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Paoli, Natalie

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Bodies of Their Own:

Feminism, Postcommunism, and Postcolonialism in Selected Novels by Slavenka Drakulić, Oksana Zabuzhko, and Domnica Radulescu

Natalie Paoli

Supervisor: Dr Sofia Kostelac

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

It is the aim of this thesis to compare and contrast selected novels by the following three postcommunist women writers: Slavenka Drakulić from Croatia, Oksana Zabuzhko from Ukraine, and Domnica Radulescu from Romania. More specifically, my goal is to examine the ways in which each of the selected texts portray issues surrounding feminism, postcommunism, postcolonialism, and sexuality. For my critical analyses, I have chosen the following six texts: *Marble Skin* (1987) and *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* (1999) by Drakulić; *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (1996) and *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (2009) by Zabuzhko; and *Train to Trieste* (2008) and *Black Sea Twilight* (2010) by Radulescu. The novels are set not only in different Eastern European countries, but also occur during different periods of postcommunism, and this will therefore inform my critical examination of them. I am interested in an examination of the ways in which Eastern European feminists writing novels which focus on the female body are writing in response to, and against the nationalist rhetoric that arose during, and following, the collapse of the Communist states. I endeavour to illustrate the ways in which postcommunist feminist writers take up the concern with the individual and personal lives of women, not only to counter former Communist depictions of women, but also to break the dominance of the phallocentric language permeating literature in Eastern Europe

Keywords: Slavenka Drakulić, Oksana Zabuzhko, Domnica Radulescu, postcommunism, feminist fictions, writing the body

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



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Natalie Paoli

16 August 2021

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Introduction[1]

Narrative is where woman is and is not at the same time.

Lidia Curti, *Female Stories, Female Bodies* – ix

The question of why literature matters is one that has preoccupied many a literary theorist, and a plethora of writing on the subject matter exists. For the purposes of this thesis, I aim to illustrate that literature's primary function is that of presenting other versions of the self, allowing the reader to draw conclusions on the insights provided by the narrative because it moves between the real and the imagined. In other words, following many literary theorists, I argue that it is through narrative construction that a novel engages in the process of meaning-making, and because of this, literature can become a form of counter-hegemonic cultural practice, a way to write *against* the dominant ideologies. Therefore, narrative texts allow for the reconstruction of what Edmund Husserl refers to as *Lebenswelt*, or 'life-world,' a space which is experienced by all. As Walter L. Reed emphasises, the 'novel explores the difference between the fictions which are enshrined in the institution of literature and the fictions […] by which we lead our daily lives' ('The Problem with a Poetics of the Novel' 104). Specifically, my concern with the importance of literature relates to the role of women in society and the ways in which their lives and lived experiences are portrayed. Both fictional characters and existing persons, I argue, are suppressed, and oppressed by patriarchal norms that reinforce gender roles. Because narratives emplot experience, literature can become an experiential act of liberation for both the feminist author and the feminist reader. Or, as

[1] Trigger warning: This thesis deals with the topics of rape and sexual assault which may be upsetting to some readers.

Trinh T. Minh-Ha poetically puts it, 'tale-telling brings the impossible within reach. With it, I am who It is, whom I am seen to be, yet I can only feel myself there where I am not, vis-à-vis an elsewhere I do not dwell in' ('Other than myself/my other self' 10). In addition, Julia Kristeva emphasises that the text 'is a practice that could be compared to a political revolution: the one that brings about in the subject what the other introduces into society. […] one cannot be transformed without the other' (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 17). Literature, then, I argue, is central to an understanding of society, and may be seen as a site where societal conventions are interrogated.

Furthermore, I argue for the connection that is drawn between the literary text as a body and the physical body as central to lived experience. Literary theorist, Peter Brooks, explains that novels 'in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of a body's entrance into meaning. That is, they dramatize ways in which the body becomes a key signifying factor in a text: how, we might say, it embodies meaning' (*Body Work* 8). Whilst Brooks' book discusses narratives in general, my concern throughout this thesis is with feminine bodies and feminist novels. Therefore, I aim to further the conversation on text, embodiment, and feminism by suggesting that like the body, the literary text also becomes a site for expression, a space where consciousness, reality, and fiction converge. Drawing on several feminist theorists, I examine the relationship between women and narrative, specifically the contentious topic of what constitutes 'feminist literature,' paying close attention to what Lidia Curti refers to as the 'inscription of the female body and female sexuality in textuality and discourse' (*Female Stories, Female Bodies* 119).

My central contention throughout this study is the assertion that the chosen novels – *Marble Skin* and *S. A Novel about the Balkans* by Slavenka Drakulić; *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* and *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* by Oksana Zabuzhko; *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* by Domnica Radulescu – attempt to present the reader with a particular writing of the body which forms part of a feminist project of resistance through literature. In particular, I am interested in an examination of the ways in which Eastern European feminists writing novels which focus on the female body are writing in response to, and against the nationalist rhetoric that arose during, and following, the collapse of the Communist[2] states.

Consequently, my study is a multifaceted one in which I aim to examine and discuss feminism not as an abstract concept, but in relation to a reading of postcommunism as postcolonialism, as well as how women's literature acts as an attempt to write against the rise in nationalism following the collapse of Communism. In this study I endeavour to illustrate the ways in which postcommunist feminist writers take up the concern with the individual and personal lives of women, not only to counter former Communist depictions of women, but also to break the dominance of the phallocentric language permeating literature in Eastern Europe. However, I need to stress that the main focus of

[2] For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term 'Communist' instead of 'socialist' when referring to the former USSR, former Yugoslavia, and the Socialist Republic of Romania. I am aware of existing debates concerning which of these terms are most accurate in discussions around the countries involved, and while I do not have the scope to go into a detailed discussion in this thesis, I would like to point to political scientist, Archie Browns' support of the use of 'Communism' instead of 'socialism.' Brown writes the following: 'Most objective analysts of those systems have, with good reason, chosen to call them Communist rather than socialist. The term, "socialist," embraces a far wider range of social movements and governments than those which owed their allegiance to Marxism-Leninism… Communist Parties were far from having a monopoly on the understanding of socialism' ('Communism' 2323). Furthermore, as Andrew Roberts explains, using 'the same term to describe the failed Soviet experiment and the success of western European socialists gives the impression that a similar logic and comparable commitments underlie both, and it makes it easy to draw the inference that western European socialists might repeat the mistakes of eastern European socialism. This impoverishes political debate because it fails to recognize that the two socialisms share only their historical roots and little else' ('The State of Socialism: A Note on Terminology' 350). I will endeavour to make a stronger case for my use of the term 'Communism' in future publications pertaining to the issue.

this thesis is neither a reading of the texts as postcolonial nor postcommunist; rather, it is about the extent to which they are 'feminist' in their attempts to resist hegemonic patriarchal literary practices.

Referring specifically to the situation in Eastern Europe, Rosalind Marsh explains that the postcommunist period has seen important developments in women's writing, and there are several reasons why women began to produce a more significant number of novels.[3] Perhaps one of the most important reasons is the relaxation of literary censorship laws which allowed women writers to choose topics that were important to them. Not only were more novels, novellas, and short stories produced by female authors, women's literary works explicitly addressed matters uniquely relevant to women's lives from specific regions in Eastern Europe. As Marsh further emphasises, postcommunist literature's focus on 'the individual's personal life [represents] a challenge to the former depiction of the "positive Soviet hero" and somewhat subsidiary "heroine" of socialist realism who were totally dedicated to the collective' ('Introduction' 23-24). However, it is important to emphasise that the term 'women's literature' within the context of writing from Eastern Europe is quite a problematic one. This is because novels written by women in Eastern Europe before the fall of Communism were often seen as frivolous, meant purely for the entertainment of women, and not something to be examined as a serious subject in literary studies (Marsh).

My intention in this study then is to critically analyse representations of the feminine body, sexuality, and identity as presented in the novels of Drakulić, Zabuzhko, and Radulescu. I propose a close reading of their texts through employing the theory of sexual

[3] See Rosalind Marsh, *New Women's Writing in Russia, Central and Eastern Europe: Gender, Generation and Identities* (2012).

difference and its reading of a feminist poetics of the novel, or that of 'writing the body' (also known as *écriture féminine*). As I go on to argue in the first chapter of this thesis, fiction allows for a certain transgression of phallocentric discourse, and thus can be reappropriated by feminist authors in order to realise this transgression. Joanne S. Frye underscores what a feminist poetics of the novel should aim to achieve:

> [It needs] to understand, to subvert, and finally to reinterpret the formal resources of novelistic representation. If we understand these conventions as having only the pretence of stability or self-assurance, we can avoid reifying them and find instead their available resources as cognitive strategies, self-consciously invoked in the attempt to interpret and represent a social experience that defies a full representation. ('Politics, Literary Form, and a Feminist Poetics of the Novel' 268)

Whilst I will enter into a more nuanced discussion of difference theory in the following chapter, for the purposes of this introduction I would like to propose a working definition of the concept of 'difference' as I aim to apply it throughout my thesis. 'Difference,' whilst being an ostensibly self-evident concept, is also difficult to clearly define precisely because it can refer to a multiplicity of issues. I briefly want to outline the approach which I will be taking with regards to this question of difference(s). Following Avtar Brah (who, in turn draws on various feminist theorists of difference), I identify four ways in which difference can be examined and explained: (1) difference as experience; (2) difference as social relation; (3) difference as subjectivity; and (4) difference as identity (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 114-126). As I go on to explain in the theoretical chapter, sexual difference theory is a theory formulated by various members of what is known as the French Feminist tradition. Notably, and those I turn to throughout this dissertation, are Luce

Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva. Furthermore, I make use of the works by Rosi Braidotti, who presents an updated theorisation of sexual difference theory. Her outline of sexual difference reads as follows:

> As opposed to the early, dichotomized readings of the relationship between body and society, the hypothesis of sexual difference has broken down the polarized oppositions between the public and the private, society and the self, language and the materiality of the body. Over and beyond dualism, it puts forth as the ruling notion the inextricable unity of the subject as a biopsychic entity. ('The Politics of Ontological Difference' 96-97)

As I go on to argue, by placing the emphasis on difference, writers are able to break down dichotomies enforced by the hegemonic patriarchal discourse.

To undertake such a study, it is essential to consider the specific contexts within which these authors write. Although Zabuzhko, Drakulić, and Radulescu have a great deal in common as women who experienced life under Communism, they differ markedly in terms of culture, language, and the ways in which Communism played out in their respective countries. For that reason, I aim to illustrate how the chosen novels engage with feminist issues as they pertain to their individual postcommunist contexts, and the extent to which they achieve a writing of the body. This is important because, as Braidotti emphasises, the 'politics of location refers to a way of making sense of diversity among women within the category of "sexual difference" understood as the binary opposite of the phallogocentric subject' (*Metamorphoses* 12). Therefore, I argue that Drakulić, Zabuzhko, and Radulescu attempt to move away from the idea of a woman's body as a

symbolic fantasy of nationhood towards what Elizabeth Grosz refers to as 'volatile bodies' – sites that are not empty signifiers, but which resist being defined (*Volatile Bodies*).

Sexual difference provides a good lens through which to read the body then, precisely because it is sensitive to a reading of context. Within literature, one way in which to understand difference theory, is to consider the issue of genre. Curti makes this connection by emphasising that gender

> is traversed by the discourse of sexual difference […] The critical voice of displacement and ambiguity for sexual difference denies the rigidity of the law of genre. […] Genres become borders to cross over and over again, simulacra of a past to be resurrected and erased, palimpsests that are continually rewritten; for female writing, one of the ways to avoid the assimilation of the same. (*Female Stories, Female Bodies* 53)

Sexual difference theory and its application in literature in the form of *écriture féminine* break free from the binary oppositions of master narratives; the theory is an attempt at writing the other without appropriating or annihilating the other's difference, reinforcing the idea that differences are revolutionary.

A final consideration for this study is the question of translation. Although this thesis does not have the space to go into a protracted discussion of translation, I would like to briefly address the topic. Whilst Radulescu's novels are written in English, for both Drakulić and Zabuzhko's texts I make use of translated copies. Translation is still a controversial issue, with some critics denouncing the capability of English picking up many of the native language's nuances, whilst other academics have insisted that translation opens up

marginal worlds to a larger audience.[4] It is my contention, however, that translation serves an important role in uncovering foreign language literature, especially novels written by women, to the world at large. This is fundamental because, as Sian Cain argues in response to the lack of translated novels by women, it is part of overcoming the 'systematic dismissal of female writers that has insidiously affected everyone: agents, editors, publicists, readers' ('Lost to Translation'). C. Vimala Rao also argues for the importance of translation, maintaining that 'philological, structural, linguistic, and anthropological knowledge has developed into such sophisticated levels that the job of the translator even in a postcolonial world has been made less difficult' ('Translation Tensions' 139). However, the intention behind translation is a complex issue in terms of whose works are translated and into which languages, and all forms part of the systemic hierarchisation of difference. Nevertheless, in some instances novelists work directly with their English translators, such is the case for example with Zabuzhko and the translators of her two novels. Moreover, both Drakulić and Zabuzhko are fluent in English and have written non-fiction pieces in English. Consequently, I maintain that translation is essential for women writers even while it presents an additional set of power relations which the female author must negotiate.

Wai Chee Dimock argues for the translation of novels into English as a form of transgression and resistance, especially against nationalism. She argues that literature, with its

> […] receding and unfolding extensions make it a political force in the world. To acknowledge this force, we need to stop assuming a one-to-one correspondence between the geographic origins of a text and its

[4] See Sibelan Forrester, 'Translation as Reincarnation: Preserving Difference in Textual Bodies' (1998).

> evolving radius of literary action. We need to stop thinking of national literatures as the linguistic equivalents of territorial maps. ('Literature for the Planet' 175)

Dimock's argument ties into the broader question of 'world literature,' as the title of her article, 'Literature for the Planet,' implies. 'World literature' was part of the greater occidental agenda, spreading Western 'masterpieces' across the globe, but thanks to modern translation techniques, marginalised literatures can now also be translated. However, this can lead one down the path of multiculturalism, which Gayatri Spivak finds problematic. Critical of multicultural world literature, she asserts the following:

> I don't believe the humanities can be global. I think our task is to supplement the uniformisation necessary for globality. We must therefore learn to think of ourselves as the custodians of the world's wealth of languages, not as impresarios of a multicultural circus in English. The task of translation is to translate before translation: languages into equivalence, a different kind of commensurability. ('Translating in a World of Languages' 36-37)

Thus, Spivak is proposing that before one can translate a text, a person must consider the hierarchisation of difference inherent in language which I mentioned above. For the purposes of this study and because of restraints around time and scope, however, I will forego an analysis of the potential differences between the translated texts.

At this point, it is important to note that, of all the novels I chose to examine in this thesis, Radulescu's are the only ones written in English. This is significant, given that the question of mother-tongue is raised in her first novel, *Train to Trieste*. In an interview for

the Centre for Romanian Studies, Radulescu explains her reason behind writing all her fiction work in English:

> I frankly don't care much about such criticism nor do I pay much attention to it. I think a writer can write in any language under the sun she/he chooses and throughout history writers wrote in different languages, not always their first native or maternal languages. I left Romania for the United States in order to start a new life, a new me, a new destiny, when I was quite young. It felt like the most natural thing in the world to write in the language of the country in which I have been living for a quarter of a century. Besides I adore writing in English more than in any other language. ('Conversation with Domnica Radulescu')

Furthermore, in her discussion on theorising exile, Radulescu maintains that through

> the appropriation of the language of the host country, the exile writer attempts to transcend his or her status as 'other' to become socially significant, to move from the margins to the centre or to decentralise the centre and place the margins in the centre. But by doing this she or he becomes an 'other' vis-à-vis her or his own native or maternal or paternal language while simultaneously expressing his/her alienation and sense of otherness vis-à-vis the adoptive country. ('Theorizing Exile' 196)

Radulescu thus, it can be argued, recognises that any language can be appropriated by feminist writers to advance a 'writing of the body' precisely because languages are entrenched in phallogocentric discourse, and therefore should be manipulated into a

'marked writing,' to echo Hélène Cixous' formulation of *écriture féminine* which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

Thesis Overview

This thesis will comprise six chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion. In my first chapter, 'Postcommunism, Postcolonialism, and *Women's* Literature,' I provide the socio-political context of the 'postcommunist' period more generally, explaining some of the central issues surrounding it. In addition, I outline and explain the theoretical framework which I will be using in my analyses of the selected novels. In the following section of this introduction, I wish to provide the background as well as the cultural socio-political context of each author.

Slavenka Drakulić

Journalist and author Slavenka Drakulić was born in Rijeka, in the Socialist Republic of Croatia, which was part of Yugoslavia, in 1949. Once a country formed under one king, Yugoslavia became a Communist state in 1946, following the Second World War. With the collapse of Communism, the situation drastically changed in Yugoslavia resulting in the country fragmenting into a series of 'independent' states through wars of secession. Drakulić experienced and reported on the Yugoslav Wars, spanning from 1991 till 2001, which deeply affected how she viewed her Croatian identity. Prior to the collapse of Communism in Yugoslavia, Drakulić was a part of a feminist movement known as 'Women and Society.' Established in 1979, the group was part of the Sociological Society of Croatia. In an interview with Nanette Funk, Drakulić explains that she was drawn to feminism through both her personal experiences and through professional, literary exposure ('Dossier on Women in Eastern Europe' 108). In particular, she cites becoming

a single mother after her divorce as one of the personal reasons why she took up feminism. She wanted to make feminism a subject open to public discussion, and emphasises the negative responses that this elicited at the time:

> In 1977 I would use the word 'feminism' in an article and they would cross it out, and put in 'the women question' in quotes. It was a kind of censorship; 'feminism' wasn't a very popular word, and we weren't very popular. After these polemics, we became really very tough. We were attacked by the party people, the politicians, the women who were very strong in politics, e.g., the president of the women's organisation of Yugoslavia and Croatia, and then by the journalists, sociologists and philosophers. We got all kinds of threatening mail. They threatened to tie us up and fuck us in the middle of Republic Square, to get us pregnant with five children, to rape us, all very brutal. ('Dossier on Women in Eastern Europe' 110)

This stands in stark contrast to the impression maintained in the West that, under Communism, the equal rights of women freely allowed for open discussions around feminism. Significantly, it also reveals the very patriarchal nature of state socialism in Eastern Europe.

Drakulić's worldview was also affected by what was taking place in her personal life. At the age of 16, she had a serious disagreement with her father, after which her father chased her out of the house, and she then made the decision to never return (Drakulić, 'Language, Shoes and Cakes' 127). This was Drakulić's first experience of a kind of exile, of loss. As she poignantly puts it:

> Later on this feeling would occur from time to time, with every loss, every departure for ever, when friends went away and people close to me died. Suddenly even the country in which I had been born ceased to exist. I won't say it was the same kind of loss, but it was a loss, for a piece of my past had snapped off. Memories and the language remained, the last thing that you bid farewell to in your life. A lot can be made out of memories and language, and these two elements alone can be enough for writing, for the preservation of identity. And you can live off them for some time at least. ('Language, Shoes and Cakes' 127)

In 1992, Drakulić, along with the journalists Vesna Kesić and Jelena Lovrić, writer Dubravka Ugrešić, and academic Rada Iveković, attended the World PEN Congress in Rio de Janeiro, during which they were criticised for attempting to undermine Croatia's opportunity to hold the aforementioned congress in Dubrovnik. Additionally, they were accused of 'raping' Croatia because they did not specify the ethnicity of the women who were being raped during the war, but rather that women 'in general' were being raped, thereby, according to their accusers, detracting from the fact that it was a clearly defined ethnic targeting, specifically against Croatians. The Croatian weekly, *Globus*, wrote an investigative article about these five women, branding them the 'witches of Rio.'[5] This indictment is significant in the context of Croatia, which has a long history of burning women as witches. The five women's personal details, such as their addresses, were made available to the public in a further attempt to punish and intimidate them. Furthermore, as David Williams explains, the article 'alleges that the women are motivated by vengeance against the new state of Croatia, which has put an end to the privilege and

[5] See Meredith Tax, 'Five Women Who Won't Be Silenced: Croatia's "Witches"' (1993).

influence they enjoyed under the "Yugo-communism" of their "beloved Yugoslavia"' (*Writing Postcommunism* 49). The *Globus* investigative team suggested that the five women were influenced by 'French feminist literature' and that they 'chose feminism as "their 'fate,' ideology, and profession" as a result of their failure to find either a partner or a "real" area of academic interest' ('*Globusov* investigativni tim, "Hrvatske feministice,"' quoted in Williams, *Writing Postcommunism* 50). Drakulić and her colleagues' actions posed a threat to Croatia's new national identity, and it was for this reason that they were so aggressively attacked.

For Drakulić, nationalism is a dangerous phenomenon of the time, and in her collection of essays *The Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War*, she explains that 'the nationalism of the former USSR, former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia is a legacy of fairy tale' ('Overcome by Nationhood' 49-52: 49). She maintains that the reason for this has to do with the Communist states' policies around the suppression of ethnic, cultural, and religious beliefs, as well as leaders using the idea of nationality to later play different groups of people up against each other in order to keep themselves in power ('Overcome by Nationhood' 50). In her book about the criminal tribunals held at The Hague after the wars, Drakulić says the following:

> Even if it appeared that way to us, the war did not descend upon us overnight. In the late eighties communism collapsed everywhere in Eastern Europe and in what was then still the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia was unprepared for the political changes that followed that collapse. We did not develop any democratic alternatives as Poland and Czechoslovakia had done, and the political vacuum was suddenly filled with nationalist parties. They all had the same program: independence

> and nation-states of their own. Simmering nationalism was soon spreading like a fire. (*They Would Never Hurt a Fly* 2-3)

Additionally, Drakulić struggles a great deal with the idea that, following the breakdown of Yugoslavia, she now possesses a 'national identity.' Perhaps ironically, under Communism, she explains that she had a true sense of individuality, but with the disintegration of Yugoslavia, she simply became another member of the nation. As she puts it: '[…] I am not in a position to choose any longer. Nor, I think, is anyone else. Just as in the days of brotherhood – unity, there is now another ideology holding people together, the ideology of nationhood' ('Overcome by Nationhood' 51). It was not something that she could refuse without being symbolically exiled from her country. Significantly, in Drakulić's interview with Funk, which was conducted in 1990, she predicted the violence which was to come from the new rise of nationalism:

> Nationalism goes along with the right wing influences, parties, and groups and is becoming very strong in these countries. One of the big historical and theoretical problems is that they want to articulate their ethnic national identity which has been blocked since the October Revolution. It was always regarded as a solved problem – we were all brothers and sisters. But it was, in fact, never solved and it has to be dealt with now. The question is how much blood it is going to cost. Will it mean a civil war in Yugoslavia? […] The nationalists manipulate women's bodies and reproductive rights for ideological reasons. ('Dossier on Women in Eastern Europe' 112)

Two years later, in 1992, Drakulić's predictions of civil war became a reality when the former Yugoslavia disintegrated following the eruption of several wars of secession.

Consequently, as Noemi Marin argues, Drakulić 'faced the challenges of a double exilic identity in her homeland [as] a refugee during the war, and a dissident under the new regime' (*After the Fall* 118). During the Yugoslav wars, when the different ethnic groups were organising their independent governments, masculinism and patriarchal values were reasserted, and women's roles shifted as nationalist reforms became more aggressive. Once again women were placed into the more traditional roles of mother, wife, and homemaker. As Drakulić states in the introduction to her collection of essays written during the collapse of Yugoslavia, the 'myth of Europe, of our belonging to the European family and culture, even as poor relations, is gone. We have been left alone with our newly-won independence, our new states, new symbols, new autocratic leaders, but with no democracy' (*The Balkan Express* 3).

Whilst the question of national identity occasionally enters into Drakulić's novels and is particularly relevant in *S.: A Novel about the Balkans*, it is not the foremost of her concerns. I contend that for her it is more important to focus on the role of female sexuality and self-awareness. What her novels highlight and investigate, I argue, is the inner life of being a woman, and what it entails to inhabit a thoroughly 'female world.' In particular, Drakulić's novels assert the commonly held feminist view that the personal and political are inextricably linked. As Nancy K Miller observes, this view was developed during the period of the second-wave feminist movement, specifically during the 1960s and 1970s, when feminists came to understand politics 'as an intensely personal and individual experience that radiates outward into common, shared hopes and goals' (*Feminist Alternatives* 4).

In Chapter II, 'Abjection, Matrophobia, and Sexuality,' I aim to provide a close reading of Drakulić's second novel, *Marble Skin*. The novel centres on the narrative of an unnamed

female sculptor who returns home after her mother's suicide attempt. The suicide attempt is triggered, it is implied, by the protagonist recreating her 'mother's body' from marble and putting it on display in an art gallery, which her mother subsequently reads about in the newspaper. Briefly outlined, the novel's main concerns are about the sexual maturation of an adolescent girl and the difficulties of negotiating the unhealthy relationship that she has with her mother, which she is then forced to confront as an adult upon her return home. Furthermore, the novel is a version of fictionalised autobiography, a characteristic of many of Drakulić's novels, and is therefore imbued with certain aspects of her own life. Therefore, I provide a reading of the novel as an example of what Maria Lauret refers to as 'fictions of subjectivity' (*Liberating Literature*),[6] whereby Drakulić appropriates certain characteristics of autobiography in order to demonstrate the ways in which a feminine identity may be constructed. Significantly, because it closely deals with the theme of sexuality and bodily consciousness, the novel encapsulates what Hélène Cixous affirms when she states that 'a woman does not write like a man, because she speaks with the body, [therefore her] writing is from the body' (quoted in Heath, *The Sexual Fix* 116). The mother-daughter relationship is at the centre of the novel and is intimately connected with the way in which the protagonist negotiates her body, specifically through puberty as she grapples with menstruation. In addition, in this chapter I aim to illustrate the influence that patriarchal discourse and practices have on relationships between mothers and daughters.

In my third chapter, 'Literature as Witness and Rape as a Weapon of War,' I provide a critical reading of Drakulić's most celebrated novel, *S.: A Novel about the Balkans*. The novel is set during 1992, the first year of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and recounts

[6] I discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.

the story of a Bosnian Muslim woman who is one of hundreds of women kept in internment camps for the sole purpose of being raped. I maintain that the novel can be read as a version of testimony through narrating the atrocities perpetrated against Bosniak women during the war. I return here once again to Cixous' work on feminine writing. As Abigail Bray explains, Cixous emphasises that 'writing and sexual difference (and the writing of sexual difference) are inseparable from questions to do with justice and freedom,' and thus, she 'understands writing as a rigorous and ethical attempt to move beyond the spectres of negation which block the path to freedom' (*Hélène Cixous* 178). I therefore contend that *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* is an example of writing and sexual difference and writing *as* sexual difference. Furthermore, I examine the way in which the novel highlights the role that women's bodies are forced into within nationalist hegemony and discourse.

Oksana Zabuzhko

Several feminists and literary critics have argued that Ukrainian author Oksana Zabuzhko's preoccupations intersect with those of both gender and nationalism.[7] Born in Lutsk, in what was then the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1960, Zabuzhko has been lauded as the most distinguished female writer in postcommunist Ukraine.[8] An academic whose area of research is literary and cultural studies, Zabuzhko's specific interest is in Ukrainian nationalism as portrayed in Ukrainian literature. She also spent a period of time in the United States teaching Ukrainian literature at Harvard as well as the University of Pittsburgh. Beginning her writing career as a poet, she only started writing

[7] See Alexandra Hrycak and Maria G. Rewakowicz, 'Feminism, Intellectuals and the Formation of Micro-Publics in Postcommunist Ukraine' (2009), and Vitaly Chernetsky, 'Ukrainian Literature at the End of the Millennium: The Ten Best Works of the 1990s' (2002).
[8] See Maria G. Rewakowicz, 'Women's Literary Discourse and National Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine' (2004-2005).

prose after the collapse of the Soviet Union with the publication of *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* in 1996. One of the main concerns raised in both *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* and *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* is how Ukrainians as an ethnic group can recover a sense of cultural identity after years of oppression by the Soviet Russians. In particular, Zabuzhko's novels are concerned with the role of what I will be referring to as the 'colonised' Ukrainian woman. This is because Zabuzhko is one of several Ukrainian feminists who belong to a postcommunist school of thought referred to as 'nationalist feminism.' According to Ukrainian feminist scholar, Tatiana Zhurzhenko, Ukrainian national feminists use discourses to 'participate in the process of inventing a Ukrainian nation and negotiating its borders, in constructing collective memory and a national identity' (quoted and translated in Hrycak and Rewakowicz, 311). However, this preoccupation proves highly problematic because Zabuzhko finds herself in the impossible position of attempting to bring feminism and nationalism together. As I go on to explain in the chapters examining her novels, Zabuzhko's works appear to have all the 'characteristics' of feminist texts which I discuss, however, her apparent feminist concerns are constantly undermined by her nationalist tendencies.

Postcolonialism is a contentious term which needs to be qualified and in the first chapter I outline the ways in which postcommunism might be read as postcolonialism. The Russian/Soviet 'colonisation' of Ukraine can be described as that of a 'settler' type. Whilst Western colonisation was based off military conquests and invasions, Russian colonisation was viewed as simply part of the expansion of the Russian nation. The way in which this rhetoric is phrased makes, as Aleksandr Etkind emphasises, Russian colonisation '"come across as a good deed, [whilst] the [Western] European one [is seen as] bad"' (quoted and translated in Chernetsky, 'Postcolonialism, Russia and Ukraine' 35-

36). However, Ukraine's history under both Russian Imperial and Soviet rule is a long, brutal, and, complicated one. As Vitaly Chernetsky stresses, more than 'any other nation within the Russian/Soviet Empire, Ukraine endured a consistent and lengthy policy aimed at [the] suppression and eradication of national identity, language and culture' ('Ukrainian Literature' 98). Whilst segregation in the Soviet Union was presented as being along class divisions, in practice this segregation was more often enforced on the basis of ethnicity. Under Stalin's leadership, as George Grabowicz explains, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was subjected to an intensive process of *Russification*, resulting in what some commentators have seen as the near destruction of the Ukrainian language and culture ('Ukrainian Studies: Framing the Contexts' 675). Russification was the process of cultural assimilation, usually forced onto a non-Russian ethnic group, as part of the process of imperial expansion. Of all the Soviet satellite states, Russification was the most rigorously enforced in Ukraine.[9]

Significantly, Grabowicz highlights that Ukraine's independence 'is particularly evocative of postcolonial transition,' adding that in Ukraine there now exists 'economic and political crises, rampant corruption and, above all, a ruthless exploitation of national resources for the aggrandisement of the ruling elite' (682). Furthermore, the historical, cultural, and political relationship between the Soviet Empire and Ukraine is redolent of what Edward Said refers to as the 'unequal relationship between unequal interlocutors' (*Culture and Imperialism* 191). Thus, under Russian and Soviet control, the Ukrainian language as well as cultural practices were suppressed. Consequently, when the Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine gained its independence, several steps were taken to 'rebuild' the Ukrainian nation. Significantly, as Serhii Plohky points out, there was a return to the rhetoric of the

[9] This accounts for the large number of non-ethnic Russian speakers living in Ukraine. See Juliane Besters-Dilger, *Language Policy and Language Situation in Ukraine: Analysis and Recommendations* (2009).

'historical mythology' of the Ukrainians ('The History of a "Non-Historical" Nation' 711). In addition, the sense of tragedy at what was lost for Ukrainians is so great because, Plokhy elucidates, 'Ukraine belongs to the so-called non-historical nations of Eastern Europe, whose nationalism and nation-states can be viewed as direct products of a highly elaborated historical myth' (709-710). Zabuzhko, in an interview with Halyna Hryn, refers to Ukraine as 'a lost, "forgotten" country, with a historical memory that's been deliberately erased, subjected for so long to all kinds of humiliation' ('A Conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko' 18). Although one risks falling into a reductionist trap, it can be argued that the advent of nationalism in Ukraine after 1990 directly resulted from the ethnic and cultural oppression that had been experienced during the twentieth century. Ukrainians were now ostensibly 'free' to recapture what had been lost.

It is important at this point to stress that nationalism in the postcommunist Eastern European context does not amount to the same thing as in Western Europe but, instead it maintains a more convoluted position. In a postcolonial, transitionary context it was often the case that feminists would collaborate with those seeking to free themselves from colonial or totalitarian subjugation in an attempt at rebuilding their oppressed nation. Feminists argued that they could gain better rights for women in future by participating in the change of regime. Drawing on Ranjoo Sedou Herr's argument for 'polycentric nationalism,' which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1, I hold that this version of nationalism may be applicable to Ukraine precisely because it presents itself (in Herr's terms) as a 'misrecognised nation suffering from "wounded pride,"' and therefore attempts the 'valorisation of [its previously] despised traits' ('The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism' 141). Furthermore, I argue that it is with this model in mind that Zabuzhko puts forth the idea of a Ukrainian nationalist feminist movement. Herr suggests

that the main problem for nationalist feminists is how to deal with the phallogocentric characteristics that seem to be intrinsic of nationalism, whilst at the same time pursuing the nationalist cause (142). However, there is the potential for this to be overcome because, it is often forgotten that nationalism is a relatively modern and changeable invention. Therefore, Herr further suggests that nationalism need not be based on the idea of national 'essence,' but that it can take on, following from Stuart Hall, a '*strategic* significance,' in an attempt to 'restore […] human dignity or to maintain, if not improve, [the standard of living]' (148). Herr's final argument, then, is that 'different conceptualisations of nationalism are possible, and if nationalism can be reconceptualised in a nonessentialist way, it may have strategic value for Third World feminisms' (148). This value, however, has not yet been realised within any postcommunist or postcolonial space, and it might well be argued that it could never be a possibility.

