gojković, put the greatest blame (for the 'demographic crisis') on men, who grew weak under communism, claiming that "women succeeded in preserving their femininity," but could not be expected to give children to wimps. *Duga*, 16 Aug 1992, p. 52. Wimps is exactly what many a political text in Hungary claimed men have grown to be (in socialism), and a Hungarian magazine-article was much less generous than Ms. Gojković: "socialism liberates woman from family shackles…and in exchange asks for an alliance in crushing male obstinacy. The women take on their part in the alliance with their usual violent moods and aggressiveness." Verdery, p. 251 ff.

39 Verdery, pp. 250-52.

a harmonious past. This reversal, this return, must still be seen in the context of the more or less sustained continuity of patriarchy. In the Romanian case of the gendering of nationalism under socialism, for example, there is much evidence of this deep-seated ("unofficial") patriarchy.

Its obsessions were not unique to Romania: the territorial extension of the nation/national state, its borders, and the continuity, both cultural and 'biological,' of Romanian'ness. In the part of a contested region of Transylvania where men had gone to work in industry, and the agricultural production was left to women, the regime made women into the privileged bearers of traditional Romanian values, as they were 'untouched' by modernity (unlike their men), and had preserved their localism better. This feminization of tradition (as a means of claiming territory), went hand in hand, however, with the narrativization of Romanian history through patrilineage, a sequence of male heroes.[40] But more striking than that, it seemed that in this lineage, women were excluded even as *reproducers* of the nation: the national spirit was reproduced through "culture (created by men) or through men's creative death," thus bringing forth the central importance of the themes of sacrifice and creative death for Romanian historiography and folklore.[41]

It is in these patterns that the emotional core of nationalism is revealed, the way the national subject comes to feel him/herself national: it is the eroticized, feminized homeland that inspires the love and heroism of *her* sons. Moreover, writes Verdery, Romania becomes a "feminine" *space*/body while her sons and heroes reside *in*(*side*) her, constitute her masculine *soul*; she is the object of the love of men – who are "historically acting subject[s]."[42] The elements of the feminization of territorial borders and (national) space will be important elements in the constructions of contemporary Serbian and Croatian nationalisms, as well as the metaphor of the homeland as female body (virginal/mutilated/raped/threatened by rape/"torn asunder"). These nationalisms have also been closely related to the ambiguities and the problematic development of the Yugoslav socialist project of "women's equality." For Rada Iveković, there is an unquestionable continuity between the tendencies of the late socialist regime and the upsurge of nationalism in the republics of the former Yugoslavia in the 1980s.[43]

40 Ibid., pp. 238-41.

41 Ibid., pp. 242-43.

42 Ibid., p. 248.

43 Iveković, p. 6.

One of the common nationalist portrayals of women, that of women as "icons of modernity,"[44] functioned also as the principle of the communist engagement of women, and the fulfilment of its promise as the ideological basis for the later official policy, expressed in legislation, of the new Yugoslav state. The "emancipated" woman (awarded for her support in the war/liberation efforts) was a "symbol of Yugoslav modernity and socialism,"[45] but as much of what was said above testifies, the principle of equality was plagued by many ambiguities and embodied at another level the surviving patriarchal values. These "emancipated" women, with a double/triple burden, became the "norm (and the ideal picture) of successful patriarchal self-managing socialism."[46] It took a few decades for this post-war visibility and representation of women in public life and their greater participation in the workforce to be reduced, circumscribed, for their presence to be eliminated, and required in another sphere. It is the tendencies of late socialism that Iveković saw as a warning, not of an inescapable war, but of the creation of a violently nationalist atmosphere which would execute this alleged fatality into reality.

Part of these tendencies was the already mentioned "return to traditional values," which in the Yugoslav case can be identified within the development differing from the East European pattern(s). For Serbian nationalism of the 1980s, one of the main fixations was the threat of the "biological extinction" of the Serbian nation, and the main trauma and conflict that defined its core and ultimately brought its catastrophic defeat, was the "Kosovo question." The imaginary of Serbian nationalism is said to have "intertwined with the sexual phantasmagorias"[47] – in its focus on the alleged systematic 'ethnic rapes' of Albanian men and the "demographic war" of the Albanians against the Serbs in Kosovo. In 1986, which can be taken as the date of the "opening of the [Serbian] national question,"[48] the 'Petition of Belgrade Intellectuals' "exposed" the "demographic explosion" of the Albanian population as a nationalist ploy to drive the Serbs away from Kosovo. From this moment on, the motive of women as "icons of modernity" will crop up again, in the pitting of the modern, Serbian woman, against her primitive, backward, Albanian other, the us/them opposition taking form as "our" against "their" women.[49] This superiority of

44 This portrayal is characteristic of some anti-colonial, national liberation movements, where the backwardness of women serves as a symbolic representation of the whole nation's backwardness, and women's emancipation is "part…of a national regeneration project." The other side of this relationship of women and modernity is exhibited in the ideology of strongly anti-modernist, cultural nationalist movements, for whom the ideal of gender equality means capitulation to Western cultural imperialism. Kandiyoti, p. 379.

"our women," complete with racist undertones, which are also present in the rape stories of "out-of control, over-sexed animals" – Albanian men, invites in turn, however, the activation of the very same, nationalist-"procreative" policy. The superiority is hardly enough: Serbian women, those icons-of-modernity are to become "baby-factories," that is, sacrifice their independent status, their "selfish" impulses not to breed for the survival of the Serbian nation.[50]

The place of women in the great project of the "revival," rejuvenation," "recreation" of (the ideal of) the Serbian national community, is to assume their "natural" roles in order to insure and confirm the "naturalness" of the organic whole that the nation "is," that it claims/wants to be.[51] In the recreation of this (imagined) community, that almost forgot and denied itself in the common Yugoslav and socialist past, the new collectivism, that easily slips from socialism into nationalism(social)ism, may serve as a refuge from, or an attempted answer to the questions once asked long before (and all throughout the history of the Serbian state). The new collectivism does not only ground its rule in the symbolic use of women, their subordination to the patriarchal principles for the sake of a higher ideal, the imposition on them of roles of mothers-of-the-nation, but it powerfully attracts real women as well, write Rener and Ule, exactly *through* offering them the refuge of the patriarchal social matrix that nationalism always adopts and takes over.[52] But if the nationalist experience is a sexualized experience, and if, as they claim, the way it "relates" to women is through masculinist metaphors and male-centered "stories," what could possibly our *female* nationalist experience from the beginning of the essay be (like)? What of the

45 Wendy Bracewell, "Women, Motherhood and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism," *Women's Studies International Forum,* 18 (5/6)., p. 3.

46 Iveković, p. 5.

47 Tanja Rener and Mirjana Ule, "Nationalism and Gender in Post Socialist Societies – Is Nationalism Female?," in *Ana's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997)., p. 229.

48 Dubravka Stojanović, "Traumatični krug srpske opozicije," in Nebojša Popov (ed). *Srpska strana rata.* (Republika: Beograd, 1996)., p. 509.

49 Bracewell, p. 5.

50 Julie Mertus, "Gender in Service of Nation: Female Citizenship in Kosovar Society," *Social Politics* (Summer/Fall 1996), p. 266 and Bracewell, pp. 5-7. The latter quotes the 1993 work *Preporod srpskog naroda* by Milan Vojnović.

51 Rener and Ule, p. 222.

52 Ibid., p. 228. Rada Iveković, "Women, Nationalism and War: Make Love Not War," *Hypatia* 8 (Fall 1993), p. 115.

"stories," like the three novels of Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović, which (should) tell of women, of the relationships of mothers and daughters, of women's lives and histories? And do they really do *that*, are they *that*? Or are they simply and clearly internalizations of the dominant discursive prescriptions, yet another homogenizing, totalizing effort of Serbian nationalism? The effort that wants to take the "women's" from the "women," seen and constructed as other, as marginal, as subordinated in the binary relationship that defines its world, and to remove the negativity necessarily awarded one of the terms, by implicating it in the dominant practice? See to it that the *female/the feminine* participates actively in that which is said by definition to exclude her, be against her?[53] To play on the active construction of identity-as-woman as a reinforcement and a confirmation of the identity-as-member-of-the-Serbian-nation?

Women, Nationalism, Balkans: Resistance

"Othering" as a process is constitutive of the nationalist projects: the "very symbolic system of nationalism needs the construction of "the Other"".[54] And the "othering" of the female can be seen as the first of all "otherings" – coming before, and constituting, the construction of an extreme national/ist identity, which is constructed as a male national identity, in opposition to, first, women and then other "enemy" nations or ethnic groups.[55] It is these assumptions that inform Rada Iveković's stand on women's differential identification with the national/ist cause – their inevitably different relationship to the Other. Women are less "obsessed by boundaries," she writes, and the way their identity is constructed bases itself on the incorporation and acceptance of, relating to the other – women (have to) adapt to husbands' families, countries, cultures. They represent (for men) the "space of mixture and meeting," which mixture often attracts the response of appropriation, control, subordination. While for a male nationalist the nationalist experience and identification is that with and of the same (or: *exclusion* of the other), for women, this exclusion is hardly a principle of involvement; on the contrary, for them it means exactly coexistence with the other (sex; as in identification with the Father-of-the-Nation).[56]

However, as it has been pointed out, this may "temper" their nationalism somewhat (or its violence), but takes away little from its

53 Iveković, "Women, Nationalism and War," p. 117.

54 Ibid., p. 115.

55 Ibid., passim.

56 Ibid., pp. 117-18, 121.

relentlessness and conviction. The(se) women are not only able to relate to the sexed, patriarchal stereotypes of the newly created nationalist mythologies, but they can also be found to reproduce these by and for themselves, possibly in a different form, yet participating in the nationalist discourse, while often denying their complicity. Complicity is taken away from "women and mothers," in an attempt to obscure that mechanism of extreme nationalism's appropriation of sexual difference and its organization to serve the destructive nationalist cause.

