

CULTURE IN TRANSITION COUNTRIES

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THE MACEDONIAN NOVEL AND THE TRANSITION PROCESSES

Loreta Georgievska-Jakovleva

This title indicates at least three possible concepts that locate and define the subject of research:

1. A certain kind of prose production (the Macedonian novel) in a defined time period marked as the period of transition, that is, from the end of the 1980s to today. This approach practically includes all of the novels written in Macedonia during a period of three decades and entails writing a certain type of history of the genre in the signified period.
2. Indicating the possible change of the paradigmatic characteristics of the novel as a genre in the stated time period under the influence of the transition processes, i.e. examining the possible change in genre conventions conditioned by social changes.
3. Examining the theme of transition in Macedonian novels.

Our research is focused on the third concept, that is, it belongs to so-called thematic criticism.

Transition and culture:

The notions “transition” and “cultural transition”

In the *Dictionary of Foreign Words*, transition is determined as “an act, process or stadium in the change of one state, shape, activity or place into another” or, in political terminology, as “a transitory state

from the past socialist society into a liberal-democratic social order” (Antić-Goldstein, 1999, p. 1312). Apart from the strict political area as a frame of change, transitions covers, or at least touches upon, all spheres of human activity.

Transition is a multidimensional process which in a political sense signifies a change into a democratic society, and in an economic sense it is a change leading to the establishing of a market economy, and is used to describe the changes occurring in the post-communist countries. The aim of transition is to bridge the historical civilizational gap between the developed and undeveloped countries in a relatively short period of time, with the help of knowledge and modernization (Kalanj/Kалањ, 1998, p. 13). The process is considered finished when these countries do not enjoy specific benefits in the form of public subsidies or financial bail outs, and high productivity is the norm in existing companies.

The process of transitioning into a democratic society, marked as transition, is difficult because it also entails changes in the value system of the collective and a redefining of the public sphere, which in the communist countries was an area under state control. Redefining as a rule includes the representation of symbols, so the cultural transition is also a constituent part of that process. Although some consider that there cannot be cultural transition because culture, more or less, is an autonomous sphere with universally valid values, I see transition as a multidimensional process, which covers all spheres of life.

Culture is always an integral part of every development and even more so, it is a project of/for that development. It is therefore understandable that cultural fields and activities, even if differently understood and defined, are subject to changes related to the dominant forms of social production. The overall industrialization of society necessarily covers the cultural sector because it changes the tone of cultural works, symbols and contents. Accordingly, transition is a combination of numerous mutually connected dimensions which are

based on the same assumptions (the project of market transformation, property pluralism, multiparty system, intellectual freedom, right to cultural diversity and cultural identity...), which, however, cannot be viewed equally or implemented with equal investment. Therefore, the notion of “transition” can be redefined as “an overall process of cultural transformation of the society”.

Further on, transition in post-socialist countries takes place in the post-modern context of Western societies, which greatly affects the overall redefining of the understanding of the notion of culture. This notion is less and less founded on the anthropological understanding as a composition of standard social values whose primary aim is cultural identification, and more and more based on cultural and creative production as crucial elements for determining the further development of each culture and each society.

The functional plane of cultural transition marks *the need to create a new identity and new identification*. On the one hand, it is a matter of metamorphosis of the self-awareness of the individual, and on the other – identification with the nation, ethnic group, religion. If “literature is a space where matters of the nature of personal identity are most provocatively articulated”, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle (Bennett, Royle 2004, p. 125) claim, then identification will be one of the crucial issues in analysing literature created in the transition periods. Contrary to the understanding of the unmediated and transparent representation of the subject and identity as the centred author of social practice, Michel Foucault points out that in examining identity, we don’t need “a theory of the knowing subject, but a theory of discursive practice” (Foucault, 2002, p. XIV). Upgrading views by examining the relation between the subject and the discursive practice, brings to the surface again the notion of identity in relation to the notions *exclusion* and *identification*, which place the focus on the process and subjectivization itself.

Contrary to naturalism, the discursive approach sees identification as construction, as a never-ending process – always “in process”. It is not strictly determined, so it can always be “conquered” or “lost”, supported or annulled. Although not without its clearly visible conditions of existence, including material and symbolic means that are necessary to support it, identification is eventually conditioned by and situated in contingency. Once it is guaranteed, it never annuls the differences (Hall, 1969, p. 2-3). As opposed to the former opinion, dissolution is impossible, and therefore identification is always a process of indeterminacy or lack, so a unity is never achieved, and it acts through differences. Therefore, it demands a “discursive act”, i.e. connecting and marking symbolical borders and the production of such borders. Since identification obeys the logic “more-than-one” (Hall), it needs what is left out, what remained from the outside, its constitutive external characteristic. Literature is one of the activities that such “effective borders” produce.

In search of identities

In the transition processes, identity, which entails identification, today is accorded an exceptional, almost magical meaning: it confirms, retains, reveals and develops special features. It opposes lack of identity, the imposing of one's opinion on others, and alienation. The right to identity is opposed to the contrary notions: alienation from one's own culture, spiritual rationalization and cultural imperialism, cultural hegemony and unequal cultural exchange. Therefore, it is a crucial word in the understanding of the new phenomena and events.

Each unification strives to transcend differences and close the cultural circle. This is especially important in the domain of cultural identity, and ensures the right to development of such identity. A nation is recognized through various cultural forms.

Identity today is not analysed in essence but strategically and in terms of position. It does not point to a stable and unified core that remains unchanged throughout historical and social changes, a core that is always the same, identical to itself through time. If this statement is conveyed to cultural identity, then we do not understand it as a “collective and true self” (Hall), common to a nation with common history and origin, a self that “guarantees” unchangeable unity or cultural background, and which is at the level of superficial differences. It is not only a matter of identity changing. It is also society that changes, its culture, even the bearers of identity. The simplest definition, and at the same time the essence of identity, is to be different from others.