Of Zabuzhko's prose writing, Uilleam Blacker argues that she is,

> […] consciously attempting to establish a style of writing in her prose and academic work that would reflect contemporary ideas of feminine writing: in both genres her sentences are sprawling, full of parentheses, repetitions, digressions, citations, snatches of dialogue, of the speech of others, foreign words, switches in person. Her style is also often broken: thoughts disappear in mid-sentence, things are left unsaid, and the loose threads must be joined up by the reader. ('Nation, Body, Home' 491)

In her two novels, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* and *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, Zabuzhko endeavours to uncover the Ukrainian nation's suppressed culture for the rest of the world, providing an historical context for non-Ukrainians. At the same time,

however, Zabuzhko's novels are also specifically directed at an ethnic Ukrainian audience. As she emphatically states, 'I live in a country that is "post" three times over: postcommunist, post-totalitarian, and postcolonial' (*A Kingdom of Fallen Statues* 90). I maintain that there is a certain extent to which Zabuzhko attempts to illustrate this in her novels. In a comparative article on Ukrainian authors, Chernetsky explains that Zabuzhko, as well as some of her fellow women authors, are

> […] responsible for an unparalleled revitalisation of feminist consciousness in Ukraine, a recognition of the close ties between the personal and the political in the traumas and struggles of Ukrainians, both men and women, and in drawing literary and critical discourse in the country to broad public attention while simultaneously endeavouring to bring it in contact with current international debates. ('Ukrainian Literature at the End of the Millennium' 100)

Therefore, I contend that Zabuzhko's feminist concerns are deeply tied into her preoccupations with the question of postcommunist Ukrainian identity and national consciousness. In both her novels she grapples with these issues in quite different ways. Alexandra Hrycak and Maria Rewakowicz argue that Zabuzhko 'not only sees her mission as helping to free women writers from the "ghetto" of women's writing by creating new spaces for women's voices in mainstream Ukrainian literature,' but also seeks to

> […] incorporate the perspectives of national feminists and national feminism into broader public understandings of national history and identity (thereby preventing feminism and gender studies from being viewed as disciplines segregated from the academic mainstream).

('Feminism, Intellectuals and the Formation of Micro-Publics in Postcommunist Ukraine' 328)

Through her literature, Zabuzhko, as Hrycak and Rewakowicz point out, 'raises the issue of woman's identity and questions the utility of traditionally assigned gender roles' ('Feminism, Intellectuals and the Formation of Micro-Publics in Postcommunist Ukraine' 328), particularly with regards to postcommunist and nationalist concerns. As Rewakowicz underlines, Zabuzhko's feminism 'projects itself more as a vehicle to engender a discursive space in which both national and feminist issues are taken up than as any attempt on her part to produce a typical feminist novel' ('Women's Literary Discourse and National Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine' 204). However, as I will emphasise in Chapter IV, Zabuzhko's views on nationalism cannot be reconciled with any feminist project.

In Chapter IV, 'The Curse of Nonexistence: Between Nationalism and Feminism,' I provide a critical close reading of *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. The novel is told from the perspective of a female Ukrainian poet and academic, named Oksana, who has come to the United States on a Fulbright scholarship to teach Ukrainian literature at an American university. Not only does Oksana have to negotiate life in a foreign country, but she also has to balance this with the volatile relationship which she has with her Ukrainian lover, Mykola. The novel can be read as a confessional monologue of a Ukrainian woman's struggle as she is forced to choose between her desire for a national revival and her own corporeal survival. At the same time, *Fieldwork* presents a highly contradictory attempt at reconciling nationalism and feminism, which ultimately, I argue, the novel fails to resolve. My fifth chapter, 'Women, the Nation, and Postcolonial Trauma,' examines *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, Zabuzhko's second novel, as a work of historical fiction.

The novel spans three generations of Ukrainian women, from World War II through to contemporary, postcommunist Ukraine. In this chapter I will consider the ways in which the author is particularly interested in the history of her country, specifically as it relates to the clear gendered roles. Unlike *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, in this novel the reader is given more historical and socio-political information about Ukraine. Once again, as I endeavour to illustrate, Zabuzhko fails to produce a feminist novel as her nationalist concerns are at the fore.

Domnica Radulescu

After the monarchy was dissolved in 1948, Stalinist principles were implemented in the Socialist Republic of Romania. Presenting yet another example of the complicated character of Communist states, Romania's 'Communism' differed from both that of Soviet Ukraine and Communist Yugoslavia. Initially another satellite state of the Soviet Union, Romania underwent the Russification process fundamental to Stalinism. However, the process was quite different because Romania was not a Slavic nation and had a language which was not related to the Slavic languages of most of the Eastern Bloc. Consequently, their history was, as Vlad Georgescu explains, 'rewritten' in order to fit into the Soviet-Russian story, and even the Romanian language with its Latin influences were made 'more' Russian (*The Romanians: A History* 214). With the death of Stalin and the political turmoil which followed, Romania began a process of breaking away from Soviet control. After 1964, the process de-Stalinisation began in earnest and saw the rise of the theme of the 'motherland.' Romanian literary critic, Eugen Negrici explains that during this period,

> [The] urge to write such poetry was genuine, and its success at that time was authentic, that is, it had not been 'cooked' in the ovens of the propaganda machine. For [this] generation, the motherland was a new

> and exciting theme, unimaginable just a few years before. It carried something of the forbidden truth and it was worth the poets' attention. Also, it was the first theme since 1948 to fulfil public demand. (quoted and translated in Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism* 103)

When Nicolae Ceaușescu came into power in 1965, Romania went on to develop a hybridisation of Soviet Communism and 'national' Communism which succeeded the 'Romanianization' of the ruling party in 1952. In addition, during Ceaușescu's term, the country came to practice what Lavinia Stan refers to as a 'sultanist-cum-totalitarianist' form of Stalinism, with Ceaușescu and his family ruling the country ('Romania: In the Shadow of the Past' 380). As Stan further explains,

> Ceaușescu was head of the state, head of government, leader of the party, and the person overseeing the Securitate's activity, and his wife Elena was a member of the Politburo, head of the Communist Party's cadre office, and vice prime minister, while their son Nicu was party leader of the Sibiu county and heir apparent to his father. (380)

A cult of personality formed around Ceaușescu, and took on, as Georgescu underscores, 'mythic proportions,' to such an extent that the people of Romania 'made pilgrimages to his obscure home town and wove legends about it' (*The Romanians* 258). This had a great deal to do with Ceaușescu's emphasis on the revival of a Romanian national consciousness and identity. Spurred on by Ceaușescu's 'July Theses,'[10] the revival of a national consciousness incited what Georgescu refers to as a 'mini cultural-revolution,' during which time 'pseudonationalism and jingoism' began 'to dominate Romanian

[10] Drawn up by him in July 1971, it was titled 'Proposed measures for the improvement of political-ideological activity, of the Marxist-Leninist education of Party members, of all working people.'

cultural institutions and the mentality of the ruling elite' (*The Romanians* 255). Georgescu adds that the

> most striking cultural change was probably the unqualified return to ideology as the primary instrument of social development. This gave rise to a new type of intellectual: the party apparatchik with degrees, titles, and pretensions, who treated culture as a kind of administrative domain to be planned, coordinated, and directed according to the demands of the ruling elite. (261)

After Ceaușescu's 'Theses' were published, the regime began a process of nation-building where the history of the Romanian people came into focus. As Dragoș Petrescu elucidates, 'the most important step to be taken was to provide the party guidelines for the writing of a "national" history' ('Can Democracy Work in Southeastern Europe?' 282). This move encompassed 'a radical attack against the cosmopolitan and pro-Western attitudes in Romanian culture' (282). Furthermore, as Petrescu explains, it was a moment of return to Dacian origins of Romanians leading to 'the founding document of Romanian national-communism,' known as 'the Romanian Communist Party Programme (RCPP)' three years later in 1974 (282). The RCPP promoted four main ideas, which

> […] became sacred themes of the 'national' historiography: (1) the ancient roots of the Romanian people; (2) the continuity of the Romanians on the actual territory from the ancient times until present; (3) the unity of the Romanian people throughout its entire history; and, (4) Romanians' continuous struggle for independence. (Petrescu, 'Can Democracy Work in Southeastern Europe?' 282-283)

In this way then, Romania's 'brand' of Communism differed in its emphasis on the national history of the people. However, the political reforms of Ceaușescu had a negative impact on the country's economy, particularly with regards to the agricultural sector, and consequently Romania was forced to implement stark austerity measures in the 1980s. The negative effects it had on the Romanians' living standards, including severe food shortages, was one of the major reasons for the eventual downfall of the Romanian Communist party during the 'Bloody Revolution' of 1989.

Domnica Radulescu was born in the Socialist Republic of Romania in 1961. At the age of 22, she fled her country for the United States in 1983 as a political refugee. Radulescu is both an academic and an author of novels and plays. I maintain that Radulescu's writing presents the reader with a certain stylistic hybridity, a fusion of genres, in which she blends historical facts, for which she drew on both her own experiences as well detailed research, with her own creativity. Following from Curti's discussion on female stories, I argue that Radulescu's texts constitute an example of the 'liminal styles of writing,' which is something 'in between the poetical and political register' (*Female Stories, Female Bodies* xi). This is significant because, as Curti further argues, such liminal writing creates an 'uncertain dividing line between reality and fiction' (xii). Additionally, Radulescu's academic interest in literature, drama, and art are revealed in her novels in a variety of ways. Similarly to Drakulić's *Marble Skin* and Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, Radulescu's first two novels, *Train to Trieste* (2008) and *Black Sea Twilight* (2010), are imbued with pseudo-autobiographical traits. Significantly and additionally, *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* are both novels which directly confront the theme of exile. Of exile Radulescu wrote that for 'Eastern Europeans who have escaped communism or fascism, exile comes with a whole array of negative and positive memories of which an

overwhelming amount are rooted in the body and in the emotions triggered by sensorial stimuli' ('Theorizing Exile' 189).

In both her novels Radulescu proceeds to illustrate how a woman can be subjected to multiple oppressions and micro-aggressions throughout her life, especially when she is an immigrant. This resonates with French feminist writer Christiane Rochefort's statement regarding novels written by women: 'I consider women's literature as a specific category,' she asserts, 'not because of biology, but because it is, in a sense, the literature of the colonised' (quoted in Showalter, 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' 197). Furthermore, Radulescu emphasises the 'indelible ties between the female body, its relation to language and space, and the dimensions of exilic experiences' ('Theorizing Exile' 188). As I aim to illustrate, Radulescu's novels are examples of the literary genre of exilic writing. As with all literary genres, there is no one way to write on this theme. As a point of note, there has been much debate around the use of the word 'exile' and whether or not this should instead be exchanged for 'migrant.' In addition, some critics have taken issue with the fact that, generally speaking, only authors who have experienced exile themselves can write 'authentic' stories of exile.[11] However, Gayatri Spivak emphasises that the 'whole *notion* of the authentic migrant experience, is one that comes to us constructed by hegemonic voices; and so, what one has to tease out is what is *not* there' (*The Post-Colonial Critic* 61). I endeavour to demonstrate that Radulescu's novels, whilst greatly influenced by her own experience with exile, are fictional, *creative* expressions of women in exile.

Analogous to Drakulić's novels, both *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* show a profound concern with the role of a woman's body. However, in her novels, Radulescu

[11] See Carine M. Mardorossian, 'From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature' (2002).

begins with an interest in the development of a girl's maturing body and flourishing sexual identity. In addition to the autobiographical elements in Radulescu's novels, Maria-Sabina Alexandru emphasises that *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* are also 'full of precise references to Romania's destiny and the immigrant's predicament' ('States of Exile' 273-274). Furthermore, both of Radulescu's novels are written in the first-person, present tense. Consequently, in Chapter 6, '(Im)possible Homecomings: Woman In/As Exile in *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight*,' I aim to provide a comparative close reading of both novels, paying particular attention to the way in which Radulescu creates novels of 'becoming' as the feminist alternative to the *Bildungsroman*.

Radulescu's first novel, *Train to Trieste*, begins in Communist Romania in the late 1970s, and follows the story of Mona Maria Manoliu's sexual, physical, and socio-political growth. In her review of *Train to Trieste*, Maria-Sabina Alexandru praises the novel as 'the first Romanian American exile story of success' ('States of Exile' 274). *Black Sea Twilight*, on the other hand, begins in the 1980s, and the protagonist, Nora Teodoru, is forced to flee Communist Romania after obtaining an illegal abortion. 'The writer in exile,' Radulescu emphasises, 'attempts a reintegration of the exiled self not only in terms of his/her own personal experience but also as the alter-ego or spokesperson for other exiles like him or her' ('Theorizing Exile' 195). In my final chapter then, I endeavour to illustrate how Radulescu's novels can be read as feminist novels of exile.

Conclusion

When looking at countries that have undergone the transition from totalitarianism or oppression to so-called democracy, one needs to ask the question: what is it about this transition that sees resurgence in violence, particularly against women? This issue should be and can be analysed in a globalised and internationalised context whilst being

sensitive to the particular histories of different countries. It is for this reason that I take up sexual difference theory as the main framework for my discussion. As Spivak stresses, every 'postcoloniality is situated, and therefore different.' ('Are We Postcolonial?' 828). And, in 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' Cixous states that woman 'must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement' (876). In the following chapters I go on to explore the ways in which women writers might go about writing a feminine text which, to parrot Cixous, puts herself into the text. I begin with a discussion of the context and an explanation of the theoretical framework I intend on using in my close reading of the selected novels. Whilst each chapter is a work in and of itself, I attempt to connect ideas where the novels appear to share a common dialogic.

Chapter I

Postcommunism, Postcolonialism, and *Women's* Literature

Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement.

Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' – 876

Postcommunism as Postcolonialism?

Subsequent to the collapse of the Communist states, people from Eastern Europe began to ask the following question, articulated most succinctly by Gayatri Spivak: 'Are you postcolonial?' ('Are We Postcolonial?' 828). This question has frustrated several critics because former Communist-ruled countries cannot easily be slotted into a 'postcolonial' paradigm (which itself is heterogeneous). Indeed, it may become dangerous to simply

compare postcommunist countries with postcolonial ones because there is a disconnection between the historical and socio-economic circumstances of the countries that simply cannot be homogenised. Nonetheless, this does not mean that there is no room for some form of interpretation of postcommunism as postcolonial. Neil Lazarus argues that the reason why 'a study of Eastern Europe as postcolonial' has been prevented in the past is because of a tendency to 'fetishize "the west"' and to think in 'third-worldist' terms ('Spectres Haunting' 120,122). He explains that because of these third-worldist presuppositions, 'postcolonial scholars seldom give sufficient emphasis to the fact that, whatever else it might have and, did involve […] – colonialism as an historical process involved the forced integration of hitherto uncapitalised societies, or societies in which the capitalist mode of production was not hegemonic, into a capitalist world-system' (120). This is an important issue because a consideration of the integration with capitalism which is a fundamental linking factor between the postcolonial and postcommunist contexts is starkly overlooked.

Furthermore, postcommunist theorists, Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Şandru, explain that the

> 'post' in both postcommunism and postcolonialism […] qualifies as the temporality of transition, a transient zone of passage from the condition of dependence to the condition of, if not independence, since that category is always fraught with doubts, then a reflection on what dependence was and what consequences it bears for the present. This self-reflective quality of the 'post' becomes the common comparative terrain between postcolonialism and postcommunism […]. ('Introduction' 115)

I contend that it is specifically this self-reflective quality which is fundamental when considering Eastern Europe as a postcolonial space. Mircea Martin compares Communist states to Apartheid South Africa asserting that if Apartheid 'was one feature of the colonial condition,' then 'communism can be regarded as replacing ethno-social segregation with *social* segregation' ('Communism as/and Colonialism' 86). This type of discrimination was viewed as being constitutive of the greater task of 'class struggle' by the Communist state. Turning towards a 'post'-apartheid reading will aid in understanding the links between postcommunism and postcolonialism. In his discussion on the post-apartheid era, Derek Hook suggests that we might now say that 'that [the] everyday South African experience is characterized by historical dissonance, by the continuous juxtaposition of forward- and backward-looking temporalities' (*(Post)apartheid Conditions* 5). Hook further explains that one 'might say of the (post)apartheid condition that its future is, as of yet, unwritten' (8). This idea is also present in the context of postcommunist Eastern Europe in that a truly 'postcommunist' era is yet to be seen. As Drakulić explains in her most recent collection of essays, *Café Europa Revisited: How to Survive Post-Communism* (2021),

> In the new post-communist reality, joy was soon accompanied by a feeling of disappointment triggered by growing poverty and the gap between those who made a fortune when state property was privatized and the extremely poor, by corruption, and by a distrust of the political elite as well as of the impermeable EU bureaucracy. […] In the meantime, we learned the hard way that we are not the same kind of Europeans, that some are more European than others. Living in the periphery and coming from another time simply make you a second-class European. (4)

When examining the period following the newly gained independence in previously colonised countries, one can see glaring similarities, particularly around issues such as corruption and the rise of nationalism.

Returning to Martin's comparison of communist states and Apartheid South Africa, he emphasises that this segregation was not only social, but was also 'exerted along *ethnic criteria*, but once again in opposition to the proclaimed principles stipulated by proletarian internationalism' ('Communism as/and Colonialism' 87).[12] As Martin further elucidates, 'national culture and collective consciousness were major targets of the destructive campaigns of the Communist ideology, which, at times, turned into actual campaigns of social engineering' (87). These were targets not only in the context of the Soviet Union, but also in Yugoslavia and the Socialist Republic of Romania.

It is important to note that tensions exist between women from Eastern Europe and women from the West with regards to discussions around feminism. There are several reasons for this and perhaps one of the more significant ones regards the ways in which Communist states imposed their ideologies on the people of these countries. The concept of emancipation is one which most women from Eastern Europe have dealt with before, as it had been forced on them through the various state propaganda tasks. Therefore, a great deal of stigma is attached to it, as Drakulić's term, 'forced emancipation', suggests. In her interview with Nanette Funk, she uses the term to 'describe the conditions of women in Eastern Europe who participate[d] in the paid workforce […] not in response to their own needs and demands, but due to manipulation by the state' ('Dossier on

[12] An example of segregation being exerted along 'ethnic criteria' can be seen in the case of Ukraine and what occurred during the Great Famine of 1932, a famine designed to specifically target ethnic Ukrainians.

Women in Eastern Europe' 89). Moreover, she explains what she had learned from discussions with women from other Communist states in Eastern Europe:

> We could understand each other immediately since we all lived under the same Communist regime and faced the same problems as women. If you went to conferences in the US it was difficult to explain why socialism needed feminism and emancipation since according to the documents, we were already equal and emancipated and Western women would envy us. […] The *modus operandi* in these countries is similar although there are differences, even in the regions. […] It is very hard for women there to recognise themselves as a separate group, to recognise their needs as separate, because they have been brainwashed for forty or more years that they are a part of the working class and that their needs have been taken care of. ('Dossier on Women in Eastern Europe' 111)

Whilst there were differences because of the different cultural contexts, the overarching ideology remained practically identical. The de facto Communist 'person' was always a man, and a brotherhood of workers was always represented as the ideal. Women took up passive roles in the nation-building process, and though they were now allowed to enter careers previously denied them, women were not given any positions of authority. Therefore, in order to understand the roles that women inhabit in postcommunist Eastern Europe it is important to begin with an understanding of what took place *during* the Communist period.

There is the problematic assumption which purports, as Funk proposes, that within the Eastern European Communist world, the equality of women has been hailed as a '*fait*

accompli which served to legitimate socialism' ('Introduction' 1-2). However, as Larissa Lissyutkina points out, referring to the context of the Soviet Union, full

> employment of the female population […] never meant the realisation of the right to work. It was a compulsory duty that gave the government the ability to use the entire population as cheap labour for the realisation of the senseless utopian project of rebuilding society and conquering and exploiting nature. ('Soviet Women at the Crossroads of Perestroika' 275)

In addition, many women had to deal with the issue known as the 'double burden.'[13] This term highlights that, in addition to being forced to work outside of the home, most women in these Communist states had to also perform domestic, unpaid labour, such as taking care of children and shopping for food,[14] inside the home. It is for these and other reasons that women from former Communist countries view liberation as the choice not to work. This is but one of many issues of contention between feminists from the West, and Eastern European women.

Therefore, emancipation for women in Eastern Europe did not possess the same connotations as it did for Westerners. In her collection of essays, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (1993), Drakulić makes the following observation concerning women in these Communist countries:

> Growing up in Eastern Europe you learn very young that politics is not an abstract concept, but a powerful force influencing people's everyday

[13] See Chris Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union* (1992).
[14] In many of the Eastern European Communist countries buying food involved standing in queues for hours only to be told that certain products, such as meat and milk, had run out due to food shortages.

> lives. It was this relationship between political authority and the trivia of daily living, this view from below, that interested me most. And who should I find down there, most removed from the seats of political power, but women. The biggest burden of everyday life was carried by them. Even if they fully participated in revolutionary events, they were less active and less visible in the aftermath of those events. (xv)

Certainly, it can be argued that women in Eastern Europe received extensive benefits from the state, including childcare and housing, but these were granted by authoritarian governments which denied the rights of the individual woman.[15] At the same time, it is fundamental to realise that the history regarding the role of women in these areas is quite complex, particularly in terms of legislature. One example of the erratic and strange nature of the laws concerning women was abortion in the Soviet Union. It was the first regime to make women's emancipation a part of the law (in 1917), and abortion was legalised at the request of women in 1920. However, because of the unstable nature of the state, abortion was criminalised during Stalin's reign, in 1936, but legalised again in 1955. This was because, at the heart of it, the Soviet Union still wanted to preserve women's roles as mothers of the nation. Zillah Eisenstein points out that it was motherhood 'rather than parenthood [that] was at issue in this legislation; biologism existed right alongside Soviet egalitarianism' ('Eastern European Male Democracies' 311). And yet, as Eisenstein elucidates, there was 'no consistency in this protectionism. Women have always done heavy labour in the countryside and have been the rubbish collectors and street cleaners in the cities' (311). Another obstacle for the issue of the

[15] Individuality in general was viewed as counterrevolutionary.

emancipation of women within these communist states is that feminism was, as Funk explains,

> appropriated by state socialism to connote spoiled Western women who hated men and could afford the luxury of indulging themselves in very privileged societies. This criticism was rooted in the communist conception of feminism as a 'bourgeois' movement that divided the class ('Feminism and Postcommunism' 86).

In addition, after having lived lives that had been physically arduous, women from these postcommunist regions viewed the option to not work as their right. This, however, also had to do with the rhetoric that accompanied the establishment of so-called new democratic states and their desire to see women in more traditional gender roles. For example, as Eisenstein explains, in the Soviet Union, perestroika was accompanied by a return to traditional, pre-Communist values precisely because Mikhail Gorbachev blamed the 'slackening of family ties on "making women equal with men in everything"' ('Eastern European Male Democracies' 312). Therefore, perestroika became a means by which to return women to their 'rightful' place. Following the disintegration of Eastern European Communist states, the image of the 'ideal Communist woman' was immediately dismantled, to be replaced by the image of ideal woman as wife and mother. There was a similar occurrence in the states which followed the breakup of Yugoslavia. For example, Drakulić highlights that political parties in Croatia began speaking of the concept of woman as the 'fruitful virgin-mother' ('Women and the New Democracy' 123). All of this meant that a great deal of attention was now focused on the importance of the family and how women could contribute to realise this.

The Rise of Nationalism

Terms such as 'nation,' 'nationality,' and 'nationalism' are challenging to define and analyse; however, I will make use of a working definition in order to provide a reading of nationalism in relation to postcommunist states. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson offers an account of nationalism, stating that 'nationality, or, as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind' (4). He proposes the following definition of the nation: 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (6). The nation is 'imagined,' according to Anderson, because the 'members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (6). Additionally, it is imagined as 'limited' because even the 'largest of them […] has finite […] boundaries, beyond which lie other nations,' and it is imagined as 'sovereign' because the 'concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm' (7). Furthermore, Joanne P. Sharp, drawing on Geoffrey Bennington's theorisation, explains the position of nationalism as following:

> 'At the origin of every nation,' states Geoffrey Bennington 'we find a story of the nation's origin.' This seemingly paradoxical definition of the nation is central to my argument about the convergence of national and gendered identities. Bennington's statement suggests that trying to find a national essence at the formative point of national history is a hopeless quest. The nation is created not through an originary moment or culturally distinct essence but through the repetition of symbols that come to represent the nation's origin and its uniqueness. National

> culture and character are ritualistic so that every repetition of its symbols serves to reinforce national identity. ('Gendering Nationhood' 97-98)

The dramatic attempt at reinforcing national identity comes precisely as a result of the totalitarian rule of Communism which Eastern European countries were subjected to. Communism eradicated traditional and religious practices, leaving people almost without a sense of culture or historicity, and without a national identity, in some cases. It is in these ways that one can now view the current 'nationalist' phenomenon in Eastern Europe. However, an important caveat is required here. Nationalism was not something completely absent in all Communist states. Rather, at work in some states (Communist Romania, for example) was a type of 'national Communism.' Walter Kemp explains that in the history of Eastern Europe, in contrast to the West, the nation was viewed differently in that it was seen as having 'preceded the state' (*Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* 8). Therefore, the idea of the nation, and of national consciousness, was already present and remained so in the Communist countries. For the Communist regimes, it was difficult to homogenise the people along socialist lines. Thus, as Kemp elucidates, once the Communists had gained control of the state, they 'tried to gain control of the nation by championing its history and distinctive cultural traditions' (6). Ethnicity played a significant role in the Communist states and was often used to bring the nation together. Furthermore, as Eisenstein argues, the twenty-first century is defined by 'old-new nationalisms,' which are a 'mix of the old and the new,' making use of 'racialized or engendered hatreds' ('Writing bodies on the nation for the globe' 36). And it is these kinds of 'old-new nationalisms' that are pervasive throughout postcommunist countries. In their novels, Drakulić, Zabuzhko, and Radulescu

demonstrate, in quite different ways, what nationalism's implications for the women of their countries were.

Gender identity is constituted at the intersection of the national, the cultural, and the personal. These concerns all come into play in a consideration of women's lives following a period of transition, such as that of the collapse of the Communist regimes of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Romania. The rise of these new so-called democracies in Eastern Europe brought forth two disconcerting phenomena – the birth of neo-nationalism with its intent on secession, and discrimination against 'Other' minorities in one's own country, and, openly aggressive, patriarchal actions against women and their civil rights. Whilst the extent to which women truly had civil rights during Communism is a complex issue, the fall of Communism saw the birth of rather extreme misogynistic and patriarchal reactions against women. The reason for this surge in nationalism is because of what Funk refers to as a 'nostalgia for the past' ('Introduction' 2) – the past which preceded colonisation. There has been a drastic effort to redefine postcommunist countries' values which they perceive to have been imposed on them by a Communist regime so that the concepts of motherhood, the family, and masculinity are described with new meaning. The first victim of nationalism then, it is argued, is the nation's women precisely because nationalism is an ideology which is couched in terms of gender. Eisenstein, however, explains that the 'gender is not usually spoken,' because it is 'encoded (naturalised) through patriarchal familialism' ('Writing Bodies' 41). Once again women are the mothers of the nation, passive participants, and not its creators or active members.

Nevertheless, nationalism is a Janus-faced ideology, in which some aspects of it may even appear to be positive. Additionally, it is not an ideology which is globally homogenous. In Eastern Europe nationalism had quite a different face when compared to its occidental

counterpart. Andrew Baruch Wachtel differentiates between what he considers a Western 'chauvinist' national discourse and the 'non-chauvinist' national discourse of Eastern Europe (*Remaining Relevant after Communism* 100). He explains that under Communism nationalist rhetoric 'was rarely expressed in political discourse' (99), but instead made an appearance in literature, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter. He further elucidates that such a literary text 'attempts to imbue its readers […] with a feeling of belonging to the nation described in the text,' thereby 'simultaneously [describing] an existing phenomenon and [creating it]' (100). However, and importantly, he adds that 'this does not automatically mean that nationalist literature is a coded form of chauvinism' (*Remaining Relevant after Communism* 100). Nonetheless, nationalist discourse remains a manifestation of patriarchy, and, as Anne McClintock argues, if it 'is not transformed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations and male privilege' (*Imperial Leather* 385).

It is interesting to note that certain feminists make the case for such a reformulation of nationalism so that it may be incorporated into a feminist discourse. Ranjoo Sedou Herr, drawing from work produced by Anthony Smith, explains that the kind of nationalism created by breaking away from colonialism constitutes what is known as '"polycentric" nationalism,' whereby a nation has the right to '"join the 'family of nations,' the international drama of status of equals' (Smith quoted in Herr, 'The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism' 139). This kind of nationalism, Herr argues, could be considered a 'justifiable nationalism' (139), and therefore holds the potential for being incorporated into feminist discourse. This, however, is not an easy thing to accomplish, for, as I have already contended, nationalism is regularly entrenched in toxic masculinity and the languages of patriarchy. Both Drakulić and Radulescu are critical of nationalism, and make no case for it, viewing it as an ideology which is completely incompatible with any

form of feminism. Drakulić, for example, is part of a group of feminists who, between the late 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, opposed nationalism, viewing it as manipulating women for their ideological goals of nation-building.[16] Zabuzhko, on the other hand, promotes a version of nationalist feminism, and in the chapters on her novels I will outline and explain her argument for this, illustrating that, ultimately, she is unable to advocate for such a cause.

'Body' I Am

Before one can speak of writing the body, a clearer definition of 'body' is required. Whilst in many regards the body is difficult to define precisely because it is fluid, and in no way universal, I endeavour to provide a working definition in order to begin to interrogate the ways in which a feminist author might 'write the body'. An examination of the body by several important feminists associates a woman's embodied experience with certain practices of power. It can be argued that a woman's body is always symbolically positioned in discourses of power which justify social hierarchies according to forms of bodily difference. To understand how this arose, it is necessary to return to the view of the body as observed during the Enlightenment.

A continuation of theories first written by ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, René Descartes proposed the philosophical concept of the mind/body split, known as Cartesian dualism, which holds that the mind and body are separate entities. Reason, seen as epitomatory of the male mind, is only possible according to this theory, when one has relinquished one's bodily desires. This theory is founded on patriarchy and thus within it, women are relegated to the realm of the body, and are thereby seen as irrational beings who can never break free from their corporeal needs. This dichotomy has been the

[16] See Jill Benderly, 'Rape, Feminism, and Nationalism in the War in Yugoslav Successor States' (1997).

standard view in Western philosophy and can be encapsulated in the words of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who expresses the following: 'The male is only a male now and again, [but] the female is always a female […] everything reminds her of her sex' (quoted in Bell, *Visions of Women* 199). The mind/body split dichotomises the human experience to physical, or corporeal, and psychological, or mental, events. In response to this, feminist scholars developed a theory of sexual difference as a critique of reason. This theory seeks to reinsert the body into discussions around knowledge and reason. However, theories based on sexual difference are not specifically new to the feminist endeavour. For example, as Rosalyn Diprose explains, for Friedrich Nietzsche one's 'place in the world, one's desires, habits and potentialities are determined by the concepts which govern the structure of the social world and which sculpt the body accordingly – a body which is a "unity as an organisation" and is therefore a "work of art"' (*The Bodies of Women* 83). And to quote Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: 'body I am entirely, and nothing else and soul is only a word for something about the body' (34). Feminist theorists go one step further and emphasise that these bodies, which cannot be separated from their 'minds', are both socioculturally and sexually specific, thereby formulating concepts of sexual difference that bring the focus onto women, subverting the conventional ideal of the rational, Cartesian man.

In her *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, Susan Bordo maintains that the body should be read as 'a medium of culture,' 'a powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of a culture are inscribed and thus reinforced through the concrete language of the body' (165). She continues to explain that the 'body is not only a *text* of culture,' but also 'a *practical*, direct locus of social control' (165). For Bordo, it is through the seemingly banal, everyday practices that 'culture is "*made* body"' (165). To

undermine the inscription of ideology onto bodies, the (patriarchal) cultural definitions of the body must be resisted, and 'real' bodies should become the focus for feminist resistance (Hekman, 'Material Bodies' 65). The woman's body, as Elizabeth Grosz elucidates in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, is both 'a thing and a nonthing,' precisely because of Cartesian philosophical discourse, which produces the 'coupling of mind with maleness and the body with femaleness' (xi, 4). Grosz continues to explain that because of these associations 'women and femininity are problematized as knowing philosophical subjects and as knowable epistemic objects,' thus 'Woman (upper case and in the singular) remains philosophy's eternal enigma, its mysterious and inscrutable object' (4-5). Therefore, 'Woman's' body is a troubling palimpsest; it cannot be defined as an object apart from a subject for whom it is the object.