These new mythologies, or narratives, should also be considered in the context of the Balkan tradition, since, as Svetlana Slapšak writes, the new, or contemporary "inventions" of women in most of the cases correspond very closely to and rely on the *corpus* of the Balkan tradition, which she takes to consist of "the oral tradition, along with the complying texts of the cultured literature and the stereotype-producing media."[57] It is the oral epic tradition that can be singled out as a remarkable source of repressive models of female behavior. In the clash of this powerful, deep-seated patriarchal culture and the communist ideology of equality and emancipation, and as the "Communist jargon...[became] increasingly incomprehensible," the ruling elite quietly gave in to the predominant models available. From this silence, some other women's voices have emerged, in a resistant attempt to inscribe themselves into and across male inventions, by knowing and using, in order to subvert, those same oppressive patterns.[58]

But in that oral tradition as well, specifically in the works of "women's poetry" (collected by Vuk Stefanović-Karadžić, and defined by him as such), there are these subversive women's voices. A poem about Queen Milica, the supposedly bereaved widow of King Lazar, tells of her wishing he stays "there" (in heaven), rather than come back for her to see him – she having coped with the situation after his "heroic" death. Other subversions can also be found that point to the "ideological differences between the nation of men and the nation of women." The loss, sacrifice, and tragedy of women from the epic poems stand in clear opposition to the post-Kosovo-battle achievements of women (like Queen Milica) in "women's poetry": their cooperation with the Turks (the other), their techniques of "survival, negotiation...solidarity," of creating an everyday life, as opposed to a heavenly one.[59]

57 Svetlana Slapšak, "What Are Women Made Of? *Inventing Women in the Yugoslav Area*," in Gisela Brinkler-Gabler and Sidonie Smith, (eds). *Writing New Identities: Gender and Immigration in Contemporary Europe*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)., p. 359.
58 Ibid., pp. 360-63.
59 Ibid., pp. 364-66.

A special case of a woman's resistance to incorporation into and constructions of the dominant national/ist discourse and narratives was Jelena Dimitrijević, a Serbian writer from the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries. Her *Letters from Niš on the Harems*, writes Svetlana Slapšak, are usually described as travel literature, but are actually more anthropological in spirit.[60] In the theoretical context of discussions of the imagining, or colonizing the other in the Balkans, she stands out as the paradigmatic colonizing "white woman" who goes to the "oriental" women to "liberate" them, yet she is not quite that, as she does not *return* from that experience. Because, in the process of knowing them, she loses her place in the national culture, the one she should have come back to. The reason this culture is lost for her, or, rather, that she becomes lost for that culture, lies precisely in the her refusal to construct the oriental *past*, the negation or neglect of which should become a focal point in the formation of a new national identity. She forges for the *oriental* an ontological, and not merely a symbolic status (as the national culture would wish it).[61] Through this act she denies and hampers the efforts of the new Balkan national states of the nineteenth century: to create historical narratives that would remove the living, barely expelled oriental/Turkish culture and heritage, into the distant past, where it should continue to exist and function as a historical stage in the evolutionary process of "civilization."[62]

It is the peculiar Orientalism of the Balkan national cultures that neither Edward Said in his seminal *Orientalism*, nor Maria Todorova in her *Imagining the Balkans* consider in detail: the dependence of national cultures of the Balkans on orientalist narratives, narratives of their Turkish past.[63] One of the elements of that orientalism is the image of the sexually depraved, amoral Muslim women, who are in the *Letters* actually "desexualized," "exposed" as real Muslim women, living in their Christian neighbors' midst. In the dominant discourse, female sexuality and desire are often constructed as a "privi-

60 Slapšak, "Haremi, nomadi," p. 138.

61 Ibid., p. 141.

62 As Maria Todorova writes in her *Imagining the Balkans*, the oppositionary relationship between East and West was some time in the 18th century further accentuated with the addition of the element of time. "[M]ovement from past to future was not merely motion but evolution from simple to complex, backward to developed, primitive to cultivated." Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*. (Miami: University of Florida Press, 1996)., p. 12.

63 In the *Introduction*, there is a brief reference to the construction of Balkan identities through opposition with the ""oriental" other." Todorova, p. 20.

lege/guilt of the other" (in this case a double other), and Jelena Dimitrijević thus broke yet another commandment of the national culture.[64] Her effort, which started out as a "colonizing" one, and evolved into an attempt of integration of the other(s) into a *different* national program, was in a direct clash with the project of either (or both) physical expulsion or relegation to a historical past of the other(s). Not knowledge and remembrance of its own *other* past, of its realities and continuities, but oblivion (or "orientalization") was the guiding principle of the emerging national culture, the culture she had willingly *removed* herself from.

The "Trilogy," Parts One and Two

"Balkans" & "Europe"

The remembering, or rather, "remembering," of one's own, *separate* (from the *other*(s), whose every trace needs to be either denied or be kept to function symbolically as a threat), *unique*, *better* past is the other side of the pattern of forgetting, of oblivion. The strategies of oblivion were not foreign to the new Yugoslav nationalisms, and they worked concomitantly with the strategies of "remembering." These strategies Dubravka Ugresic also calls "terrors," terrors by forgetting and terrors by remembering.[65] In the Croatian case, it is the continuity of national, Croatian identity that must be established, and the danger of a remembering or a re-establishment of a Yugoslav one that must be dispelled. The building of the Croatian identity thus depends on the erecting of the line of difference, and is formulated in what appears to be another, nesting orientalism, a discursive strategy common in the region, characterized best by the ubiquitous "*we* are the saviors of Christianity," the drawing of the East-West borderline to suit the national/ist idea of its own past, of where it "actually," historically, belongs to (and this can be drawn by Hungarians as well as Bulgarians).

But this Croatian self-identity, that Todorova would call a "Balkan self-identity, erected against an "oriental" other" (while she speaks of the nesting orientalisms of former Yugoslavia), denies its Balkanness first. As Todorova writes, the former Yugoslavs "had in toto rejected their belonging to the Balkans," and moreover, used Balkanness (as the quality of a "down there" of Europe) to "sustain their Croatianness, Serbianness…pure and innocent, or at least salvageable," projecting on some other Balkans (that further "down") "their darker side."[66]

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64 Slapšak, "Haremi, nomadi," p. 144.

65 Dubravka Ugrešić, *The Culture of Lies*. (London: Phoenix House, 1998)., p. 80.

66 Todorova, p. 53.

The new outburst of *balkanist* discourse in Western media, following the bloody break-up of Yugoslavia, has been joined by the Croatian insistence on the un-Balkanness of Croatia, where Balkans is synonymous with violence, dirt, barbarity, illiteracy, unculturedness, and so on.[67]

In Serbia however, a development had occurred that Todorova would perhaps see stemming from the "need for solidarity in the abyss," but that has its roots back in the nineteenth century dilemmas of the emerging Serbian state: the issues of modernization and "westernization" vs. the Slavic and Eastern – as the "genuinely" Serbian – way. This was a central dilemma and had served as a framework for virtually every issue that the newly independent Serbian state had to face.[68] The contemporary embrace of the "Balkans" as a site of genuine feeling, of the place where the lost soul of Europe resides, seems like a (positive) variation on the balkanist discursive insistence on the Balkans as the down-under, the dark side of Europe. But it is important to note that the nationalist discourse in Serbia accepted the fault-line of civilizations, turning around, however, the *valuation* awarded these "civilizations," and the East-West opposition itself.

Much before the new Serbian-Croatian war had started, the language of victimization and hate and the construction and popularization of specific historical narratives began to prepare the ground for the real violence. The narratives that concern us here would be the narratives of the Serbian victimhood under the Ustaše regime in the Second World War, and the narrative of the *ill-fatedness*, and *unnaturalness* of the union of the South Slavs (Slovene, Croats and Serbs) in 1918, and of its successor, the Communist, federal Yugoslavia, including the view of this state as a "historical mistake," in which time and again the "national question" has to

67 An influential book has given official Croatia an enormous boost in its quest for recognition as the safeguard of Western civilization: Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*. Huntington includes the Catholic Croatia whose history has been mostly with the (Western) Empire of the Habsburgs in the "European" realm, while the Serbs belong to a different "civilization," outside of "Europe," on the account of their Orthodoxy and Byzantine-Ottoman historical-cultural legacy.