Generally speaking, identities are subject to *radical historization*, and they are constantly in a process of transformation. “We need to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively ‘settled’ character of many populations and cultures” (Hall, p. 54) in regard to the transition process, which is a global phenomenon in post-communist countries. Although it seems that identities originate from the historical past with which they are still connected, the essence of identities is in the issues linked to the use of the resources of history, language and culture in the process of creation. These relations emphasize not so much the questions: “who are we”, “where we come from”, but rather “what could we be”; “how are we represented and how does that affect our self-representation”. Thus, identities are constructed within, not outside of representation.

Cultural pluralism, cultural transition and a right to identity

Post-socialist countries are undergoing a double process – the process of transition and the process of globalization. While in the economic spheres these two processes are complementary and entail development

of national economies, thus becoming connected to globally projected economic liberalism and the market economy, it is contradictory in the cultural spheres, since if economic globalization means standardization of production and exchange, cultural globalization supports change and redefinition of cultural identities. Change itself and redefinition is a process with many contradictions and dangers.

Cultural change, on the one hand, opens up a process of emancipation of a large number of cultures and affects them in such a way that it undermines the hierarchical order. The cultural and civilizational heritage of various cultures becomes accessible to all. Intensive and easily accessible communication between cultures, enabled by technological development, contributes to individuals and societies accepting various cultural values as a cornerstone of their own choice. However, each such choice affects simultaneously the redefining of cultural identity.

With the introduction of the concept of cultural rights (the right to use one's mother tongue, the right to choose one's own cultural affiliation, the right to choose one's religion, etc.) as human rights, the integrative concept of national cultures is put in question. This gives rise to the fear that cultural globalization could also signify the imposition and domination of one type of cultural values, mostly Western ones. In such frames, we speak of cultural hybridization (Canclini, 1995), cultural assimilation, even cultural wars and clash of civilizations (Huntington/ХАНТИНГТОН, 2000).

In such a context, it becomes apparent that the process of intercultural harmony or at least mutual understanding between cultures cannot be achieved only through accessibility to information and the linking of and communication between cultures. On the one hand, the mediation of cultural values and reference to similar models of cultural development bring "... sedimentation of identity, organized in more or less established groups (ethnic groups, nation, class, which

are restructured in interethnic, trans-class and trans-national groups))” (Canclini, 1995, p. XXVIII) and there is development of the theses for the so-called transnational identity closely related to the notion of “European cultural space” in which diversity is declared to be integral and valuable. However, on the other hand, we are witnesses to the fact that the hybridization processes may have a lot of limiting results, and that in the process of intercultural linking and communication, what prevails is cultural identification based on ethnic, national, class, local identities, processes that some authors identify, and “culture wars”.

Such a situation raises the questions: “does every culture cooperate in a pluralistic community as an equal partner or as a subordinate?”; “in which cases can we say that there are external motivations for change – political, ideological, unifying, or are they within the essence of culture?” It is clear that cultures are susceptible to changes, but also denials (Majstorović/Мажсторовиќ, 1979, p. 242), in that even cultural tradition changes in such a way that its significance is rediscovered and revived. Cultural pluralism must be an open and free dialogue between various cultures, or it will lose its true significance and meaning. The claim that the cultural identities are constructed within representation does not relativize the previous claim. It means that they are connected with fantasy, imagination and tradition itself, and therefore tradition cannot be read as infinite repetition, but as “changeable un-changeability” (Gilroy, 1994, p. 12). Precisely because of this, we understand identities that are constructed in discourse as *specific strategies of expression in specific historical and institutional places* in which specific discursive formations and practices are used. What is more, they are generated inside the games of the specific modalities of power, and are products of signifying differences and exclusions rather than a sign of the identical, naturally constituted self.

Cultural transition and Macedonia

The view that identity is constructed only through the relation with the Other, through the relation towards what it is not, is generally accepted. Thus, identities function as a point of identification and belonging only because they have the ability to exclude, leave out, reject “outside” what is despised. The constituting of identity is therefore, as Laclau says, an act of power. “Derrida showed how the constituting of identity is always based on exclusion of something and establishing a forceful hierarchy between two resulting sides – male/female, etc. The separateness of the second notion is in such a way reduced to function of accident, something secondary unlike the first (Laclau, 1990, p. 33). Thus, identities are constructed with the help of power games and exclusion, and are examined as something that is constructed either through differences or as something that is being persistently destabilized by what was left out.

In the Macedonian transition, these analyses bear a special importance because they undergo a double process: the process of requesting new identification in the system of parliamentary democracy, but also an underlined process of identification with tradition as a consequence of the denied, excluded position that Macedonia has in regard to its importance. Thus, the novels created in this transitional period must be contextually interpreted. Because the context determines the meaning, transformation or importance of the subjective forms as much as the form itself does. The context covers the cultural symbols, context of concrete situations and the broader historical contexts and circumstances.

The transition process in the former Yugoslav states officially started in December 1990 with the referendum of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia, in which 88.5% of the citizens voted for an independent state. This referendum was a consequence of the dispute

that started between the “north” and the “south”, above all, between Slovenia and Serbia, at the end of the 1980s, due to economic and political misunderstandings. For Macedonia, the transition process is more specific and complex than the processes that appeared in the other states of the former Yugoslav federation. It represents a process of definitive accomplishment of centuries-old Macedonian ideals – the forming of an independent and sovereign state, but it was also an opportunity for the reawakening of the aspirations of neighbouring states to take over Macedonian territory, along with assimilation of Macedonian cultural identity. These two opposing tendencies have been taking place simultaneously, and are still present, resulting in a so-called identity crisis.