Hélène Cixous, as Abigail Bray explains, defines the 'feminine' as signifying 'the social repression of female autonomy and desire and also a subversive *élan vital* or vital creative force' (*Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference* 56). In her renowned essay, 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' Cixous emphatically states that it is only by writing 'from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that woman will confirm women in a place other than silence' (881). As I indicated in the introduction, the main focus of my thesis is to examine the ways in and the extent to which the selected novels take up this challenge. In order to do so, however, it is necessary to say something about the potential problems of making use of a 'French Feminist framework.' The term 'French Feminism,' which has been attached to the works of Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, among others, has often come to mean an esoteric, Eurocentric feminism which privileges an occidental worldview. An example of some of the criticism towards French feminism can be found in Gayatri Spivak's influential essay, 'French Feminism in an International Frame,' in which she questions the

validity of a 'Western feminism' for postcolonial, non-western women through a critique of Julia Kristeva's work, by referring to it as a 'set of directives for class and race-privileged literary women' ('French Feminism in an International Frame' 158). Certainly, Kristeva's approach in 'About Chinese Women' (1986), the focus of Spivak's critique, does raise some problematic points. There is no space here to go into an examination of the ways in which Kristeva's article lacks a sense of cultural sensitivity; however, I maintain that outrightly dismissing all of her theorisations as irrelevant to a postcolonial (and postcommunist) context is to deny that there is scope for aspects of her work to be reappropriated.[17]

As I go on to explain later in this chapter, difference feminism – one version of 'French feminism' – allows for a greater understanding of a woman's specific situatedness in the world. In *New Maladies of the Soul*, published sometime after 'About Chinese Women' (in 1995), Kristeva makes an argument for difference, maintaining that we 'recognise an irreducible and self-sufficient singularity that is multifaceted, flowing, and in some ways non-identical' (208). Furthermore, Kelly Oliver, referring to Kristeva's work, explains how accounting for difference is important:

> In order to think about ethical and political theory, we have to be able to think about the relationship between identity – individual, group, and national – and difference. We need to formulate a theory of difference that accounts for oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion in order to theorise how to reformulate difference so that it does not lead to oppression, marginalisation and exclusion (*Reading Kristeva* 12).

[17] It is important to note, however, that Spivak does not discount all French feminist theories. For example, she comes to Luce Irigaray's defence against the accusation of essentialism in 'French Feminism Revisited: Ethics and Politics' (1992).

Oliver goes on to argue, that for Kristeva, 'this is the ethical-political struggle of all oppressed people. Oppressed peoples want their difference recognised and respected without that recognition becoming the basis for exclusion' (13). Within difference feminism, as I go on to argue, 'difference' becomes a site of resistance against hegemonic ideas of identity-formation. It is also worth noting that, as Michel Foucault has put it, theory should be conceived of as a toolbox, where tools are accordingly appropriated,[18] and throughout this thesis, I take up this notion, aligning myself with Rosi Braidotti's theorisation of nomadism.

One other potential critique regarding French feminism I would like to briefly address, is the issue of its datedness. In more recent times, as Linda Martín Alcoff emphasises, intersectionality 'has now become non-negotiable for feminist theory, creating new challenges for Continental feminist philosophy, certainly for the trend that came to be known as French feminism' ('Feminism: Then and Now' 272). It is my contention that a 'French feminist' theory of sexual difference may well be considered as feeding into intersectionality, precisely because it requires a consideration of a woman's specific embodied experiences, experiences which are founded in race and class, among other sociocultural specificities.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her influential *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, explains that certain 'cultural themes are expressed by rites of bodily manipulation […]. The rituals enact the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression they enable people to know their own society. The rituals work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body' (129). A theory of sexual difference allows one to disrupt this 'bodily manipulation',

[18] See *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975).

to arrive at complex, more nuanced understandings of women's embodied experiences. As I discussed in the introductory chapter, difference is not a simple concept to define and has many different aspects. Joan Scott argues that experience 'is at once always already an interpretation *and* is in need of interpretation' ('Experience' 37). Difference as experience, or as *lived* experience, Avtar Brah explains, is central to the feminism of sexual difference, and deals with the feminist dictum 'the personal is political,' emphasising the role of experience as 'the site of subject formation' (*Cartographies of Diaspora* 115). Difference as social relation, alternatively, is expressed in terms of '*systematic* relations' through discourses dealing in the political, the economic, and the cultural. Thus, as Brah maintains, it 'highlights *systematically across contingencies*' (117). Difference as subjectivity is closely linked to the notion of experience as contributing to the formation of the subject. This view of difference falls in line with the feminist critique of Cartesian mind/body dualism. And, finally, difference as identity examines the ways in which identities 'are inscribed through experiences culturally constructed in social relations' (Brah 123).

Nevertheless, the four conceptualisations of difference I briefly discussed in my introduction – difference as experience, social relation, subjectivity, and identity – allow for a reading of lived experience which is neither homogenous nor essentialist. Teresa de Lauretis maintains that experience

> […] is the process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in social reality and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, originating in oneself) those relations – material, economic, and

> interpersonal – which are in fact social, and, in a larger perspective, historical. (Quoted in Scott, 'Experience' 27-28)

Braidotti is perhaps one of the greatest advocates for a theory of sexual difference today. She explains that it is a central discourse for feminism as it 'dislodges the belief in the "natural" foundations of socially coded and enforced differences and of the system of values and representation which they support' ('Sexual Difference Theory' 300). Furthermore, Braidotti maintains that sexual difference theory also emphasises the 'positivity of difference, while opposing the automatic counter-affirmation of oppositional identities' ('Sexual Difference Theory' 302). Therefore, according to her, feminists must re-evaluate existing discourses of difference to rescue difference theory from the 'hegemonic connotations it acquired in classical philosophical thinking' (Braidotti, 'Sexual Difference Theory' 302). In *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Braidotti takes the defence of sexual difference theory further by referring to it as 'enfleshed materialism' (13). For her such a theory, drawn from the Continental philosophical theory of sexual difference, offers a more nuanced and thorough 'critique of power,' calling for the 'dissolution of the humanist subject' (*Metamorphoses* 20). The humanist subject must be dissolved precisely because it is always 'man.' Enfleshed materialism offers a good perspective for reading the body precisely because it places the emphasis on the subject's situatedness and interrogates its dislocation within Eurocentric phallocentrism. Difference becomes a positive force, opening up the potential for varied ways of reading the body.

Elizabeth Grosz, too, emphasises the importance of the use sexual difference theory for feminists to highlight the ways in which phallocentric power relations have imposed a fixed meaning onto sexual difference, and to find ways in which to modify this. Grosz's

main argument maintains that human subjectivity and agency cannot be understood without first providing a more than in-depth account of the significance that corporeality holds for human beings. She states the following:

> The task, then, is not to establish a neutral or objective perspective on the question of sexual difference but to find a position encompassing enough for a sexually specific perspective to be able to open itself up to, meet with, and be surprised at the (reciprocal) otherness of the other sex(es). Sexual difference entails the existence of sexual ethics, an ethics of the ongoing negotiations between beings whose differences, whose alterities, are left intact but with whom some kind of exchange is nonetheless possible. (*Volatile Bodies* 192)

Grosz further insists that all women's bodies, irrespective of class, race, and history, contain an 'irreducible specificity' (*Volatile Bodies* 207). She stresses that women's bodies are 'marked as different from men's (and inferior to them) particularly at those bodily regions where women's differences are most visibly manifest' (207). Women will always maintain a certain alienness, difference, *otherness*, in relation to men. Bodies, therefore, cannot simply be viewed as universal objects, but rather are very much products of social and cultural construction. In order to understand what embodiment means in the sense of the individual (woman), one first needs to understand how sexual, cultural, racial, and other differences intersect and create meaning through the bodies of these individuals. Examining the role of the hegemonic notion of power as it pertains to corporeality is necessary precisely because the embodied experiences of women are structured according to particular configurations of domination and subordination. Thus, one must speak of the particular situatedness of women's bodies.

Returning to the beginnings of difference theory, one 'French' feminist who argued for a theory of sexual difference, and whose works I make use of, is Luce Irigaray. In *This Sex Which Is Not One*, Irigaray maintains that female sexuality 'has always been conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters' (23). Women's bodies are not objects which possess a fixed meaning, but rather they are always inherently the products of social construction and inscription. As Irigaray puts it: '[Women are withdrawn] into proper names, violated by them. Not yours, not mine. We [women] don't have any. We [women] change names as men exchange us, as they use us, use us up' (*This Sex* 205). The way in which a woman might go about undoing and subverting this universal (masculine) discourse is, for Irigaray, to 'upset the whole set of dominant values,' to 'challenge every theory, every thought, every existing language,' and to 'question the very foundation of our social and cultural order, the organisation of which has been prescribed by the patriarchal system' ('Women's Exile' 68). Irigaray's project entails appropriating the existing patriarchal language system in order to subvert it, thereby creating a 'feminine language' ('Women's Exile' 65). Accordingly, women's autonomy can only come from speaking *as women*. Grosz explains that for Irigaray, to

> […] speak as woman means to undo the reign of the 'proper' – the proper name, property, propriety, self-proximity. It means to evoke rather than designate, to overflow and exceed all boundaries and oppositions. It involves speaking from a position in the middle of the binaries (the so-called position of the 'excluded middle'), affirming both poles while undoing their polarisation. To speak with meanings that resonate, that are tactile and corporeal as well as conceptual, that reverberate in their plurality and polyvocity. (*Sexual Subversions* 132)

Therefore, Irigaray emphasises the need to rethink the connection between the 'self' and the 'Other' as part of the project of sexual difference. Returning to the Western conceptualisation, the self is always masculine and Irigaray proposes woman's otherness, or alterity as resistance towards this phallocentric discourse. However, she cautions against offering a fixed definition of 'woman,' stating:

> I cannot answer either *on* or *of* woman. If I pretended I could do it – if I accepted or maintained I could do it – I would do nothing but once more bring the female question back to the discourse that keeps it displaced, banned, at best ignored […]. Femaleness cannot be signified by proper meanings, by proper names or concepts, not even that of a woman. (*This Sex* 129)

'Otherness,' or alterity, becomes a way in which to conserve subjectivity, thereby emphasising difference as a means of resistance. This is because the Other is a corporeal and embodied being, possessing a materiality which can be engaged with. However, it is important to stress that for Irigaray, the Other possesses an irreducible otherness and difference. As Braidotti explains, for Irigaray the 'feminine' is 'neither one essentialized entity, nor an immediately accessible one,' rather it is a 'virtual reality, in the sense that it is the effect of a project, a political and conceptual project of transcending the traditional […] subject-position of Woman as Other, so as not to express the other of the Other' (*Metamorphoses* 22-23). She further emphasises that for Irigaray, such a transcendence can only take place by means of embodied locations, which as I have discussed above, she refers to as 'enfleshed materialism' (23).

A charge of essentialism is one of the criticisms that have been brought against feminist sexual difference theory. According to Grosz, this criticism promotes a form of

essentialism which 'refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganization' (*Space, Time, and Perversion* 47). In this instance essentialism is reduced to mere biological determinism. In addition, this criticism relies on the conceptualisation of oversimplified dichotomies, emphasising that essentialists place a fixed essence onto women.

Tina Chanter, however, argues that to accuse Irigaray of 'essentialism not only rejects [the] interrogation of certain assumptions about sameness that habitually underlie feminist struggles for equality in the political arena, it also refuses to acknowledge the challenge Irigaray issues to conventional conceptions of the enigmatic divide between nature and culture' (*Ethics of Eros* 46). And Spivak too comes to Irigaray's defence, stating that the 'usual critique of Irigaray, that she is an "essentialist," generally springs from an ignoring of the aggressive role of rhetoricity in her prose' ('French Feminism Revisited' 74). What Irigaray attempts to do, and what is required from feminists in order to free them from phallocentrism's grip, is to construct a positive category of women, proposing a particular form of strategic essentialism which cannot be reduced to simple terms. As she stresses:

> Because we are always open, the horizon will never be circumscribed. Stretching out, never ceasing to unfold ourselves, we must invent so many different voices to speak all of "us," including our cracks and faults, that forever won't be enough time. We will never travel all the way round our periphery: we have so many dimensions. ('When Our Lips Speak Together' 75)

Nonetheless, this is by no means a straight-forward project, and as Braidotti underscores, 'figurations are essential to this political project' (*Metamorphoses* 27). Figurations may be understood as all the 'differences' a woman might contain, such as ethnicity, class, and religion. Consequently, as already mentioned, a woman's particular situation must be taken into account. Sexual difference, or enfleshed/embodied materialism, is in fact a total rejection of essentialist identities imposed by hegemonic practices. Whilst I have emphasised the tensions existing between Eastern European feminists and those feminists from the West, it is my contention that a theory of sexual difference avoids the pitfalls of the 'Western gaze' precisely because it focuses on a woman's situatedness.

Furthermore, the theory of sexual difference as a form of strategic essentialism necessary for the feminist project, as Braidotti explains, is

> also the active gesture of affirmation of women's ontological desire, of our political determination as well as our subjective wish to posit ourselves as female subjects, that is to say not as disembodied entities but rather as corporeal and consequently sexed beings. The sexualisation and the embodiment of the subject are the key notions in what I would call 'feminist epistemology' in that they provide the conceptual tools and the gender-specific perceptions that govern the production of feminist thought. ('The Politics of Ontological Difference' 90)

Her argument stresses the need to rethink a woman's body in terms that are 'neither biological nor sociological' (98-99). She suggests that Irigaray's formulation of sexual difference presents such a reconceptualization of the feminine body and experience. Irigaray achieves this through the process of mimesis, whereby she mimes the

essentialist language used in phallocentric discourse. On the surface it appears as though Irigaray reinforces the binary opposition between men and women, by emphasising the association of feminine with women and the masculine with men. But this is part of her strategy of miming. Through mimesis, she wishes to emphasise the differences between man and woman by illustrating that there is no symmetry within these differences, but rather that they are arranged according to hegemonic practices of phallocentrism. When a woman voices the 'feminine' she is attempting to deconstruct the patriarchal idea of what female nature is, in this way legitimating herself. In order to gain political power from phallocentrism, a woman must 'speak as a woman'; women need to redefine what *being* a woman might entail. Gayatri Spivak refers to this as the '*livingness* of the feminine,' stating that 'the nameless feminine is the name of living' ('Feminism and Deconstruction' 216). Furthermore, she emphasises that 'we would naturalize the *name* "woman" if we transformed it into the central character in that narrative of woman's recognition within sexuality' (219). This culminates in what she refers to as the 'gendered subaltern' (220).

Returning to Irigaray's point about 'speaking as woman,' she refers to this as *parler-femme*, or 'womanspeak'. She outlines the problem of women speaking the same as men in *This Sex Which Is Not One*:

> If we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again. […] Listen: all round us, men and women sound just the same. […] If we keep on speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we'll each other, fail ourselves. Again... Words will pass through our bodies, above our

> heads. They'll vanish, and we'll be lost. Far off, up high. Absent from ourselves: we'll be spoken machines, speaking machines. (205)

Thus, she emphasises that as women we should *speak as women* in order to subvert the masculine dominant discourse. Margaret Whitford, drawing on Irigaray, proposes a definition for speaking-as-woman, or *parler-femme*, stating that in 'speaking as a woman should be language (*langage*) or discourse which contributes to making it possible for women to occupy the social and symbolic space as woman-subjects, epistemological subjects, producers of truth and culture' (*Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* 51). In an interview with Alice Jardine, Irigaray emphasises this: 'I am a woman. I write with who I am,' because not 'to contribute to making language and its writings sexed is to perpetuate the pseudo-neutrality of those laws and traditions that privilege masculine genealogies and their codes of logic' ('Writing as a Woman' 53). What this means is that 'the female body is not to remain the object of men's discourse or their various arts but that it becomes the object of a female subjectivity experiencing and identifying itself' (59). In the following sections I go on to define what this writing – a writing of a woman's body – might look like.

Writing the Body: A Literature of Their Own

The question of what makes a literary text written by a woman 'feminist' or 'feminine' is a precarious one that needs to be qualified. Some feminist theorists, notably those belonging to the Anglo-American feminist school of thought, have presented the argument that *all* women's writing must be feminist, merely by the fact that these texts

have been written by women.[19] However, Toril Moi points out that the Anglo-American tradition is highly problematic in that it promotes the idea of an authentic female experience which is founded in white, middle-class ethnocentricity.[20] For the purposes of this thesis, I argue that there should be a deeper concern around 'womanhood' as an embodied experience for a novel to be considered feminist. One might start by claiming that novels which may be deemed 'feminist' or 'feminine' aspire to create a certain sense of women's lived bodily experiences; 'feminist' texts adopt an aesthetic which troubles phallogocentric discourse, thereby creating the discursive spaces for the articulation of female specific experience. Such texts strive to break away from masculine, patriarchal standards of writing, and in this way provide an account of female identity read corporeally. To put the matter in very broad terms, I would argue that a feminist writer is someone who strives to rewrite the hegemonic version of gender in dominant fiction. In particular, feminist texts are concerned with delegitimating specific patriarchal narratives and socio-cultural orders, and attempt to make that which is invisible visible, giving voice to that which is voiceless. However, the term 'feminist literature' can be a very problematic one, connoting a definition of a homogeneous object of study instead of a diverse field of cultural production, and therefore it is important to constantly return to the context from which a particular author is writing. Additionally, it is also necessary to be cautious in using the label 'woman's writing' or 'woman's literature' for the same reason as outlined above. Sara Ahmed stresses that using the term 'woman' as an 'unmediated and transparent category' is problematic precisely because it serves to 'make invisible these broader contexts of difference' (*Differences that Matter* 127). This ties into what Stuart Hall expresses with regards to difference, when he emphasises that

[19] See Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's famous book *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979).
[20] See Toril Moi, *French Feminist Thought: A Reader* (1987).

'boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference,' because each has 'negotiated its economic, political and cultural dependency differently' ('Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation' 73). Here, writing and authorial contexts interconnect and become a feminist project of resistance. As Frigga Haug underscores, writing 'is a transgression of boundaries, [and] an exploration of new territory' ('Memory-Work' 36). In the context of postcommunism, a writing of the body can be seen as a form of resistance towards an ever-growing nationalist masculine discourse. Furthermore, narrative, Joanne Frye affirms, generates 'experience as a part of an interpretive construct' ('Politics' 256). For her, the construction of narrative is one way by which a woman might identify her place in the world (255). She draws on Fredric Jameson, who in *The Political Unconscious* maintains that the 'all-informing process of *narrative*,' is the 'central function or *instance* of the human mind' (xiii). To expand on this, Frye holds that human beings 'claim and define [their] experiences as [their own] through the stories by which [they] assign meaning' ('Politics' 257).

In an attempt to formulate what 'writing the body' entails, it might prove useful to begin with what Hélène Cixous refers to as writing that is 'said to be feminine.' For Cixous, it is essential to not fall for the allure of assigning names to particular types of writing.[21] As she maintains, and as I have already indicated, texts that are written by women do not necessarily make them a feminine writing in the sense that they display concerns around feminism. Fundamentally, however, in 'The Laugh of the Medusa' Cixous goes on to explain that

> […] there is such a thing as a *marked* writing that until now, far more extensively and repressively than is even suspected or admitted, writing

[21] Similarly, like Irigaray, Cixous resists any attempt to be defined as a theorist.

> has been run by a libidinal and cultural – hence political, typically masculine – economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that's frightening, since it's often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction. (879)

Additionally, she maintains that a 'feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive' because it is 'volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments' ('Medusa' 888). Moi goes on to explain that, for Cixous, texts that are said to be feminine 'strive in the direction of difference, struggle to undermine the dominant phallogocentric logic, split open the closure of the binary opposition and revel in the pleasures of open-ended textuality' (*Sexual/Textual Politics* 108). Significantly, Cixous' view of literature is directly connected to the corporeal. As she states,

> [by] writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and the location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. ('Medusa' 880)

In several of her important works, Cixous emphasises the fundamental role which the literary text plays in the creation of a revolutionary 'feminine' language. She maintains that it is woman alone who can change the phallocentricity of the dominant discourse, and that she must do so by writing, by making use of *écriture féminine*. As Bray goes on to explain, '*écriture féminine* is not simply about recapturing an immediate connection to a

body which has been colonised by phallocentric language, it us about contemplating the material process of thought itself. Writing, in this sense, is inseparable from the materiality of thought' (*Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference* 72). Therefore, the process by which feminine writing is realised must begin with the author *knowing* her body, and thereby writing *with* it. For Cixous then, women should write about their bodies through their bodies; they must write themselves out of the world constructed by men. This conception of writing the body also circumvents the essentialization and universalisation of women's literature in that it draws on specific contexts for its examinations.

Moreover, as Virginia Woolf emphasises, 'when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values – to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. And for that, of course, she will be criticised […]' ('Women and Fiction' 48-49). By developing feminine or feminist writing, women can attempt to change the way the patriarchal, hegemonic discourse functions. This view comes into conflict with the popular postmodernist credence that the 'Author is Dead.' 'The Death of the Author' is a 1967 essay by Roland Barthes in which he criticises the focus on an author's historical, political, cultural, etc. context as a way of distilling meaning from her narrative work. Barthes' views such a reading as interpretive tyranny and urges readers to break free from such restrictive literary interpretation.[22] However, as Nancy K. Miller argues, this Barthesian approach cannot work for 'women' because it 'prematurely forecloses the question of identity for them' ('Changing the Subject' 106). Moreover, Miller adds that because 'women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production, that men

[22] See Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes* (2003).

have had, women have not, I think, (collectively) felt burdened by too much Self, Ego, Cogito, etc.' (106). Consequently, in terms of a reading of feminist texts, the 'author' must remain decidedly alive.

In order to further gain a better understanding of what feminist literature might look like, I want to examine, following several feminist theorists, the metaphor of the 'woman's sentence'. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf writes the following: 'Mary is tampering with the expected sequence. First, she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well, she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking but for the sake of creating' (88). For Woolf, the sentence which is being broken is one that encapsulates the 'ridicule, the censure, the assurance of inferiority' regarding women's deficiencies (*Granite and Rainbow* 80). Thus, a woman can only write if she undertakes the effort of 'altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it' (*Granite and Rainbow* 81). The reason for this is that the feminist author must rebel against the standards of literary conventions which have been established according to masculine, or patriarchal, values. Consequently, novels said to be feminine, or feminist, unsettle these seemingly conventional standards precisely by *writing the body*. Once again, however, one must be cautious when referring to a text as feminist because, as Rosalind Coward suggests, there are texts that display a 'surface commitment to feminism' and 'those that have a deeper commitment' ('Are Women's Novels Feminist Novels?' 228-229). To distinguish between these two, one must ask how 'they achieve their visions of reality, *how* representations work […], how the text is constructed by writing practices and what ideologies are involved in it' (Coward 229). Literature, as Minh-Ha emphasises, is 'above all releasing oneself from external censorship' ('*L'Innécriture*' 130). A text deemed feminist will strive to write *against* phallocentric

conventions; it will present a preoccupation with the feminine body and sexuality – it will be an example of *écriture feminine*. Miller provides a summation of *écriture feminine*, stating that it 'can be described roughly as a process or a practice by which the female *body,* with its peculiar drives and rhythms, inscribes itself as text' ('Emphasis Added' 37). She further adds that to 'read women's literature is to see and hear repeatedly a chafing against the "unsatisfactory reality" contained in the maxim' (46-47). *Écriture feminine*, or 'writing the body', has the potential to disrupt phallocentric literary conventions, emphasising what Mary Eagleton refers to as the 'female signature' (*Figuring the Woman Author* 23). This 'signature' is important because it asserts the presence of women and of their embodied experiences, which is essential to feminist creative writing, and it is my intention to demonstrate the ways in which the novels under examination present versions of this 'signature.'

As a final consideration, it is important to note that a key characteristic of 'feminine' writing is its focus on 'woman-centred' stories. Gerda Lerner emphasises the fundamental importance of these narratives, stating that they are necessary

> […] to light up areas of historical darkness […] considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture *within* the general culture shared by men and women. History must include an account of the female experience over time and should include the development of feminist consciousness as an essential aspect of women's past. This is the primary task of women's history. The central question it raises is: What would history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by values they define? (*The Majority Finds Its Past* 52)

In this thesis it is my contention that the selected postcommunist feminist novels take up the role of a 'minor literature' as defined by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze. A minor literature, they explain, '[…] is not the literature of a minor language but the literature a minority makes in a major language. But the primary characteristic of a minor literature involves all the ways in which the language is effected by a strong co-efficient of deterritorialization' ('What is a Minor Literature?' 16). This is a useful definition precisely because the feminist literary project, as I aim to demonstrate in subsequent chapters, is concerned with using the dominant 'patriarchal' language to subvert and undermine its ideology. They further elucidate that, because a minor literature exists 'in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political,' and therefore, 'the question of the individual becomes even more necessary, indispensable, magnified microscopically, because an entirely different story stirs within' (16). Finally, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a minor literature has three specific characteristics: 'the deterritorialization of the [major] language, the connection of the individual and the political, [and] the collective arrangement of utterance' (18). By reading Drakulić, Zabuzhko, and Radulescu's novels as texts which write the body, I demonstrate their attempt to deterritorialize patriarchal literary genres and conventions precisely by writing narratives that are both decidedly individual and deeply political.

Chapter II

Abjection, Matrophobia, and Sexuality in *Marble Skin*

The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers', and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery.

Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* – 236

Published in 1987 shortly after Slavenka Drakulić's first novel, *Holograms of Fear*, *Marble Skin*[23] is a novel of development which focuses on female sexuality as it pertains to puberty, menstruation, and the way in which these processes relate to the constantly

[23] The novel was first translated into English from the French in 1993.

changing relationship that the unnamed protagonist has with her mother. Employing a first-person narrative perspective in the form of a fictional autobiography, the novel follows the story of a sculptor has just exhibited a work in marble entitled 'My Mother's Body,' a piece of art so shocking that when her mother sees a photograph of it in a newspaper, she attempts suicide. The protagonist is thus forced to return home to not only care for her mother, but to also confront their unresolved past. The reader is given insight into this past through a stream-of-consciousness narrative mode where the narrator moves between the past and the present. Marked by the emotional intensity of the prose, the novel merges the art of sculpture with imagery of the body so that the visceral and corporeal are evoked and examined, thereby presenting, as I argue in this chapter, a novel which exemplifies 'writing the body.' Indeed, as Celia Hawkesworth notes, the 'novel is relentlessly physical, steeped in a pervasive aroma of sweat and menstrual blood' and, therefore, 'it may be seen as fulfilling definitions of *écriture féminine* as writing the female body, in which blood is seen as a central symbol' (My italics, 'Croatian Women Writers 1945-95' 270). In addition, the novel presents, as Hawkesworth argues, a narrative which 'may be seen as archetypically "female,"' and is steeped in the language of the feminine body (270).

In her discussion on the women-centred feminist novels in postcommunist Serbian and Croatian literature, Jasmina Lukić explains that many of these texts share the same fictional autobiographical characteristics whereby a 'character is in many respects very close to the author herself' ('Women-Centred Narratives' 227). With regards to *Marble Skin*, this can be supported by turning, for example, to Drakulić's non-fictive autobiographical texts such as *Café Europa*, in which she refers to her own mother as aloof and distant and emphasises that she has never been close to her (68). I maintain that the genre of fictionalised memoir is enabling for feminist authors precisely because

it allows them to imbue their fiction with their own life experiences as women. In this way then, the author mitigates any criticism which may be directed towards her as someone who speaks for all women. Drakulić's use of the first-person narrative in the novel adds to the sense that it is autobiographical to some extent. Moreover, Maria Lauret refers to these kinds of feminist novels as 'fictions of subjectivity,' in which the author makes use of the tradition of autobiographical discourse, but in such a manner as to 'subvert it by offering explorations of the social and psychic construction of female subjectivity […], telling a story of ostensibly private failure […] which are then redefined as nevertheless enabling and real because necessary for personal and political growth' (*Liberating Literature* 99-100).

First-person narrative is useful for the creation of a feminist novel because, as Joanne S. Frye argues, the first-person novel presents a form of subversion, allowing the protagonist 'agency [that] engages the narrative process in rejecting fixed plot or teleological structure' (*Living Stories, Telling Lives* 71). Following from this, I contend that *Marble Skin* is an example of what Bran Nicol, examining one of Iris Murdoch's novels, refers to as the 'first-person retrospective novel' ('Anticipating Retrospection' 187). Such a novel, Bran explains, inhabits 'the realm of the *feigned,* that which masquerades as something it is not, rather than the *fictive,* which does not attempt to hide its artificiality (187-188). Since the narrator in *Marble Skin* is also the protagonist, she constitutes what is known as an autodiegetic narrator. Bran emphasises that the autodiegetic narrator 'maintains a degree of autonomy not matched in other forms' because she 'possesses an independence quite unlike even the most realistically drawn character in a third-person text, because every word of the narrative originates only from […] her' ('Anticipating Retrospection' 189). In addition, all the characters in the novel remain unnamed. This contributes to the enigmatic tone which the novel is attempting to set. Indeed, as Sam

Sacks argues, discussing the role of unnamed characters in novels, this kind of anonymity 'keeps the book in a state of quantum superposition between memoir and fiction,' and this is significant because as long as 'the question is left open, both avenues of interpretation remain passable' ('The Rise of the Nameless Narrator'). Therefore, I contend that *Marble Skin* blurs the lines between the 'real and the fictional.' Once again Drakulić allows herself the opportunity to both speak from a personal space, but also to maintain the sense of the fictional by withholding character names. Following in the tradition of the fictional autobiography, the novel also presents the reader with a confession of a girl's sexual maturation and experiences. This ties into Rosalind Coward's contention that a 'preoccupation with the confession of sexual experience is one of the most characteristic features of contemporary feminist writings [and that] novels by feminists also present the experience of sexuality as the significant experience of the novel' ('"This Novel Changes Lives"' 59).

Throughout *Marble Skin*, the protagonist provides the reader with vignettes from her childhood. This is often prompted by photographs from the past. When the narrator returns to her childhood home as an adult, she finds that her mother has covered one wall in her old bedroom with photographs of the protagonist as a child. The selection of photographs speaks to her mother's desire for the protagonist to forever remain the preadolescent girl which she has fixed in her mind. As the narrator notes, in the photographs she is always 'a little blond girl who must never, ever grow up' (25). The photographs provide the narrator with the opportunity to reveal a memory from her childhood to the reader. For example, the final chronological photograph is significant because, whilst her mother believed that it was the last moment of her daughter's 'innocence' – she is only eleven in the photo – the protagonist is already experiencing the beginning of puberty, and she explains this to the reader: 'I hold my arms folded

awkwardly, as if I am trying to hide my breasts. They cannot yet be seen – at least not from the outside. But I know they are there. I feel them already, small, hard pads, painful around the nipple' (25). The exposition of the narrator's experience of her sexual coming-of-age is fundamental to an understanding of patriarchy's influence on this experience as enforced by her mother, who becomes a vehicle for ideological conditioning.

Writing the Body

Marble Skin illustrates the feelings experienced by a woman in relation to her body; in a more general sense it encapsulates what Lukić refers to as 'female self-awareness' ('Women-Centred Narratives' 236). The novel centres on the microcosm of patriarchy and sexual abuse within the family home. The first chapter of the novel summarises and brings to the reader's attention the central issues of the narrator's troubled relationship with her mother, and the impact that this has on her own relationship with her body and her sexuality. Suggestively, the novel immediately opens on the conflicted relationship between the unnamed narrator and her unnamed mother. 'Suddenly it happened. I thought I had already forgiven my mother for everything,' the narrator states on page one, alerting the reader to the tensions in their relationship. The way in which the protagonist goes about dealing with this complicated relationship is through art. She seeks intimacy with her own mother, a way in which to reach her, something which was missing from her childhood. She inextricably links her mother's body, and women's bodies in general, to art. For her the materials of her art become enmeshed with the language of the body. The mediums she uses – clay, wood, marble – are all imbued with bodily images and symbolism throughout the novel. For the protagonist, sculpting becomes a way for her to deal with her unresolved childhood trauma. Significantly, the narrator associates the idea of a woman's body with the body of her mother. Her mother's

body has had a profound impact on the narrator's own construction of her body-image and sexuality. When she enters puberty, her mother is frightened and becomes more distant. It is she who teaches the protagonist to hate her body as a site of dirt and shame – as something which needs to be hidden. This, I maintain, is particularly the case with the development of a young woman's body, which is best illustrated through menstruation. 'Completing' her childhood by returning from her self-imposed exile, and dealing with her unsettled relationship with her mother, is the only way in which Drakulić's protagonist can find closure to properly come to terms with her relationship with her own body. The novel, as I go on to argue in this chapter, offers a good example of Luce Irigaray's conceptualisation of parler-femme, or 'speaking as woman,' and as Cixous affirms, writing is an 'act which will not only "realise" the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal' ('The Laugh of the Medusa' 880). Furthermore, Cixous adds that in 'woman, personal history blends together with the history of all women, as well as national and world history' (882). Thus, whilst the novel is an intimate story of one woman's personal trauma and growth, it also presents a narrative which is all too familiar to many women across the globe.