68 Thus, the parliamentary debates on the introduction of railway in the 1880s can perfectly illustrate the chasms between the "pro-Western," "pro-European" forces, and those who opposed such a step, believing it was Serbia's mission to resist this novelty. They thought Serbia belonged in "future, victorious Slavic culture," whose task was to alleviate the "egotistical struggle of the Western culture and to create a harmonious relationship between culture and the pure Orthodox faith, whose defender…is the great Russian people." See Latinka Perović, "Politička elita i modernizacija u prvoj deceniji nezavisnosti srpske države," Srbija u modernizacijskim procesima XX veka. (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 1994)., pp. 235-245.

emerge. By the time the situation in Kosovo changed and the "Serbian tragedy," marked by the loss of Serbian dominance in the province, was readdressed, it was clear that the solution for the "national question" of Serbs in Yugoslavia found expression in the dangerous mechanism of invention and "staging of reality" that operated and manipulated with the existent fears and animosities of the population.[69] The mechanism worked to "attribute hostile feelings to everything done by the others." By doing this, it hoped, and succeeded in constructing "the feeling of *hurt pride*, based on which the feeling of endangeredness is "naturally" spread and the actual preparations for "defence" activated."[70]

The Unloving Grandmother or on the History of Serbo-Croatian Relations

These nationalist sentiments have been widely disseminated by the time the first novel of Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović was published in 1991. *Ana-Maria Didn't Love Me* exactly corresponds to and feeds off the already virulent nationalist discourse and can be read as a fictional contribution to the whole opus of works mentioned earlier.[71] It depends and relies on this discursive practice, seeks a place, legitimation for itself *as* yet another "proof" of a historical necessity, masked as a personal (women's) narrative. Its language is also, from the very beginning, unmistakeably devoted to a certain construction of "woman," home," and "motherland." There are the inescapable roses, embroidery, female aptness in fitting a room, tidiness, the rural-provincial motifs and atmosphere: the first elements of an aesthetics of kitsch emerge.

Immediately the image of the mother takes its shape: she usually "embraces gently, comfortingly, encouragingly, softly, comfortably warm" (7). Her bosom is protectively soft, and her whispers "wet" (9). She is an *undesired* (but misfortunately desiring) mother as well, and the impossibility of coexistence of proper motherhood and sexual appeal is bestowed on Vera by her daughter, the narrator: "her flannelette nightgown was pink, with blue and red little flowers, buttoned to the top, with a "*bubi*" top edged with lace. Now I know [*sic!*]: that was the night attire of a practical housewife, devoted wife and caring mother, and not of a *lover*." The desexualization of motherhood is accepted and approved from within the text: as it will become clear in *Ženski rodoslov*, a mother's ac-

69 Vesna Pešić, "Rat za nacionalne države," in *Srpska strana rata*, p. 35.

70 Ibid., p. 36.

71 And as such, it is by no means a lone example. Late Slobodan Selenić's *Timor Mortis*, published in 1989, albeit of a not quite the same literary quality, can be argued to function in the same way.

tive sexual desire shall always be hampered and proscribed, "punished" by suffering and indignity.

The idyll of home is overshadowed by the "mysterious" woman of the "foreign-sounding" name, Ana Maria, who is identified as "the mother of my father Tomislav" (10), instead of the expected "my grandmother," which immediately establishes a distance between the narrator and her grandmother, a confirmation to the reader that something is definately 'wrong' with this character. Father's departure to Zagreb is given further meaning through the recounting of his mother's first reaction to his marriage to Vera (from a letter 'accidentally' found, and written in a "Croatian" dialect):

> "If you bring that Serbian Gypsy to my house, I will kill her without a doubt. I will cut her throat, most definitely, like in Kulušic's street, where, alas, the willows don't grow, and they are, you should never have forgotten that, my son, the best place for Serbs!"[72]

This, the text goes on, "example of ferocity of thought and feeling in the expression of untameable nationalist hatred" (11) is preceded by a portrait of this Serb-hating Croatian woman:

> "On her head is a black hat. Her strange elegance is completed by a big black bag and black leather gloves....[S]he considered Zagreb the center of the world, and the Catholic church was for her an absolute sanctity. Accordingly, only pure-bred Croat women and devout, true believers were women awarded respect. The rest were not worthy of any attention" (10-11).

When Iva, the girl, and her mother, leave Kruševac, a small Serbian town the Croatian grandmother "has never heard of," it is the smells of their provincial home, of the warm and loving Serbian *baba*-Marica's home-made sweets and of the "Fresh Hay" perfume of the carriage that see them off, the last reminders of "home" before they face the foreign, already feared Zagreb.

As the two innocents, symbols of Serbian good will and naivety, their simplicity and roughness of manner described with pride, Iva and mother are confronted by a hostile, conceited, arrogant Zagreb. The mantra-like "You are in Zagreb now" becomes the constant signifier of a Serbian traumatiza-

72 In the original: "Ak buš dopelal tu srbijansku ciganku v moju hižu, bum je bez dvojbe ubila. Zaklala bum je, vjerojatno, kak v Kulušicevoj, kaj me, pak, žalosti, ne rastiju vrbe, a one su, to nigdar nisi smio pozabit, sinek si moj, najbolše mjesto za Srbe!" p. 11.

tion at the hands of Croatian insolence and scorn, but thus also begins the seduction of Croatia-as-West, the seduction by language, history and manners. "You have come from Balkans to Europe and you must learn how to behave," is the first thing Ana Maria tells her daughter-in-law. Ana Maria is made into a diabolic figure (her other daughter-in-law describes her as a witch, who "drinks the blood of everyone who lets her by day, and walks on Mirogoj [the city cemetery] by night" (26)), the fanatical Catholic who is "hiding" something – and it is all but obvious that what is being hidden is the past of converting and murdering of Serbs, the images of which have already overflooded the Serbian imaginary, waiting for yet another ultimate confirmation, that is, contemporary self-fulfilment.

In an interview which introduces *Ana Maria Didn't Love Me* as the first part of the trilogy of the "biography of her soul" and as the "story of her childhood," Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović confesses that, in order to write it, she "did research on the history of Yugoslav peoples and the Yugoslav idea" (unfortunately, she doesn't reveal her sources). In the novel, the Yugoslav idea is constructed as a very intimate relationship between Croats and Serbs. It introduces, "exposes," and defines Croatian anti-Yugoslavism as pathological Serb-hatred in the "historical" character of Eugen Vitek, the grandfather of Ana Maria, and an "embittered, ferocious enemy of the union of the South Slavs" (184).

Croatian nationalism is thus defined as Serb-hatred and Yugoslavia and the "Yugoslav idea" can unimpededly function as what every Croatian nationalist anyway holds it to be: a historical embodiment of Serbian hegemony, the unfortunate replacement of one yoke for another. But this is the hegemony that dare not speak its name: through embracing and appropriating the "Yugoslav idea," the Serbian nationalist discourse can denounce Croatian wish for separateness as a murderous, blood-thirsty drive, that needs to be combated and crushed. The "reality-content" of these propositions is only slightly relevant for this analysis: what seems more significant are the investments into the images of perpetrator and victim, where the victimhood is always a Serbian privilege, and the destructive impulse is attributed to the other. (And, as Homi Bhabba has observed, it is the nation's paranoia of victimization that feeds its aggressiveness.)[73]

But prior to the moment of recognition and separation, comes the period of coexistence, which is in the novel a period of Croatian seduction of the girl, Iva, of her abandoning the true 'home' and 'motherland' of Serbia

73 Homi Bhabba, *Location of Culture*. (New York: Routledge, 1994).

(that is, the rejection and neglect of her mother – as an act symbolic of that), the triteness and simplicity of the "primitive decor" of Serbian provincial backwaters for the glamour and sophistication of the Croatian capital, its (Western, European) past and "character." In this process, the different constructions of womanhood become implicated with ethnic othering: Iva's aunt Vilma, just as her mother Ana Maria, is a "lady," and her (Croatian) femininity is in a clear opposition with the femininity of Iva's mother: while Vera is denounced by her husband as a woman who "rather stays home [than goes out, tries to be a lady], a genuine home-fly with an apron, fussing all the time around her sweetie, her dear" (37), Vilma is in turn denounced by the narrator as a woman who "has neither will nor interest for such triviality as children and home."[74] Neither has she time, further ironizes the narrator, because she has to

> "make it to the hair-dresser's, manicure's, beautician's, dress-maker's, do the window-shopping and carefully study the foreign journals so that she doesn't miss by any chance some fashion news, go for a riding or tennis lesson, in order to stay fit and slim, attend an important concert, show, exhibition" (33).

Neither active participation in social life nor attention to physical appearance are the 'qualities' that the text lets women possess if they are to be *good* women, that is, mothers. Without the doting and housewifeliness of Vera, a woman's only refuge – and a resented, even if perhaps an envied one – is being a "lady." And that latter quality distinctly belongs with the ethnic others.

The seduction of Iva, even if only temporary, is important as it builds up the momentum towards the terrible scene of recognition, as if to accentuate the perversity, in all its strength, of the appeal of civility, high (Western) culture, and noble history – all a mere mask for brutality and hatred (in the words of one critic, we have here "bitter, devastating scenes from Zagreb, in which an image of fake nobility, pretentiousness and noble-bloodedness, Catholic fanaticism and Ustashe nazism are driven to paroxysm"). The fascination with the grandmother begins with her speech, in which she

> "most naturally mixed Croatian and German, in the ways of 19th- and 20th-century nobility...Her sentences! Long, embellished, high style. Cultivated to the maximum....[W]ords carefully chosen, to sound as beautiful as possible, but convey the meaning as adequately. The speech that is shaped through edu-

74 Later in the text (53), Vilma is additionally reviled, since she had a German lover during the war.

> cation, which is refined, as precious stones are, with the dust of a line of generations…whose beauty cannot be reached and attained by careful listening and simple reproduction" (38).