The inability of Macedonia to be accepted to the UN under its constitutional name testifies to the partial success of anti-Macedonian propaganda, a process that is still underway. With the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the forms of denying the Macedonian language, nation and state are renewed. Thus, transition for Macedonia, on the one hand, represents an effort to confirm identity through the recognition of Macedonia as an equal state of the UN under its constitutional name, and on the other, the adoption and adaptation of Macedonian society to European liberal democracy.

In Macedonia, as well as in other transition countries, self-identification, individual or collective, is read in two directions. The first refers to re-traditionalization, that is, turning to traditional identity which is sometimes referred to as “conservative revolution” (Cirić/Цирик). The second can be explained with the increased desire and need to emphasize the difference with the pre-transition period, i.e. to produce values close to or similar to those in the developed world. If we view cultural transition at the symbolical level, this process contributes to increased production of the symbolic.

In the context of Macedonian novels, these tendencies establish two images that have the relation Macedonia-Europe as space, and in terms of time they discuss either the synchronic (present-present) or the diachronic (present-past) axis. The first type produces collective, ethnic identity, the second – individual identity. Such classification is conditional because identity is not given once and for all, but it is “multilayered and heterogeneous” (Kjulafkova/Ќулафкова, 2006, p. 174). Thus, collective identity merges with individual identity, so it is impossible to differentiate them strictly.

Transition and fiction

In fact, the question raised here can be formulated in the following way: how do the “symbolical order” and the social order merge and create the auto-imagological image of Macedonia, i.e. what is the relationship between the social and psychological reality? Are narration and stream of consciousness not empirically the most obvious aspects of subjectivity? We are all users of images and narratives. Therefore, our point of view is not determined only by narratives for us or narratives for others. We tell stories about the past in the form of memory that creates the versions of what we are now. We use fictive or fantastic forms in order to escape, forget, project into the future.

Allegory in defense of identity:

Ermis Lafazanovski: The Nobleman, Zojder, Skopje 1997

The novel *The Nobleman* by Ermis Lafazanovski, published in 1997, is among the first novels in Macedonia that have as their focus of interest the period of transition. Written as an allegory, it examines the possibilities of recognizing Macedonia as an equal member of the United Nations, i.e. the possibility of confirming Macedonian identity. The novel is a subtle perception of the obstacles in this process.

The plot of the novel, as in any allegorical story, is simple. Kurando, a small-time smuggler and trader, with a passion for material gain, dissatisfied with the “situation in the society, desires for something to happen to him that will pull him out of spiritual and financial misery”. He therefore decides to obtain an aristocratic title and thus create his own powerful dynasty. In order to achieve this purpose, he works on two projects: “The clan Cocoheads” – the preparation of a family tree of his ancestors – and the “Map” – the search for the silver and gold medallions of his great grandfather. Blagorodna,¹ his future wife, is involved in the activity concerning the aristocratic title, because her name strengthens the chances of him accomplishing his aim.

Contextual meaning

Allegory is an ambiguous form, in which there are two parallel meanings, implicit and explicit, which within the novel “produce” two stories – one explicit with a large number of details and specific characteristics, and one implicit, which is understood through the generalization of the details of the explicit story.² In order to arrive at the generalization, the allegory requires a context which is understandable and common both for the author and for the reader. Thus, allegory is the constant coinciding of the current and the intended context, in which the current layer points to the semantics of general ideas. Therefore, allegory could be determined as the “personification of ideas”.

In order to reveal the implicit meaning of the novel, its spatial-temporal situation is important. We approach it indirectly, ordering the events in logical-chronological order: if the stories told by Kurando’s family go back two or three generations, and the beginning is situated

¹ The female name Blagorodna in Macedonian has the same root as “blagorodnik”, which means “nobleman” (translator’s note).

² For the nature and specific characteristics of the allegory, see the book by Georgievska-Jakovleva, Loreta. 2002.

in the Turkish period, the protagonist being witness to the old age of the Ordendzija and Dete Begalche³ (characters-symbols of the anti-fascist struggle and Civil War in Greece), then we can come to the conclusion that Kurando is acting in contemporary times. Similar details indirectly show that there are indications that the location in question is Macedonia. The temporal location of the novel in contemporary times points to the possibility to mark certain “critical spots” which show deviation from semantic rules. Such places are the characters and their attributes.

Thus, the linguistic sign Blagorodna creates “gaps” and suggests that analogy should be sought that must come from the broad associative domain of the text. If we look at the associations caused by the episodes in which we witness the reasons why Kurando rejects the Blond one and opts for Blagorodna, the associations caused by the character of Dete Begalche, as well as the characters mentioned in the stories, Hrabrij, Vezilij, and put them in historical context, linking them to the character of Blagorodna, we come to the conclusion that the character of Blagorodna is a metaphor for Macedonia, which is achieved by replacing the lexemes. The details regarding the motives for the relationship between Kurando and Blagorodna are focused on the processes of Macedonia gaining independence (rejecting the evil stepfather as a condition for the relationship) and replacement of the Eastern (the Blond) with Western influence. The events concerning her kidnapping, and then release with the help of the Shaman from Thessalonica, the Ordendzija and the Doctor of Natural Sciences and Arts are in fact efforts to retain the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia and its final international recognition. The help from three sides, personified in the given characters, is a metaphor for the forces which may provide support: folk wisdom, science and art – as the most powerful weapons in proving one’s own identity.

³ The usual term for refugee children from Aegean Macedonia.

This leads to the conclusion that in the novel *The Nobleman*, the detail is historically loaded, and participates in the revealing of the implicit story. In regard to the project “The clan Cocoheads”, because of a lack of documents (written history), Kurando addresses persons who can state facts about his origin. He in fact addresses collective memory and folk knowledge. The writing of stories is an allegory of the process of the creation of Macedonian history, a direction that indicates that it is an act that is neither fully completed nor proceeds easily. The official recognition of that history is a process that requires international affirmation, which should be supported by: Filjan Chovek, Dete Begalche, Ordendzija, the Doctor of Natural Sciences and Arts.