One of the fundamental ways in which her mother shames the protagonist's developing body is in response to the start of her menses. For her mother, menstruation is one of the feminine body's signs of weakness and betrayal. Menstruation is a fundamental marker of the feminine body, yet at the same time it is seen as dirty, associated with excrement. In addition, menstruation is a significant marker of difference in that it does not, as Elizabeth Grosz explicates, 'differentiate female from male, [but rather] it marks the difference between men and *mothers*' (*Sexual Subversions* 76). In addition, Grosz goes on

to say that the 'horror of menstruation serves to tie women into a (presumably natural) maternity without acknowledging women's *sexual* specificity, a residual femininity unrepresented by maternity' (76). In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva argues that menstruation has been construed as a form of abjection:

> Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which the body becomes separated from another body in order to be – maintaining that night in which the outline of the signified thing vanishes and where only the imponderable affect is carried out. (9-10)

Additionally, she explains that menstrual blood 'stands for the danger issuing from within identity (social or sexual),' – 'it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate, [and] through internalisation, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference' (*Powers of Horror* 71). Furthermore, Grosz explains that the 'abject is the space of struggle against the mother […]. At the same time, it is a desperate attempt to be her, to blur the divisions between the child's identity and the mother's' (*Sexual Subversions* 78). Perhaps ironically then, menstruation is one of the events that can unite mothers and daughters on common ground. In the case of Drakulić's protagonist, however, this is not realised.

The narrator's childhood memories of her menstruation are all negative precisely because her mother views it as something disgusting, something which must be hidden and never spoken of. The narrator recalls her mother's response to her when she first started menstruating:

> […] I now belonged to another category of women, those who leave behind them traces of their nauseating femininity. What could she

> expect of me, if not betrayal? She believed, no doubt, that is was too late now, that she would be powerless from then on: I would soon be intoxicated by my own body. She found it hard to cope with the presence of my blood in the house. It was perhaps then that she repudiated me, me, that girl who was incapable of understanding that femininity is a dangerous burden. (39)

It is significant then that the stress of the return to her mother's home brings about the narrator's period. She describes it as a 'fear lurking in my abdomen, cupped in my womb, overflowing at night, simultaneously bringing me towards and pushing me further away from my mother' (36). This is indicative of the complicated relationship that the narrator has with her own body. She is trapped by the perception that her own maternal body is abject, and thus she is alienated from it. But the narrator is also aware that it is her mother who has filled her head with these images of her menstruating body. 'I follow that wet patch back through time,' she observes, 'impossible to do otherwise. This has happened before! Disgust, fear, I recognise the moment of divorce from my own body […]' (39). This disgust, as mentioned above, was instilled by her mother because she herself is disgusted by her abject body, to the point that she threatens her young daughter, stating the following when she discovers that the protagonist has started menstruating: '"I will kill myself or go mad if you do that again, if you stain the mattress," she said quietly, as if to herself. It wasn't an accusation or a threat. It was a statement, as if spots of blood could really make her lose her reason' (38). This response has had a traumatic effect upon the narrator's developing self-image. However, whilst traumatised, the narrator also realises why the beginning of her menstruation threatened her mother; it is a symbol of power, of her burgeoning womanhood and her pulling away. Her mother is terrified of menstruation to the point that she can barely speak to the narrator of it: 'In an undecided,

flat voice, a shadowy voice inhabited, I felt, by some ghost, she murmured that it happened to women every month and that I would recognise the start by the pain in my abdomen' (43). Once again, this ties in with the notion that menstruation is a secret, dirty thing which should not be spoken of.

Her mother's views on menstruation are further entrenched in the narrator through the way in which she teaches her daughter how to deal with her stained underwear. She has the compulsion to get rid of the bloodstain as soon as possible; the mere sight of it upsets her: 'Abruptly she pushed the bowl back under the bath: a little water splashed on the floor. She wiped it up straight away: no, no, it's nothing, it doesn't exist, this world that smells of decomposition. Forget it. Don't forget it' (43). At work in this scene are two important issues; the issue of menstruation, but also that of the symbolic role that a woman's underwear plays within the dominant masculine world. Sünne Andressen argues that women's underwear 'function as a sign of the invisible,' and that 'in seeing them in this way, [girls] learn to acquiesce in the contradictory requirement that we make reference to a core that is "sexuality" by displaying that which is to be concealed as demonstratively "non-sexual"' ('The Slavegirl Project' 137). 'Even in isolation from the body,' Andressen further explains, 'knickers make reference to sexuality, *are* sexuality,' and this can be seen in the fact that there 'is as much difference between a pair of knickers and bikini bottoms as there is between being naked and being fully dressed' (137). This all plays a part in the patriarchal process of female socialisation.

Mothers and Daughters

The trope of the mother-daughter relationship is a popular one in European literature and came to prominence in Western Europe as a result of the second-wave feminist

movement.[24] It is important, however, to keep in mind that whilst this theme might be employed by feminist writers it is not in and of itself feminist and can sometimes contribute to stereotypes about mother-daughter relationships. Drakulić first employs this theme in her first novel, *Holograms of Fear* (1992), where the relationship that the narrator has with her mother is described as an unhappy and distant one. The protagonist refers to her mother as 'cold, beautiful, and self-absorbed' (*Holograms of Fear* 52). All communication between the narrator and her mother has broken down, as she observes: 'Whenever we end up alone the words clot and the gestures come of themselves, empty, hollow, meaningless' (*Holograms of Fear* 50-51). The relationship between a mother and her daughter is taken even further in *Marble Skin*. As the protagonist states, her mother

> […] taught me the language of silence – the meaning of gestures, murmurs and perfumes, strangled cries and unfinished phrases. She taught me to recognise the substructure of words, movements in the darkness, eyes that suddenly turn away, treacherous silence. (63)

Marble Skin, I maintain, problematises the relationship between mothers and daughters, and Drakulić achieves this by drawing from her own experiences with her mother. Whilst it might appear that the novel is inadvertently reinscribing a very patriarchal view of the relationship between mothers and daughters, I believe that this is done intentionally in an effort to illustrate how patriarchy alienates mothers and daughters because it needs to prevent a potential alliance of mutual resistance between them. In addition, mothers are also potential vehicles for the transmission of certain values involving womanhood onto daughters.

[24] See Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother–Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989).

Lack of communication and misunderstanding between mother and daughter is at the forefront in *Marble Skin*. The protagonist's father commits suicide when she is three years old, making her mother the primary adult influence during her formative years. The reason for her volatile relationship with her mother stems from the fact that her mother enforces a specific view of a woman's body on her, a view which the narrator rebels against. 'How could I tell her, how could I make her understand with words what a woman's body is?' (3), the narrator asks of her mother at the beginning of the novel. From a young age her perception and understanding of a woman's body is associated with the body of her mother. This happens not only because of her mother's inherited ideology, but also because, as she maintains, that to 'learn to know [my mother] I had to become her' (60). Additionally, the relationship is a negative one because of her mother's complicity in the protagonist's sexual abuse and rape by her stepfather.

The novel revolves around the tension between the protagonist's views on the feminine body and the views instilled by her mother. Her mother, viewing a woman's body as filthy and unclean, and a source of danger, drills into the protagonist a particular hatred of the body which she attempts to break free from. This is an almost impossible task for the protagonist, and she wishes that her mother had not existed: 'If only there had not been that word: mother' (10). Immediately it becomes clear then that the narrator displays what is referred to as 'matrophobia,' a term devised by Lynn Sukenick ('Feeling and Reason in Doris Lessing's Fiction' 519). Matrophobia, rather than the fear of one's mother, is the fear of becoming her. As Adrienne Rich puts it, 'thousands of daughters see their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to win free of, the one through whom the restrictions and degradations of a female existence were perforce transmitted' (*Of Woman Born* 235). Matrophobia is a consequence of the role of maternity under patriarchy, which Elisabeth Grosz argues, 'curtails the mother's ability

to act as a woman' (*Sexual Subversions* 122). She goes on to explain that the consequences of this 'implies an "exile" for the daughter, for she is cut off from access to the woman-mother; and thus, from her own potential as a woman' (122-123). The daughter, according to Grosz, having no woman she can identify with, 'can take on the socially validated place as a mother herself only by replacing her mother, by "killing" her […]' (123). Additionally, Luce Irigaray explains that because women are 'torn from their first desires, their sexuality,' they can 'never find a substitute for the mother, except by taking her place, [by] suppressing her to take her place' (quoted in Grosz, *Sexual Subversions* 123). Once again, Drakulić's display of matrophobia in the novel could be read as re-establishing patriarchal ideology, but I believe that it is a conscious move by the author to demonstrate the role that the mother-daughter relationship comes to have under such ideology.

In the novel, the protagonist's mother denies her own sexuality, tearing herself away from her first desires. The relationship between the narrator and her mother are further complicated by the mother's desire for absolute control over her own body and sexuality, as well as that of her daughter's. As the narrator observes, '[my mother] bound me. She blocked my eyes and my ears. She gagged me. Trusting, I accepted all her prohibitions' (31). From a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, 'the bodily development of her daughter,' Kari Flaake explains, 'confronts [the mother] with the upcoming separation and her own aging process,' and 'can remind the mother of her own unsatisfied sexuality, her own unfulfilled desire for autonomy, and her own problems with femininity' ('A Body of One's Own' 9). Indeed, the narrator's mother struggles to come to terms with her own sexuality and sexual desires, and, as a result, she projects all her sexual frustrations and failures onto her daughter. This is in line with Rich's assertion that 'a mother's victimisation does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches for

clues as to what it means to be a woman' (*Of Woman Born* 243). One example of this mutilation of her daughter in the novel occurs when her mother denies the narrator her own sexuality: 'In front of men she also referred to me in the third person, as if I wasn't there or as if I was invisible' (30). This has a great deal to do with the potential threat that the protagonist's pubescent body poses to her mother. Her daughter's sexualised body is seen as being in competition with her own. However, it can also be argued that since the narrator's mother denies her own embodied existence, she does not know how to manage her daughter's developing body. Thus, ironically, because of her mother's behaviour towards her, the protagonist feels that she is too close to her mother. As she observes, 'My mother seemed closer to me than my own body and I felt I had to pass through her in order to reach myself' (55).

Significantly, the narrator's pubescent body becomes a matrophobic battleground, causing a feeling of matrophobic hostility in her because, as Maria Reventós argues, 'as long as femininity is culturally constructed around the female body (its beauty), the daughter will use it as an instrument of protest or resistance, as a site of struggle against the mother over the issue of feminine identity' ('The Obscure Maternal Double' 287). In the novel, this can be seen when the narrator recalls one of the few memories she has of her mother being affectionate towards her. The memory is intimately related to the narrator's body and recalls a time when her mother was brushing her hair, complementing its beauty. This is an important concern because of the significance that a woman's hair holds within most patriarchal societies. Whilst drinking in her mother's affection, the narrator realises that here she is afforded the opportunity to rebel against her mother, inflicting pain on her: 'Already, as she passed her fingers through [my hair], as she pronounced the word "beautiful," I knew that I would get it cut' (67). She explains that she does this, betrays her mother, in order to 'cut the bonds, the bonds which link

hair, blood and decomposition' (69), which in turn are all linked to her mother. She uses any opportunity she has to hurt her mother in an attempt to both rebel against her and draw close to her. Additionally, having her hair cut also presents the protagonist with the opportunity to proclaim her femininity and budding sexuality as her own, unique experience.

In order to both purge herself of her mother's indoctrination and to reconnect with her mother on some level, the narrator recreates her mother's body from a variety of mediums, including clay and marble. The language of the body becomes fused with the language of art. For example, when she describes working with clay: 'Kneading it I warmed it up till it was totally submissive and would take the imprint of the tiniest lines on my palm' (3). She has already associated clay with her mother's body: 'I seem to touch her; the clay is already so hot. As if brushing my hand across her breasts, damp from the stuffy room, damp from sleep' (4). Yet, although clay is the narrator's medium of choice, she considers it too weak a medium with which to sculpt her mother's likeness, precisely because it offers up no resistance. She requires more resistance so that she may inflict violence on it, the sculpture becoming a surrogate for her mother's body. This becomes clear when considering the language that she uses when referring to the block of marble which she will use to create the sculpture of her mother: 'Still unfinished, vulnerable, I open her legs with a single blow of my hammer […]' (5). The protagonist here is asserting symbolic dominance over her mother which appears to be violently misogynistic and contributes to what might be considered one of the problematic aspects of the novel. However, this problematic instance can be seen as the protagonist's attempt at inflicting retribution on her mother, and she seems to be only capable of doing so by using the same misogynistic discourse that her mother had used in shaping her daughter's self-image.

At certain points in the novel, it becomes difficult to discern between the narrator's discussion of her artwork and that of her mother's actual, physical body. The statue becomes the only way in which the protagonist can express her feelings towards her mother, as she describes her imagining her mother's response to seeing it for the first time:

> The photograph of my statue penetrates her eyes as she opens the newspaper. Pain stabbing her lungs, like lightning, then persisting. It's the first time I've made her feel anything at all. She is aware of her body torturing me still, that I have carried it within me, like a stain I am unable to wash out, throughout my absence. She looks at the photograph and understands that inside me she slowly turned into a stone. (165)

The protagonist's feelings toward her mother are also unsettling in that, at several points in the novel, it seems as though she is expressing sexual desire for her mother. For example, when referring to a clay sculpture she had made of her mother, she says, 'I seem to touch her, the clay is already so hot. As if brushing my hand across her breasts, damp from that stuffy room, damp from sleep' (4). Her love for her mother as a daughter is fused with a certain desire to *have* her. It is as though at this point the protagonist is taking up a masculine role, and sexually objectifying her mother's body.

Additionally, and significantly, the narrator's mother is linked to specific spaces in the house. The narrator associates certain rooms directly with her mother's embodied presence. For example, the protagonist refers to the bathroom as a place of hate and of love (48), because it was there that she was first shamed by her mother when her menstruation started, but it was also where her mother displayed her rare shows of affection towards her daughter. This is especially fundamental to her mother's bedroom,

where the rape takes place, and as will be discussed, it is a space which is generally forbidden to the protagonist. It might be helpful here to turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of the literary chronotope. Bakhtin, whilst notorious for not providing a clear and fixed definition of the chronotope, gestures towards the basic 'idea that narrative texts are not only composed of a sequence of diegetic events and speech acts, but also – perhaps even primarily – of the construction of a particular fictional world or chronotope' (Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart, 'Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope' 4). The closest Bakhtin comes to articulating this definition is in his essay titled 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics,' where he states the following:

> In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (84)

The idea of time being embodied also ties into the idea around writing the body. This can be seen in the protagonist's response to the house upon her return. 'I can no longer escape the images,' she says to the reader, 'emanating from the clothes, the furniture, the smell of lavender and wax, the window frame, the initials embroidered on the sheet, the round handles on the wardrobe doors, my own fingers suddenly burning me, as if licked by flames' (50). The house thus becomes an extension of her mother's body and existence, and therefore stands as a literary chronotope. Furthermore, the house also becomes a site of decay which is symbolic of the ageing of the protagonist's mother. To the narrator, the

house is now a museum of her mother's life, as she observes: 'Nothing had changed in the house, in her room, these eighteen years, as if not a single object had been moved' (18). The house is a hostile space for the narrator, filled with reminders of her abusive past.

The Outsider Threat

The role of the protagonist's stepfather in *Marble Skin* is, as Isla McKetta in her review argues, to catalyse the 'relationship between mother and daughter' (1). Referring to him simply as 'the man,' his presence emphasises the conflict between the protagonist and her mother, putting even more strain on their relationship. From the first moment when the man becomes her stepfather and moves in with them, the narrator is threatened by his presence as a masculine force asserting his patriarchal dominance over their home. As she observes: 'Immediately he crossed the threshold he began a campaign of conquest of the place' (87). The narrator describes his presence in their lives by making use of the language of the body. The actual physicality of his masculine body poses a direct threat to the narrator's relationship with her mother. 'His body was an obstacle, a barrier between us,' she says. 'Insidious, threatening, hard. I felt I would have to fight him, day after day. His presence was heavy, suffocating. I bumped against him, against his developing sway over my mother' (87). The narrator, being highly sensitive to every move and mannerism of her mother, immediately experiences the ways in which her stepfather's masculine presence changes her mother's behaviour:

> From that morning on – from that first breakfast illuminated by his presence – she began to change. She became more flexible, more rounded. Her voice became softer, her movements lighter. […] I could no longer recognise her. I was sure that she was escaping from me, that she

> was heading for undiscovered countries where I could never again be with her. (82-83)

It is also important to note that the change in her mother's behaviour is a direct consequence of patriarchy's ideological influence. In order to secure the man's love for her, to endear herself to him, her mother must behave in particular ways.

More than just a masculine force in the house who takes her mother's love away from her, the stepfather also becomes a sexual threat to the young narrator. The narrator views her mother's marriage to the man as a betrayal, because, 'He would change my love for my mother, a hungry, exclusive love, intolerant of the presence of a third person, my silent admiration and her way of accepting it' (80). This leads her to the realisation that the only way in which she will be able to reach her mother is *through* the man. 'Allowing' herself to be seduced and raped so as to be closer to her mother. However, that is not to say that the protagonist is responsible for the sexual abuse her stepfather commits against her. Rather, I suggest that the novel aims to highlight the misogynistic paradigms which normalise violence against women, and how the protagonist internalises them as she attempts to recapture the relationship she has with her mother. As I endeavour to illustrate, the stepfather is aware of the insecurities that the protagonist has regarding her relationship with her mother, and he uses these to groom her and abuse her.

From a feminist perspective, depictions of rape in literature can be highly problematic. This is because, depending on the way in which rape is presented in a novel, it may constitute a second violation towards a woman reader. Several feminist theorists have raised the issue around the question of ethics – what should be taken into account when presenting and reading depictions of rape in literature?[25] Jyotika Virdi, for example,

[25] See Tanya Horeck, *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Fiction and Film* (2004).

argues that this is a dilemma for feminists because, 'the erasure of rape from the narrative bears the marks of a patriarchal discourse of honour and chastity; yet showing rape, some argue, eroticizes it for the male gaze and purveys the victim myth' ('Reverence, Rape – And then Revenge' 266). In addition, as Sorcha Gunne and Zoë Brigley Thompson emphasise, in order to break away from the binary, patriarchal depictions of rape, it is necessary to confront the issue directly, in a 'shocking and uncomfortable' manner ('Introduction: Feminism without Borders' 3), and then to closely examine the given rape scene, the language used and the setting created, in order to determine whether it might be read as an ethical portrayal or not. A fine line exists between using rape in a novel in order to critically confront it from a feminist perspective and using it for the purposes of voyeuristic shock value. I argue that *Marble Skin* provides an opportunity for a discussion around the role of a girl's body in a primarily patriarchal setting, and how a young girl might be vulnerable to abuse. Furthermore, I believe that the novel does not commodify the trauma of rape, but rather illustrates how, fundamentally, it is a serious issue which is taken up by feminists.

In the novel, the rape is already gestured towards in the first chapter when the narrator utters the following: 'Silence and a man's footsteps. Coming closer. A moment which was to cut my life in two' (18). For her, the splitting of her life into two parts pertains to her connection with her mother, severing the already fragmented relationship that they have. Significantly, the rape happens in her mother's room when the narrator enters it one afternoon. Her mother's room is a forbidden space, the site of her mother's sexuality from which the narrator is barred, as well as the location of her intimacy with the man. By entering her mother's bedroom when she is not there, the protagonist is rebelling against her mother, violating her space. It is significant then that the rape should take place on her mother's bed, as it can be seen as a violation within a violation. What further

traumatises the narrator is her mother's lack of protection. She states: 'I am incapable of unearthing any memory of her protective touch buried deep inside me, to help defend me from the touch of the man' (94). It is implied that her mother should have been aware, however tenuously, that the man had an unhealthy interest in the protagonist. And, indeed, this is supported by her mother's response to her daughter's developing body, which, as is argued, she sees as posing a danger to her relationship with her new husband.

Her stepfather's process of assaulting the narrator is a slow one. As with many men who sexually abuse young girls, he first proceeds to groom her. Before the actual rape happens, he violates her in other ways. The most invasive violation before the rape happens when he enters the bathroom one day while she is having a bath. This is no accident, but rather a calculated move which he makes. 'There wasn't one part of me that could have said no – I couldn't pronounce a sound, a word, I was empty of thought' (97), the narrator recalls. Her agency is stripped by the man's violation. Being a young girl, she does not fully realise what is happening to her, and being alienated from her mother, she cannot confide in her: 'Only later did the feeling of danger invade that emptiness inside me. The idea of having done wrong assailed me from without, in waves. […] I didn't tell her what had happened. Alone in the bathroom I swallowed up those words' (97, 100). The sexual abuse confuses and traumatises the narrator as a child because, whilst she realises that her body has been violated, she is not certain as to *how* she has been violated: to an extent she both enjoys and is disgusted by it, which is part of the deeper psychological trauma of sexual abuse. This is further complicated because, to the narrator, the man is teaching her things about her body which her mother refuses to. It is significant because in this instance the narrator is the 'blank' text upon which the stepfather can inscribe his masculine agency and fits into what Susan Gubar refers to as the 'model of pen-penis writing' ('"The Blank Page" and Issues in Female Creativity' 295).

She explains that this 'model of the pen-penis writing on the virgin page participates in a long tradition identifying the author as a male who is primary and the female as his passive creation – a secondary object lacking autonomy, endowed with often contradictory meaning but denied intentionality' ('"The Blank Page"' 295). The narrator's stepfather, it can be argued, wants to mould her into a fixed model of womanhood.

However, his view on a woman's body is another one which the narrator wants to resist, as she recalls: 'He wanted to teach me what a body is. […] I would like to tell him that I don't want to be a body' (103). She desires to know and understand her body, to feel it, but the only two people with the authority to teach her about her body cannot empower her to claim it. The narrator is further traumatised as she realises that her stepfather's existence, after he has raped her, is still coming between her and her mother. She is not able to articulate the words needed to explain to her mother that she wants to overcome the disconnection from her body which she is experiencing. As she laments to the reader: 'How can I tell her that before he arrived I didn't exist? […] Her shape, her curves and shadow dance before my eyes and prevent me from seeing what l look like myself. Myself. Myself' (134). For the narrator, her stepfather's attention was the only affirmation of her own bodily existence that she was able to obtain. Before he entered their lives, her mother made her belief that she did not truly have a body. After he has raped her, the narrator fantasises about her mother coming to her rescue, taking her side, and killing her husband for what he has done to her daughter. But her mother, indoctrinated by her husband's masculinity, refuses to see the truth, and believe her. Is it at this point that the narrator realises, in order to save herself, she has to completely break free of her mother: 'Separation, like an incision. "I wish you were dead," I tell her' (147). After this the narrator is sent to a boarding school, and she severs ties with her mother until she herself is an adult.

Conclusion

The narrator can only find closure by confronting her past and the complicated relationship she has with her mother. It is only through this confrontation that she will, ironically, be able to 'forget,' and in so doing, move on. As she acknowledges to herself, 'I know that I will not leave here until the past has been completely drained out of me, like a torrent. Until the house has vomited it out. To forget. To no longer remember, to instantly lose memory' (50). Reliving all that has happened between her and her mother in their house offers the narrator a kind of purging. Frigga Haug refers to this delving into the past as 'memory work', explaining that by

> 'stepping back into the past, we embark upon a form of archaeology' that enables us to understand the processes that make us what we are and so change what we are. [Therefore] by 'memory work,' the excavation of 'ideologised' consciousness, we retrieve 'elements of a new image of [self] on the basis of which [we] may possibly be able to construct alternatives for the future.' (quoted in Greene, 'Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory' 300-301)

Through this memory work then, the protagonist can recognise the way in which her mother has sculpted her perception of her own body, much in the same way that she has sculpted her mother's body from a slab of marble. It is significant that it takes her mother's suicide attempt to bring forth reconciliation between them. By excavating her past, the narrator has also realises that her mother is not as 'untouched,' as unaffected, as she had thought. But she only comes to realise this once she has thoroughly confronted the past:

> I will be content to nurture a new image inside me, her despair. I am already conscious that this is the beginning of a new era, the thread that will lead me back to myself and to sculpture. As others recognise hunger or thirst, I can recognise the moment when dumbness becomes speech – that particular kind of language (188).

Finally, she and her mother have discovered a common language that will enable them to reconnect, or even to connect in a way that had previously been impossible for them. This is significant because it can be read as an undermining of the phallocentric expectations surrounding mother-daughter relationships. It is interesting to note the parallel which can be drawn between the novel's personal tragedy of the mother-daughter relationship and the failure of Yugoslavia as the metaphorical mother which was to keep united its many ethnic groups.

Marble Skin, however, does not end on a seemingly perfect note and is exemplary of the open endings of that can be found in many feminist novels. As Lauret explains, open endings 'illustrate that the feminism of these texts is not a matter of a single ideology or theory underlying all; they are not simple narratives of conversion' and are part of the genre of fictions of subjectivity because they exemplify 'a feminist subjectivity which is always positional, provisional, or – in Nancy Miller's words – "subject to change"' (*Liberating Literature* 101). The novel is also characteristic of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of a minor literature, because 'it exists in a narrow space, every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political. Thus the question of the individual becomes even more necessary, indispensable, magnified microscopically, because of an entirely different story stirs within it' ('What is a Minor Literature?' 16).

Chapter III

Literature as Witness and Rape as a Weapon of War in *S. A Novel about the Balkans*

He has stolen your wisdom from you, he has closed your memory to what you were, he has made of you that which is not which does not speak which does not possess which does not write […] He has invented your history. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.

Monique Wittig, *Les Guerilleres* – 89

[…] if war is the negation of humanity, documentary prose is its affirmation.

Drakulić, 'Reading Karahasan' – 27

Drakulić's fourth novel, *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* (published in 1999), is, arguably, the most well-known of her novels. Significantly, the novel was first published in German and English in 1999, and only in Serbo-Croatian a year later, which speaks to the politics around translation and publication of texts from former Yugoslavia. Sanja Bahun explains that the tendency of novels being published in Western European languages before the native language of the authors had a great deal to do with the fact that stories of the

disintegration of Yugoslavia were of great interest to the rest of Europe, and she emphasises the fact that

> […] these texts have a substantial degree of success in the global, and more specifically, European book market, points to a paradoxical dynamic of demand, one that has been consolidating since the break-up of Yugoslavia and that has accompanied, like a melancholic sign, the global dispersal of Yugoslav peoples. ('There Was Once a Country' 64)

However, it is important to bear in mind that portrayals of war-crimes in novels can be problematic in its voyeuristic appeal to the West. As Joseph R. Slaughter emphasises, 'Western-consumer demand […] turns multicultural, postcolonial reading into a kind of humanitarian intervention,' thus commodifying the suffering of others (*Human Rights, Inc.* 35). I argue that it is this demand which accounts for the success and popularity of the novel. Nevertheless, I do not believe that Drakulić's intention was to feed into the Western appetite for reading the suffering of others. In this chapter I aim to illustrate that the novel can be read as a version of testimony, a certain form of witnessing of the atrocities perpetrated against Bosniak women during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, particularly with regards to the lack of the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission. Though violent acts were committed against both men and women of Bosniak ethnicity, the chapter's focus will be on the way in which the conflict quickly became gendered, with Serb forces killing Bosniak men and boys, and taking the women and girls as prisoners. As I go on to illustrate, *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* provides insight into what Bosniak women were forced to suffer at the hands of Serb forces, and is a form of testimony for these women, some of whom Drakulić interviewed from a journalistic perspective before completing her novel. In addition, this chapter will

examine the role that gender politics have to play in the examination of crimes against humanity. Furthermore, I argue that in the novel Drakulić is concerned with what Rosi Braidotti refers to the 'politics of location' (*Metamorphoses* 13), highlighting the significance of the specificity of difference as I defined it in my theoretical chapter.

Turning to one particularly scathing review of the novel, I wish to demonstrate the tensions which exist between the Serb account of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the factual evidence as presented on the part of the Bosniaks. Radmila J. Gorup, a Serb(ian) academic, expresses that Drakulić's novel 'is a journalistic enterprise thinly disguised as a novel,' adding that 'nothing is more upsetting than a fiction writer with a mission' (669). She goes on to say the following:

> Summaries of women's experiences given through 'indirect narrative' are reminiscent of actual press coverage of the rapes in Bosnia. The world of the novel is divided into 'good guys' and 'bad guys.' Occasionally a 'bad' character is presented with some vestiges of humanity […]. However, that quickly evaporates. 'They,' the Serbs, are all brutes; everyone else is good. (669-670)

Gorup ends her review by stating that '[i]deology and fiction are a dangerous mix' (670). As I argue, Drakulić does in fact make use of an 'indirect narrative' in a manner typical of the interviews conducted with Bosniak victims of rape, and that her motives behind the novel is in line with an ideology of 'truth-telling.' What is at play in Gorup's review pertains to the broader argument around who the 'true' perpetrators of the war are. And whilst I acknowledge that crimes were committed by all groups, including the Croat and Bosniak forces, most of the mass killings and mass rapes, as proven by the information

obtained by a number of independent entities, were committed by Serb forces. One such account, for example, was provided by Helsinki Watch,[26] as Jeri Laber explains:

> Although the rapes have been attributed to all sides of the war, the Serbian forces appear to be using rape on the largest scale and with impunity. Whether or not the order of rape comes from the highest authorities, the practice appears to be tacitly condoned, and even encouraged, at the local levels of command. The fact that the rapes often occur before witnesses indicates that the rapists have nothing to fear. (quoted in Benderly, 'Rape, Feminism, and Nationalism' 66)

Whilst reports by such NGOs are tainted by certain ideological goals, independent investigators and journalist, such as Drakulić, have provided similar accounts.

In *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* the reader is presented with a 'survivor narrative' depicting a year in the life of a Bosniak-Serb woman experiencing the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, thus its narration is retrospectively oriented.[27] It is set during 1992, the first year of the war, when the worst of the mass rapes were committed. The protagonist, simply referred to as 'S,' is a primary school teacher in a rural village in Bosnia, who one summer's day is taken, along with the other women, as a hostage by Serb forces. The Bosniak men of the village are summarily executed. Soon after being placed in one of the infamous Serb militia internment camps, in most cases repurposed factories or warehouses, S. becomes a victim of rape and torture. The novel, I argue, is concerned with the protagonist's attempts to remember what had happened, in order to process her traumatic experiences as she goes through different stages of existence during the seven

[26] A private American NGO which followed the Helsinki Accords (signed in 1975).
[27] This was also characteristic of Drakulić's earlier novel, *Marble Skin*.

months of her captivity. At each of these stages in the novel, S. is not in possession of her body, but rather an object to be displaced by men. In her novel, I contend, Drakulić is interested in portraying events which could simultaneously be universal and individual. The universality in the novel is signalled by the lack of personal as well as place names. For example, in the chapter where S. returns to the beginning of the story, the reader is told that it takes place in the 'Village of B., Bosnia.' Similarly, the characters remain unnamed and are simply given a single letter which to refer to them by. As Bahun emphasises, and what is also evident in *Marble Skin*, Drakulić 'evades the traps of sentimentalism in *S.*, focussing instead on describing 'the process of intrapsychic reorganization after a trauma as slow and difficult' ('There Once was a Country' 69). Furthermore, I maintain that the novel stands for a testimony of what Dori Laub refers to as an event 'without a witness' ('An Event without a Witness' 80). Writing about the Holocaust, Laub explains that 'the inherently incomprehensible and deceptive psychological structure of the event precluded its own witnessing, even by its very victims' (80). My aim in this chapter, then, is to examine the ways in which Drakulić's novel achieves this.

I argue that the incorporeal voice of the third-person narrator used by Drakulić is representative of the disembodiment which takes place within the protagonist once the attacks on the Bosniak women begin. Accordingly, the narrator brings across the severe extent of S.'s disconnection from her body as a means of protection against the horrors imposed on her body. In her comparative reading of Drakulić and fellow-Croatian author, Dubravka Ugrešić's novels, Bahun argues that the subjects in these novels, display 'hyper cathected rememberings' of their former country ('There Was Once a Country' 64). Furthermore, and particularly in the case of Drakulić's novel, the narrator employs both 'emotional vignettes [and] dissociated images' in order to illustrate that for the

protagonist a specific kind of 'identity-body traumatisation has taken place' ('There Was Once a Country' 64). Throughout the novel, S.'s memory of the war is brought across to the reader in a series of vignettes of her everyday life. For example, at the very beginning, at the end of May 1992, she states: 'The smell, the smell of dust in the dry air, that is what she will remember. The taste of coffee with too much sugar. The image of women quietly climbing on to the bus, one by one, as if going on an excursion. And the smell of her own sweat' (11).