Mother's attempts at mimicry of this "holy speech" are noted with pity that will later surface as pride, and can be seen as the prevailing of her base-but-honest, Serbian origins, that are impossible to hide (be spoiled, that is) under the influence of "Zagreb." The mother remains true to Serbia/herself, but her (failed) attempts to escape this predicament are also a monument to the ill-fatedness, the impropriety of her union/marriage to Tomislav, to the "truth" of his/Croatian thorough rejection of her. Vera's marriage outside of the ethnos stands out as the metaphor of the failed Yugoslav project, and her stubborn, desperate, unreturned and unsatisfied sexual desire for him as the good-natured, honest, best-intentioned, but obviously silly Serbian wish for a union with those who cannot desire them back, those 'who hate and have been hating us.'

As Iva's wish for recognition by Ana Maria is rewarded after she announces her decision to be a "writer," the relationship of seduction and initiation takes full sway. Iva is entranced by the fairy-tales of the "family history of Viteks," the family that she desires to become part of, that she, for a brief time, is allowed "into." But there can never be real acceptance, we soon learn. It is Iva who must change in her aspiration to the status of "nobilitation" from the pit of "unbaptized Serbian trash," it is that change that becomes the precondition of acceptance. So Iva is baptised. In the episode of her baptism, however, her resilience, and the persistence of her true origins is given away: confirming the view of Catholicism as a formal religion, devoid of feeling, mystery, real communication with God, she proclaims that her Catholic baptism "left absolutely no trace in [her]" (60). This episode also exposes the true project, and the true nature of Croatian acceptance of Serbs: (forced) baptism, as the one element of the Ustaše "Serbian solution" (one third to the pits, one third baptized, one third back to Serbia).

As the history of the Viteks, which is also the history of the "national and cultural consciousness of Croats," is recounted with both fascination and repellence, the strong Croatian sentiments of belonging "naturally" with Vienna and the Austro-Hungarian Empire and indelible distinction from the 'down under' of "Kalemegdan and Sava Mala" (70) are used to further erect the line of difference, the ultimate incongruity of the two nations. The image of the arrogant, hating Croats, who think of themselves as European, but are also seen as "impure," somehow contaminated by all that German and Hungarian influence, looking down on the provincial, but honest, "uncivilized" and

"barbaric," but pure-bred Serbs, explodes into their own barbarity, under a mask of civility (in the scene of Ana Maria's knife-attack on Iva).

Jasenovac and Other Fantasies

But before the Ana Maria the grandmother, there is Ana Maria the young girl, whose "inner" life becomes the subject of the now omniscient narrator's account. As in Theweleit's *Freikorps* texts, the language is here full of "strangely ambivalent emotions" in its constructions of femininity, sexuality, and male-female relations: the constitutive elements, it seems, in the making of Ana Maria the hating grandmother.[75] Ana Maria's relationship to her father is one of "adoration," such adoration that leads her to renounce her faith in God after her father, Alexander Vitek, is killed at the hands of "filthy peasants." The peasant-revulsion of the character of Ana Maria's father is coupled by the pleasure invested by the text in the images of the rampaging, looting brutes:

> "There are already there, in the house. They storm through the rooms in rage. While they are looking for him [Alexander] they put everything that crosses their way in pockets and sacks, under their sweaty shirts and shabby coats. They fight and grab from each other who will take what, who will take more....Those damn devils, fools and vagabonds, that wild herd: not knowing what they are doing, they will destroy everything that's worth anything...Their mares, fit only for drudgery and child-bearing, would remain the only women! And who will then give birth to and raise gentlemen?"

While the demise of Croatian nobility and of the "ladies," women who "raise gentlemen," is gleefully observed, it is not simply the glee of the ideologically correct egalitarianism that is at stake here – but the reconstitution of another, competing, "our" nobility, the claiming of that status for one's own, "historical" upper class, which process will take shape in another novel of Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović.

But to go back to Ana Maria. As the father-daughter relationship prevails over her devoutness, she leaves the nunnery for this-wordly life, finding another object to relate to, a man who will become her husband.

75 In his introduction to *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit explains his inquiry is directed to the way fascist language of his Freikorps "soldier males" speaks of men's relations with women, and of their relationship to "external reality and its bodily location," which "grows out of one's own relationship to one's own body and to other human bodies." The analysis of the males' relations to women reveals "strangely ambivalent emotions" of "interest and indifference, aggressiveness and veneration, hatred, anxiety, alienation and desire." Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*. (vol 1). (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984)., pp. 24-26.

Thus defined through relationships of "adoration" and full identification, "succumbing completely to her enchantment with Branislav" (96), Ana Maria also excites her husband "almost unbearably." For him, she is the

> "reticent, Madonna-like Jesus' fiancée, who...hasn't been touched, even by wind. To make love to her!...To melt that ice! To make that quiet, composed voice to moan passionately! What unthought-of pleasures those will be!"

But this time as well, female sexuality is not "understood" in its difference: she gives herself to him in her "quiet, reticent way, living it deeply inside, without surface reactions [sic!], without revealing herself" (98). As the impossibility, the ban on relating, drives the "insensitive" Branislav to proclaim her "*samostanska ḍuca*" and her body "smelling of wax," he seeks to replace her "coldness" with the warmth of other bodies. This betrayal, in turn, makes Ana Maria deny the pleasures of the flesh, and returns her to God, from whom she now awaits a task so that she may prove "the strength of her faith and the limitlessness of her love for God" (115). Thus ultimately, it was the dangerous, frustrated sexuality, the constant seeking of union (with man *or* God), and the rejection and betrayal of man, and then her willing constriction of sexuality, that made Ana Maria one of the collaborators in the Ustaše project of the return of the Serbs to the Roman-Catholic faith.

This revelation follows the animal-like scream "Slaughtered! Slaughtered! You should all be slaughtered!" which comes as a reaction to Iva's *faux-pas*, the description of Bishop Stepinac as a "criminal. Executioner under a mask of faith..." The images and words of the hate of Serbs keep flooding: "Our and their slaughter is not the same....They kill for vengeance, retribution, passion, and we make God happy by removing from Croatia [*lijepe naše*] all those...infidels, schizmatics who reject His mercy and return to the Faith!" The representations of murder ("their screams filled her with pleasure") and later of the rape of Ana Maria's Jewish look-alike [sic!] by an "ideologically appropriate" perpetrator are recounted in such a way that they can be said to function as a "release of emotion."[76] The fictional initiator of this latter crime is the priest who "craved greatly after Ana Maria," in an "almost inhuman way." She in turn was "excit-

76 Theweleit analyses the description of a murder of a German woman by a Polish soldier as containing the identification of the author *with* the soldier who does it; and this representation, like many others, is yet another "release of emotion" that the soldier males are occupied with. p. 190.

ed by his folly. Her insides would tremble lightly....And she knew: he wouldn't be able to caress her gently. He would tear her apart" (118). But her fantasy and his desire will find union *through* the body of another woman, the "Viennese Jew."

> "...Three young, strong, raw Ustaše jumped on the woman and brought her down to the floor. They tore her dress and underwear, until she was fully naked. She was lying with her legs spread apart and arms open. Like Christ on the cross. [*It is not known to me whether there is any image of Christ on the cross with his legs spread apart*].
>
> ....[Ana Maria] tried not to watch.
>
> ....[But] something in the man's voice made her obey. She leant on the wall and clenched her hands behind her back.
>
> One of the men already had his pants down and jumped on the woman brutally. He slapped her, bit her cheeks, her neck, her breasts, moaned and grunted, put his hands into her hair and painfully pinched her all over her body, his hairy buttocks moved back and forth. Even before he calmed down after the last, strong cramp, already the other Ustaša was there, terribly excited, impatiently ready [*perhaps just: impatient, not to mention the man's buttocks which, both grammatically and syntactically have assumed the status of an independent subject in the previous sentence, performing an action outside the context of the remainder of the sentence*] to take his place.
>
> The woman did not defend herself. She was lying lifelessly and whined softly [*well, she either lied lifelessly or whined*]. Like a lost, beaten dog. [*The reader simply shudders at the amount of sympathy expressed in this sentence. It is not clear here whether the tone that defiles the suffering of the Jewish girl ("like a lost, beaten dog") belongs to Ana Maria or the narrator herself. The next sentence ("Ana Maria knew...") however proves that there is an unusual shrinkage of the distance and partial identification between Ana Maria and the narrator in this scene.*]
>
> Ana Maria knew: that woman was nobody. She does not exist. Hers is only the body. And the Ustaše are in fact raping her" (119-120).

As the scene culminated in the blood-sucking of the woman by the priest, Ana Maria tries to flee, and the priest pronounces the words we have already read before: "Slaughtered! Slaughtered! You should all be slaughtered!" This "you" seems to be a different you, a trinity of women-Jews-Serbs, but that returns in the text in the scene with Iva, this time with singular meaning, as a discharge of a sexual humiliation, the turning of a defiled, almost-raped Ana Maria on the unyielding, un-remodelled and unreformable Serbian grandchild.