Reaching for identity

The process of hampering international affirmation and official recognition of Macedonian history in the allegoric code is given in the part “At the cursed spies”, and it indicates the reaching for Macedonian identity by its neighbours.

Here we can see the subtle pressures and assimilation techniques of Macedonian identity, among which the bribe has historically been proved as the most effective.

The third project called “Map” represents the resolution of the novel. Instead of golden and silver medallions, which appear as leitmotifs in the stories about his ancestors, Kurando finds his father’s bones. Along with guns that do not shoot, but sing, and with the bones which are not gold medallions, Kurando “runs away towards freedom”. And while we may predict a happy ending, the novel ends as a conflict between the material and the spiritual. The gold medallions which, as a family inheritance, were supposed to help in achieving the aim of acquiring an aristocratic title, suddenly turn into American gold dollars put into

a Christmas pie which becomes “the pie of discord”. The profit and small benefits that persist as leitmotifs throughout the whole novel receive their privileged position, and leave the solution open.

Here, it finally becomes clear that the three projects of the Egg are mutually closely connected. They have as their theme the transition process, so the final aim – Macedonia to become an equal, respected UN and EU member state – is presented as an impossible mission. As every allegory, it has a (implicit) lesson: neither the stabilizing of the economy, nor political and security stability are possible as long as selfish interests prevail.

Globalization or personal initiative:

Jordan Plevnesh: The Eighth Wonder of the World, Kultura, Skopje 2005
Jordan Plevnesh's novel *The Eighth Wonder of the World* has a simple plot: Aleksandar Simpsar, son of Filip Simpsar, architect and victim of the communist regime in Macedonia, unable to find a job as a qualified architect, neither in Macedonia since his father was convicted to life imprisonment by the Macedonian communist authorities as a fighter for an autonomous Macedonia, nor abroad because “he realizes that his diploma from the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje has no chance of being recognized in Western Germany” (p. 12), is employed by the international firm “Weltbauzeit” as a facade worker. He works for several decades on tall buildings all around the world, but also on the idea of realizing his dream, to build a stone construction, and in such a way leave a trace in the world. At the moment of the unfortunate fall of the Berlin Church of Memory, that dream receives a concrete shape – a kind of jukebox which would emit all 6,703 languages known on the planet Earth, an Eternal Construction that he calls the “Tree Crown of the World”. That, according to Aleksandar Simpsar, will be the Eighth Wonder of the World built on the Galichica Mountain.

This is an allegorical story which includes an extra-literary context. That context is the events on the European political scene in a given period, marked in the text through the historically confirmed event of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which is also a marker, a direction in which the text should be read. Namely, the fall of Aleksandar Simsar, which is crucial for the definition of the idea of the Eternal Construction happens “several months before that defining moment” and “breathing the air of the divided Eastern and Western Berlin, he felt that a Great Invisible Key opens the Brandenburg Gate (...), he felt that in front of his eyes that watched him from high, the Iron Curtain of the ideologically divided world opens, he felt that very soon the great mixing of the free and the non-free nations will start, who will tread the empty space of the New Time, he felt, simply, that Communism, which held almost half a planet under its control, will simply die, no more and no less but in 24 hours” (p. 18).

This situation explicitly identifies the time of the story as a time in which the transition happens. Transition as a process raises the following questions: if the world is no longer ideologically divided, i.e. the old division of the world into communism and capitalism no longer holds, then it enters a time of “great commotion”. Hence, transition is not a process that only post-communist countries go through, since the disintegration of the communist regime valid for “half a planet” cannot affect the remaining half. Or, according to the words of one retired American admiral from the period of the Cold War: “... there used to be two forces in the world: America and Russia; America was in charge of producing wealth, Russia was in charge of producing misery, and clear air is produced from suffering”, and previously: “If Russia does not sing, humankind will die” (p. 71).

Transition, which on the level of economy and politics is most frequently related to Eastern Europe, also covers its western part, so transition in the novel *The Eighth Wonder of the World* is analysed as a

global process for finding new principles for rescuing the world after the fall of communism, symbolically represented in the name of the construction company “Weltbauzeit” – ‘Time for building the world’. In accordance with already articulated policies in the world, this process is easily recognizable as the process marked by the term globalization.

The image of Macedonia

The most appropriate place for the building of the Tree Crown of the World is the Galichica mountain, i.e. the place from which both the Ohrid and the Prespa Lake can be seen at the same time, because according to its author, it is one of the most beautiful places in the world, and he states that “in the world means a personal view of the world” (p. 29). This view determines Macedonia as the *axis mundi*, as a symbolical cosmogony pillar, energetic and natural resource. As such, he identifies, among other things, the 150-million-year age of the Ohrid Lake, the diversity of the flora on the Galichica mountain and the endemic species, the Ohrid trout. It is exactly the natural code that makes it possible for the image of Macedonia as *axis mundi* to be created.

The code of the culture, on the other hand, identifies Macedonia as the cradle of civilization. The image of the “interesting circumstances” or the historical code, such as the building of the world by Alexander of Macedon and the mad acts of Justinian, the voluntary and forced exile of the Macedonian intelligentsia in the European capitals, the peace agreements in which the Macedonians are “defeated, deceived, displaced”. The tension, disagreement and grotesqueness are caused by the clash of the cultural and historical code. The deliberate insistence on the similarity of the personal name of the protagonist Aleksandar Simpsar with the ancient emperor Alexander of Macedon, a similarity that is also confirmed by the name of his father, in fact

reveals the current and exceptionally aggressive policy of the denial of Macedonian identity, not as a right of two or more nations to aspire to the same identity, but the absurd contemporary situation in which the right to Macedonian identity is denied although only one nation in the contemporary world calls itself Macedonia.