In a journal article Drakulić explains why writing a novel documenting an aspect of the Yugoslav Wars is of great importance, stating the following:

> Why do we write? Does it make any sense to document the war at all, when it is bound to happen again? My own experience with this war tells me that to write is, above all, to try to establish some kind of order in chaos. In a general sense, writing itself is the proof that human beings can behave rationally, and this might be its only purpose. As it is possible to kill, it is also possible to write. ('Drakulić reading Karahasan' 27)

This strongly echoes what Zimbabwean author Yvonne Vera stresses about the significance writing for women holds in her discussion of contemporary African women's literature. 'Writing,' she underscores, 'offers a moment of intervention' ('Preface' 3), and it is this concern which I endeavour to examine in my analysis of *S.: A Novel about the Balkans*.

The Bosnian War in Context

Writing at the time of the Yugoslav wars, Slavoj Žižek made the following observation about Yugoslavia vis-à-vis Western Europe's opinion of the Balkan republic:

> The fantasy which organised the perception of ex-Yugoslavia is that of the Balkans as the Other of the West: the place of savage ethnic conflicts long ago overcome by civilised Europe, the place where nothing is forgotten and nothing learned, where old traumas are being replayed again and again, where symbolic links are simultaneously devalued (dozens of cease-fires broken) and overvalued (the primitive warrior's notions of honour and pride). (quoted in Srećko Horvat, 'Danke Deutschland!' 19)

The disintegration of Yugoslavia saw wars of secession turn into violent ethnic conflicts. It was a multifaceted breakdown, occurring in part as a result of the forced multiculturalism implemented under the ideal of 'Yugoslavia,' a united realm of Southern Slavic people, as well as the death of Josip Tito, and the failure of the Communist state. The fragmentation of the Balkan republic cannot simply be summarised without an in-depth analysis of the historical background around the various ethnicities and complex politics within Yugoslavia. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I want to focus on the violent nature of the war that took place in Bosnia and Herzegovina[28], between 1992 and 1995, because this period of the war touched Drakulić deeply. Furthermore, I will be paying specific attention to the attack of the Bosniak Muslims by Bosnian Serb[29] forces,

[28] Hereafter 'Bosnia-Herzegovina.'
[29] In this chapter I make use of the terms 'Bosniak,' 'Croat,' and 'Serb' as opposed to 'Bosnian,' 'Croatian,' and 'Serbian' to differentiate between a specific ethnic group as identified during the war, and those citizens living in specific regions of former Yugoslavia.

which were predominantly led by Radovan Karadžić, and supported by Slobodan Milošević of the Serbian government.

Drakulić is clear in her understanding that the wars of secession differed significantly from region to region in the rapidly fragmenting Yugoslavia. As she emphasises:

> War is first of all chaos, but within that chaos there are degrees, extremes, nuances of what one sees and feels. […] Imagine it as two ends of a set of binoculars; if you look through it from one end, you will see faraway things appear close. If you look through it from the other end, you will see the very same objects appear farther away. ('Reading Karahasan' 23)

Whilst the war in Croatia upset her greatly, she turned her focus to the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina precisely because of the way nationalism was being played out upon Bosniak women's bodies. The aggression meted out towards the Bosniaks by Serb soldiers had to do with the perceived differences born out of the rise of Serbian nationalism, according to which the Muslim Bosniaks posed a risk to the existence of the Orthodox Christian Serb nation. This way of differentiating between ethnic groups occurs because, as Bette Denich emphasises,

> nationalist ideologies are exclusive in a symbolic sense, typically defining the relation between peoples and states in terms of hegemony and cultural dominance, [and the] transition from exclusionary metaphor into physical extermination is the transformation of meaning that defines [ethnic cleansing]. ('Dismembering Yugoslavia' 368)

In March 1994, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted a historic resolution condemning all violations of women's human rights and calling for the full integration of women's human rights throughout the monitoring and reporting system which works through the UN Human Rights Centre (Zalewski, '"Well, what is the Feminist Perspective on Bosnia?"' 347). Following the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) declared that the systematic rape and sexual slavery of women during war is a crime against humanity, considered second only to genocide. Several political theorists and feminists insist that it should in fact be considered a form of genocide as it severely impacts the future development of the victimised cultural group. This has been the case for other countries where rape as a weapon of war has been observed, such as during the conflict in Rwanda. By 2008, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia had convicted 45 Serbs of war crimes, most notably for the mass killings of Bosniak men. My focus in this chapter is not on the use of rape as a weapon of war constituting a violation of women's 'human rights,' but rather on the way in which this crime is portrayed in *S.: A Novel about the Balkans*. In other words, I am more concerned with the way in which the novel interrogates the role women's bodies take up during nation-building through ethnic cleansing.

Ethnic conflict following a period of transition from an oppressive government to so-called democracy has occurred in several countries across the globe. During the war, outside observers, such as Amnesty International and the United Nations Security Council, soon realised that the mass rape of Bosniak women and girls was being committed, and that it became a form of ethnic cleansing and a tool of Serbian nationalist politics. Furthermore, women were not just gang-raped but also kept in 'rape camps' for a period of time, and only released once their pregnancies were too far advanced for

abortions. Often, they were released in exchange for Serb prisoners of war. Later, many of these women reported the Serb soldiers telling them that they were planting their 'seeds' in them in order to produce 'Chetnik'[30] babies. These rapes were not incidental to the war but rather a very large part of it, with the number of women and girls who were raped and tortured ranging in the tens of thousands. Several commentators have remarked on the necessity for a change in the legislation of international human rights which would allow for the use of mass rape and the practice of forced impregnation during war to be viewed as a form of genocide.

Rape and the Everyday

Two important questions to ask are: what are the characteristics of wartime rape, and why does it occur on such mass scale? Rape during war or conflict is often distinguished by the overwhelming failure of investigations into the occurrences, and the lack of prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes. However, though this is well true, and although much still needs to be rectified in this regard, the assumption of such claims is that outside of conflict and war, rape as a crime perpetrated against women is dealt with successfully and sufficiently when this, clearly, is not the case. Therefore, as Liz Kelly emphasises, it is important to focus on the 'continuum of sexual violence' which exists even before a state of conflict or war occurs ('The Everyday/Everynightness of Rape' 122). Gail Kligman similarly underscores this, arguing that political 'self-determination in [Eastern Europe] has always been linked to [the] control of women's bodies,' both under the Communism regimes, and the nationalist autocracies which followed them (quoted in Benderly, 'Rape, Feminism, and Nationalism in the War in Yugoslav Successor

[30] 'Chetnik' was the term commonly used to describe a member of the Serbian guerrilla force created in 1903.

States' 65). Consequently, it is necessary to stress the conceptual links that exist between gender subordination and sexual violence in the everyday, and the use of rape as a weapon of war.

I contend that the use of rape during war only becomes a successful weapon of terror because of the socio-cultural concepts of honour and shame that are already attached to women's bodies during times of peace. Therefore, it is crucial to consider what role rape plays within the everyday interactions of men and women during times of peace. Patricia Weitsman argues that, in 'essence, a woman's identity never really stands alone' but rather 'is always juxtaposed by her sexual relationships to men, whether coercive or consensual' ('The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence' 564). Therefore, as Weitsman elucidates, these 'assumptions must already exist to support a policy of mass rape. If they do not, this policy loses its coercive power and may not be as successful in driving families apart or securing ethnic cleansing' (Weitsman, 'The Politics of Identity and Sexual Violence' 564). Additionally, and fundamentally, rape according to Ann Cahill, 'cannot be considered merely an act of violence [precisely] because it is instrumental in the construction of the distinctly feminine body' ('Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body' 43). She continues to explain that rape, or the ever-present threat of rape, has an important function in the development of feminine bodily comportment (43). In *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* this is illustrated, for example, when the protagonist has been moved to what is referred to as the 'women's room' within in the internment camp. Before S. is subjected to rape, or even before she becomes aware that the other women are being raped, she is already cognisant of the potential risk of being raped. She observes the way in which the women around her in the warehouse behave and internalises it herself:

> It is better to become invisible. Indeed, S. notices that instinctively all the women abide by this rule. They walk with hunched shoulders, their eyes lowered, their bodies pressed together, and quiet, making themselves smaller than they are. I have to become as invisible as can be, S. tells herself. She stays as far away from the guards as possible; she thinks that will help her. (20)

The women in the warehouse along with S. conform to a particular bodily comportment which they believe may spare them from harm done at the hands of the Serb soldiers. This is because, as the narrator emphasises, constantly present in the women's minds is the 'fear of men, of what they can do to women' (25). The moment when S. is called out by a soldier to follow him to the 'women's room,' as she has seen other women do without returning to the warehouse, her mannerisms change:

> S. wipes her hands on her skirt, the way housewives do when someone catches them in the middle of making lunch. Or like very old women who wipe their hands on their aprons before shaking hands with an unknown visitor who finds them at the stove. Her hands are clammy. All she can feel are the palms of her hands and her throat. Suddenly she cannot swallow her own saliva. Finally, S. takes a step. (28)

It is important to emphasise, however, that this way of thinking and of acting, often exists before the conflict even begins, and is associated with the state of the feminine body as it is defined within patriarchal, hyper-masculine societies.

The limitations imposed upon a woman in terms of where her body can move freely and safely, are enforced by the potential risk of harm that can be inflicted upon the body by other bodies, in other words, by the bodies of men. In this way, women's bodies are

always-already positioned to be used and expounded upon. The feminine body, therefore, instead of being in any way natural is, in reality, the 'location of inscription' (Cahill, 'Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body' 47). Simone de Beauvoir tells us that it 'is not so much as a body, but as a body subject to taboos, to laws, that a subject is conscious of itself and fulfils itself' (*The Second Sex* 75). In addition, Cahill argues that within

> […] the invisible wall she throws up around her, a woman may consider herself safe; in this space, she has increased control over her body. To go beyond that space is to enter an arena where her body is in danger of being violated. This limited, individual safety zone which determines the smallness of a woman's step, the gathering in of her sitting body, and the daintiness of her gestures mirrors in fact the larger hampering of her mobility. ('Foucault, Rape, and the Construction of the Feminine Body' 54-55)

In the novel, the protagonist and the other women in the 'women's room' who are there with her, do all that is available to them to avoid the soldiers' attention as much as possible, because they have internalised these statements around risk and inherently know that they will be harmed. Importantly, the more that the women in the 'women's room' with S. suffer at the hands of the Serb men, the more they conform to a certain bodily comportment. As S. observes:

> Despite the heat, the girls lie down dressed. As if not one of them wishes to display her naked body. Nakedness reminds them of what they do not want to contemplate, of violence. The body has to be concealed as much as possible, made as invisible, as undesirable as possible. They cannot

> hide from the men at whose disposal they lie. Here women no longer have the right to say no. They hide from themselves, cover themselves up with clothes which in men's hands turn instantly into rags and tatters. (33)

The only semblance of control which the women in the novel have is with regards to what happens to their bodies when the Serb men are not using them, and this becomes their last expression of freedom. At this point in the novel (and in the war), they realise that they are now merely objects to the Serb men – objects of an enemy that need to be defiled. This is clear when S. comes to the realisation that she is, as the narrator emphasises, 'in a storehouse of women, in a room where female bodies were stored for the use of men' (32). Significantly, the danger that is posed to a woman's body is not posed to her body in general, rather, the potential risk towards her body in this instance is always sexualised. In Drakulić's novel, the peril posed to the protagonist and the other Bosniak women's sexual being, and freedom is now informed by the Serb nationalist desire to destroy the 'Other.'

Wartime Rape and Nationalism

As I have argued above, at times of peace the individual body of a woman is in many instances the focus of domination and aggression. During the process of nation-building, this becomes even more intensified. Maria Olujic explains that in the case of Yugoslavia, 'the use of rape as a weapon of war,' rather than being an aberration, instead 'comes directly out of [S]outhern European concepts of sexuality and honour, and without an understanding of these concepts in peacetime culture, wartime behaviour is not understandable' ('Embodiment of Terror' 45-46). These concepts of sexuality and honour, whilst having existed in some form during Communism, are exaggerated as part

of the process of nation-building. In order for postcommunist nationalism to succeed, the intrepid characteristics of men belonging to a particular national or ethnic group have to be emphasised.

Wartime rape may well have become more systematised and organised in late-twentieth century and twenty-first century conflicts yet, as Jonathan Gottschall explains, it is a phenomenon that possesses a certain timeless ubiquity and can be traced back to 'early accounts in the Torah, in Homer, in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles, and in mythological events like the rape of the Sabine women' ('Explaining Wartime Rape' 131). In addition, mass rape in war goes beyond men taking advantage of the weakened position of state security with regards to women who are left unprotected in towns and villages. It goes right to the role of women in a nationalist society, and what may be termed the honour/shame dichotomy. Women are both the source of honour and of shame to the men within a nationalist patriarchal culture. Gottschall further explicates that wartime rape

> […] is credited with spreading debilitating terror, diminishing the resistance of civilians, and demoralising, humiliating, and emasculating enemy soldiers who are thereby shown to have failed in their most elemental protective duties. Further, mass rape is said to cast blight on the very roots of the afflicted culture, affecting its capacity to remain coherent and to reproduce itself. By raping women, soldiers split the familial atoms of which every society is composed. ('Explaining Wartime Rape' 131)

It is also important to raise the issue of the hypermasculinisation of military men in relation to this. As Nancy Hartsock observes, 'masculine virility and violence are

commonly linked together and the traditional values of masculinity are systematically invoked in basic training in the military' ('Masculinity, Heroism and the Making of War' 352). Therefore, it is instilled in men that for them to be viewed as a 'true' soldier within the military, they must be 'not-woman.' In other words, it is during war that men are especially encouraged to be ultra-masculine.

When conflict breaks out, women are no longer viewed individually but rather collectively. For that reason, during times of war the concept of lineage can be extended to include an entire ethnic group. Women become collective representations of the nation as well as cultural embodiments of the enemy 'Other.' Furthermore, women are viewed as nonbeings in both instances; their bodies are carriers of complex cultural values and are spatial representations of the nation. In this way the fungibility of women is revealed. During ethnic conflict a soldier, by raping a woman belonging to the culture of the enemy Other, is, as Sondra Hale explains, 'committing one of a series of acts to annihilate difference, that is, culture, while perhaps augmenting his own' ('Rape as a Marker and Eraser of Difference' 110). Consequently, 'annihilating women's dignity and rights through a violation of her body is the same as annihilating the culture' ('Rape as a Marker and Eraser of Difference' 111). Thus, in raping, torturing, and impregnating the Bosniak women, the Serb militiamen are engaging in the process of destroying the former's culture and national identity, thereby strengthening their own.

In the context of former Yugoslavia Julie Mostov explains that, a 'dominant characteristic of the national warrior expressed in contemporary war propaganda in Serbia and Croatia is his virility' ('Sexing the nation/desexing the body' 93). Furthermore, Mostov expounds that this national warrior is regarded as being 'brave, ready to expose himself to the dangers of warfare and tests of his manhood,' and be initiated 'into the world of real men

comes with readiness to demonstrate this bravery to comrades on the battlefield' (93). An example of this in Drakulić's novel can be found in the young man who initially confronts S. in her home at the beginning of the conflict. At first, he is timid and even respectful towards her, making use of the formal Serbo-Croat term of address. However, once he is in the company of other, older, militiamen, his attitude towards S. changes: 'He is gruff with her in front of the other men, and now uses the familiar *ti* when speaking to her. His voice is deeper, as befits someone giving orders. S. sees that he feels proud to be in the dangerous company of adult men' (My italics, 10). Fundamentally, the novel highlights the point that the face of war is always the face of a man. Drakulić's protagonist realises this even before the young Serb man has modified his behaviour towards her:

> S. is still standing next to the stove as if paralysed. She does not dare move or speak. She realises that what she is looking at here is the face of war. Somebody simply opens the door of your apartment and war enters your life, enters you. She knows that from this moment on, there are no more obstacles standing between her and war. (7)

At this point S. is already experiencing a type of violation of her bodily space. Her private space is invaded by an enemy soldier because, in nationalism, women become the territories upon which the war is waged; the female body becomes a site of political struggle, and for the protagonist, this is the beginning of this process of inscription and rewriting.

Within nationalist rhetoric and, specifically within the Yugoslavian context, women are symbols of culture. Therefore, as I argued earlier, the way in which violence takes on a gendered nature during war, focussing on women's bodies, comes as a result of the peacetime meanings of sexuality and what it means to have a 'woman's' body. In addition,

in nationalism, Zillah Eisenstein explicates, 'women are the mothers of *all* children of the nation. [The] fictive power of motherhood stands against the varied realities of women's experiences in society,' and thus, nationalism 'reduces women to their motherhood' (*Hatreds* 51). This became especially true in the case of the Bosnian war when, in an even more perverted reinterpretation of this basic tenet of nationalism, Serb soldiers used the bodies of the Bosniak women as another way to reproduce the Serb nation by consciously attempting to impregnate them. Significantly then, the forced impregnation of these women by Serb men served to humiliate Bosniak men, to destroy their lineage, read as *territory*, and to ensure the superiority of the Serb nation. S. comes to realise this later in the novel:

> The moment the armed men appeared in their village, each one of them had ceased to be a person. Now they are even less so, they have been reduced to a collection of similar beings of the female gender, of the same blood. Blood alone is important, the right blood of the soldiers versus the wrong blood of the women. (35)

The irony, of course, lies in the fact that the protagonist, like so many people living in Bosnia-Herzegovina at the time, was of 'mixed' ethnicity. In other words, people were not labelled as belonging to a specific ethnic group such as 'Serb' or 'Bosniak' because it was difficult to determine this and had no importance during Communism. In the novel, this subject comes up when the protagonist is talking to another Bosniak woman she knows in the refugee camp: 'G. suddenly tells her that her mother is Serbian. I wasn't even aware of it – until the war, says G., and then looks down at the sarma. My mother was Serbian too, says S.' (84-85). This reinforces the important point that national identity is an imagined one and makes up a great part of the national story. To perpetuate this myth,

the Serbs had to define those who were no seen as being a 'pure' Serb, usually someone who had some Bosniak heritage, in order to remove the threat such a person posed to the national narrative.

Another important issue which is endemic to rape in both wartime and the everyday, is that of shame. The shame of being raped is a significant one in patriarchal discourse, shifting blame from the perpetrator (man) onto the victim (woman). In the novel, before S. herself is raped, the other women intimate what happens to those women who are taken away be the militiamen. However, it is something the women do not want to discuss:

> If word got around that they had been defiled they would not be able to go back home to their villages, their husbands or parents. So they hold their tongues, they really believe they will go back home, S. thinks to herself. She thinks she can tell which women it happened to by how they suddenly fall silent if the subject should happen to arise, or avert their eyes from the person talking. Their careful skirting of the subject, their avoidance of certain words, their look, betrays them [. . .] the secret signs of what they so *wrongly* call their 'disgrace.' (My italics 27)

It is significant to note that S. and/or the narrator consider the word 'disgrace' as a completely wrong description of what happens to the women, precisely because it implies that the blame lies with the women and not the men raping them. This, I believe, is an attempt on the part of the narrator to get the reader to interrogate these highly problematic beliefs. Olujic explains the reason behind why women are given the blame when they are raped:

> [Because] a woman's body is a microcosm of her lineage, and the body's weak points being its orifices, by dishonouring a woman, a man symbolically dishonours the whole lineage. This is partly due to women's reproductive power, [women being the mothers of a nation, as already mentioned]. [And, underlying] the whole honour complex is the fear that somehow a man from another group will impregnate a woman and make fools of the whole group by forcing them to raise an 'alien' child. In this way the competing lineage would have permanently invaded the victim's lineage. ('Embodiment of Terror' 45)

Significantly, as Joanne Sharpe explains, in re-emerging nation-states, 'women's bodies and the symbolic body of the nation become significantly enmeshed in hegemonic nationalist discourse' ('Gendering Nationhood' 100). And this is precisely what happens with S. and the other Bosniak women. Furthermore, the forced impregnation of the Bosniak women, however, was predominantly ideological and symbolic in its physicality. The Serb soldiers did not care about what would happen to the children they fathered. Drakulić's protagonist realises this once she has given birth to a boy:

> S. cannot take her eyes off the child. What will happen to him? How many such children will be born without their fathers ever knowing about them? M. once told her that while they were raping her the soldiers had told her that she would give birth to their Serbian child and that they would force all of these Muslim women to give birth to Serbian children. Where are those soldiers now? If children are born, they will be born to these women and they, not their unknown fathers, will decide their fate. Not one of these children will know who their real father is. The mothers

> will disown them and give them up for adoption. Somebody else will give them a name and a country. (97)

The children born of these rapes, instead of being assumed into the Serb nation, rather become the objects of the Bosniak men's shame, in the same way to the women who gave birth to them are now repositories of shame. Geraldine Heng and Janadas Devan refer to this as 'uterine nationalism,' a nationalism which is created 'out of the recesses of the womb' ('State Fatherhood' 349). This version of nationalism plays on the idea that women are the bearers of the nation, and thus from their wombs they propagate it.

When her ordeal in the women's room has come to an end, after being exchanged for Serb prisoners of war, S. is uncertain of herself, stripped of her rights to her own body: 'S. cannot imagine what peace might mean for all these women who have no place to go back to and yet are jostling to leave for the unknown' (61). Drakulić's protagonist has come to the realisation that the assertion of male dominance over her has changed her status as a woman irrevocably:

> Her body lies in the bed like an inanimate object, an emptied bellow or shopping bag. Nothing has changed with her departure from the camp. Her body is still in their power, even more so now. Only now does S. understand that a woman's body never really belongs to the woman. It belongs to others — to the man, the children, the family. And in wartime to soldiers. Five months. A distant and remote verdict has condemned her to this condition from which there is no escape. S. feels as if someone has returned her to the camp, to the 'women's room.' She has been betrayed. This is war, inside her, in her own womb. And they are winning... (70)

S. is no longer the same person she was before being taken prisoner; her state of being has drastically been altered.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's Missing TRC

Before considering the role which *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* might play with regards to the issue of testimony, I wish to first discuss the context of the 'missing' truth and reconciliation commission of Bosnia-Herzegovina. During the early 1990s, the world saw the rise of truth and reconciliation commissions charged with dealing with the aftermath of oppressive violence in transitionary societies. However, as pointed out by Jasna Dragovic-Soso, whilst some truth and reconciliation commissions failed to accomplish their objectives, many others were not even realised ('History of a Failure' 1). This was the case for the attempt made at establishing a truth and reconciliation commission following the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was not realised beyond a draft proposal. It was while the Bosnian War was still raging in former Yugoslavia that the suggestion of creating a truth commission was first brought up. This idea was raised while discussions around the creation of a war-crimes tribunal were taking place. A truth commission would, theoretically, do what a criminal tribunal could not. Nonetheless, the creation of an international criminal tribunal took priority over a truth and reconciliation commission, leading to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia being established by Resolution 827, which was passed on the 25th of May 1993. Field investigators began conducting their research in July of 1994. The Bosnian War ended with the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia-Herzegovina (also known as the Dayton Agreement) on the 14th of December 1995.[31]

[31] It is of significance to note that the Dayton Agreement coincided with the establishment of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

South African former judge, Richard Goldstone, was nominated to serve as the first chief prosecutor of the ICTY.[32] Goldstone, who felt that it was not enough for a criminal tribunal to deal with the crimes perpetrated, but that more was needed, stated the following:

> In addition to criminal prosecutions, it is necessary for a damaged society to arrive at a wider understanding of the causes of its suffering. For no matter how well the tribunal does its job, the scope of history is far broader than proving the guilt of a few specific individuals […]. The tribunal can tell an important part of the story but it is equally important that the people come to their own consensus about their recent history and acknowledge the abuses suffered by all victims. ('Ethnic Reconciliation Needs the Help of a Truth Commission' 1998)

As mentioned before, the situation in the former Yugoslavia, as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina, was a complex one, with complicated ethnic, political, and religious divisions. It would therefore be necessary to look further than only the facts of the crimes; the relationships between community members would have to be examined. More importantly, the establishment of a truth commission would allow for the testimonies of those who suffered injustices, as well as the confessions of those who perpetrated them, to be illuminated. This would, theoretically, be essential, because a criminal tribunal is not designed to be victim-centred; rather, it is first concerned with establishing the guilt of particular war-criminals, and then with bringing about the appropriate punishment.[33] Commentators have noted the ICTY's shortcomings with regards to the punishment of the men in charge of systematic practice of mass rape.

[32] His most notable prosecutions were that of Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić.
[33] As a point of note, the maximum sentence that the ICTY could impose was life imprisonment.

At the time of the ICTY's first trials, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South African became the exemplar for other post-conflict countries attempting to bring order and justice. As Tinyiko Maluleke explains, the 'temptation to make the South African TRC both a model and a success story on the African continent is a great one, seeing that a significant part of the world is in dire need of "success stories" in the field of conflict resolution and peace-making' ('Can Lions and Rabbits Reconcile?' 195). Additionally, Alex Boraine, one of the 'architects' of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, asserts that

> […] no new [truth] commission can ignore the South African model in its own deliberations. It is not so much that the South African experience should be duplicated but rather that, because the commission broke new ground and had the most ambitious programme of any commission before or since, there are many insights to be gleaned from its experience. ('South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission from a Global Perspective' 150)

It was therefore argued that the creation of a Bosnian truth and reconciliation commission, following South Africa's example, would enable Bosnia-Herzegovina to commence with post-war healing and nation-building by preventing the ethnic ideology of either the Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croats to dominate. This would serve, as Neil J. Kritz and Jakob Finci argue, to 'bring […] citizens and peoples to a position of constructively considering a common future,' thereby helping to 'reconstruct [a] multi-ethnic society' ('A Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Bosnia and Herzegovina' 53). However, I am not as assured that a TRC would have been successful following the Bosnian war.

There are several mitigating factors as to why a Bosnian truth and reconciliation commission never went past its draft law. The two dominant factors involved the ICTY's resistance to a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as the fact that the push for a TRC overwhelmingly came from the 'outside.' This latter factor, the overwhelmingly international agenda, together with the fact that there had been no change in regime,[34] presented, as Dragovic-Soso explains, 'the TRC's advocates with a paradox' ('History of a Failure' 7). This was because, as Dragovic-Soso expounds, in order to

> […] be legitimate, a Bosnian truth commission needed to be perceived locally as an authentic national institution, yet the country's nationalist politicians (many of whom had been in power during the war) could not be relied upon to drive the process forward. ('History of a Failure' 7)

Additionally, 'speaking' truth is never enough. 'The problem is' Erin Daly emphasises, 'that the truth neither is nor does all that we expect of it […], and [therefore] it cannot necessarily accomplish the ambitious goals we assign it' ('Truth Skepticism' 23). Furthermore, the unfortunate reality is that 'after war and ethnic cleansing,' as Fletcher and Weinstein elucidate, 'truth is always contested, even when the facts are revealed in a court of law' ('Empathy and Rehumanization after Mass Violence' 317). In the case of the Bosnian war there has been significant resistance from the Serbs to accept the 'truth' of their war crimes,[35] and this has greatly contributed to the failure of a Bosnian Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Literature as Witnessing

[34] The regime predominantly consisted of Serb men.
[35] I intimated this in my discussion of Gorup's review of the novel earlier in this chapter.

It is useful at this point to turn to a context which I am familiar with, that of the Republic of South Africa, in order to provide a discussion around the role literature might play in the process of truth and reconciliation. Referring to the South African context, author André P. Brink suggests that the 'silent places' left unspoken within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission opens up the opportunity for creative writers to go 'beyond the facts', thereby creating a 'real' that is also 'imagined' ('Stories of History' 30). This is possible because, 'history, memory, and language intersect so precisely as to be almost indistinguishable' ('Stories of History' 32). Brink further elucidates that the '"origins" of history, as recovered through memory, are encoded in language,' because 'each was a condition for the others' (32). This enables the literary to engage with testimony and witnessing because, in Andrew van der Vlies' words, 'the role of the literary is most usefully apprehended as a kind of advocacy or hospitality, an openness to hearing – to waiting for – the voice of the victim' ('On the Ambiguities of Narrative and of History' 954). Whilst *S.: A Novel about the Balkans* constitutes a fictionalised account of the mass rape which took place in 1992 in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I maintain that it provides a potential voice for the women who were the victims of this ethnic targeting.

Although there is no archive of a Bosnian TRC, I argue that Drakulić attempted to create her own version by interviewing Bosniak women who had been raped by Serb men during the war. In addition, she also read the testimonies of women that had been gathered by the Centre for War Crimes in Bosnia. The novel, I argue, therefore takes on the role of the 'interviewer-listener' which Laub argues 'takes on the responsibility for bearing witness [to] that [which] previously the narrator felt [she] bore alone, and therefore could not carry out' ('An Event without a Witness' 85). She adds that it is this 'encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes

possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing' (85). Furthermore, Laub explicates that there are 'three separate, distinct levels of witnessing […]: the level of being witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself' ('An Event without a Witness' 75). Drakulić participates in two of these levels of witnessing. By interviewing Bosniak women herself, she becomes a witness to the testimonies, and by using the testimonies gathered by the Centre for War Crimes, as well as by attending the trials of several Serb men accused of mass rapes held at The Hague, she becomes a witness to the process of witnessing. Making use of these testimonies then, Drakulić wrote *S. A Novel about the Balkans*, thereby creating, in Mark Sanders' words, a kind of 'witnessing,' and an 'openness to hearing' (*Ambiguities of Witnessing* 6) the voices of the victims of rape and torture. This form of testimony is fundamental because, as Sander notes, fiction becomes 'the condition of [the] possibility of truthful testimony' (6). Consequently, I have illustrated that through *S.: A Novel about the Balkans*, Drakulić attempts to present a certain kind of survivor narrative which was lacking from the trials held at The Hague.

Conclusion

In her study on the role of gender and truth commissions conducted in 2006, Vasuki Nesiah, at the International Centre for Transitional Justice, concluded that

> […] many truth commissions have failed women [because], the crimes they have suffered are under-reported, their voices are rendered inaudible, their depiction in commission reports is one-dimensional, and their needs and goals are deprioritised in recommendations for

> reparations, reform, and prosecutions. (*Truth Commissions and Gender* 41)

This further illustrates the problematic nature of international human rights laws. Rape as a weapon of war is still very much a serious threat to girls and women in contemporary times in several regions across the world. Currently being witnessed, for example, are cases such as the rape and sexual enslavement of Nigerian women and girls by Boko Haram militants, and of Yazidi women and girls by fighters for Isis. As I have argued throughout this chapter, nationalism poses great danger to women precisely because women's bodies are seen as objects in the process of nation-building.

As a result of her experiences of torture and gang rape, Drakulić's protagonist has completely changed the way in which she now views her own body. The reality of the status of the feminine body and the ways in which it is used and appropriated have been revealed to her. S. disassociates from the rest of the world, her world, and her body. She soon realises this: 'More clearly than ever before she feels stripped of her right to herself, completely dispossessed of her own body' (31). And as she lies in the hospital bed of the maternity ward in Stockholm, she makes this final declaration: 'There is so much she could tell her about a body that lives independently of a person's will, about the way a body can be enslaved which is known only to women' (96). In her novel then, Drakulić is creating a sort of archive of the Bosniak women's experiences, articulating experiences that cannot be articulated by the victims, and thus exposing a version of the truth of what happened during the Bosnian War, which has not been brought to light through a truth-and-reconciliation committee. This is a significant endeavour on Drakulić's part, tying into what Kristeva has to say about the importance of literature. 'The text,' she argues, 'is a practice that could be compared to a political revolution: the one brings about in the

subject what the other introduces into society,' and 'one cannot be transformed without the other' (*Revolution in Poetic Language* 17). Consequently, I have illustrated in this chapter that through *S.: A Novel about the Balkans*, Drakulić specifically emphasises the position women are placed in during the process of nation-building as nationalism's first victims as part of her feminist concerns around writing the bodies of women. Together with *Marble Skin*, Drakulić's two novels offers insight into the roles women's bodies come to play in different contexts: peacetime and during war.

Chapter IV
Between Nationalism and Feminism in *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*

[T]o make a long story short, the topic of my lecture today, ladies and gentlemen, is, as noted in the program, 'Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex' […].