The construction of the Serb-hating Ana Maria has its complement in the misogynous

investment of the text in the monologue of Tomislav, Iva's father, which is formulated as his rejection of Vera, his answers to her (sexual, among other) entreaties (for the reader muted, silent, unseen). His vileness finds "proof" in the dismissal of the already mentioned housewifely qualities of Vera ("what use do I have from a "good wife, mother and housewife?....Bara [the maid] can be that too."). As his words again draw the line between desired and undesired femininity, narrator's sympathy for the mother, but also disgust for her, and pleasure in the father's verbal humiliation, can be discerned in the following:

> And what, for Christ's sake, are you trying to do?! You don't intend to seduce me, do you? For your sake, or you think I need it? Well, you can stop trying, I don't. Come on, stop touching me. Can't you notice, really, how my body retreats before your hand? I don't want to kiss you either. I don't want your tongue on my neck and chest. You needn't have undressed. Your body is uncomfortably warm and wet, you know I never liked that. Neither do I want your fat, disgusting ass which you try to wiggle seductively into my lap. Leave my hand alone. Your tits are still *prima*, congratulations, you managed to save something, but for me, unfortunately, they have no attraction anymore. And your belly is a disgusting, sagging sack of fat. Leave my hand alone. It's wet and sticky between your thighs, I will have to go and wash myself..." (83)

This passage can hardly justify itself as only the final gesture attributed to the father, before Iva can in turn renounce him, nor could it ever be a childhood memory; it *is* yet another instance, the final one, of Toma's non-desire for the mother, but more than just verbalizing this rejection and sending them back to Kruševac, it also formulates the proscription of the direct expression of female sexual desire; the misfortune that it brings, the inappropriateness of woman's sexual advancing, and the (deserved) humiliation that awaits her. It also passes the final decision on the inappropriateness and undesirability of Vera's marriage: not only did she marry out of (the Orthodox) faith, out of the nation, but she also married "for love." So serves her right: as one of *baba*-Marica's "eternal female wisdoms" goes, "for a moment of happiness, an eternity of misfortune."[77]

The Second Grandmother

Iva's return to Krusevac introduces the real motherly figure of the three novels, the other, Montenegrin grandmother Marica. After "This is no Zagreb!" becomes the new

77 In the original: "*Za jedan časak radosti, sto godina žalosti*."

predicament of poor Iva, and once a woman harasses her in the street as a child of soon-to-be-divorced parents, *baba*-Marica comes to the rescue: "Her eyes! God, how much warmth, love, pity and pain! I took hold of her with both my arms around the hips and put my face into her soft, big belly. I was crying" (127). This grandmother is different from Ana Maria, "completely different in [her] nature, mentality, cultural heritage and system of values." On the one side the seductive fairy-tales of the noble Croatian past, and on the other, the simple, crude stories of *baba*-Marica, "devoid of magic, tension, Romanesque [sic!] atmosphere, pathos, mysticism, fine layering" (144). The narrator asks to be forgiven, for not telling the *false* glamour of the "ladies'" stories from the more genuine, "manly" history of her other family line – for at this point, Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović has not yet tapped into the "women's" themes, as they themselves have not won their place in the public discourse.

And so the first "story" of the other side of the family tree belongs to the (so far neglected) grandfather "Pero, son of Boško," a hero, "an imposing figure firmly grounded in the two cult-qualities of the man of the Montenegrin myth: *čojstvo i junastvo*..." (144).[78] His greatest tragedy was, without a doubt, the marriage of his daughter to Tomislav, her "betrayal" (148). To parents' entreaties, which are nothing but a faithful rendering of the everyday production of newspapers and popular historical "studies" ("Brothers! What brothers, child? Brothers who, whenever there is an occasion, stab you in the back! Always, in all wars, they were against us!"), Vera replies in an idealism that the nationalist discourse constructs as the other side of the "Serbian predicament": a faith in the principles of brotherhood and unity. "And we against them," she replies. "But not because we wanted to. This is just an outcome of our unfortunate past, the tactics of our enemies of all sorts: divide and conquer!..." (149). The eventual rejection (by Iva) of this Croatian father will become an important element in the construction of the feeling of ethnic-Serbian communality, of the possibility of an "us" and of "they," which are relied upon, and taken for granted in the later novels. The weak Oedipal (Croatian) father can be replaced by the Father-of-the-Nation, and the "impurity" of origin is vindicated by an act of proper mating, and the giving birth to a Son.

78 *Čojstvo*: "to be honest, just, principled, a man of his word, to firmly stand behind your beliefs and be guided by your moral being, without paying attention to blackmail, economic hardships, abandonment of friends, loss of social status and identity...all that requires a great deal of personal courage that I place higher that bravery in war and thus consider real heroism" (145).

Writers and Other Intellectuals

Already in *Ana Maria Didn't Love Me* there are the first signs of what will become in *Iva* a full-fledged, nauseatingly repetitive claim by the narrator-author to the status of "writer," "intellectual," "artist," to the self as gifted, talented, special. In her essay "Gingerbread Heart Culture,"[79] Dubravka Ugresic quotes Nabokov on the one kind of *poshlost* (a Russian word Nabokov preferred to English equivalents "such as *cheap*, *inferior*, *sorry*, *trashy*, *scurvy*, *tawdry* and the like"), the "disturbing" one: [it is] particularly strong and pernicious when the falsity is not obvious and when it is believed, rightly or not, that the values it imitates belong to the highest reaches of art, thought or sensibility."[80]

The seriousness of this belief seems quite grotesque, even more so if contrasted with the tendencies of removal from the 'seriousness' of "high" culture, and the attempts at imploding the very opposition of "high" culture and "low" culture itself. But in our case, the "low" seeks legitimation through the imitation of what it believes are the values belonging to the "highest reaches of art, thought or sensibility," and in these particular times, it *becomes* part of the mainstream, through participation in the official ideology, which invites it in and needs it in order to function. It was that specific subculture that had been formed parallel with socialist, state-sponsored kitsch, the "rural" subculture of the population which, having migrated to the towns, had not accepted the city culture, but preserved their own ways (necessarily altered in form), which seems to have been susceptible ground for the spreading of the new, nationalist kitsch, which replaced the old one in the role of ideological preservation, constitution and dissemination of dominant values.[81]

Read Kundera's "need for kitsch…[as] the need to gaze into the mirror of the beautifying lie and to be moved to tears of gratification at one's own reflection"[82] in:

> "My literary talent and the need to write were my one stable point in life….Writing was the magical armor that made me less vulnerable….My poetry was the magical Cinderella dress….Obsession to write…gave a name and a content to my difference. It made sense out of my loneliness. They will live, and I will be a writer, I spoke in a trance, spoke loudly…" (48-49)

79 She is here referring to Danilo Kiš' metaphor for nationalist kitsch – the gingerbread heart (a type of cake, sold at village fairs). Ugrešić, p. 50.

80 Ibid., p. 49.

81 Ibid., p. 51.

82 Milan Kundera, *Art of the Novel*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1993)., p. 135.

In an interview, Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović reveals that she expects to receive the Nobel Prize in the 21st century. And on the cover of the novel *Iva*, "the story of her adolescence," described in a blurb-review as "belonging to the genre of the romance novel…but elevated from the world of…banality…to universality," the unmistakeably trivial-romance design "reveals" in fact (lift the cover, and there is it, *another* cover) the pretensions of this work-of-art, work of genius: the Authoress herself, *writing*, posing with a self-important and deadly serious air; an image of what it thinks *must be* an artist.

"The Story of An Adolescence" and the Ideology of Virginity

And indeed, *Iva* is so much more than "just a romance": it is an attempt to construct an "artistic," "literary" subjectivity based on the exclusion and denial of the corporeal, to define the intellectual, the "mind" (as in the long tradition of Western philosophy), in an oppositionary relationship of dominance to the "body," and sexuality, in which process it mimics again the patriarchal coupling of body with femaleness. It is *through* the denial of a certain (uninhibited, non-procreative) female sexuality, and the assertion of a difference between "two kinds of love" (the "spiritual" and the "bodily"), where her realm is the "spiritual" one, that Iva's status as a "writer" is to be achieved, and her righteous femininity erected as a dam against the tide of "powerful forces" whose existence inside her "self" is acknowledged, but pathologized.

Višnja, a girl from Iva's home-town, and later girlfriend and wife of her "spiritual mate," Dane, takes on the role of predating, sexual femininity. She at first does not resist sexual advances ("When I touched her breasts, she did not resist. I was simply ecstatic. Otherwise, you were supposed to talk girls into every next level of intimacy.…Višnja was really different" (31)), and in spite [sic!] of her virginity, her "moves and ways were brimming with mature sensuality…so that it all looked like experience."[83] Yet the disgust overwhelms her once the sexual act is finished. Iva, on the other hand, is for Dane a "sister he never had," whom he "doesn't fancy as a girl," his asexual queen. But this is because her "spiritual" being excluded mere, ordinary, base sexuality ("the nothingness of Dane's love for Višnja.…[Its] essence was instinct, mere surface sensations which inflame the senses" (64)); *she* was special. She craved love, "unordinary," "intense," and "dramatic." Since that love "goes (*kao avan uz tučak!*) with understanding," it would seem that Dane, who "understands" her is the "right" one.

83 It seems like the authoress here implies that there is a causal relationship between the loss of virginity and sensuality, or even better, between virginity and frigidity.

But she sees him with Višnja, and in that exclusive, monogamous, overstated world where "belonging" is one and "complete," and "love" can be commanded ("I would never *agree* [italics mine] to love someone who, knowing me, loved someone else" (73)), Dane can only become somebody else, a "brother." Once her relationship with Dane is constructed as one of "understanding," an asexual, spiritual one, his later attempts to break it are considered near-incestuous, and Iva will, untouched by a man, enter a marriage ("I need security and peace. I shall marry Lazar" (105)) with a student she barely knows, and who has been in love with her for three years.