The image of Europe

Contrary to the generally accepted image of Europe as a civilization and culture that “works” towards human progress, which can be identified in the slogan of the French Revolution, “equality, fraternity and freedom”, Plevnesh’s novel reveals the historical logic of the existence of Europe as a “logic of too large production of fascism and death”, identified in the 20th century in two massive ideologies, fascism and communism. It is, according to a famous Russian novel, “the most expensive grave in the world” (p. 29), in which “the fall is the basic content of its present history” (p. 41). The symbolism of the colour white identifies the reasons that remove the mask from the European motto “equality, fraternity, freedom”. The purpose is to search for the other side of human progress seen in the tyranny of money and the imprisonment of the new man in the shackles of consumption. The division of the world, symbolically represented by the Berlin Wall, and the new opportunities of humankind after its fall are the focus of interest of this novel. Hence the assumption for a possible widening of the notion of transition in the sense of a new opportunity for humankind. The Berlin Wall does not only symbolize the division of Europe into Western (civilized, progressive, in which human rights are respected) and Eastern (barbarian, regressive in which force and terror rule), but the division of the world into the privileged and discriminated against. Europe is no longer white, Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon say (Jordan, Vedon/Џордан, Ведон, 1999). This is a

fact that is learned by Aleksandar Simpsar, who projects the Eighth Wonder of the World – the Tree Crown of the World – as a possible escape route. Technological development enables us to know what is happening globally, so events, broadcast by media, become accessible

... next from the TV screen he saw all the latest samples of the Tree Crown of the World, which was lively present in his sick and fallen head. So, lying in the bed completely immovable, he saw all movements of history (...) he saw Prague and Budapest and especially Warsaw released from the heads, bodies and dead souls that were evaporating in the black smoke of the historical deceptions. Some internal flame was burning in his fallen head. He was thinking that he, in fact, fell in the right moment to be able to achieve the imagined Construction. (p. 26)

So, the Crown of the World is a possibility for the world to unite, to prevail over the logic that says: “Your culture still has spirituality, and why should it get tangled with our sick, material world” (Areen, cited in Jordan, Vedon/Џордан, Ведон 1999, p. 198). Such a thesis does not reveal the essence of the division of the world in the cultural realm and the different sociocultural and ethnic identities, but in the sphere of market power and the tyranny of money as the basic condition for acquiring power. Plevnesh’s novel, in fact, disputes the increasingly expressed tendency within globalization for cultural industrialization, which entails mass production, standardization of products, massive reproduction, thus invalidating created cultural values.

The Crown of the World – a new utopia

The Tree Crown of the World as a new utopia actually implements the idea that the cultural code is universal, it cannot be closed in national and state borders, and everyone, that is, the whole of humanity, has the right to it. Weedon asks: “WHY GETOIZATION” (Jordan, Vedon/

Џордан, Ведон, 1999, p. 379). The answer is more explicit because of the “tyranny of money” which “has turned our planet into a purchase-and-sale culture: they purchase and they sell countries, nations, religions, the debauch of capital has reached an international orgy, millions of human beings die of hunger (...) all forms of white terror of capital that is prepared after the fall of communism to buy for nothing two thirds of the planet (...)” (p. 60).

In contemporary society, values that are based on quantity and quality of products and knowledge prevail. Man is as valuable as he produces. If we interpret the meaning as material knowledge, then that criterion is similar to the production criterion. The novel raises a voice against such knowledge, and emphasizes the spiritual values of all epochs. The message of the novel *The Eighth Wonder of the World* is in the question asked by Aleksandar Simpsar: “What am poor I? Buddh-ist, Jesus-ist, Moses-ist, Muhammad’ist, Cropn-ist?” Despite the different names, he is above all “ist”,⁴ i.e. he achieves a “spiritual consensus” for the return of the spiritual as a possibility for neutralizing of the domination of the merciless “white forces” that retain the order of the dominant and dominated people, classes, states, nations, in order to make a profit.

Us and the Others:

Lidija Dimkovska: Hidden Camera, Magor, Skopje 2004

In regards to the novels of Olivera Nikolova *Rosica’s Dolls* and Lidija Dimkovska *Hidden Camera*, Natasha Avramovska, establishing two models of experiencing and surviving transition in literature, states:

(...) the simultaneous contemporary importance of the two views of the Balkans that are imminent to these novels: the

⁴ “ist” means “the same” in Macedonian (translator’s note).

historical view 'from within', which reexamines the undisputed assumptions of the contemporary relations between the Balkan nations and the globally installed culture, which allows for the possibility: to get boiled in the divided Balkan cauldron or go conquer the world with a bag on your back. The worlds on the margin live the simultaneity of this temporal division of their social and cultural order, which results in division of the 'moment' of the positioning of the communication (and literary) practices. In the Macedonian/Balkan literary communication, this temporal division is a result of the social changes after the fall of socialism. (Avramovska/Аврамовска, 2006, p. 130)

Dimkovska's novel gives a different view of the Macedonian transition. The novel *The Nobleman* by Ermis Lafazanovski is a reaction to the attempts to assimilate Macedonian identity, motivated by the desire to obtain material profit from the other's territory, and spiritual and material heritage in the first years of the transition. *The Eighth Wonder of the World* by Jordan Plevnesh opposes two universally unbalanced principles: the material, which is absolutely dominant and is seen in the tyranny of money, and the spiritual, which is underestimated and marginalized, seen in the possibility to build the Tree Crown in Macedonia as a condition for a balanced relation of these two principles, so that it can finally be concluded that transition, at a higher level, is a global process upon which the survival of humankind depends. In the context of the Macedonian transition, Lidija Dimkovska with her novel *Hidden Camera* introduces a new, global view in Macedonian narrative practice. In an ironic and self-ironic code, the author examines the possibility to be a world citizen with origin from Macedonia.