Zabuzhko, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* – 30

Sparking much controversy when it was published in 1996,[36] *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* was the first Ukrainian best-seller to be written by a woman, quickly making Oksana Zabuzhko one of the best-known authors in postcommunist Ukraine today. Several critics have suggested that the novel is the first serious attempt at raising the question of what Ukrainian feminism might look like.[37] In the novel the reader is presented with a confessional monologue given in the form of stream-of-consciousness. It is told from the perspective of a female Ukrainian poet and academic, named Oksana, who has come to

[36] It was published in English in 2011.
[37] See Andrew Baruch Wachtel, *Remaining Relevant after Communism* (2006).

the United States on a Fulbright scholarship to teach Ukrainian literature. The protagonist's name invites us to read her narrative experiences as pseudo-biographically of the author's. In this way, the novel might be read as a reproduction of Zabuzhko's own life. Additionally, the narrator's rambling monologue throughout the novel mirrors the fragmented identity of a person subjected to domination and marginalisation by another ethnic group.

It is significant to note that the novel is as much about a woman's body as it is about writing and creating, in which the fusion of the poetic voice and the voice of the intellectual takes place. In her review of the novel, Svitlana Kobets suggests that Zabuzhko has done away with the 'melodramatic overtones that have become almost canonical in Ukrainian literature,' and, instead, has instilled in her novel 'an extremism of method which consistently undermines this time-(dis)honoured national convention' ('Review' 182). She goes on to argue that what Zabuzhko is doing in the novel is to employ the technique of defamiliarisation as the 'criterion for reevaluating the issues under discussion' (182). Therefore, to some extent the novel may be read as a parody of the melodramatic novel because of its overdramatisation of the main concerns by the narrator. This, however, is difficult to claim with certainty because of the contradictions and ambiguities which can be found throughout the novel, particularly because the novel resists interpretation.

Moreover, the novel combines the story of a failed love affair with that of Ukrainian national consciousness discourse, and the characters become platforms for a national postcolonial politics where gender identity clashes with cultural identity. It can be argued that Zabuzhko's anti-colonial focus ties into her views on national consciousness and her attempts at formulating a version of nationalist feminism. The aim of this chapter then is

to examine the ways in which *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* might be read as an attempt at defining national consciousness and identity in Ukraine from a postcommunist perspective. Furthermore, I endeavour to explore the questions of trauma, on both a collective, national level, as well as the trauma of being an individual, and especially a woman, which are raised in the novel. Tied into this, the issue of identity politics and identity formation in what may now be termed 'postcolonial' Ukraine will additionally be examined. Finally, there is the contentious issue of whether the novel is a clear example of a feminist text. Several critics have argued that Zabuzhko is presenting a form of nationalist feminism in her novel, bringing together the quest for a new, postcommunist, post-Russian national identity, and an examination of the role which the colonised woman's body comes to play in this nation-building project. However, as I endeavour to illustrate, the novel fails to provide an adequate reconciliation between nationalism and feminism.

In an article written in 2007, Zabuzhko reflects on her novel stating that when she wrote *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* 'I tortured myself over the Ukrainian "loser's complex,"' ('Time to go Down to the Cellar'). This statement, written more than a decade after the novel was published, provides some insight into why *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* is such a problematic novel. At this stage it is useful to turn to Elleke Boehmer's argument for the 'writerliness' of 'national consciousness' (*Stories of Women* 145). Through this phrase, Boehmer infers that in a postcolonial context, the nation depends on novelistic narratives and plots in order to construct a new sense of the nation's meaning. Furthermore, Richard Kearney, quoting Hayden White, emphasises that narrative plot, or 'story,' is 'a process of "selection and arrangement of data from the *unprocessed historical record* in the interest of rendering the record more comprehensible to an *audience* of a particular kind" (quoted in Kearney, *On Stories* 85). Kearney goes on to explain that where 'a so-called "chronicle"

was content to report a sequence of happenings as they occurred, "story" contrives to insert a specific sense of perspective and purpose into the otherwise aimless chronology' (85). Following from this, I argue that Zabuzhko's novel is an attempt to convey Ukrainian postcolonial trauma to the reader. Uilleam Blacker, in his analysis of the novel, explains this, stating that

> [The] body becomes a space of conflict, of power relations, a field of battle between colonised and coloniser. The colonising Russian-Communist powers inflict physical violence on this territory in order to control it and the culture inscribed in it; the anti-colonial discourse struggles to reclaim it and use it as a space of resistance. […] In these power struggles the woman herself becomes a passive space, a blank surface on which to inscribe, erase, and reinscribe political and cultural discourses, and it is within the confines of the domestic space that this is allowed to happen. ('Nation, Body, Home' 498)

Several feminist critics, such as Alexandra Hrycak and Maria G. Rewakowicz, have maintained that the novel's main concerns are centred around the focus on female sexuality in a patriarchal postcolonial context, and focus on how a woman's body fits into the problem of postcommunist Ukrainian identity politics and national consciousness. Moreover, as Hrycak and Rewakowicz go on to emphasise, the novel is significant precisely because,

> […] for the first time in Ukrainian fiction, the perspective of a woman intellectual is heard not only on romance or sex, but on the patriarchal marginalisation of women and the colonial handicaps of men, that is, on complexes that distort the behaviour of both genders alike. ('Feminism,

> Intellectuals and the Formation of Micro-Publics in Postcommunist Ukraine' 326)

The title of the novel reveals the topic to the reader in that it signals the relationship between a Ukrainian woman's body and the issue of national and cultural reinvention, and it was the title which led to the controversies about the novel. As Zabuzhko states in an interview with the English translator of her novel, Halyna Hryn,

> '[…] the deceptive and comic title […] has misled so many critics, to the point that I was dubbed by some "a pornographic writer" […]. And then others meticulously counted up the "sexual scenes" in the text and discovered that there were, in fact, two of them, each no longer than a page and a half' ('A Conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko' 17).

Contrary to this, however, is Zabuzhko's own statement behind the purpose of her novel. When told that *Fieldwork* has been claimed by Ukrainian feminists as a sort of manifesto, she replied with the following:

> 'What I attacked [in the novel] was, basically, a system of social lies extending to the point of mental rape, and affecting both men and women. That is why I don't divide my readers along male/female lines. I don't believe that intelligence is gender-specific – women, too, know quite well how to protect patriarchal standards with the utmost bile against their "dissident" sisters.' (Hryn, 'A Conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko' 21-22)

Nevertheless, commentators contend that Zabuzhko's statement is in no way a negation of feminism. Instead, they argue that the novel shows a concern for not only the effects

that colonisation has on women, but also what it does to the men of an oppressed group. As Hrycak and Rewakowicz maintain, in the novel, although

> [Mykola] is nationally conscious, he nonetheless suffers from inferiority complexes that leave him unable to satisfy her. Indeed, he is sexually abusive. The novel implies that his inability to fulfil her and his abusive behaviour stem from that fact that a colonial subject is not a free subject. [Mykola] has interiorised imperial abuse and in turn becomes an abuser himself. ('Feminism, Intellectuals and the Formation of Micro-Publics in Postcommunist Ukraine' 326)

Consequently, the body of the colonised woman is doubly oppressed, both by the coloniser and the colonised man who needs a scapegoat upon which to take out his frustrations of being emasculated under foreign oppression.

However, as Blacker rightly emphasises, Zabuzhko's attitude towards feminism in the novel is problematic and ambiguous 'precisely because of its cultural agenda' ('Nation, Body, Home' 492). Blacker further highlights that the

> […] problematic relationship with feminist ideas is most pronounced […] in relation to national identity and the colonial situation. Zabuzhko's narrator consciously embeds herself in the colonial-gender conflicts […]. She actively inscribes the cultural narrative of anti-colonial resistance (or postcolonial survival) on the surface of her own body by putting up with the physical and emotional pain inflicted by her emasculated lover for the sake of the continuation of the race of 'Ukrainian intelligentsia. (492-493)

Questions such as where Ukraine stands now that it has its independence, specifically in relation to the West, and what is to become of the Ukrainian ethno-linguistic identity, are raised by the novel's narrator. Interwoven among these questions is an attempt to construct a feminist consciousness as it relates to the nationalist cause.

Ukrainian *Nonexistence*

In her interview with Hryn, Zabuzhko explains the approach she took with regards to writing the history of Ukraine: '[…] in *Fieldwork* I did attack, quite intentionally and with full awareness, the hidden traumas and the most intimate (apparently self-defensive!) delusions of a considerable part of a nation' ('A Conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko' 21). In this sentence Zabuzhko encapsulates the tensions inherent in the novel, signalling the problem of expressing the inexpressible. Ukrainians, it can be argued, take up the position of the 'Other' to the Russians. Yet at the same time, their own identity is erased by Russians who often refer to Ukrainians as 'little Russians.' Ukraine has always been considered part of Russia and its culture and language, rather than a separate ethnic group.[38] Additionally, as George Grabowicz emphasises, Ukraine's past is a matter of Ukraine being 'ever the object, not the subject of history' ('Ukrainian Studies: Framing the Contexts' 675). This may begin to explain the protagonist, Oksana's, behaviour in the novel, demonstrating the erratic and contradictory conduct of a traumatised postcolonial woman, and ties in with what Ranjoo Sedou Herr has to say about 'Third-World'[39] feminists. According to Herr, Third-World feminists 'are firmly ensconced in their own culture, not only in the banal sense that their identities are intricately tied to their culture, but also in the sense that their particular feminist agenda makes sense only within their

[38] See Vitaly Chernetsky, 'Opening the Floodgates: The New Ukrainian Writing' (1997), 'Ukrainian Literature at the End of the Millennium: The Ten Best Works of the 1990s' (2002), and George G. Grabowicz 'Ukrainian Studies: Framing the Contexts' (1995).

particular culture' ('The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism' 151). This accounts for why *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* is such a problematic and contradictory novel when attempting to present an examination of it. Similarly, I argue that Zabuzhko's feminist concerns are specific to her context as a Ukrainian woman born and raised during (Russian) Communist rule, and her texts should be examined with this in mind.

The novel is structured in such a way that it comes across as a speech being given to an invisible audience and is signalled by the narrator's use of the phrase 'ladies and gentlemen.' In this speech Oksana paints a picture of Ukraine as the eternal victim of Russian-Soviet domination. She refers to this problem as 'the eternal Ukrainian *curse of nonexistence*' (34). According to her, this curse is 'the Ukrainian choice […] between *nonexistence* and an *existence that kills you* […]' (46). What the narrator is highlighting here is the question of Ukrainian nationalism. From her perspective it is implied that postcommunist Ukrainians can either choose to carry on with a life of obscurity following the collapse of the USSR, or they can join the global movement for national consciousness happening all across the former Eastern Bloc by reviving interest in the literary texts which were previously suppressed and banned by the Soviets.

The narrator is greatly in favour of a nationalist revival movement, and she emphasises this to the reader/audience:

> I'm making the point, ladies and gentlemen, that it's not such a great thrill to belong to a beaten nation, as the fox in the folktale said, the unbeaten rides on the back of the beaten – and that's what the beaten one deserves, the problem is that in the meantime that beaten one manages to sing, let's say, the ballad of the misfortunate captives, and in this way – legitimises his own humiliated position, because art, don't you

> know, always legitimises, in the eyes of an outsider, the life that gave it birth; and in that fact lies its, that is, art's, gre-eat [sic] deception. (116)

She is concerned about the way in which Ukrainian literature perpetuates the view of her people as weak and oppressed. Here Oksana is attempting to satirise the tradition of the Ukrainian melodrama I gestured at earlier. However, this reads as sarcasm rather than actual satire, and presents a certain monological, self-loathing. She is also questioning how Ukrainian arts have been portrayed and received, specifically in relation to the West. Instead of lamenting their fate, the narrator-protagonist is suggesting that Ukrainian artists and writers reclaim their traditions and make them great once again.

In the 1930s the Ukrainian intelligentsia, including its writers, became the focus of the Soviet purges, and by the end of the decade, about four fifths of them had been eliminated. In the novel, Oksana laments this, stating: '[And] anyway, how much of that Ukrainian intelligentsia is there among us anyway, pitiful, forcibly ***dragged back*** against the current of history – a tiny group and even that scattered: a dying species, almost-extinct clan' (77). Throughout the novel, the narrator provides the reader with these brief eruptions of tragic moments in the Ukrainians' history under the Soviets, playing around with the national tragedy, but also providing context for the audience. Ukraine's great 'historical myth' can be found in the image of the Cossack, and, indeed, in the novel, Oksana makes reference to this image at several points, for example, when she quotes a stanza from a well-known Ukrainian poem, which reads: '[W]ring your hands, every finger too; you'll not find, my dear girl, a Cossack's love more true […]' (46-47). The narrator also highlights the Ukrainians' past by making use of many traditional sayings that emerged during their oppression, for example, when she states: '[…] "if you could just give me a drink of water, because I'm so hungry I don't even have anywhere to stay," as the saying goes […]' (121).

Such a saying was born out of the Great Famine of the 1930s. The kind of nostalgia that Zabuzhko's protagonist participates in is what Svetlana Boym refers to as 'restorative nostalgia' (*The Future of Nostalgia* 41). Boym explains that this type of nostalgia 'characterises national and nationalist revivals all over the world, [engaging] in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to nationalist symbols and myths, [and therefore] manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past […]' (41). The traditions that are fostered in this environment are, according to Boym, 'characterised by a higher degree of symbolic formalisation and ritualization than the actual peasant customs and conventions after which they were patterned' (42). The intellectualisation and romanticisation of the poor and suffering peasant is a motif which the narrator uses throughout the novel, however it is not clear whether she does so in earnest or as parody.

Oksana perpetually raises Ukrainians' past of Soviet oppression throughout the novel, sorrowfully asking the audience, 'what happened to all of them afterward, did they all really die out in the 1933 Famine? Did they perish in the camps, in the NKVD holding cells, or did they simply work themselves to extinction on the collective farms?' (89). She also provides the reader with insight into what she perceives as the Ukrainian mentality under the Soviets, stating that:

> Fear came early. Fear was passed on in the genes, one was to fear all beyond the immediate family circle – anyone who expressed any degree of interest in you was in fact spying for the KGB to find out what's really going on at home and then those bad men will come again and put Daddy in prison. Especially suspicious were those who tried to strike up 'liberal' conversations. (143)

For the narrator, the national memory and consciousness of the Ukrainians are entrenched, almost at a biological level. Thus, the decisions which Oksana makes throughout the novel are all in one way or another governed by her desire to resurrect what she perceives as the Ukrainian ethnic identity. She presents this desire as though it is a compulsion that cannot be controlled. In this way, the Ukrainian national discourse becomes tied in with the language of her body.

The Body

Earlier in this thesis I suggested that the first-person, fictional autobiographic narrative mode is employed by feminist writers in order to convey the sense of their own personal and political experiences. Or, as Maria Lauret explains, 'first person narratives construct a feminist subject who is in the process of becoming a knowing subject' (*Liberating Literature* 102), the emphasis on 'being in the process.' Zabuzhko, in her interview with Hryn, explicitly states why she chose to make use of autobiographical elements, such as her own name and academic history, in *Fieldwork*:

> 'For you see, if the novel was to articulate certain things which Ukrainian literature has never articulated before, and be heard, all these dark and dirty secrets HAD [sic] to be pronounced "in the first person," or as part of the author's most personal existential experience. Or, to put it briefly: to win the reader's trust, you sometimes need to pay with your own blood. In the end, that's what literature is all about, isn't it?' (Hryn 20)

What is important to note here is the fact that Zabuzhko is hinting at the unreliability of herself the author as well as that of her narrator. This contributes to the resistance to interpretation that can be found throughout the novel. J. M. Coetzee, whose own works blend the fictional and the autobiographical, questions the possibility of a 'true life-story,'

stating that autobiography 'is a kind of self-writing in which you are constrained to respect the facts of your history. But which facts? All the facts? No. All the facts are too many facts. You choose the facts insofar as they fit in with your evolving purpose' (*Doubling the Point* 18). Furthermore, Coetzee concludes that all 'autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography' (*Doubling the Point* 391).

Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex begins with the narrator, Oksana's, insinuation that she is suffering from depression. This depression can be traced back to both her having left her homeland for a life in the Unites States, as well as the deeply troubling relationship that she has with her Ukrainian lover, Mykola. The relationship with Mykola is already over at the time when Oksana is recounting her experiences of it to her imagined audience. In order to deal with these issues, the narrator has created a different 'persona' whom she refers to, among other names, as the 'prison hag' (5). She distinguishes between this persona and the woman whom Mykola refers to as 'sweetness' (4), among other things. Significantly, the creation of this 'hag' has to do with the fact that the narrator sees herself as being imprisoned during her relationship with Mykola, as being a prisoner to his abusive nature as well as to her desire to rebuild a sense of Ukrainian national consciousness and identity by engaging in a relationship with a 'true' Ukrainian man. As she explains to the reader:

> […] it was with that man that this dishevelled witch with strangely unhealthy glistening eyes and teeth and some invisible but suspected criminal past would periodically run out to centre stage, boldly smashing the fragile vessels of unfulfilled dreams; that man would liberate her, call her forth from the remote jail cell […]. (5)

The words which Oksana uses to describe herself – 'hag,' 'witch' – are also significant in that she is appropriating stereotypical misogynistic language. These are some of the moments when a sense of satirical and ironic melodrama is being employed in the novel. The parody is supported by the tone which the narrator uses: she speaks in a matter of fact and almost tongue-in-cheek manner when she refers to herself in these ways. The language she uses is also expressed in terms of the body, specifically, of her own body, and this approach can be found throughout Zabuzhko's writing. As Zabuzhko states, 'writing is like cannibalism: eat my body, drink my blood' (quoted in Blacker, 'Nation, Body, Home' 492).

Marko Pavlyshyn argues that novels by Ukrainian women authors written during the 1980s and 1990s were often typified by 'traditional romantic images of the female role' ('Ukrainian Literature and the Erotics of Postcolonialism' 122). In addition, Pavlyshyn explains, 'in the erotic encounter women are passive and receptive [and] endowed with attributes of beauty for the appreciation of their male lovers,' consequently meaning that they can be 'fully realised only in love and motherhood' (122). Although this might seem apparent in *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, I argue that Zabuzhko is attempting to subvert this convention. Whilst the narrator submits to Mykola's objectification of her body, she is aware from the start that this should not be allowed: 'In the beginning she would still try to come to some understanding, to explain that she too may have some preliminary requests, and not just "down there:" is there nothing other than my sex organs that interests you?' (7). There are many other such moments throughout the novel where Oksana questions and is critical of Mykola's treatment of her. At the same time, she realises that she is conforming to what society expects of women:

> N-nope, you weren't a masochist, you were a fucking normal woman whose body took pleasure in giving joy to others […] and no matter how many bras are burned by American feminists, masturbation – whether with a rubber penis or living person […] will give you neither poems nor children. And that's it, period. 'That's your limit.' (28)

Nevertheless, conforming to a patriarchal ideology of 'womanhood' is something which the narrator appears to do willingly. A 'feminist' self does not seem possible for Oksana, precisely because she believes that she must do what she can to achieve the revival of a Ukrainian national consciousness, and it is only through taking up the role of the nationalist figure of woman that she realises this.

The Quest for National Revival

The primary vehicle through which the narrator feels she can contribute to the revival of Ukraine's ethnic identity is by entering into a romantic relationship with someone whom she believes to be an example of a 'real' Ukrainian man. She emphasises that Mykola is the first true Ukrainian man in her life: 'Honestly – the first. The first one *ready-made* – whom she did ***not*** have to teach Ukrainian' (30-31). The narrator has embodied Ukrainian nationalism in him, because, for her he is 'homeland and home' (154). Oksana continues to explain to the audience that he

> […] was the first man from *your world*, the first with whom you could exchange not merely words, but simultaneously the entire boundlessness of shimmering secret treasure troves, reflections from inside the deepest wells that are revealed by those words, and therefore

> it was easy to talk as to breathe and to dream, and that's why the conversation was drunk eagerly with parched, dry lips, the intoxication even more dizzying, ah, this never-before experienced total freedom to be yourself, this four-hands piano playing, at last, across the entire keyboard, inspiration and improvisation, so many sparks, laughter, and energy suddenly released, when each note – ironic hint, nuance, wit, touch – resonates at once, picked up by your interlocutor […] – a little closer, may I? (31-32)

The way in which she expresses her desire for him may, at first glance, appear as characteristic of the fragmented writing of *écriture féminine*; but here it becomes a statement of her commitment to the traditional role of woman within a national revivalist discourse. The potential for the novel being exemplary of *écriture féminine* is constantly undermined by Oksana's desire to please Mykola. Moreover, throughout the novel she emphasises that her greatest concern is the national one.

From the beginning it is a relationship marked by emotional and even physical abuse. In retrospect, Oksana explains to her audience that she had pre-empted the danger which Mykola's disillusionment with Ukrainian nationalism would come to pose to her as a woman: 'strange, how in that confused moment the message was so clear and you knew, as if some bystander in your head uttered a calm, meaningful, grammatical sentence: "***This man is going to hurt you***"' (12). Even Oksana's poetry expresses the abusive relationship which she has with Mykola:

> Tonight, terror will probably come.
> Hot shivers – of lovemaking or vomiting –
> Foreboding debauched coupling
> Or death's cry – shake the ailing body.

Rupture, rupture – all ligaments, nerves, veins:
My defencelessness is now so total,
Like an overt call to evil: Come! (92-93)

Oksana here is emphasising the fact that she feels powerless in her desire to be with Mykola as part of recapturing Ukrainian national consciousness. This abusive relationship is mirrored in her own relationship with Ukrainian nationalism, for, as she states, one's 'homeland is not simply the land of your birth, a true homeland is the country that can *kill* you – even at a distance, the same way a mother slowly but inexorably kills an adult child by holding it near, shackling its every move and thought with her burdensome presence' (30). The social threat that nationalism might pose to a woman is made very clear and it seems as though the narrator is suggesting that this violence is the cost of national revivalism, and must be endured for the 'greater good.'

In Mykola, I argue, Zabuzhko has embodied the role of the colonised man. As Blacker holds, Mykola treats the protagonist in this abusive way because he sees himself as 'fighting for a mother who has given herself to the coloniser,' and he 'embodies everything that is ruined in the postcolonial Ukrainian male' ('Nation, Body, Home' 489). Therefore, to some extent the relationship between Oksana and Mykola is symbolic of, as Blacker suggests, the colonial trauma of the Ukrainian nation ('Nation, Body, Home'). Mykola's internalised anger at being a man oppressed by imperialism has no other outlet than transferring it onto Oksana. Judith Williamson argues that women, as 'the guardians of "personal life," become a dumping ground for all the values society wants off its back but must be perceived to cherish […], whereby a culture can proudly proclaim its inclusion of precisely what it has excluded" ('Woman Is an Island,' 106), and it is in this way which Mykola perceives Oksana. Moreover, according to Blacker the narrator sees in Mykola 'a

reflection of the oppressed artists and writers whom she so admired as a girl' ('Nation, Body, Home' 490). Oksana values Mykola as a member of the Ukrainian intelligentsia who emerged in the nineteenth century and created the foundation upon which the Ukrainian national identity was built. The reason behind this may be because, as her, 'oh so excellently programmed patriotic friend,' explained to her once: 'we fall in love not with the man, but with the national idea' (114-115). Consequently, Oksana refers to herself as a 'poor sexual victim of the national idea' (115). As with many other moments throughout the novel, it is unclear whether the narrator is being serious, or whether she is actually satirising what she sees as the tragedy of Ukrainians. Nevertheless, it is at junctures like this in *Fieldwork* where the novel's nationalist concerns are clearly in conflict with its feminism.

Mykola treats the narrator as a political signifier, as what Judith Butler terms a 'phantasmatic promise' (*Bodies that Matter* 191), by saying to Oksana that they should have a baby together; the implication being that reproduction is the only way in which to properly consummate their relationship. Furthermore, Mykola constantly treats the narrator as an object of his own sexual desire. As she objects in the novel:

> How is it even possible to comprehend the world of those who contemplate their own sex organ in the third person? When they say to you, and that's the only way that man said it – 'Open "her" up,' all your senses are immediately transported to the gynaecologist's stirrups – because it's not 'she,' it's 'you' that's opening up – or in this case, rather, locking down with a dead bolt. (8)

Oksana here is being satirical about the way in which Mykola treats her, once again making it unclear as to whether she is truly serious about their relationship, because, as

much as she wants to propagate the sense of a Ukrainian national identity, she realises her lover's limitations. She goes so far as to mock him for his weaknesses, referring to him as a 'small-town seducer,' and as nothing more than a 'provincial dandy in [a] narcissistic get-up' (9). It is significant that she also mocks her own aversion to his subjugation of her body which turns the novel into a self-deprecating narrative. Once again complicating a straight-forward analysis of her relationship with Mykola, Oksana continues with the abusive relationship precisely she views herself 'poor sexual victim of the national idea' (115), and that this is the price which must be paid for the good of the nation. She explains to the reader the effect which Mykola's physical and mental abuse has had on her:

> You have taught my body to castrate the perpetrator: all of my feminine strength, accumulated for generations, which has thus far been directed toward the light, with you has turned itself inside out, black lining outward, has become destructive – death-bearing, it won't mince words about it and put it plainly. (97)

Nonetheless, the narrator arrives at a point where she has had enough of Mykola's abuse, and thus she breaks off their relationship, leaving him. In this way it can be argued that she is demonstrating a certain sexual agency. However, the overall tone of the novel remains the same; Oksana is not a feminist character because she does not fully take ownership of her own body.

Writing the Nation

The other way in which the novel's narrator identifies with her nation is through literature and poetry, both that of the Ukrainian nation as well as her own works. As I have already mentioned, like Zabuzhko, Oksana the protagonist is a poet, and throughout *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, she quotes her own work and explains what it means to her as an individual. She emphasises the significance of reading her poetry to an audience by referring to it as a 'public orgasm' (10), adding that 'whether you call it exhibitionism or not, it was your own text that would always protect you from abuse and humiliation, you read it the way you wrote it – out loud, led by the self-propelling music of the verse' (11). And yet, at the same time, she is disparaging of her own position as a poet:

> […] you're not Yevtushenko or Tatiana Tolstaya to get thousands for each appearance, and who the hell are you anyway, backwater Ukrainian from the Khrushchev communal housing projects that you've been trying to break out of your whole damn life to no avail, Cinderella who crosses the ocean to grouse over dinner at Sheffield's with a pair of Nobel prize winners […] about the intellectual bankruptcy of contemporary civilisation, after which you return to your six-square-metre Kyiv kitchen to fight with your mother and be humiliated by having to explain to various editors that 'my homeland will be where I am.' (29)

In this one quote the narrator summarises all of her insecurities with regards to her role as a poet and as a Ukrainian. In the United States she has become even more self-conscious and depressed about herself as belong to a 'broken' nation.

In addition, throughout the novel, Oksana also references the fate and role of Ukrainian literature in general. For her literature is deeply tied in with national discourse and identity, and this relates to what Wachtel has to say about the role of literature in Eastern

Europe. Comparable to its general national history, the history and development of Ukrainian literature is one filled with conflict. The novel gestures towards this, referring to specific Ukrainian authors, for example Nikolai Gogol, stating: 'Gogol had no choice! given that he was who he was, no choice but to write in Russian! you can cry, you can dance – no choice!' (36). Vitaly Chernetsky holds that the 'uniqueness of Ukrainian literature among its Slavic neighbours is that despite the richness and length of its tradition, it remained a literature in an endangered language, brutally suppressed by the ruling colonial powers for much of the modern era' ('Opening the Floodgates' 674). This is because, out of all the other Eastern European Communist countries, as I have already highlighted, Ukrainian as a language was a specific target of attack. Throughout her work Zabuzhko laments the fact that not that many people speak 'proper' Ukrainian.[40]

Furthermore, Kobets explains that, as a poet, 'the narrator not only performs the therapeutic role of reconstituting Ukraine's self-consciousness, she also challenges her country's metaphysical doom by daring to assume the role of the Creator' ('Review: Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex' 184). It can be argued then that what the narrator hopes to achieve through her monologue, is a rewriting of the Ukrainian national consciousness. As she sarcastically says to the audience,

> [The] road to mental health: find the reason and the problem goes away. Why hasn't anyone thought of doing this with nations: you neatly psychoanalyse a whole national history, and 'poof, you're cured' […]. Literature as a form of national therapy. Hmm, not a bad idea. Too bad that we happen to have no literature. (158)

[40] Currently in Ukraine, many 'ethnic' Ukrainians use Russian as their first language.

The narrator further laments the future which Ukrainian literature has in the United States:

> [In] this country, ladies and gentlemen, with its increasing proliferation of satanic sects in the underground and psychiatric offices on the surface, might it not be time to stop and ponder over the question of authorial rights – over what we truly can do, and what we shouldn't? (136)

She feels that it is impossible for Ukrainian authors to truly be appreciated in the United States, yet if they remain in Ukraine, there is no future for them either because their literary works will not be taken seriously. Thus, for the narrator, they are doomed to fail either way. Life in the United States offers the narrator the opportunity to showcase and parody what she views as the overarching Ukrainian mentality, whilst at the same time criticising the American tendency of 'Othering,' or essentialising different cultures and nationalities. In her discussion on autobiography, Linda Anderson emphasises that the 'female autograph dramatizes alterity and non-presence' (*Autobiography* 87). To some extent it can be argued that through her protagonist, Zabuzhko is attempting to illustrate this.

Sarcastically and angrily, Oksana emphasises what Ukrainians appear as to Americans:

> Eastern fatalism, oh yes – the Russians have it; we're in worse shape, we, actually, are neither here nor there, Europe has managed to infect us with the raving fever of individual desire, faith in our personal 'Yes, I can!' – however, we never developed a foundation for such faith, those structures that might support that 'I can!' and thus have tussled about

> for ages at the bottom of history – our Ukrainian 'I can!' helpless and alone. Amen. (23)

The narrator is quite scathing of Americans at several points throughout the novel. This is illustrated when she, for example, refers to the 'Great American Depression from which it seems that about seventy percent of the population suffers, running to psychiatrists, gulping down Prozac, each nation goes crazy in its own way' (39). She also emphasises Ukraine's status as a non-existent country by recounting an episode when she explained to an American that the title of Ukraine's national anthem translates to 'Ukraine has not yet died' to which her friend responds with laughter and puzzlement. Oksana is tired of and upset by Americans not knowing where Ukraine is or what its people have gone through, as she recounts what happens to her every time she introduces herself to an American: '"Where are you from?" – "Ukraine." – "Where's that?" – you had grown tired of not being in this world' (33). Therefore, significantly, life in the United States only emphasises the fact that her country is 'non-existent' for Oksana. In addition, the narrator contrasts the world-wide importance of America with the observation of Ukraine, stating that

> America, as everyone knows, is 'the land of opportunities,' half of Europe, and not just our godforsaken part but the purest, from Britain to Italy, is dying to get over there, money, career […], and what is there in Ukraine, Ukraine is Chronos chomping away at his children. (20)

Once again, the narrator reiterates what she perceives to be the 'nonexistence' of the Ukrainians. But at a later point in the novel, once again directly addressing the American audience, Oksana asks the following:

> 'Do you know the Ukrainian night,' ladies and gentlemen? Nah, you know fuck-all about the Ukrainian night, and there's nothing in it for you to know, you've got your own, no less turbid nights, you commit suicide in elegant, suburban, ivy-covered homes because there's nobody to eat turkey with for Thanksgiving. (114)

She then returns to her own state of misery, adding:

> […] it's just that I've had it with my own universal empathy, I've had it because, you see, no matter which way I turn, there's misery, misery, and misery – maybe that's the way I'm wired, or maybe it's my 'acutely tragic sensibility' always picking up the odour of misery like an insect's antennae, and groaning, I crawl toward it rather than happily screwing my young, healthy stud […]. (114)

The narrator's tone here is very sarcastic, and this undermines the potential satirical aspect which the novel might encapsulate. Returning to the idea of the Ukrainian melodrama, Rewakowicz argues that as part of the endeavours of Ukrainian feminist writers, novels like Zabuzhko's are 'calling into question the established canon, not only because it was ideologically biased, that is, promoting communist propaganda (in this respect they were not alone), but also because it clearly reflected a patriarchal mode of thinking' ('Women's Literary Discourse and National Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine' 275-294). The notion of a feminist writing being so formulaic is problematic precisely because it mirrors nationalistic discourse, which instrumentalises and reifies culture in this way. Hence, it can be argued once again that the novel fails to present a feminist narrative.

Conclusion

Later in his critique of *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, Blacker notes that within

> […] the space of Zabuzhko's writing subject, the basic tension is between the artist striving to find a distinctly feminine voice, which would represent a departure from male-dominated Ukrainian traditions, and thus a self-removal from them, and on the other hand her love for those traditions, and desire to play a part in preserving and propagating them. ('Nation, Body, Home' 501).