Marriage to Lazar is "destiny" ("when I woke up, I knew I would marry the man who talks to me first that day"), but it is also, it will become clear, a very prudent decision. As Dane observes, Lazar is "elegant, polite, with a fresh hair-cut...reliable, calm, thorough. An economist." Once marriage to Lazar is decided, all boys whom she "allowed [!] to court her" are cast aside. As Lazar will proudly comment in *Ženski rodoslov*: "I would never have married you if you hadn't been a virgin!"[84] Only in the normative marital relationship ("I could sleep with anyone I was married to" (128)), are the "powerful forces" of sexual desire, whose destructive consequences will be elaborated on in *Ženski rodoslov*, permitted expression. "Lazar came and kissed me. First on the neck. Then on the mouth. After all these years, it still took only a single touch for me to start trembling, hot....It was a mute sign of passion which needed no encouragement as it grew on its own . . ." (178).

This new-old imperative of virginity fits into the context of the 'return of traditional values,' and is a central concept of female rightist propagators of Serbian nationalism, like Isidora Bjelica. One of the founders of a women's group "Samo Srpkinja Srbina Spasava" (Only Serbian Women Can Save Serbian Men), Bjelica's other expectations of Serbian women include "creating little Serbs," and "putting their talents and intelligence where it is most needed - and at the present moment that is in the service of the Serb who is prepared to give his life for the defence of the Orthodox faith and Serbdom."[85] In her prose works, Bjelica introduces virginity as a glamorous, noble quality, a long-forgotten skill that Serbian mothers must again teach their daughters (so they could again be "princesses").[86]

84 In the original: "Da znaš, nikada te ne bih uzeo da si dala devojčicu na bubanj! rekao mi je više puta moj muž. Nije krio zadovoljstvo što sam do dvadeset pete godine opnicu sašuvala netaknutom" (105).

85 Bracewell, pp. 9-10. Bjelica quoted from *Pogledi*, Sept 7, 1992.

86 Isidora Bjelica, *Ozloglašena, ili, Moderna Pandora*.

The Historical Novel, or Reincarnations

What *Iva* also does is rediscover history, give the Kosovo myth yet another articulation, thus including itself in the nationalist discourse through its fictional offspring, the historical novel. This attempt to legitimize the "love story," raise it to the level of "universal" (to be understood as national) through its interweaving with the greatest Serbian myth, which is itself, in turn, "sexualized," includes a brazenly act of the appropriation of Dubrovnik and its history as "Serbian." The Ragusan republic is an 'organic-spiritual' part, a complement of the medieval Serbian kingdom (Milo(and Frane, the Ragusan noble, as "the two sides of one and the same bright shining sun"), to be severed from its source by the "Asian infidel," but preserving its heritage, carrying in its womb the seed of Serbdom (the child of the Ragusan beauty and the Serbian noble, conceived in the eve of the battle).

The demise of Lazar's kingdom, whose center is importantly (and in yet another instance of the strategy of kitsch) also the home-town of the narrator-author, is reconstructed in the novel through the painful choice of Bogdan, a young Serbian noble, between loyalty and love for the motherland and the carnal love for a (Dubrovnik) woman (another Iva); in his case, of course, death, that is, heavenly life prevails, a life of unattained bliss of love, of unsatisfied desire, in a victory over their this-wordly fulfilment. In the nationalist division of labor, if Serbian men die for the defence of Serbdom, women live, to maintain the nation, to preserve its continuity. The language of *Iva* speaks the masculinist language of myth, the "male" oral tradition, speaks of the death of heroes, of a world ending with their tragedy, not of the *life* that comes immediately after, life of coexistence, of survival.

> "News is brought about the demise of Lazar's kingdom…The bewidowed Queen Milica asks protection from the Ragusan republic. There is no more Serbian nobility. No knights have remained alive. The heroes stayed at Kosovo. Their bones and attires mixed. Without graves. From their blood peonies have sprung….And in their midst, one white lily has bloomed" (187).

But in this world of red peonies, "eternal" white lilies and "sugar-pink" roses (of Lazar, the stranger-husband-to-be: "He has style…holding those seven *sugar-pink* roses. Not many men can do that" (75)) the tragedy, the trauma of the past is to be redeemed by the present: Iva and Lazar of today are meant to be together as "reincarnations" of the Bogdan and Iva of the past, thus uniting in the present what was divided in the past, and the first Iva, who rejected Ragusan legitimacy for her child and remained "true" to her Serbian hero, being "reincarnated" as "our" Iva, the future Serbian mother.

The Discovery of "Women's": The Trilogy, Part Three

"Women's"?

Female Lineage (*Ženski rodoslov*), the last of the three novels, was published in 1996, and advertised as "an exciting family saga, a blood-stained anthology of women's pains, a dictionary of eternal women's destinies."[87] Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović, claims her interviewer, is the only writer who has "exclusively women as *characters* in her works." Characters=heroes (*junaci,* not *junakinje*, and certainly not *likovi*, this is an epic, historical narrative, and we know these feature *heroes*, not simply *characters*), following what Rada Iveković observes as a tendency of nationalism to "award" women male nationalist qualities like "courage, bravery, sacrifice." The woman(=*hero*) here stands for something else, it seems – is the feminine figure again, as Ivekovic writes, a *carrier*, an embodiment of a male principle, men's activity and experience?[88] Or are the intentions slightly different, and the activities and experiences markedly different from "male" ones, and precisely interesting *because* of their, in this work specifically defined and prescribed, *femininity*?

> "I believe women are the stronger, more resolute, more creative half of humanity....It also seems that they are more interesting, complex personalities, and thus a greater literary challenge....And the dominant personages in my life, and in my lineage, were women. Therefore, it is logical that female characters and female sensibility [sic] dominate my writing too."

But in what way do these women "dominate"? And what is the ideological commitment of this domination in the text, if there is any? For one, it is certainly not feminist. It may be *a)* about women ("centrality of female characters"); *b)* written by a woman; *c)* speaking, among other things, on the subjects of love, sexual desire and "concrete women's experiences," although in the language of trivial romance, but its commitment is somewhere else, outside of feminism, and these efforts should not be characterized as women's literature (provided we do not use the term women's literature to label any work written by a woman about women). The ideological commitment of this "domination" is in the vindication of patriarchy, and the preservation of a certain modality of male-female relations, that is, the obscuring of their social conditioning, the assumption of their "naturalness," permanence ("everything had changed and yet nothing did" (245)), immutability, all

87 The blurb on the back cover of *Ženski rodoslov* (Beograd: Narodna knjiga, 1998).

88 Iveković, "Women, Nationalism and War," p. 116.

throughout the national "histories," constructed here as "women's," and thus all in the service of the idea of Nation.

Of "centrality": women-centered novels have been with us since the novel emerged as a form of entertainment, and have at that time been "preoccupied with questions of sexual morality," and with the entry of the heroine into marriage.[89] While the nineteenth century, and especially its popular literature, continued relying on events concerning the heroine's marriage as a "central narrative device," it also proceeded to construct female sexuality as dangerous and destructive, and its female heroines as silent, speaking with the body only.[90] The female body, as Theweleit writes, was encoded with the promises of freedom, and in the face of failure of their fulfilment, men "took vengeance on that body itself."[91] *Of the "erotic"* (the authoress, again): "there is as much erotics in my novels as in the lives of my *heroes* [sic]. The erotic, as an important part of life, must surely be an important part of literature as well."

In the framework of Foucault's theory of the changing treatment of sexuality, and the contemporary investment in *speaking* about it, what used to be considered a Victorian "genre" of pornographic novel can well be redefined as a form of autobiographical literature, or confession,[92] just as the new women's sexual "confessions" can be seen as a continuation of that autobiographical tradition.[93] But as the speaking of sex has (finally) become a female prerogative as well, the preoccupation with female sexuality is viewed by some critics as carrying another danger: the new ideological definition of women "in relation to their sexual history;" and their personal narratives, the "knowing-themselves" processes, again revolving around sexual experience.[94]

The "speaking of sex" in the case of romantic fiction (which can, in some of its varieties, reach the label of "pornography") is especially prone to a critique of this kind. Women write and read these novels, and reading them is sometimes considered an "oppositionary" practice, an act which in its

89 Rosalind Coward, "The True Story of How I Became My Own person," in *The Feminist Reader*, Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (eds). (London: Macmillan, 1989)., p. 36.

90 Ibid., pp. 37-9.

91 Theweleit, p. 359.

92 Rastko Močnik, "Trivijalni ne-žanr: pornografski "roman." Prilog tipologiji trivijalne literature," in *Trivijalna književnost*, Svetlana Slapšak (ed).

93 Coward, p. 41.

94Ibid., pp. 44-45.

"uselessness" counteracts the workings of patriarchy, of the social order and the dominant modality of social relations. But as an analysis of the narrative devices and the ideological implications of romantic fiction has shown, it functions mostly as yet another reaffirmation of that order, as it disseminates among women a compliance with a traditional concept of femininity, bound to the "social roles of lover, wife and mother," roles "essential to the maintenance of the current organization of life."[95]

Reducing women to *the* sex, defining them *through* their sexuality is a common "sin" of women-centered novels.[96] It is also the main tenet of nationalist practice, the one nationalist mechanism needs to appropriate in order to insure its functioning and domination. Having said that, I feel the need to modify the "centrality" of "women" in Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović's novels. What is "central" in *Ženski rodoslov* seems rather to be an obsession with (non)experiencing a certain kind of male-female relations, the importance and value given to the traditional female qualities of women in the "Balkan area" (their bearing, sacrifice, morality) and the traditional "occupations" of women elsewhere: childbearing, love, marriage – and as consequence of this, with the production of a certain "national" femininity that is one necessarily implicated with motherhood and sexual restraint (not non-feeling).