The story of the novel is the following: Lila Serafimska, a writer, receives a three-month scholarship in Vienna from a Western

European foundation in order to write a novel. The scholarship covers accommodation with a computer, which she shares with two other people: the photographer Edlira, an Albanian, and the musician Joseph, a Pakistani, and a 900-euro monthly allowance. The novel situated in this way is an opportunity to analyse social and cultural closeness on two levels: of the centre (European sponsors) and the periphery (marginal cultures: Balkan and Eastern), and the differences in the periphery itself.

The novel is narrated by two voices, with a lucid inventiveness: a ruby is implanted into Lila's toe nail, which plays the role of a hidden camera in writing the events. The position of an objective viewer, who registers the events at the moment when they take place is supplemented by the narrative told in first person, the voice of Lila, who by definition gives a subjective view of things, so that the "narrative I" and the "experiencing I" create a creative double voice which acts in several directions, but, above all, gives the opportunity for watching oneself as another, and deconstructs the division of the objective and the subjective position in the storytelling. In regard to the autobiographical layer, which has the task of legitimizing the narrated events as truth, and the explicit auto-referential determination of the genre of the novel as "A-fictional", Dimkovska actually plays with the established conventions of the historiographical fiction as truthful, and the narration as possible, without legitimacy of truth. Such a double position of the narrator legitimizes what is experienced as truth, which has "a multilayered argumentation: both as a view from the outside, and as fragmentation of the identity, which searches for itself through different perspectives, both as a literary game with a viewpoint in narrative discourse, and as a paranoid note of the eternal migrants" (Stojmenska/Стојменска, 2004, p. 57).

Ghettoization of the periphery

The narrative technique sublimated in the slogan that is used for commercial purposes “two in one”, along with the framing story, establishes the theme of “world/worlds on the margin of the multiply ‘moved’ perspective of the other (Avramovska/Аврамовска, 2006, p. 122). This perspective is a perspective of the life which is a voluntary exile and banishment as a possibility for the marginalized (states, cultures, people) to enter the world of the privileged. Thus, apart from the already pointed out function of double narrator, it also points to seeing another opportunity in the already regulated linguistic existence by the privileged (the rich West) and points to a message with a meaning different from the already established order of donors and receivers of donations. The theme of this attitude is given at the very beginning of the novel with an emphasized ironic tone both towards “one’s own” and towards “the other”:

Contrary to the openness of the social security (provided flat and a monthly allowance), the closed nature of the true relationship rears its head. Technical issues are always resolved efficiently and in a timely manner, the conditions of the agreement are fulfilled, but there is no true connection between people. A barrier, a wall, is always present between those who sponsor and those who are sponsored. The reader, who shares the point of view of the non-Europeans, does not know who Klaus is, and the characters from the novel do not know him either. Nor do the Europeans know the one who is outside of their circle. Thus, the sponsored artists, although selected, remain anonymous. They are selected to give a missing perspective, but not as a perspective with a name, the perspective of an individual creative expression, but as a perspective of a given ethnic, national tradition. And in the (Western European) tradition, which is obsessed with dates and names, such a collective perspective exists only outside of history. Thus, the flat is a

reservation camp, a ghetto in which the other cultures which are not Western European are isolated. Their creative works are to be displayed for an exposition which turns into a museum of the exotic.

The visa as an opposition to openness, and namelessness as an opposition to the thesis of the global village, protect the advantage of the centre in the exchange for goods, information and cultural property, and leaves the periphery truly unknown. The expression “Writer-in-residence” displays precisely that false relation of the privileged West, which wants to show the ghetto as a palace, and dominance as openness. And that unknown world in the world is rich exactly in its differences. These differences are evident only if they are a confirmation of one’s own Euro-centric idea, if they fit in the existing network of meanings related to the Western European imperialism. The request of the western donor for “a perspective which is missing”, articulated in Klaus’s words, is the public declaring the need for difference, and emphasizing the importance of this difference, but only as an issue that is connected to the fulfilment of specific cultural needs of specific people, and not as the presence of various cultures in modern society as a common asset. “Writer-in-residence” is a clever form of imposing one’s own perspective in these countries. Thus, respect for cultural pluralism is crucial in overlooking the relations that are created in post-communist and post-colonial countries, and artists are an instrument in implementing that policy. Dimkovska’s novel *Hidden Camera* problematizes the issue of the right to cultural plurality as a possibility for sustaining the division dominant-marginalized with a consciousness that rejects the possibility of reproducing one’s own marginalization.

The self-irony comes from the position in which the author is aware of her own as well as the other people’s weaknesses, especially those that come from a Euro-centric ideology, who in terms of cultural plurality do not see equal cultures and societies but a hierarchy in which Europe is at the top. This is enabled by the economic, political

and, of course, military power of the Western world, which reproduces the relations that enable the sustaining of such an order. By accepting the scholarship, the position of the author only ostensibly contributes to the reproduction of the image of the dominant, while she speaks with unconcealed irony about the world seen from an ethical aspect. This sameness reveals the hidden position of dominance of the Western European ideology through subtle control of the Other.

Worlds in the world

The Macedonian transition is represented through different relations that are established as a personal understanding of current social processes. The novel does not aim to give an analytical, exhaustive and consistent image of the transition period, but, analogous to its “patchwork structure”, to add humorous, personal, seemingly trivial remarks about the situations – situations that do not have the character of great existential tremors, but are ostensibly banal, minor situations which are encountered daily, but which pierce deeply into personal, social and ethnic identity. Personal identity is left in the central narrative of the novel through the narrative technique “two in one”, seen as a conflict between the external that causes divisions and conflicts and internal which wishes to discover itself as a “nutshell” to which all the world will be a home. This cosmopolitanism of the personal I enables a lucid commentary of the transition in which the weaknesses of the socialism that is withdrawing are not so absolutely negative in comparison with the weaknesses of the capitalism that is coming. There are ironically underlined descriptions of the most popular, often profitable themes in the West connected to human rights and rights to be different, such as children’s rights, domestic violence, homosexuality and transsexuality, whose “roots” are identified in the time of socialism, but are invisible because they are not profitable. The contemporary era

parades rights often forgetting that they are emphasized so that people can live better, not in order to parade them.