Zabuzhko's protagonist is thus trapped in the dilemma of either propagating feminist concerns or promoting the desire to restore her nation's ethnic identity. Both pose a threat to the security of the other, and by the end of the novel, no resolution has been found. The narrator concludes the novel by making the following statement:

> Pass me the microphone and I'll say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, we have created a wonderful world, and please accept, on this occasion, sincere greetings from US Air, and from CNN, and from the CIA, and the Uruguay drug mafia, and the Romanian Securitate, and from the Committee of the Communist Party of China, and from the millions of killers in all the prisons of the world as well as the tens of millions still at large, and from the five thousand Sarajevo children born of rape, who will, after all, grow up some day, and – onward and upward, brave new world, and that, actually, is all I wanted to say, thank you for your attention, ladies and gentlemen, have a good flight.' (160)

This final statement is quite a puzzling and troubling one; the narrator appears to be satirising nationalism globally and yet this is at odds with her ethno-nationalist agenda. The reference to the children born of rape in Sarajevo is interesting and can be linked to the previous chapter on Drakulić's novel about the mass rape of women during the Balkan war. Following from the argument I made in that chapter regarding the role which women play within the project of nation-building, any attempt by women to forge a nationalist feminism simply is not tenable, because women will always be relegated to the role of symbols of the nation. It is significant to note that Oksana's closing statement lacks a critique of Ukrainian nationalism, and the reader is once again left to decode what this omission might mean. As I have explained in this chapter, Zabuzhko's protagonist vacillates between a defence of Ukrainian nationalism and a critique of it. Ultimately, however, as Cynthia Enloe reminds us, within nationalism, being 'reduced to a symbol has meant that women have not been treated as genuine participants (with their own ideas, goals, and skills) in the nationalist movements organized to end colonialism, ethnic domination, racism, and globalized capitalist exploitation' (*Bananas, Beaches and Bases* 87). Therefore, the entire ideological basis of nationalism would have to fundamentally be changed before a feminist nationalism can be attempted. And, unfortunately, as the protagonist's narrative has ultimately emphasised, she is unwilling to sacrifice Ukrainian ethno-nationalism.

Chapter V

Postcolonial Trauma in *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*

History is built upon the actions of men. And yet it is the women who are its keepers, protecting memories and secrets long after the dead have ceased to speak.

Zabuzhko, *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* – 34

The Ukrainian 'cellar' must be exposed, opened to the daylight, of that I am firmly convinced.

Zabuzhko, 'Time to Go Down the Cellar'

The allegory of the museum is one that is regularly employed by authors, particularly in relation to narratives of countries which saw the dissolution of totalitarian or colonial

regimes and are now dealing with the fallout in a post-transitionary period.[41] In *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, Zabuzhko implements this trope in order to convey a multitude of issues, both personal and political. The novel was published in 2009,[42] thirteen years after *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, and in Zabuzhko's own words, can be described as 'something of "a textbook on Ukraine and Ukrainian history"' (quoted in Lyachynska, 'Oksana Zabuzhko'). This is further supported by the fact that Zabuzhko provides the reader with a resource list on the historical context of Ukraine at the end of the novel. In addition, the structure of the novel is indicative of an actual museum; instead of traditional chapter numbers, each section has a room number and subtitle. It is significant then that the first chapter, 'Room 1: This,' opens with a discussion of old family photographs. The novel is also characterised by its episodic prose style, an attempt at imparting to the reader a sense of how memory functions. Furthermore, its style has been likened to that of Marcel Proust's by some reviewers, and is also illustrative of g William Faulkner's theme, 'The past is never dead. It is not even past.'[43]

Briefly summarised, the novel's primary focus appears to be that of the Soviet past of Ukraine as it covers sixty years of Ukraine's contemporary history. It spans three generations, from the Second World War onwards. In her afterword to the novel, Zabuzhko stresses that only the characters 'are purely fictitious,' and everything that happens to them 'has actually happened to various people at different points in time, [and] could still happen' ('Afterword' 709). Furthermore, she emphasises that this 'actually, is what we call reality' (709), thus presenting the reader with a hybrid of fiction and history. From a feminist perspective, this hybrid, self-reflexive approach suggests

[41] One example of a well-known Eastern European novel which appropriates this trope is Croatian author, Dubravka Ugrešić's *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998).
[42] It was published in English in 2012.
[43] See Waheed Rabbani, 'Review of *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*' (2013).

that historical and fictional narratives need to be merged in order to bring to light marginalised female stories. Invention through fiction, as I discussed in my chapter on the Bosnian War, allows for untold, or 'lost' stories to be realised. And whilst Zabuzhko's novel appears to present a concern for unearthing the untold tales of women, I will illustrate that it, more so than *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, moves further away from a feminist approach, and rather towards one which is concerned with the task of Ukrainian ethno-nationalism.

The Museum of Abandoned Secrets contains a plethora of issues, from explorations around the role of women in the shaping of history, to questions about the past as not past but as remaining in the present, and the recapturing of ethnic identity and national consciousness following Soviet oppression. Unlike *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, the novel is not written in the first-person narrative, but focuses on two main characters – Daryna Anatoliivna Goshchynska and her romantic partner, Adrian Ambrozievich Vatamanyuk. Their plot narratives take the reader into the past, introducing other characters of importance along the way, most notably other female characters. Daryna is a Ukrainian television journalist known for the programme she produces and hosts, aptly named 'Diogenes' Lantern.' Diogenes is a Greek philosopher known as one of the founders of the philosophy of Cynicism. Cynicism's main tenet is to live a life of virtue in agreement with nature, and Diogenes is often portrayed as carrying a lantern, in search of an honest man as representative of 'the truth.'[44] Daryna, desiring to shine light onto particularly controversial contemporary matters, especially centred on corruption in postcommunist Ukraine, thus takes up the role of Diogenes. The irony, of course, is that later she is forced to choose between participating in the corrupt system of postcommunist Ukraine or

[44] See Luis E. Navia, *Diogenes The Cynic: The War Against the World* (2005).

losing her job as the presenter of the show, because the new investors who have taken over want to use the show as a front for trafficking young Ukrainian women.

The novel differs markedly from *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, not only in terms of narrativity, but also in several other ways. Most notable is that *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* is more in line with what Maria G. Rewakowicz theorises, when she explains that

> women's discourse in post-Soviet Ukraine is instructive for two reasons: first, it is remarkably vibrant (quantitatively and qualitatively) and no longer marginal, as was the case under the Soviet regime; and second, it provides a particularly interesting case for studying the complexity of national identity formation in the post-independence period. ('Women's Literary Discourse and National Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine' 275)

Through the main protagonist, Daryna, the reader first gains insight into the traumatised psyche of a postcolonial, Eastern European individual. As I endeavour to illustrate, the novel initially attempts to provide a focus on the gendered history of Ukraine. As Oleksandra Shchur argues, in the novel,

> Zabuzhko brings visibility to various aspects of gender inequality in Ukraine, captures Ukrainians' perceptions about gender roles, and points to how the Soviet gender order has morphed in postcommunism. ('Ukrainian Women between Communism and Post-Communism' 268)

The novel also illustrates the role which female activists played in the resistance against foreign oppression as well as the process of nation-building to the reader. Referring to postcolonial feminist writers, Elleke Boehmer states that while these writers

> […] tend perhaps to be especially concerned with those narratives that cannot be integrated into the grand teleological march of official history, they, too, deploy the genre to claim and configure national and other identities. By conveying women's complex give-and-take between public and private spaces, women writers use the novel as a powerful instrument with which to reshape national cultures in a way more hospitable to women's presence. (*Stories of Women* 12)

Boehmer's formulation here speaks to what Zabuzhko's novel attempts to achieve. However, Zabuzhko once again finds herself in the dilemma of choosing to pursue a nationalist agenda which is antagonistic towards women in its current form, or a more feminist approach. It particularly becomes evident as the novel progresses; Daryna is not so much concerned with woman's fate under Soviet rule, but rather the Ukrainian nation's as a whole. And whilst a nation might be considered 'female' in terms of the discourse used, the ideology behind nation-building is firmly patriarchal, or to use feminist terms, phallogocentric.

Returning to the motif of the museum, I want to consider Fredric Jameson's theorisation of allegory. Allegory, he argues, is characteristic of 'Third-World' literature, and these novels should, specifically, be read as '*national allegories*,' ('Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' 69). Although I have argued that the locution 'Third World' is a problematic one, and that Eastern Europe cannot easily be placed within a Third-World paradigm, it is my contention that numerous postcommunist novels can be read in an allegorical light, and this is especially the case with *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*. This is because, in agreement with Jameson's theorisation, even those apparently 'personal' novels (such as Drakulić's *Marble Skin*, for example), 'necessarily project a

political dimension in the form of national allegory' (69). Jameson further emphasises that '*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*' (69). And, of course, this resonates with what I discussed earlier regarding the second-wave feminist maxim: 'the personal is always political.' Drawing on these conceptualisations of allegory, I argue that the trope of the museum is particularly useful for conveying a sense of the 'ruins' left after Communism's collapse. The image of the museum not only plays an allegorical role in the novel but is also a physical space. Daryna's mother, Olga, used to work in a museum during Communism. Olga views the past as past, and this angers Daryna. She refers to this mentality as 'generational egoism in reverse' (267), where the older generation of Ukrainians, the 'slave generation' (277) in Daryna's words, believes that their children are living in a better world. Daryna attributes her mother's blind optimism about the postcommunist future to her mother's past work in the museum. As she notes: 'Mom can be forgiven […], she spends her working life in a museum, after all, got used to a catalogued kind of past, ordered and pinned to corresponding dates' (268). Furthermore, the image of the museum functions as a metaphor for Ukraine's Soviet past as whole.

Once again referring to the Soviet archives on Ukrainians, this passage from the novel given from Daryna's perspective, captures the idea of the museum as a metaphor for the past:

> The files of the Supreme Command – those got shipped to Moscow, they took loads of Ukrainian archives, in 1991 most recently, after August 24, right after the independence – cleaned the stacks out like in '41 before the German army, people say, burned papers right there in the yard for several weeks – covered their tracks, you know. (200)

In addition, this passage highlights the fact that the Soviets stole the Ukrainians' past, their historical and cultural legacy, leaving them bereft of the truth of what had happened to many people's loved ones. Significantly, Zabuzhko can be defined as an anti-colonial author precisely because in *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* she strives for a 'critical evaluation of the [Soviet] colonial past' and illustrates that the 'traces of this past […] still form a prominent part of the psyche of the contemporary postcolonial subject' (Chernetsky, 'Postcolonialism, Russia and Ukraine' 43). This is especially evident in the character of Daryna Goshchynska who becomes the agent through which the Soviet Union's inhuman practices are revealed to the reader. And in this sense, Zabuzhko's novel conforms to what Vitaly Chernetsky refers to as an instance of 'engagé, resistant' postmodernist literature in the Ukrainian context ('Postcolonialism, Russia and Ukraine' 43). Zabuzhko's anti-colonial novel thus encapsulates what Frantz Fanon maintains about writing by the colonised: 'For us who are determined to break the back of colonialism, our historic mission is to authorise every revolt, every desperate act, and every attack aborted or drowned in blood' (*The Wretched of the Earth* 146). The novel undertakes this task by providing detailed accounts of several historical moments related to the Soviet colonisation of Ukraine, most notably that of the role of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, a partisan militia particularly active in the 1940s.

Linked to the image of the museum is that of ruins, another motif often employed by postcommunist writers. In Marta Rabikowska's discussion on this topic, she explains that just like 'real ruins,' memories of life during Communism 'interrupt dominant narratives by providing alternative views of historical experience' ('Introduction' 18). This is especially evident in *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* as the novel presents the reader with alternative views of the roles which women were assigned to during the Second World War, as well as during the Soviet occupation which followed thereafter.

Furthermore, the novel displays certain characteristics of what Gayle Greene maintains about many feminist narrative strategies, that there is a 'sense of the past as evolving in confrontation with the present' ('Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory' 306). As Daryna notes, 'women are better memory keepers' (18). Women's quest to gather and keep memories, according to Greene, 'tend to be vertical rather than horizontal: women dive, surface, fly. Besides this, they "divine," "excavate," dig in, dig out, and engage in various sorts of archaeological projects' ('Feminist Fiction and the Uses of Memory' 303). In order to for women to reclaim suppressed and lost histories, an unconventional aesthetic needs to be adopted. *Écriture féminine* offers the potential for such an aesthetics. Hélène Cixous describes *écriture féminine* as part of 'the work of un-forgetting, of un-silencing, of unearthing, of un-blinding oneself and of un-deafening oneself' ('To Live the Orange' 83). Cixous' description can be tied into Green's argument for women's role as the collectors of memories. In the novel, it is Daryna and not Adrian who pursues the story of the female Ukrainian Insurgent Army soldier. She is motivated to do this when she discovers the photograph of Adrian's great-aunt, Olena Ambroziivna Dovgan (also known as Aunt Gela and Geltsia) who was killed in 1947 along with other members of the UIA. Daryna as the agent who uncovers the secrets, it can be argued, is significant for a feminist reading of the novel.

Photographs are another important part of digging up the past in *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*. Significantly, the beginning of the novel immediately places the focus on the past as Daryna is going through several old photographs:

> And then come the photos: black and white, faded into a caramel-brown sepia, some printed on that old dense paper with the embossed dappling and white scalloped edges like the lace collars of school uniforms, all

> from the pre-Kodak era – the era of the Cold War and nationally manufactured photography supplies (really, nationally manufactured everything) […]. (1)

This long opening sentence encapsulates the main idea that the past is never past, but rather is very much present in the novel. With her remark about 'nationally manufactured everything,' Daryna is referring to the insular world of the Soviet era when, as a result of sanctions as well as the façade of being an autonomous state, most products had to be produced within the Soviet Union and could not be imported.[45] Furthermore, the state had an immense impact on aesthetic forms in literature. In the same paragraph, Daryna discusses the fashion styles of women from the 1950s and in the same breath she mentions a film which the women in the photographs would have, theoretically, been able to go and watch. Accordingly, she is painting a picture for the reader of what 1950s Soviet Ukraine would have looked like. Daryna then goes on to make the following statement:

> You know what I just thought? Women are generally less susceptible to political perturbations than men. They pull on their nylon stockings, or later, the hose that were so hard to find in the stores, and smooth them over their legs with the same concentration no matter what – Kennedy assassinations or tanks in the streets of Prague – and that's why it is men who truly define the face of a country […]. (2)

This observation, I maintain, is an indictment of the roles which women were consigned to in the 1950s. They were forced to distance themselves from the politics of the day and

[45] This led to serious shortages of many basic products.

rather concentrate on finding ways in which to make their appearances more appealing without, of course, appearing to bourgeois. However, as Daryna goes on to discover and reveal to the reader, women were in fact entrenched in the politics of the day, and not separate from them. Nevertheless, and perhaps an important point missed by Zabuzhko, is the notion that these women may embody a form of quotidian resilience, resisting the system in the only ways possible for them. Indeed, Aunt Gela in many ways represents the example of how an 'every day' woman could become a resistance fighter.

The Novel as an Historical Account

Significantly, *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* is both an historical and a transhistorical novel. By transhistorical here, I take the definition from Nancy Van Styvendale, where the transhistorical, or 'transhistoricity,' describes 'intergenerational trauma,' signalling 'a trauma that takes place and is repeated in multiple epochs and, in this sense, exceeds historicity' ('The Trans/Historicity of Trauma' 204). Knowledge of the recent past, as the novel illustrates, is constantly in the back of Ukrainians' minds. As I have already argued, this theme is made evident at the beginning of the novel when Daryna reflects on her and her partner's dead family members, through an examination of old photographs. She recalls some of their names, observing that they are 'names that sound as if they belonged to a completely different nation, and maybe it was a different nation after all, the one wiped out in 1933 between Kyiv and Poltava' (3). Here, for example, Daryna is referring to the 'Great Famine,' the *Holodomor*, which took place in the early 1930s. This is one of many episodes where she illustrates the notion of collective memory, referring to certain events which are embedded in the nation's psyche, precisely because colonial trauma is often a collective experience.

The unconventional narrative style of *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* is characteristic of what Antonio Gramsci maintains about the history of the subaltern classes – that it is 'necessarily fragmented and episodic' (*Selections from the Prison Notebooks* 54). Daryna's own fragmented discourse throughout the novel mirrors this. It is my contention that through Daryna, the novel illustrates both trauma of a private and personal nature, as well as that of collective trauma, of belonging to a culture or a nation that had been subjected to various forms and occasions of colonisation and occupation. Daryna is a character who is thoroughly traumatised precisely because she has experienced personal trauma as well as partaking of the collective trauma of her people. She displays this trauma through the ways in which she expresses herself in the novel, primarily through an inner monologue which the reader is privy to. This relates to what Judith Lewis Herman states about the 'unspeakableness' of the trauma itself; it is unspeakable precisely because it 'overwhelm[s] the ordinary adaptations to life' (*Trauma and Recovery* 33). However, at the same time as Herman further emphasises, atrocities 'refuse to be buried,' because remembering 'and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites for both the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims' (1). By making the reader privy to her inner thoughts about the trauma she is experiencing, Daryna is exorcising ghosts, which ties into allegory of the overarching narrative of the novel. Ghosts from the Second World War invade Daryna and Adrian's lives in an attempt to let their stories be heard, one aspect of the notion of collective trauma which the novel raises.

At several points in the novel, Daryna makes glib remarks either about the collective past of the nation, her own personal past experiences, or the current postcommunist situation

in Ukraine. This is similar to Oksana's expressions of the Ukrainian situation in *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. Throughout *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, Daryna persistently talks about what Ukrainians *do* or *say*. She is almost obsessed with this issue, bringing across the complexities and contradictions associated with nationalist consciousness and identity formation. Despite her inability to fully express her trauma, she is intent on breaking the silence and exposing the truth. The trigger for her decision is the discovery of what was her father's final *raison d'être*, written in the margins of one of his books. It is necessary to quote at length here in order to illustrate Daryna's thought pattern:

> […] I ran into a note in the margin of a yellowed coarse page […] written next to the apparently innocuous, idiotic critique, 'Hamlet's hesitation to act decisively in sight of triumphing evilness.' […] He underlined this critique with an impulsive, nearly straight line, and scrawled an equally triumphing *this!!!* with three exclamation marks in the margin. It struck me like a divinely inspired epiphany. […] I became firmly convinced that my father's long 'struggle against the system' (as we Ukrainians have been calling it since 1991), […] the whole gory mess that replaced his life and that finally sent him to the loony bin with the then-typical political diagnosis of 'acute paranoid psychopathy,' stemmed from nothing other than my father's secret knowledge that he, too, shared, like a shameful disease, Hamlet's damned hesitation to act decisively in the sight of triumphing evilness. (20-23)

Daryna's monologue here is once again reminiscent of Oksana's in *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. This technique, as I have discussed before, is an attempt to convey the sense of

trauma to the reader, that it is something which cannot properly be expressed. Both Daryna and Oksana are traumatised not only by their own personal experiences under Soviet rule, but also by the tragedies which Ukrainians suffered as a collective ethnic group. In the above quote, Daryna reveals not only her moment of epiphany upon discovering her father's '*this!!!*,' but she also exposes what she refers to as the system of 'Soviet criminal psychiatry' (24). Branding political dissidents as mentally ill was a common practice implemented by the Soviets when it came to punishing those who refused to participate in the system.[46] Whilst this is an instance of personal trauma for Daryna, it should also be considered an occurrence of collective trauma precisely because it happened to so many people during the Soviet Union's domination.

Another example of a traumatic event in the novel which is both personal and collective, is Daryna's own experience of being interrogated by the Ukrainian branch of the Soviet KGB. It is in no way unique, and yet was uniquely traumatising for her. She explains how the interrogator convinced her to become a spy for the KGB at the university which she was attending:

> All of it wore her down so much that when the captain finally concluded his soliloquy (because he'd talked almost non-stop the entire time) and suggested she write some monthly reports for him, she, instead of telling him to eff off right there and then, agreed to 'think about it' – compelled either by the student habit of not turning things in until the last possible moment (to win time to prepare, time to dress her refusal into an

[46] See Stéphane Courtois, *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (1999).

> impeccably worded formula, although that was something they most certainly did not give a damn about!) or by the instinctive impulse to step away from the scene of an accident first, like when you break a heel walking, and only the catch your breath and assess the situation. (223-224)

Daryna continues to explain that later on in her life she realised that this was in fact a collective experience, that she could recognise this 'infestation of mind in dissidents' memoirs,' and that people 'lived like that for years, wired, as if into an electric grid, trying to untangle something that by definition could not be untangled' (224). However, the collective nature of these experiences did not bring people together as one might expect. As Daryna further reveals:

> Millions of people went through the same trials, and yet no collective experience emerged from it, and every rookie had to start from scratch as though he (or she) were the only one in the world – a metaphysical state, almost, like in love or in death when no other's experience is of any use to you, and no book has words for what is happening to you, the One and Only, with the sole difference that this whole thing was sealed under the massive lid of solid, shamed silence – this was not an experience people liked to share. (224)

This is what Herman is referring to when she explains that to 'speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that attached to victims' (*Trauma and Recovery* 2). In addition, Herman elucidates that the 'knowledge of horrible events

periodically intrudes into public awareness but is rarely retained for long. Denial, repression, and dissociation operate on a social as well as an individual level' (2). Daryna is well aware of the fact that many Ukrainians are living in denial, and she emphasises this at several points in the novel. The denial by the Ukrainians of the oppression suffered as a result of the Soviet regime's rule simultaneously further traumatises her and spurs her on to bring the truth to light. She displays great loathing for the past and yet she has a strong relationship with it. For her, as is demonstrated throughout the novel, the past is constantly present. This relates to the concept of transhistoricity which I discussed earlier.

Herman continues to explain that '[s]ecrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defence,' and the 'more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more completely his arguments prevail' (*Trauma and Recovery* 8). *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* demonstrates that secrecy and silence are still very much a part of postcommunist Ukraine as it was under the Soviet regime. Daryna, speaking metaphorically about her people simply pressing the delete button when it comes to the history of their persecution and suffering, is an example of the will-to-forget, or the amnesia of the victims with regards to a horrific experience of colonisation or oppression. In addition, Daryna illustrates a certain kind of disillusionment with the Ukrainians, which is very much a part of her traumatised status as well as the postcolonial, postcommunist condition within which she falls. Here one might think of what Madina Tlostanova calls 'double-unconsciousness,' and the 'phenomenon of passing for a Russian' which occurred during the Soviet regime's rule ('Postsocialist = Postcolonial?' 137). The novel is thus underlining the problematics of people concealing their ethnicity in an attempt to mimic and come across as 'more' Russian. This is a clear

example of the kind of mimicry which can be found in several other former colonies. What is being gestured at here is the fact that Ukraine is yet to be de-Sovieticised as the people have not regained their national consciousness or sense of cultural identity. In the previous chapter I briefly discussed the painful and complex history of Ukraine under Soviet rule. The Ukrainians' collective past is traumatic precisely because, as Taras Kuzio emphasises, 'Tsarist or Soviet historiography […] denied the very existence of a Ukrainian ethic group or defined it as a temporary historical aberration' ('Identity and Nation-Building in Ukraine' 347). This denial of a separate Ukrainian ethnic identity served to break Ukrainians' collective resistance against the Soviet (Russian) regime and led to the 'double-consciousness' which Tlostanova refers to.

In addition to having to work through her trauma, Daryna struggles with the problematic issue of identifying as an 'authentically' Ukrainian person. It is here where *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* moves away from a feminist endeavour, as ethnicity and national consciousness become the focus. Initially upon meeting Adrian, Daryna voices her concern about whether or not he would be a 'real' Ukrainian, fearing him to be 'one of the Russian-speaking' Ukrainians, thus bracing herself 'for the forced, just-learned Ukrainian, tight as a new shoe, with foreign phonemes rubbed raw like blisters […] and the cringe-inducing hobbling through phrases as they translate them, word for word' (16). Daryna's concerns here echo Oksana's from *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex.* What is further being raised here in the novel is the issue of ethnolinguistic hierarchy, where Russian was prioritised and enforced over Ukrainian. This is highly significant in the Ukrainian context, given the history of discrimination and oppression. Kuzio emphasises that language 'plays a crucial role in self-identification as it is potentially a symbol of one's distinctiveness, and language is often […] an important factor in differentiating ethnic

communities' ('Identity and Nation-Building in Ukraine' 350). The emphasis on the purity of the Ukrainian language is something which is also emphasised in *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. Similarly to Daryna, Oksana is intent on having a partner who can speak the language 'the way it is meant to be spoken.' Furthermore, for Zabuzhko's characters, 'pure' Ukrainian is closely linked to the Ukrainian intelligentsia, and this is important precisely because of the mass purges of the intelligentsia that occurred in the 1930s. Those who still speak the original language are viewed as the last champions of the Ukrainian people, the ones who must rebuild Ukrainian identity in the post-Soviet era. The reason for this emphasis on purism goes back to the issue of acculturation. Russification, as discussed in an earlier chapter, involved the suppression of the Ukrainian language in favour of Russian. As a result of this, after the fall of the Soviet Union several Ukrainian scholars, including Zabuzhko, have placed great emphasis on raising the status of the Ukrainian language. However understandable the project of uplifting a previously oppressed language may be, the emphasis on ethnic and linguistic purity is one of the pitfalls of nationalism.

In *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* Daryna shares and expresses these feelings towards her native language. She desperately wants to celebrate her nation's freedom from the shackles of the Soviet regime and yet, as she contemplates throughout the novel, she knows that the Ukrainians have not yet achieved the freedom they longed for. As with Zabuzhko's first novel, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, the author's problematic focus on nationalism becomes an underlining ideology in her prose works. In addition, the reclamation of ethnically pure identities lie at the heart of many nationalist endeavours is, as many theorists on the subject have pointed out, a mere myth, mere fiction. The author's unironic approach in *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* appears to indicate that

the novel is not meant to be read as a criticism of ethno-nationalist propaganda. From a feminist perspective, the idea of ethnic purity is also at odds with the aesthetic of *écriture féminine*, which focuses on and emphasises changeability and heterogeneity. The novel, then, cannot be read as an undertaking of the project of *écriture féminine* because it is presenting an aesthetic which is antithetical to the feminist project, a discourse far more favourable to nationalism.

At one point in the novel, when referring to her intentions of approaching the Security Bureau[47] to gather information on Aunt Gela, Daryna states:

> Nothing's easy in this ghetto country of ours. But at least it's not 1954, and our own Ukrainian Security Bureau does give up their archives bit by bit at the rate of their honourable retirees' relocation to the Lukyaniv Cemetery, or wherever it is that they bury them these days… Yep, to avoid traumatising anyone… You can scoff all you want; I think they must be really vulnerable right now. If you're gonna break women's fingers in the doors or, you know, crush testicles with your boots, you've got to be, among other things, a hundred percent sure that you would never *ever* be held responsible for it, and by the time you're old, after you've lived all your life with that certainty – heck, the idea alone'd give you a heart attack. (199)

Once again, this disparaging of postcommunist Ukraine is something which is shared by *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*'s Oksana. In this quote, Daryna is referring to the fact that

[47] The post-Soviet secret police of Ukraine.

many members of the post-Soviet Ukrainian Security Bureau were in fact responsible for many of the crimes committed against Ukrainians deemed political dissidents because they were members of the KGB during Communism. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, secret files documenting the crimes committed against millions of Ukrainians by the KGB and the state were to be made available to the families of those who were killed, imprisoned, and tortured. Making the files available to the public would unmask those who were complicit in the crimes, and therefore, the Security Bureau stalled the release. Furthermore, because the new Ukrainian regime is not so different from the old regime, corruption is rife. Daryna is well aware of this, and in a sarcastic tone she observes some of the corrupt activities taking place in postcommunist Ukraine: 'Ukrainians, as every pre-schooler will tell you, focus on […] simpler, homely things: arms, drugs, non-ferrous metals, poached Carpathian lumber, girls "for work in Europe" – fail-safe operations, with good cash flow, and who needs academies and shit like that; let things take their course […]' (76). The palpable sarcastic tone here makes it seem as though Daryna does not, in fact, care for her fellow Ukrainian, which perhaps illustrates the vapidity of nationalism. It certainly indicates that the novel does not undertake the approach of écriture *féminine*.

Daryna's final interview is with Vadym, her friend Vlada's husband and a member of the Ukrainian parliament. The topic which they discuss is the current state of affairs in Ukraine. During the interview, she provides one of the most striking images of futility and despair for the postcommunist situation of Ukraine:

> This is who they are, these serious people – all those who, after the Soviet Union's collapse, rushed to rake in never-before-seen capitals, first as cash knitted into their undershorts, and later as transfers to offshore

> accounts – this is who they are: the descendants of a pogrom. The kind of pogrom modern history couldn't fathom, and which, for that very reason, it failed to see or acknowledge when it happened in its own time, simply pressed the delete button. And now it is too late, they have arrived – the ones who, as Vadym said, make up the best pogrom squads. They have arrived and will take revenge on the new century for the mounds of deleted corpses from the past, spawning similarly deleted mounds of new corpses, and never suspecting that they themselves constitute a mutation – a tool of revenge. Flagellum Dei, the scourge of God […]. They have magnificent teeth, brand new titanium implants, and are insatiable like the iron locusts of the Apocalypse: they have come to eat, and they will eat until they burst – until their titanium teeth grind everything in their path into dust. (503)

In this passage, Daryna creates a dystopic vision of Ukraine's future, emphasising the fact that Ukraine's past will eventually catch up with its future, leading to negative consequences.

One of the main focuses on women in *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* is the story of Adrian's Aunt Gela (Olena Dovgan) and her role in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. It is when Daryna first sees the photograph of Aunt Gela that she is motivated to uncover her story. She emphasises upon seeing the photograph: 'I just *could not* leave the photograph […]. It was *mine* – it had become mine […] at that moment I was possessed by *someone else's will*' (43). Though Adrian knows of his great-aunt through his grandmother, he does not know what had happened to her when she disappeared in 1947. He does, however,

know that a certain UIA partisan, Adrian Ortynsky, was a love interest of Aunt Gela, and it is implied that he was named after this Ortynsky. Later, as I have already mentioned, Adrian is possessed by Ortynsky's ghost. Adrian, embodied as Ortynsky in his dreams, lives the soldier's last days fighting the Soviets during the resistance and therefore, comes to know how he and the members of his unit died. Gela's story tells of the Soviets' desire to remove all trace of the UIA. The commander of the unit, Gela's lover and Ortynsky's rival, gives away the details of their group's location to the MGB in order to secure safe passage for himself and Gela, who is pregnant. But the entire group refuses to surrender to the Soviets, and they blow themselves up with grenades, killing some members of the MGB.

Aunt Gela's story is important, not only because she was one of the few women UIA soldiers, but also because her story links the past and the present through Daryna and Adrian. This ties into another important issue raised by the novel, that of the interconnectedness of the past, the present, and the people who exist in them. Pavlo Ivanovych Boozerov, the Security Bureau agent who assists Daryna with uncovering what exactly happened to Aunt Gela in 1947, is also the KGB curator who knew and worked with Daryna's mother at the museum before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Additionally, it is later revealed that he is the son of a Jewish UIA fighter named Rachel (known to him as Lea Goldman), who was caught, imprisoned, and raped by the Soviets. After giving birth to him in the prison, Rachel commits suicide, and Boozerov is subsequently adopted by a Russian couple. Although he has no knowledge of this, the reader discovers, through Adrian's dreams, that Boozerov's biological father is Adrian Ortynsky. Adrian dreams of what had happened between Rachel and Ortynsky, of their short-lived love affair during

the resistance. This is one of several instances where the novel connects several story threads so that they come back to the protagonists.

Women and History

Another important aspect of the role of women in Ukraine's nation-building process is shown through the friendship between Daryna and her best friend from university, Vladyslava Matusevych. Vlada is a painter and artist of some renown. Daryna emphasises the significance of female friendship, calling it 'associative twinship,' a 'reciprocal mirroring and intertwining' (63). Daryna and Vlada are both part of what is known as the 'last Soviet generation,' the last generation to have been born and raised during Communism. They are significant characters because, as Oleksandra Shchur explains, they represent

> […] a fairly new type of female character in Ukrainian literature. Outspoken women intellectuals and independent cultural producers, these members of the 'last Soviet generation' were able to build their careers and make names for themselves during the chaotic transitional 1990s, eagerly closing the book on the restrictions of the communist era, and embracing opportunities for cultural production without censorship. ('Ukrainian Women between Communism and Post-Communism' 271-272)

Furthermore, they share many common past experiences, for example when it comes to their first marriage, as Daryna observes: 'We had both married very proper Soviet boys

[…], and it was only when time came crashing down around us that were realised these proper Soviet boys, so handsome and nice, feared nothing more than growing up […]' (72). Additionally, both of their mothers were from the 'tribe of mothballed ancient girls who didn't know how to go outside alone or where the phone and electricity bills were' (82), as Daryna refers to them. Accordingly, they are part of the last group of Ukrainians to fully understand what living under Soviet rule was like, and they reminisce with each other about this. For example, when Daryna is interviewing Vlada for 'Diogenes' Lantern,' the latter recalls a popular communist joke: '"Remember the old Soviet joke," [Vladyslava] says. "Why is there no meat in the stores? […] Because we're making leaps and bounds toward Communism and the cattle can't keep up"' (47). Significantly in this scene, however, is the sentence which Vlada utters after this: '"It's the same with artists who gain international recognition – the country can't keep up"' (47). Here both women are commenting on the negative state of affairs in postcommunist Ukraine, and the problem of 'brain-drain.' Because there were no opportunities for the intelligentsia following the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of Ukraine's educated left the country in search of better opportunities. Daryna responds sarcastically to this, stating: '"The country's best minds are leaving in droves, and I'm afraid if this goes on at the same rate for another ten or fifteen years, we'll all be running around on all fours by then. Still, Vlada, you and I are optimists, aren't we?"' (47-48).