Some of the narrative strategies of romantic fiction are used by Ljiljana Habjanovic Đurovic in *Ženski rodoslov*, although her "historical romance" corresponds to different cultural codes and myths than those the Mills & Boon paperbacks relate to. At the first glance, in its structure, *Ženski rodoslov* is not a single "retelling of myth," but a composite of different myths of the Balkan, or Montenegrin patriarchal and Yugoslav tradition.[97] It claims a historical "reality" for its stories, and it insists on its historicism through the technique employed also in the rendering of the (contemporary) imaginary world of the novel *real*: the "profusion of commodities," the intense attention to detail, the highly sophisticated description of the "articles, landscapes and events apparently inessential to the course of the story."[98] But in the po-

95 Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*. (London: Virago, 1987)., pp. 207-8.

96 Coward, pp. 46-47.

97 Radway compares the popular romances with the myths of oral cultures, "in the sense that they relate a story already familiar to the people who chose to read them." She draws on Umberto Eco to state later that the "act of retelling…functioned as the ritual reaffirmation of fundamental cultural beliefs and collective affirmations." p. 198.

98 Radway, p. 194, quoting Umberto Eco.

pular historical novel, the kind revived in Serbia during the last two decades, these descriptions are very essential to the story as they map and delineate the nationalist imaginary, the inventory of its architecture, costume, cuisine.

> "Scattered on the crags, the houses of Dub were made of broken or roughly hewn stone, unpainted, covered by straw. Low, tight, dark, with an earth-floor, they consisted of one room divided in two parts....Only such houses did Krstinja know. So she stared in awe into the white-stone two- and three-floored houses, with green venetian blinds, and the baroque palaces nearly hidden in the gardens of laurel, figs and oranges, not knowing how to name this beauty" (22).

And the "respectable and mighty" Petrović "had on him the embellished Montenegrin costume of finest making, and on his waist hung a *džeferdan* coated with silver and mother-of-pearl, whose splendor and beauty testified to the dignity of its owner" (50).

Then there is the preoccupation with other, contemporary detail, which has the function of marking the text as feminine, as women are known to be universally interested in doilies, furniture, pans and buckets, and of course, clothes. This detail, however, is also important in the signification of ethnic otherness, "otherness of style," and thus collaborates in the proliferation of new varieties of nationalist kitsch, the "feminine" ones. Telling is the episode of Vera's unfortunate attempt to "lighten up" the grim interior of their, that is, Ana Maria's, Zagreb flat:

> "When she wasn't sawing, she embroidered....She picked bright colors...and embroidered only flowers, and sometimes, when the weather was very quiet, and her sorrow as flat and spacious as a field, the room would be filled by the smell of those flowers. Once she decorated the kitchen with her work.
>
> - What, in the name of God, is this? - screamed Ana Maria.... - You can't find this even in Dolac! Such primitive décor! In my house! Disgusting!

Lineages

What *Ženski rodoslov* is also "centrally" concerned about, as a historical novel, is the recreation of a community, of ethnic belonging, that is seeks to ensure through the notion of female lineage, as the traditional guarantee of the "continuity of the masculine discontinuity."[99] The lineage, even more interestingly, is a Montenegrin one. An another, perhaps less brazen act of appropriation

99 Iveković, "Women, Nationalism and War," p. 124.

(but what times may come...!) this "female lineage" becomes an organic part of an implied "we" that is common for the author and her (Serbian) reading public. The female lineage is female in misfortune, constituted as the consequence of a failure to yield a male descendant. The "tragic" narrativization of this failure, as well as the traditionally strong Montenegrin patriarchism, institutionalized in many social practices and the national classic of "high" literature, seem at first to be criticized in *Ženski rodoslov*.

But as the narrative of Krstinja, first woman of the lineage (and what a most unwilling head of that, *female* lineage, she is) unfolds, examples abound of the vindication of patriarchy, of the understanding and exculpation of male violence, and the sharing in the obsession with the producing of a male descendant – all masked as their criticism. But the text clearly devotes itself to this task, as it, for example, "punishes" the character of the sister of Niko, Krstinja's husband, for inviting the foreign laws to trespass onto the traditional territory of Montenegrin family relations, and customary laws regulating them, which provide for the exclusion of women from the inheritance of the family fortune. Niko's curse of Joke:

> "Be it damned for you, Joke! Let God make you fall and rise on your feet again! Let you be sick for nine years, let grass grow through your bones and you death not come until you beg of me to be forgiven! And I shall never forgive you! What have you done to me and my six wretched, misfortunate, brotherless daughters!" (73)

is later referred to in the text as a "just curse," which, having been said on the "holy day of Sunday," always finds it way to the rightful, that is, sinful, owner. Joke indeed does end up as her brother had cursed her:

> "Sin has destroyed me! I cannot get up on my feet! For nine years I have been sick and rotting. The Montenegrin woman cuts her hair and pounds her bosom for her brother. And kills herself, like the sister of Batrić! And I took my only brother to court, wretched me....I will pay for this before God! (92)

Love and Marriage

The next in the lineage, Krstinja's daughter Milena, and incidentally, the first to direct "reproach and rebellion" to her mother's non-love of her daughters, will also be punished for another sin: the marriage of love. Just as Iva's mother Vera, who "was born after [Milena's] death [and] repeated her life," was punished too. Iva yearned, as we have learned earlier, for a love "unordinary, intense and dramatic, [dreamt] about permeation of souls, perfect understanding.

When two know they are one" (106). Only later will she "*learn to accept* [italics mine] generosity and tolerance" in place of understanding, "physical union" instead of "complete permeation." Why this change?

At first, there is seemingly the "determination" to escape "woman's destiny," part of the whole schizophrenic insistence on the "emancipated and successful woman" status,[100] and the alleged criticism of the "men's conditioning of women's lives" (98). They are hard to reconcile with the confession, at the beginning of the book, that *baba*-Marica's stories and morality "have been the most important part of [her] education," which she has "never rejected."[101] Another instance of a "tragic" narrativization is the lament on post-war Yugoslav sexual mores and mentality: the hippy costumes "were only decor. The children of self-managing socialism grew up as the inheritors of their grandmothers' pedagogical luggage" (99). The imposition of a "women's" tragic destiny, of the inevitability of women's lives being conditioned by men, begins already with this false criticism, that will eventually evolve into full embracing and acceptance of this predicament.

Sacrifice without limits: Love is in *Ženski rodoslov* to "sacrifice without limits," but its sacrifices are misdirected, its end predetermined: tragedy, or end-in-marriage ("in the miseries of common everyday life"). Its "one kind" is a dangerously strong passion that demands much greater (the "right kind" of) sacrifice in order to be contained and not allowed to destroy a woman's life. A woman consumed by passion cannot make a good decision, thus corroding the health of the family unit, and by extension, the greater, national community. The "other kind of love" comes as an acceptance of other priorities, for example, marrying "the man a woman can grow old with," a man who can, by extension, take on the masculine responsibility of providing security and status to his *family*. *Baba*-Marica's "For one day of happiness a thousand days of misfortune," casts a

100 Which, in another patriarchal stipulation, means not having children, as women's mothering and professional roles are deemed impossible to reconcile. "One cannot belong to another and create, I believed. And I wanted to create" (110).

101 In the same interview where her ambition and "accomplishment," as well as the "centrality" of female characters/heroes are emphasized, Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurovic betrays herself in the description of her uncle: He was intelligent, authoritative [sic!], reliable, gentle on second look, and charming, he formed some of my ethical criteria and taste. When I started high school, he told me: You don't have to be a good student, but you have to be a good girl." When I was in my first year of university, he took me to the cinema to see "Gone With the Wind." "So that you see what a woman who doesn't know what she wants gets in life," he told me. Those two lessons I remembered forever.

light on the female lineage, once Iva realized what this appeal to precaution and restraint meant.

Restraint, or abstinence from: from what, it will become clear in the doubled tragic story of Milena and Vera, the mother and the great-grandmother. Milena started "waiting for love when she was fourteen." She "identified with the heroes tortured by love and yearning, secretly envying them for the intensity of their feelings." Hers is the first "hunger without a name," the hunger that will become a "bird plucking between her thighs," "dog-like hunger," "a pang without a name." Milena's love for Mihajlo, when it comes, will be a "magical and intoxicating whirlpool of a self-destructive folly in two" (119). Mihajlo is an "inappropriate" match, he is beneath her, she already has a fiancé her father found for her. Her love is a direct act of disobedience and rebellion. This love is destructive, even in a dream: his hands "burned her skin," it is unsettling: "she had no peace anymore. At night she turned in bed and bit the pillow..." Her loneliness, being without him, is an "icy abyss," and the words about him were "suffocating her." Her yearning was finally satisfied, "by one thing only." And so on and so on...There is an abundance of the "erotic" here that is danger itself: the danger of "self-destructiveness."

The text also shows a great (erotic) fascination with Mihajlo, the reason behind all this "folly," and the object of Milena's yearning. When Milena marries Mihajlo, and her love and daring ("which is the same as folly," judges the text) are confronted with betrayal, with the disappearance of his feelings and *respect* for her, by the full expression of his cruelty, his inability to be faithful (he is "that kind of man"), this tragedy and demise are *deserved*. Milena brought it on herself, by not abiding by the traditional laws and customs, by not restraining herself, by not thinking about the future (*"Ljubav je dok se guzica ne oladi!"*). It is not sympathy, but glee, glee-as-warning, that is invested in Milena's character. And Mihajlo, who is never doing anything but "acting out" his true self (and that can't be helped), will become the symbol of that desiring force which is "inside," but must be fought, resisted, only fantasized about.