Nomadism at home in the Other

The journeys abroad of Lila, the protagonist in the novel, or the intrinsic nomadism, enable a true connection between the Macedonian, Albanian and Pakistani, which may be “constructed” but indicates “the super-imposing of the emotional above all theories, stereotypes and cliché of the national mentalities. “The presence of these problems in the novel is part of the ‘given task’, and represents the necessity to provide attractiveness of the discourse to the modern European reader, who is especially attracted by issues of ethnic national and gender stereotypes (...)” (Stojmenska-Elzesser/Стојменска-Елзесер, 2004, p. 58). Dimkovska brings this attraction to the position of necessity with the message of true equality of worlds within the World. The author promotes a “multi-optical accommodation” (Sheleva/Шелева, 2005, p. 203) for which, “it is best that there is no fireplace, but there is a fire”⁵ as a possibility to overcome a traumatically created national belonging and fatal historical-existential label. To have a fire as a condition of overcoming the tragic conflicts both in the East and West, and in the Balkans and in Europe.

In search of the lost essence:

Pajo Avirović: Dzahiz and the Dog Exterminators, Detska radost, Skopje 2005

One of the many characters that appear in the world of the novel by Pajo Avirović is Mr Ranko, potential business partner of the protagonist

⁵ The Macedonian word “ognishte”, meaning literally “fireplace” is metaphorically used in Macedonian to signify a place of residence, a home. (Translator’s note)

who is also a narrator, whose most appropriate epithet is “fabricator” – he indicates in a summarized way the themes of the novel whose chronotope could be named the chronotope of transition.

And Mr. Ranko wants to talk. About everything: about politics, about the national issue, about the self-destruction syndrome, about the Vergina sun, about Philip and Alexander of Macedon, our people in Australia, about Albanians, about the international community... we can't seem to get to the tomatoes. Different culture, I say to myself (...) We in the West have not even said hello to each other, and we are already taking out our notebooks, catalogues and laptops. Ranko, obviously, has time. (p. 182)

The stated issues are united in the question about the undefined national identity of the character and narrator Petar Adamović or Pierre Adamov or Peter Adamoff, with double ff at the end, seen through the prism of the blessing of his father, “if we, the fathers, did not enter communism, at least you (the children) should get out of this transition” (p. 195).

The mosaic structure of the novel enables the forming of an image, step by step, of the transition in Macedonia, in which the values, habits, customs originating from the ideology of socialism definitely lose meaning, and the new is not formed yet. In this in-between state, characteristic of the grotesque, the main trait is disorientation. Although the novel is not a grotesque image of the Macedonian transition, but a warm, humane confessional that readers who are of a similar generation as the author will feel to be their own, after the closing of the book, a frightening feeling ensues of deformity and vagueness at the knowledge that this world close and familiar to us has become foreign to us.

The story of the foreign world, in which only those who lack a strong spine feel they belong, is framed within the story of the

origin of the manuscript. The narrator of the story is Koce Gocev, a consul at the Embassy of the Republic of Macedonia in France. The introductory story is in fact a report about the death of the author of the manuscript. Namely, on 5.8.2003, a report arrives at the embassy that the Macedonian citizen P. A. died at the market in Rungis in Paris, crushed by several tons of tomatoes that fell on his head precisely on the hundredth anniversary of Ilinden. It is an occasion for him to remember that he left a manuscript that can be a novel of “intimate character” and requests his opinion. The last story, named “Epilogue” announces the “revival” of P. A., that is, the fact that P. A. changes his identity and, from a tomato salesman in France, becomes a gardener who plants bananas on the Canary Islands. The epilogue is, in fact, how Koce Gocev handles the manuscript in a kind of puzzle solving on discovering the identity of the author of the story named *The Miracle of Zoltkovija* and signed by Dzahis from Macedonia and of a novel signed by Pierre Adamov. The resolution of the puzzle changes the person who is identifying it from the role of uninterested official into a “reader”, an allegory of the opportunity to achieve the blessing of escaping transition.

Sinking into lack of individuality

Avirović's novel introduces as a theme the Macedonian transition as a state of something in-between, something that lost its original shape and did not create a new one – something that lacks individuality, in which the old shape loses force and changes into ruin, and the new one has not appeared. The protagonist and narrator P. A. faces such a lack of individuality or sinks into a lack of individuality during his latest encounter with the fatherland to which he travels because of the illness of his father. The long-time absence puts him in a position of wonder caused by the clash of what is experienced and what is remembered

in the past and the present. It is a kind of a “search for the lost time” in which the old ideals, habits and customs surface in the memory. The time of socialism in Macedonia is experienced as time of happy childhood in which social frustrations are neutralized by family harmony. Time in which security is guaranteed because the state is secure and stable, the honourable pioneer is truly honourable, a time in which national and religious difference are overcome with simple human logic “if she becomes our daughter-in-law, she will be ours, even if she isn’t; if not, even if she is ours, she won’t be” (p. 56), a time in which the facing of the other, concern about the other’s pain are united in the slogan “brotherhood and unity”. That is socialism seen from a child’s eyes, a child who under the vow of the honourable pioneer adopts the values as they are: “I will study hard, and I will work, and I will be a good comrade; that I will love our self-governed fatherland the SFRY, that I will develop brotherhood and unity and ideas for which Tito fought, that I will appreciate all people in the world that want freedom and peace”, and they instil the feeling of “true pride that he grows into the most beautiful of all worlds” (p. 91).