"Centrality of women" is exposed in the fascination with Mihajlo, Milena's adulterous, undependable husband, in the sentimentalism and forgiveness his return from a long stay in Alasca and other distant localities is shrouded in. Milena, left by her husband, "accepts her guilt for the first wrong choice" (195). Mihajlo, the one who abandoned without a word, is good-hearted and meant for the best. After all, as we find out, his betrayal (promising reunion in the New World, then never sending the money) was not intentional, it was just a lapse of his nature, a breakout of his passions: in a drinking-spree, Mihajlo spent his three-year's savings and was too ashamed to admit it, so

he disappeared. After returning to Cetinje, he soon abandons the family again. It couldn't matter less.

Mihajlo, the destructive presence that must only be fantasized about, is also what his daughter Marica sees in her first suitor, and responds with a "soft trembling, feeling this trembling moves something in her, something yet unknown" (213). But Milena, the mother who was devastated and ruined as she dared touch and experience the living presence and not only be satisfied with the fantasy, knows better: she drives the suitor away. Marica "understood her mother, and became like her. But she never forgave her" (214). Mihajlo, or rather, his specter, will emerge again, as the first time Vera ever sets her eye on Tomislav, he is talking about Mihajlo, the "famous Mihajlo Pantov," this being "a warning [Vera] did not then understand yet."

The restriction, the urge for restraint, must be transmitted down the family line, and so must the disgust for "bodily things." The disgust is insisted on during the period prior to an actual event of marriage: on its own, an act of love and the forces that drive one to it stand as the ultimate ruination, the "proof" of which is Milena's fate itself. The instution of marriage awards "passion" respectability, but it is only the husband's passion that achieves expression and satisfaction. Marica is never allowed to feel that same "pang" as when she felt seeing Mihajlo, her first suitor, an eery resemblance to Mihajlo, her father: in her marriage with dependable, gentle, considerate Pero, she will only "start" to feel love as an extension of "gratitude, which can also be a second name for love" (222). We have a case here of ruin as the "second name for passion," or at least for the female, heterosexual, non-procreative kind.

Motherhood as the Only Passion

Again in the episode of Marica and Pero, the incompatibility of passion and genuine motherly feeling and competence is demonstrated: the text dwells elaborately on Marica's, whose love is at most "gratitude," wish for children, for a child, and the pain and emptiness that the lack of it creates, in spite of their "quite, harmonious marriage." When a child finally comes, it dies and thus "creates the final bond that tied Marica and Pero together. The same pain, understanding and devotedness often bring two people closer together than impetuous, intoxicating desire" (223). The verdict is clear: as Marica becomes a mother who is "obsessively passionate" about motherhood, a good mother, just as passionate about children as "Milena was about love...and Vera about Tomislav" (224), the impossibility of coexistence of non-procreative female desire (constructed as dangerous) and proper, productive and fulfilling motherhood is reinforced.

The good mother is a being asexual in her passion and devotion to children, and not only that: the restraint, non-indulgence in sexual passion actually becomes a precondition for

(good) motherhood. A woman's life, her destiny, her fortunes, are determined at the very moment of the coming to life of her sexual being, for she must decide to what use she will put her sexual energy, the craving of her "insides". If she allows herself, and her "insides" to follow the first impulse, a natural and ever-present one, but still manageable, she is doomed. It is this doom of Vera and Milena that Marica managed to escape, that our narrator escapes too—yet her escape is at some point described as an act of pardon "of some good God"—a pardon of exclusion from the universal history of women's suffering, a rare pardon.

In the final part of the *Ženski rodoslov*, Vera's story is told all over again, with more yet conviction, more judging, more reinforcement of the same proscriptive, cruel moral: a woman who is consumed by love and desire for a man, even if that man "agrees" to be her husband, shall be punished, and her punishment shall be two-fold: she will not be desired back, her marriage will be ruined, and she will not be able to love her children, be a good mother to them.

Reinforcement of the Patriarchal in an Attempt of "Women's Writing": Conclusions

As a system of cultural representations which enables identification with the larger community through an imagining of shared experience, the nation cannot be seen just as a passive spectrum of possible choices offered to the members of a community. On the contrary, the idea of the nation has a strong homogenizing effect as it imposes identities on all members of a given community. In most nationalist discourse though, the women are invisible or excluded, yet this invisibility and exclusion do not mean that the women are not encompassed by the idea of the nation. Indeed, nationalist discourse needs women, in a very specific way, as it depends on a certain modality of male-female relations and also relies on gendered, sexualized imagery and the control of women's sexuality. So, in some cases, it is not the invisibility of women, but rather their use as symbolic capital, their objectivization, and the appropriation of what otherwise constitutes the marginal or marginalized "feminine" that best characterizes a nationalist discourse or its particular manifestation.

The three novels of Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović, often referred to as her "trilogy" and sold in amazing numbers in the context of contemporary Serbia[102] were interpreted in this essay as contributions to the nationalist discourse in Serbia, and contributions of a specific kind. What Ljiljana Habjanović-

102 By May 2000, *Iva* was published in 18 000 copies, *Ana Marija me nije volela* in 24 000 copies, and *Ženski rodoslov* in more than 93 000 copies. Her latest novel, *Peacock's Feather*, has been published in 21 000 copies over the period of 7 months. *Politika*, Internet edition, May 16 2000.

Đurović did in the first of the three novels analyzed here, *Ana Marija Didn't Love Me*, was simply to repeat the patriarchal models and preserve the stereotypes already heavily disseminated by popular forms of nationalist discourse. She worked within this discourse, trying to "sell" her work as "a story of a childhood" or later, in *Iva*, "a story of an adolescence". It was also just simply bad writing, with flat characters for whom "real-life" existence was claimed in order to award them literary credibility, but who actually served the author to make points that were in agreement with the nationalist parlance of the time. In *Ženski rodoslov*, though, this bad writing emerges masked as "women's writing" (both ceaselessly promoting itself as such, and being thusly promoted by others), seeking to project this "quality" to the previous two novels. In the examples given above earlier, I tried to illustrate the level and extent of appropriation that occurs throughout the novel .

Ženski rodoslov, the authoress claims in an interview, has "exclusively women as characters[=heroes, *not* heroines]." Already at that point a careful reader should be able to expose the mimicry of nationalist discourse, to discern the "awry" taste of the appeal to "women's writing," of the claim that these novels *are* about women. What Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović is doing here is "translating" from one discourse to another, and her (Freudian) slip reveals just that, as her women characters bear the title 'heroes,' quite appropriate for characters in epic discourse. In her literary world, women can be happy and satisfied, and their lives "fulfilled" only if they accept the well-defined, carefully prescribed, "natural" role that they are given inside the patriarchal system of values. Every attempt to break out of that role, to become independent, to seek different kinds of fulfilment, following their own wishes or feelings, is severely punished, *within* the world of the novel itself, as their failures are contrasted (not even subtly) with the happiness and wisdom of those women who conformed to the roles prescribed to them.

The characterization of *Ženski rodoslov a*s a "dictionary of eternal women's destinies," reinforces yet again the conclusion that what is at work in Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović's novels is the totalitarian mechanism of patriarchal discourse, which lies at the foundation and enables the functioning and effectiveness of the homogenizing efforts of nationalism. The imposition of a "women's" (tragic) destiny, of the inevitability of women's lives being conditioned by men began already in *Ženski rodoslov* with the false, pseudo-feminist criticism of "grandmothers' pedagogical baggage," and eventually evolves into full embracing and acceptance of this "women's" predicament. To change that "eternal," "natural" destiny is inconceivable, and a woman will stay imprisoned within that circle of "eternity" whether she conforms in happiness or "strays" in misery.

The women's predicament, it seems, can only be escaped through "metamorphosis" into the other sex. Not without relief and glee, Ljiljana Habjanović-Đurović announces the end of her "female lineage," which has yielded the Only Son (finally) as she "has been given back what was taken away from Krstinja" (286). "Taken away": "deprived of" a value highest of all, now confirmed as the "happy end," of the "bloody anthology of women's pains." The birth of Aleksandar, her son, *makes sense* of all former pains, in that he is *part* (*kopča*) of that lineage, and at the same time, this lineage is, as well as the history of pain, interrupted by him. He will not get the two figurines, which Milena instituted as the gift of a mother to her first-born daughter, down the family line, as they are the symbol of women's pain and suffering too (the pain of having daughters?).

The three things nationalism 'wants' from women are satisfied, tasks accomplished, destinies fulfilled: biological preservation, cultural continuity, maintenance of moral standards and traditional values. The women as carriers of a moral revolution: "Serbian mothers must return to the morals of their mothers…The traditional ornament of our woman is sacrifice without limits for her family, her existence."[103] Rather than making women invisible, the mechanism at work here seeks to implicate women directly, supposedly as "heroes" of their own lives, not by assigning them masculine qualities of "courage, bravery, sacrifice," but on the contrary, affirming but in effect essentializing and fixing those "feminine" qualities that will make possible the preservation of patriarchal order and thus also enable nationalist identification.

103 Milan Vojnović, *Preporod srpskog naroda*. (Beograd: Mimico, 1993)., p. 29. Quoted in Bracewell, p. 10. 59