However, behind that verbal security, first as a sense, and then as a realization, the image of life lived with “invisible fears, expecting something bad to happen, comes up” (p. 78). Behind the half-achieved utopia of socialism, signs of its final breakdown can be seen. Signs that at first are established as something illogical by the child’s logic, while at the end they grow into an armed conflict with tragic consequences.

The novel is one of the few ones in Macedonia that have as their theme the time of the disintegration of the Yugoslav republics. In it, the reader doesn’t encounter documented events. It is not an expert analysis of what happened, but a marking of the mood and the atmosphere in the context of everyday life and concretized through the change in everyday habits. The commentaries do not have the ambition of stating a greater philosophical truth, but they come down

to the logical addition of two plus two in lucidly enunciated remarks. The announcements for the disintegration are summarized in short extracts from life, such as the sentence “someone forgot their glasses” heard on TV as a debate from a Central Committee session while the family is preoccupied with other things, and much later there is the comment: “We need a good dioptrics to recognize the evil, while it is still in pre-embryo phase, while there is still time to destroy it from the root” (p. 179).

The image of the war in Bosnia continues in the image of the Macedonian transition, which receives its specific image in destroyed warehouses, abandoned workshops, factories with broken windows, overgrown yards, and unpainted walls. Thus, the Macedonian transition, on the one hand, has become a graveyard of socialism, and, on the other hand, an uncritical copy of the West where the market turns into the hypermarket, discussion into alienation, fresh chicken into frozen chicken, American chicken, similar to people in “leading roles, artificial, frozen, tasteless and, above all, with an expired ‘best before’ date” (p. 74). A time in which presents are replaced with an envelopes of cash, the destiny of the individual has become collateral damage, handicrafts have been replaced with “trading firms”, honesty with demagoguery, ideas with conformism. A time whose main characteristic is laziness and disorientation caused by ignorance.

The novel also discusses the theme of foreign influence on the Macedonian mentality which quickly adjusts to the market economy. As opposed to unemployment in general and closed factories, the market economy is present in behaviour and evaluation. This is where the conclusion comes from that the frozen American chicken reveals everything about the mentality. In that sense, the orientalism and the eastern thinker Dzhahiz are necessary in the “search for the lost essence”, and not for Proust’s lost time.

Identity in transition

The search for the lost essence actually imposes the topic of identity, both personal and national. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the transition period shook not only Macedonian national identity but also individual identity. The novel, in the form of a personal confession, has as its theme the dilemma of a Yugoslav citizen of Serbian nationality born in Macedonia, who studied in Bosnia, an Orientalist by profession who lives in France, a dilemma regarding the question of belonging, complicated national belonging, according to which, “you are born as one thing, grow up as another, so that both merge into something third, which is both the one and the other, but is neither the one nor the other” (p. 99), which is very difficult for a child to process, so in the fourth grade P. A. chooses his own nationality: he becomes a Frenchman. He decided on this under the influence of an anecdote connected to Balzac, who, because of the jokes at the expense of his height and his plumpness, said “In our country, France, people are measured from the shoulders up. Not the nationality, but the head as personal identity”.

The philosophy according to which identity is determined by the mind and pleasure, not by territory and ethnic background is the answer to the absurd war fought in the Balkans. P. A. refuses to be nationally marked, he refuses to share his national collective identity at the expense of the profiteering “heathen-heinous” war. Although aware that he may be stigmatized as a traitor, he chooses the soft option. The option which in one country, even if it is called Zoltkovija, there aren't only Zoltkovci and Lutkovci, but also others, and all of them together, because they deal with secondary things, and are on the threshold of survival.

The globalization process, which includes transition in the post-communist countries, evidently brings about challenges that change the

composition of cultural values expressed in separate cultural identities. That change is probably occurring more rapidly than the possibility to conceive it, and thus faster than the possibility to undertake public policies that enable societies to apply adequate policies. That is probably why there are no social answers to the situation of the rapid changes and general instability of the historically established orders. The general situation of global instability works in favour of conservatism, extreme promotion of the interests of separate nations and nation-states, affirmation of individual interests as opposed to general ones. On the other hand, industrialization, its cultural acts and values, and its demand to spread to other areas, contribute to extra-cultural areas affecting the nature of culture and its definition in the frameworks of the overall social context. "The cultural production is related to and merged with the production process and the other areas, which based on the global spread of generic technologies, especially information technology" (Svob-Džokić, Primorac, Jurlin, 2008, p. 27).

Today, cultural transition is discussed in a global context, which makes the change of cultural values and cultural identities more dynamic. The restructuring of cultural values, according to Nada Svob-Džokić, includes:

- undermining the hierarchy of cultures and their strong profiling into forming and affirmation of values of individual national, ethnic, feminist, queer, and other cultures;
- expansion of the multicultural and intercultural environment which is connected to mass migration of the population, the spreading of large cities and increasingly softer national borders;
- adjusting to the global trends of liberal capitalism, consumer society and multiculturalism;
- forming "integrated cultural zones", linked to economic integration;

- redefining cultural identities;
- de-territorialization of culture;
- hybridization of culture in increasingly heterogeneous societies;
- introducing new technologies in cultural creation;
- more open cultural communication and mediation of cultural values;
- placement of cultural products and values on the market;
- cultural industrialization.

The Macedonian novel reacts to such changes and is trying to find possible solutions in the global lack of security and opposition, discussing the problems of globalization and transition in the Macedonian context. The offered analyses and interpretations of the specific novels offer two global possibilities:

- turning to oneself, towards one's own possibilities, identification of one's own weaknesses in establishing the personal and national identity in the world (the novels *The Nobleman* and *Dzahiriz*) and
- openness towards the Other through one's personal initiative (*The Eighth Wonder of the World* and *Hidden Camera*).

In both possibilities, we can see the process of leaving the rigid national and ethnic cultural identification, individualization and cultural values, but also a strong need to affirm authentic cultural values based on cultural heritage as opposed to global heritage.

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