Closely related to the past is the concept of secrets, something which is of great significance, as the novel's title illustrates, and *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* also plays around with the metaphor of secrets. This is raised early on during Daryna's interview with Vlada. In the chapter titled 'Room 2. From the Cycle *Secrets: Contents of a Purse Found at the Scene of the Accident*' (46-98), the metaphor is examined in depth. The

chapter forms the foundation for a discussion around secrets and the role of women. Here secrets function not only as a metaphor but is also the name of a traditional game that used to be played by Ukrainian girls. Daryna attempts to make the case that perhaps the game of secrets is a motif from the past, related to older Ukrainian myths but Vlada disagrees with her, stating: "'And you know why not? Precisely because *secrets* was a girls-only game. It was women who buried the icons – it was their job: […] because they were safer from authorities – if they got caught it was no big deal, like what else would you expect from a stupid broad'" (My italics, 56). This leads Vlada to a discussion about the role of women during Soviet times:

> 'It's like when women riot, it's not for real. [A] home's icons have always been a kind of Di Penates, deities of the hearth, and of course, all things domestic constituted the woman's sphere of influence – the man's began outside the door. So when our grannies went digging to bury their icons, they weren't intent on preserving our artistic heritage, but simply protecting the spirit of the home, as good wives and mothers have always done […]. It was women's work, Daryna, and that's why two generations later it turned into a girls-only game. That's the only explanation.' (56)

In this extract, Vlada is highlighting the traditional gender roles of women, underlining the fact that Soviet rule was not as feminist and progressive when it came to women as it appeared to be to the outside world. Additionally, Daryna defies gender roles by insisting on fighting for the truth. In this way, she becomes an active agent of history, inverting the

standard view that it is men who make history and women are merely the keepers of its secrets and memories.

Vlada dies unexpectedly in a vehicle crash during which she apparently had fallen asleep at the wheel. This explanation, however, is somewhat doubtful, and it is implied that Vlada may have committed suicide. Her death affects Daryna greatly, and she makes the observation that it is more unnatural for young women to die than it is for men to die: 'it's as if men are expected to die, she observes, '[as if they] were doomed to die by some communal pact' (78). She goes on to emphasise that a 'young woman's death is another matter altogether: it is always seen as a violation of the very natural order of things, since the first thought is inevitably about her brood – when there isn't any (and never will be) and when there is (who will watch, oh, who will take care […])' (79). But Vlada's death is no simple matter. The implication that she may have taken her own life changes things even more for Daryna.

A further issue which greatly concerns Daryna is the trafficking of women into and out of Ukraine.[48] When the television station she is working for is taken over by new investors, her employer explains to her that her 'Diogenes' Lantern' will be replaced by another show, a beauty pageant called 'Miss New TV.' She is given the opportunity to host this show and to receive a significant increase in her salary. However, as she quickly discovers, the show is in fact a front for luring young women into the underground world of human trafficking. When she confronts her employer about it, he exclaims with a response indicative of the general attitude towards women in postcommunist Ukraine:

[48] An issue which has become more pronounced during the postcommunist period.

> 'What, you think those girls are all unspoiled goods? Half of them are turning the same tricks for free in their shithole towns and can only dream of being paid for it. They're the ones signing up in droves in response to those ads for dancers in Europe. You think they don't know what kind of dancing they'll be doing? Those floozies'll be thrilled to get out of their pig farms […].' (256)

His reaction to Daryna also reflects an attitude which is a postcommunist legacy of the Soviet regime. As Daryna says to herself, 'one always needs to justify one's own actions, and blaming the victims is always the murderer's simplest excuse' (256-257). This reaction is tied into the issue of the hypermasculinisation of discourse which has occurred in many postcommunist countries and corresponds to the rise in nationalism. The novel's contradictoriness is revealed in moments such as these, where a more feminist approach seems evident, and yet is not fully followed through with.

In response to what is happening at the television station, Daryna approaches Vadym, precisely because he is a powerful man in politics, and she wants his assistance in stopping the takeover by the new investors. After Vadym has explained to her that nothing can be done and she should leave well enough alone, they begin debating the Communist regime and various kinds of ideologies. Referring to the fact that Vadym had obtained a degree in history, Daryna starts musing about it:

> A useful department it was, history: full of country boys straight from army service who paraded around in double-breasted navy suits with

> Komsomol pins in their lapels and signed up to rat for the KGB for the love of the game. Now the boys are all well past forty and have a new and improved uniform – an Armani suit and a Rolex on the wrist, a real one. And chauffeur Vasya in the SUV – a distant relative from the native village. Who are all these people, and how did they come to manipulate the lives of millions of others – including mine. (487)

This passage describes Daryna's view of the present state of Ukraine and the men who are now in charge, a specific reference to the type of capitalist culture which developed out of the Soviet Union's collapse. Significantly, at this point in the conversation Vadym explains to her that the Ukrainian government is like a corporation, to which Daryna responds in anger, stating:

> 'So then, this *corporation* of yours was made up of zombies who'd zombied themselves so thoroughly they knew nothing about the country they ruled! […] The FSB[49] still can't bring itself to believe that Ukraine is independent – they keep waiting for their made-up picture to come back on. Governors, my ass! Like blind butchers in a slaughterhouse.' (487)

At this point Daryna is underlining the fact that Ukraine is still very much tied to Russia, to the coloniser. Here, the novel's 'postcoloniality' is emphasised as the character notes the dependency which Ukrainians maintain to a dominant group. The anomie of postcoloniality is thus quite evident in the passage.

[49] Federal Security Bureau.

Conclusion

Daryna's new journalistic story will be a story of betrayal, 'Of one's country. Of love. Of oneself. Betrayal as a road that leads to death […]' (703). In uncovering Gela's story, Daryna comes to the realisation that it is she and Adrian who must carry on with the fight to reveal the buried truths of the atrocities committed in the past. Importantly, however, it is not only the past wrongs which need to be revealed, but also the current corrupt activities being committed by Ukrainian politicians, which are themselves legacies of the Soviet oppression.

Throughout this chapter, I have endeavoured to illustrate that, whilst *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* provides some insight into the gendered history of Ukraine, its primary focus remains the history of what the Ukrainians suffered under the Soviet regime, and the corruption and crime which followed the transition to so-called democracy. In this sense then, Zabuzhko's focus is more 'postcolonial' than 'feminist,' thus her nationalist interests take precedence. *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*' problematic moments are more identifiable in the chapters in which Adrian tells his story. Adrian makes certain comments about women, such as the view that they are too emotional for politics, which are noticeably sexist. Even Daryna slips into a patriarchal mode of thinking at some points in the novel, for example, when she reduces women's behaviour to biological determinism, stating that certain behaviours are programmed into women 'by Mother Nature herself' (364). Adrian, in a similar vein to the character Mykola from Zabuzhko's first novel, inspires the female protagonist to take on the woman's task within nation-building. Daryna is, in fact, even more inspired by her pregnancy. Cynthia Enloe offers an explanation for this, explaining that women in nationalist struggles take on the

traditional roles of 'bearers of the community's memory,' and, 'being praised by men in the nationalist movement for bearing more children and raising them well doesn't always feel like being patronized or marginalized' (*Bananas, Beaches and Bases* 55). Because Zabuzhko does not problematise this tendency, the novel loses all possibility of becoming a version of writing the body. There is very little attempt made at providing a critique of the overtly patriarchal ideology entrenched in nationalist discourse, and therefore the novel lacks the sense of a 'marked writing,' to use Cixous' term for *écriture féminine*. As Uilleam Blacker notes, speaking of *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, Zabuzhko's 'work displays an ambiguous attitude towards feminist ideas, precisely because of its cultural agenda. […] This problematic relationship with feminist ideas is most pronounced […] in relation to national identity and the colonial situation' ('Nation, Body, Home' 492). Ultimately, then, the extent to which Zabuzhko can be referred to as a 'feminist' writer is brought into question.

Chapter VI

(Im)possible Homecomings: Woman In/As Exile in *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight*

'Narrative is a tricky and complicated operation, as it both competes with and transforms life and history in the telling of a story.'

Domnica Radulescu, 'States of Exile' – 278

In *After Exile*, Amy Kaminsky asserts that exile 'and all the processes related to it, have a material component, and that component is felt, experienced, and known through the body' (xi). She continues to state that 'without the emplaced human body, there is nothing to know or represent about exile and its aftermath' (*After Exile* xi). Drawing on this quote, I endeavour to examine the ways in which Domnica Radulescu's first two novels, *Train to Trieste* (2008) and *Black Sea Twilight* (2010), are precisely concerned with the question of women's embodied experience as told from the perspective of women in exile. Set in

different decades during Ceaușescu's regime, both novels begin with the sexual awakening of their respective protagonists, Mona Manoliu and Nora Teodoru. Furthermore, both novels proceed with an examination of the protagonists' identity-formation whilst they must navigate the state of being in exile after fleeing the homeland that they love. In an interview with Maria-Sabina Alexandru, Radulescu explains that her '"creation of strong, independent female protagonists is equally a conscious choice and a visceral instinctive drive"' ('States of Exile' 277). And, as Alexandru emphasises, the protagonists of the two novels 'are strong, capable, empowered Romanian women, who escape the political manacles of Communist Romania solely through personal effort and achieve personal and professional fulfilment in the countries of their dreams, also managing to reconcile themselves with the yet unanswered issues of their past' ('States of Exile,' Maria-Sabina Alexandru 276).

Another important aspect of Radulescu's 'body-writing' is the role which the Romanian landscape comes to play in both novels; the Carpathian Mountains in *Train to Trieste* and the Black Sea in *Black Sea Twilight*. Radulescu's protagonists subvert the patriarchal tendency to conflate nature with a woman's body; a consequence of Enlightenment rationalism which I discuss in more detail in the first chapter of this thesis. From early in the novels, both protagonists highlight the value the landscape holds for them. Mona emphasises that it is only in the Carpathians that 'I finally feel at home, not in a fairy tale, not in a place I want to run away from, but in a place where my body feels whole and where my heart has a steady beat' (*Train to Trieste* 12-13), while Nora stresses the significance of the Black Sea by stating that the 'idea of living away from the seashore doesn't seem terribly appealing to me. I don't know where I would find all my ideas for paintings' (*Black Sea Twilight* 14). As I go on to illustrate in this chapter, the landscape takes up a significant role as part of the protagonists' identity, in a re-appropriation of

rationalist, patriarchal notions of 'landscape', 'space', and 'woman as nature.' Both *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* employ a first-person narrative style, creating a certain sense of intimacy in order to allow the reader to become attached to the Romanian landscape, and thereby, empathise with the narrators' love and longing for their country. As Alexandru emphasises in her interview with Radulescu, both novels are also 'full of precise references to Romania's destiny and the immigrant's predicament' ('States of Exile' 273-274).

It is important to keep in mind that, whilst the two novels are greatly influenced by Radulescu's own experience with exile, they are fictional, creative expressions of women in exile. In addition, both *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* are redolent of many stories of exile and displacement of Eastern Europeans. In this chapter, I endeavour to illustrate the way in which the question of identity formation takes up a significant role, by arguing that Radulescu's novels should be read as novels of becoming, where 'becoming' signifies a hybrid model of identity; an identity which is 'in-between' and always 'in-process.' I take the term 'subject-in-process' from Julia Kristeva, who argues that the subject is not fixed but fluid, constantly changing.[50] Additionally, drawing on several important feminist theorists of difference theory, I argue that the process of 'becoming' involves the abandoning of a fixed identity in favour of a subjectivity which is always in flux.

Following Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland, I argue that novels of becoming are a feminist response to the *Bildungsroman* genre. As they maintain in *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, a feminist version of the *Bildungsroman* is not possible precisely because the 'broadest definitions of the [genre] presuppose a range of

[50] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980).

social options available only to men' ('Introduction' 7). Furthermore, as Walter Horace Bruford argues, '*Bildung* belong[s] to the male hero and define[s] a culture that [is] associated with introspectiveness, an individualistic conscience, consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, the deepening of one's own personality' (*The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation* vii). The 'one' in this case, then, is always male. Nevertheless, it is of interest to note the features which feminist novels of development share with the traditional (read 'masculine') *Bildungsroman*:

> the belief in a coherent self (although not necessarily an autonomous one); faith in the possibility of development (although change may be frustrated, may occur at different stages and rates, and may be concealed in the narrative); insistence on a time span in which development occurs (although the time span may exist only in memory); and emphasis on social context (even as an adversary) (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland, 'Introduction' 14).

However, the differences between the *Bildungsroman* and the female development novel, or 'novels of becoming,' are important. Abel, Hirsch, and Langland emphasise this, stating that the 'fully realised and individuated self who caps the journey of the *Bildungsroman* may not represent the developmental goals of women, or of women characters' ('Introduction' 10). This is because a certain tension exists between a 'genre that embodies male norms and the values of its female protagonists' ('Introduction' 10-11). They continue to explain what further separates the two is the fact that, for 'many heroines, development does not proceed gradually from stage to stage' (11). Instead, 'development may be compressed into brief epiphanic moments. Since the significant changes are internal, flashes of recognition often replace the continuous unfolding of an

action' (12). Furthermore, women's novels of becoming are, as Ellen Morgan argues, 'the most salient form of [women's] literature' ('Humanbecoming' 185), because they offer up insights into how the bodily experiences of girls growing up shape their identities as women. As I aim to illustrate, both *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* display the characteristics of novels of becoming, especially highlighting the significance of writing the body as feminist endeavour. Significantly, both Mona and Nora's identities are defined corporeally, through their lived experiences, which change as they grow older and enter different circumstances and environments. Therefore, it is my assertion that Radulescu's novels illustrate a particular 'writing of the body' where the focus is on the corporeal experiences of female protagonists.

I once again return to Rosi Braidotti's conceptualisation of the bodily experiences of women, which she so aptly refers to as 'enfleshed materialism' (*Metamorphoses* 13), as a starting point for an examination of the way in which Radulescu writes the protagonists' bodies. For Braidotti, the body, 'or the embodiment of the subject, is a key term in the feminist struggle for the redefinition of subjectivity; it is to be understood as neither a biological nor a sociological category, but rather as a point of overlapping between the physical, the symbolic, and the sociological' ('Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and the Nomadic Subject' 7). Therefore, as she explicates, the 'starting point for feminist redefinitions of female subjectivity is paradoxical: it is a new form of materialism that nonetheless inherits the corporeal materiality of the poststructuralists and thus places emphasis on the embodied and therefore sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject' (7). Enfleshed materialism offers a good perspective for reading the body precisely because it places the emphasis on the subject's situatedness and interrogates its dislocation within Eurocentric phallocentrism. Sexual difference becomes a positive force, opening up the potential for varied ways of reading the body, which is never fixed.

Women will always maintain a certain alienness, difference, otherness, in relation to men. Bodies, therefore, cannot simply be viewed as universal objects, but rather are very much products of social and cultural construction. In order to understand fully what embodiment means in the sense of the individual (woman), one first needs to understand how sexual, cultural, racial, and other differences intersect and create meaning through the bodies of these individuals. Examining the role of the hegemonic notion of power as it pertains to corporeality is necessary precisely because the embodied experiences of women are structured according to specific configurations of domination and subordination. Thus, one must speak of the situatedness of women's bodies, and it is my contention that both of Radulescu's protagonists illustrate this issue.

In her interview with Alexandru, Radulescu explains her view on women's position, which is significant for an understanding of the approach she takes in writing women's bodies. 'Being a woman in a man's world', Radulescu emphasises,

> is already a state of exile and of living in the margins. Being a woman exile, or immigrant, or refugee partakes both of the general state of alienation, grief of uprooting, excitement, and fear of resettling and of new beginnings characteristic of both men and women and of the marginalisation and gender inequities that women suffer in different societies. Therefore women exiles are doubly so, and as a result of the overlapping marginalisation because of a societal or class condition and of gender status they can be subjected to more violence, stereotyping, idealising, or demonising compared with men refugees. ('States of Exile' 282)

As Radulescu's quote highlights, women are already in a state of exile, living on the margins, in a state of 'Otherness'. The Other possesses an irreducible otherness and difference. Significantly, for Irigaray, the 'feminine' is 'neither one essentialized entity, nor an immediately accessible one,' rather it is a 'virtual reality, in the sense that it is the effect of a project, a political and conceptual project of transcending the traditional […] subject-position of Woman as Other, so as not to express the other of the Other' (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 22-23). Furthermore, such a transcendence can only take place by means of embodied locations (22-23). Embodied locations, in terms of a theory of sexual difference, refers to the specific situatedness a woman might find herself in not only in terms of her class and race, but also in terms of the ways in which she experiences her body.

In order to wrest political power from phallocentrism, as I argued in my theoretical outline, a woman must 'speak as a woman'; women need to redefine what being a woman might entail. Gayatri Spivak refers to this as the 'livingness of the feminine,' stating that 'the nameless feminine is the name of living' ('Feminism and Deconstruction' 216). Additionally, she emphasises that 'we would naturalize the name "woman" if we transformed it into the central character in that narrative of woman's recognition within sexuality' (219). This culminates in what she refers to as the 'gendered subaltern' (220). Through a writing of the body and an emphasis on the gendered aspects of the protagonists' identities, Mona and Nora's narratives illustrate the intimate connection which exists between the language of the body, displacement, and exile, thereby emphasising the issue of woman *in* exile and woman *as* exile. Significantly, Mona and Nora's identities are always in a state of incarnate-becoming; they both shape and are shaped by their own situatedness and environment. The concept of positionality which I

employ here is one in line what Maria Lauret has in mind when she refers to 'feminist fictions of subjectivity' (*Liberating Literature* 102). As she goes on to explain,

> Feminist fictions of subjectivity then seek to intervene in the symbolic order by restructuring the sentence of women's lives, whilst at the same time they are being shaped by existing cultural scripts which limit the reach of the new. They have a cognitive function, but it is feminist theory, living memory and feminist politics which authenticate feminist fiction's claim to truth, mediating between fictional representation and the real conditions of women's lives. (105)

This formulation of positionality is central to both *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight* particularly as it relates to the novel of development, which plays around with the genre of autobiography. As a genre, Lauret explains the novel of development, or the 'feminist fiction of subjectivity,' is a genre which

> on one hand draws upon a traditional white Western discourse, that of autobiography – a discourse which assumes unified identity and records public achievement (the story of significant lives, by implication those of great men). But whilst drawing on autobiographical discourse, feminists also try to subvert it by offering explorations of the social and psychic construction of female subjectivity (99-100)

In both of Radulescu's novels, the protagonists' psychosocial inner development as they negotiate their lives within the confines of, firstly, the totalitarian Communism regime, and later, as women in exile, are revealed to the reader. Significantly, this development is inextricably tied into the way in which they experience their bodies.

Becoming Woman in *Train to Trieste*

'This summer I am seventeen, I am bursting into being a woman, and I don't care about empty shops and sugar and flour rations'

- Radulescu, *Train to Trieste* – 16

Published in 2008, *Train to Trieste* begins in Communist Romania in 1977 and details the life of Mona Maria Manoliu growing up under totalitarian rule. Bernhard Schlink describes the novel as a 'coming of age story, a struggle for political integrity and female identity, a wonderful love story,' adding that 'the book engages [the reader] on many levels.'[51] I resist defining the novel as a 'love story' precisely because the romance genre with regards to women's writing, as Rachel Blau DuPlessis explains, works towards conventional endings whereby the protagonist is either rewarded with marriage or punished for acting outside of societal bounds (*Writing Beyond the Ending* 4). Traditionally, the romance plot does not allow for the kind of *Bildung*, or 'becoming', which Schlink's review maintains. In her study on nineteenth-century romance novels by women, Blau DuPlessis observes that 'love' and 'growth' are mutually exclusive, adding that as 'a gendered subject in the nineteenth century, [the heroine] has barely any realistic options in work or vocation, so her heroism lies in self-mastery, defining herself as a free agent, freely choosing the romance that nonetheless, in one form or another, is her fate' (15). Taking Blau DuPlessis' argument, I assert that this is still the case for many romance novels of the contemporary age, and it is for this reason that I make the case for Radulescu's novels as exemplary of writing the body, presenting what might be termed a feminist narrative.

[51] Quoted on the novel's back cover (Black Swan edition).

Therefore, I agree with Schlink's statement that *Train to Trieste* is a coming-of-age story where the protagonist struggles not only to define her 'female' identity, but also attempts to grapple with her status as a dissident within a totalitarian setting. Returning to the discussion at the onset of this chapter, I maintain that the novel should be read as a 'novel of becoming.' Briefly summarised, it charts Mona's life as she progresses from being a young woman dealing with her burgeoning sexuality and intense first romantic relationship, to one as a political refugee who must flee her homeland for fear of being arrested by the Securitate, the Romanian secret police. During her final year of school, while she is in an intense sexual relationship with a young man named Mihai Simionu (who has already finished high school), her parents become convinced that the Securitate will arrest Mona for her (and their own) dissident views if she remains in Romania. Both her parents and her friends suspect Mihai of working for the Securitate as a spy, rooting out dissidents. Subsequently, wanting to get Mona away from Mihai and out of Romania, her family arranges for her to escape the country via Yugoslavia, making her way to Trieste in Italy. However, she only stays in Trieste for a brief time until she is sent to the USA because Italy does not want any more refugees. The second important phase of her life thus takes place in the United States, where she finally manages to find permanent residence. The novel concludes with Mona confronting her past following the 'Bloody Revolution' of 1989 in Romania, after having lived in the United States for most of her adult life. It is structured in such a way that each chapter, instead of being numbered, is titled by the subject which is to be examined and is divided into two parts. 'Part One' of the novel documents Mona's life in Romania as well as her subsequent stay in Italy. 'Part Two' then begins with the start of her new life in the USA and concludes with her return to Romania.

In a sense Mona stands for all teenage girls but, fundamentally, her story is, drawing on Elizabeth Grosz's theorisation, irreducibly specific (*Volatile Bodies* 192). As Grosz goes on to explain, if women are

> to develop autonomous modes of self-understanding and positions from which to challenge male knowledges and paradigms, the specific nature and integration (or perhaps lack of it) of the female body and female subjectivity and its similarities to and differences from men's bodies and identities need to be articulated. The specificity of bodies must be understood in its historical rather than simply its biological concreteness. Indeed, there is no body as such: there are only bodies – male or female, black, brown, white, large or small – and the gradations in between. Bodies can be represented or understood not as entities in themselves or simply on a linear continuum with its polar extremes occupied by male and female bodies (with the various gradations of "intersexed" individuals in between) but as a field, a two-dimensional continuum in which race (and possibly even class, caste, or religion) form body specifications. (19)

This specificity, as I argued in Chapter 1, allows for a discussion of women's lives without casting generalisations. The specificity of Mona's life-story also highlights the novel as one of becoming. Mona demonstrates a certain sense of enfleshed materialism when she describes her growing sexual awareness: 'I see myself blooming,' she tells the reader, '[like] the queen of the night, fragrant and plump' (20). The individualism of Mona's enfleshed materialism highlights the novel's feminist concerns. A particularly striking instance of this enfleshed materialism in the novel is when Mona and Mihai have sex for

the first time. It is worth quoting at length here as the scene is not only the fundamental moment of Mona's sexual awakening, but also to that of her political one:

> Drops of sound enter every pore of my body. His bedsheets are starchy and cool. As I take off my blue dress, the same dress I wore on the mountain in the rain, I see through the open window the portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Nicolae Ceaușescu, the *Father of the Nation*, hanging on the building across the street. They are ugly and they scare me. I seem to know it all, to understand with precision every detail of every little caress on my body. I am not shy. Waves of heat and sound rise in my body. Limbs, whispers. He bites into my shoulder, I bite into his. I am dazed, curious at what's happening. I hear children playing outside right below our window, a ball hitting the pavement stubbornly, monotonously. The bearded faces of Marx, Engels, Lenin and the unbearded face of Nicolae Ceaușescu watch us from the building across the street. I can see them right from where I lie, through the window. I dose my eyes and don't think of anything. Grieg is playing. Clear notes dripping like rain. Mihai's body is wiry and taut and it smells of pine resin, as if he's sucked all the smells of the mountains into his olive-coloured flesh. I lose myself in this tangle of limbs, in this melting of flesh into flesh. Every part of my body wants to scream and moan as he holds me. Purples and reds burst in my head behind my dosed lids and shoot through the veins and muscles in my body. I hold his hand, as he lies next to me, sweaty and trembling. (25-26)

These narratives stand in stark contrast to the more formulaic genre of the *Bildungsroman*. As an adolescent, Mona's increasing sexual awareness plays a significant role in the process of her becoming. This formulation ties into the literary goals of *écriture féminine*, and the novel constitutes an example of what Hélène Cixous refers to as 'marked writing' ('The Laugh of the Medusa' 875). Mona's story is 'marked' not only because of her sexual experiences, but also by her relationships to other women, especially her female family members. As she explains to the reader before giving an in-depth description of said family members' background: 'I pray to my female relatives and beg them to protect my love with Mihai. Somehow my dead female relatives seem more reliable to me than the God or the Mother of God that my aunt Matilda always talks to me about. I want to be like the women in my family, the strong and lucky-in-love ones' (31).

Écriture féminine and novels of becoming share this 'marked writing.' 'Marked writing' avoids the essentialisation of women's positions in society by arguing for a contextual specificity which also allows for a broader reading of women's lived experiences. Moreover, through the character of Mona, a certain 'female signature,' in Mary Eagleton's terms (*Figuring the Woman Author* 23), is present, for example, when she recalls that the 'summer with many orange moons when I discover the greed of my own body, I am also my great-grandmother who listens to Beethoven in the music-box mirror she saved from the floods' (34). Mona's story therefore is very clearly the story of a girl's 'becoming' woman.

The year in which the novel first begins – 1977 – is significant for the narrator for two main reasons. Firstly, it is the year when the Vrancea earthquake struck Romania. Measuring 7.2 on the Richter magnitude scale, it was the second-most powerful earthquake recorded in Romanian history. The earthquake destroyed iconic buildings in

Bucharest and a number of celebrated Romanian persons, including actors, writers, and academics were killed. Mona recounts the day when the earthquake hit, emphasising how the aftermath of the disaster immediately triggers the image of war in her father's mind: '"This looks just like after the war,"' he recalls, and then adds melancholically, '"If a war ends, then there's hunger. If we get enough bread to fill our bellies a little, then there's terror. Just when we start to have a little hope, then this comes ... comes down on us like a fist"' (67). He is very disillusioned with life, forever expecting the worse, which, arguably, is a symptom of the trauma of living under a totalitarian regime.

Secondly, and more importantly, 1977 is the year of Mona's first great love, of her sexual awakening. Both 'love' and 'quest' are essential in Radulescu's novels, as they are intertwined throughout the process of becoming. 'This summer I am seventeen, I am bursting into being a woman, and I don't care about empty shops and sugar and flour rations. […] I want to be there in the centre of his heart where it smells like raw earth. I want him to be my first lover […]' (16). This single quote contains some of the main themes of the novel: Mona's burgeoning sexuality, and how this is tied into the landscape, as well as the tumultuous political situation. Mona views her growing sexual awareness as being visceral in the same way as descriptions of the landscape: she experiences her surrounding environment not simply visually, but also physically. She emphasises this, stating:

> This is the spring before the summer when I discover my first love, sprouting from raw earth, raw flesh, misery and death. My love among the rocky, dark Carpathians grew like a stubborn plant, like a wild creature, like the colour pink in the middle of the rainbow, like the yellow hyacinth blossoming from the cracked, bleeding earth. (67)

The narrator's description of her love affair with Mihai here highlights *Train to Trieste*'s use of corporeal language, specifically as it pertains to the landscape of the Romanian countryside. 'My body is growing into a big, plump queen of the night flower,' she observes, 'pulsating in the wild night of the Carpathians, where I have learned to love, where I will always want to return, for which I will always yearn' (181). The narrator stresses the link between her body and her country explicitly, and this technique is evident in all of Radulescu's novels. Additionally, in *Train to Trieste* descriptions of the landscape continually return to the corporeal, because the body, according to Brooks, 'becomes a key organising element in [literary] narratives' (*Body Work* 47).

In *Train to Trieste*, Mona's story of displacement resonates with Radulescu's own experience as a political émigré living in exile in the United States after fleeing for fear of arrest by the Secret Police. It is not only through Mona's storyline that Radulescu writes her own experiences, but also by her inclusion of detailed descriptions of the Romanian countryside. In her interview for Shenandoah, she emphasises this:

> I try to imbue my European settings with a sense of history and the magic of what is generally known as the old world. I work at evoking settings in which nature and architecture complement each other, urban settings with touches of natural beauty […]. The European settings are in my flesh and blood as I grew up among them. ('Domnica Radulescu, Novelist, Scholar, Teacher')

Radulescu imbues *Train to Trieste* with scenes of the Romanian landscape in an attempt to impart her own sense of Romanianness to a foreign audience. One example early on in the novel is when the protagonist describes the Carpathians to the reader:

> Up here I finally feel at home, not in a fairy tale, not in a place I want to run away from, but in a place where my body feels whole and where my heart has a steady beat. There are children's voices coming from behind the thick stone walls that line the streets. Blood-red poppies and orange marigolds grow in little beds along the pavements. Right around the comer there is a large open market, and I can hear faint echoes of peasants' voices advertising tomatoes and radishes, watermelons and spring potatoes. The summer open market is the only place where you can still buy food without a huge queue. In Romania, we eat better in the summer. (12-13)

Additionally, as is suggested by Radulescu in her interview quoted above, she stresses the importance which the physicality of Romania holds for her, and how it is deeply ingrained in her identity through the character of Mona, who emphasises the significance which the Carpathians hold for her, describing it as 'a place where my body *feels* whole and where my heart has a steady beat' (My italics, 12-13).

Thus, it might be said that Radulescu positions herself in the role of mediator; she mediates the experience of exile to an audience which does not necessarily understand that experience. As she explains in the interview for the Centre for Romanian Studies, 'I will say that it is the experience of exile and immigration that marks and even defines not only the substance but also the aesthetics of the exiled writer' ('Conversation with Domnica Radulescu'). Of the three authors I have studied in this thesis, Radulescu is the only one who makes her authorial intentions clear. Whilst the concept of 'authorial intention' is a highly contested issue, and perhaps too great to go into here, my argument for Radulescu's novels being examples of *écriture féminine*, supports her stance. It is also

significant to note that in the same interview, Radulescu also affirms that her novels are feminist novels: 'Yes, my novels too are feminist novels in that they give voice to empowered female protagonists creating and recreating themselves, searching for personal and professional fulfilment, and telling their own stories' ('Conversation with Domnica Radulescu').

History and Language

Romania's history, both older and more recent, is marred by a certain emptiness and rewritten recorded accounts. Vlad Georgescu explains that part of this obfuscated history resulted from the Soviet Union's control of Romania: 'The entire history of Romania was rewritten to play up the role of the Slavs, to diminish that of the Romans and the Latin elements, and to stress the support the Romanians had received through the ages from their eastern brother and liberator' (*The Romanians: A History* 241). Ironically, and in line with nationalist agendas, as Georgescu elucidates, by 'using history the [post-Soviet] regime intended to demonstrate its legitimacy while at the same time diverting the public's nationalism to party use' (262). It is significant, then, that enfleshed materialism in the context of Mona's story becomes a means by which the 'missing' stories of Romania might be told in a manner not muddled by ethno-nationalist discourse Good. Mona's aunt refers to the absent parts of their nation's history as 'the black hole in Romanian history'; a 'place of nonhistory, dark and mysterious like a womb' (159). Whilst this place is one of sadness for lack of information or preventing the formation of a sense of identity A bit convoluted - rephrase, Mona finds a strange comfort in it, explaining that within this empty space she 'could curl up like a foetus and forget everything and float in the warm gelatinous waters of oblivion, waiting' for a new sense of self to be born (159). What Mona

seems to be suggesting here is that history is neither objective nor static, and an argument can be made for a connection between women's identities that are always in the process of becoming and that of history, which is never a foregone conclusion. It What? is also redolent of a feminist project of refusing to speak in terms of a phallogocentric discourse.

In addition, the history of the Romanian language, a language which is part of the category of Romance languages due to the process of Romanisation,[52] is of great importance in the novel. Little of the original Dacian language can be found in modern Romanian. The word *dor* becomes the epitome of Romania and being Romanian to Mona. It is her father who first introduces the significance of the word to her, in the chapter titled 'Three Deaths, an Animal Flower, and the Word *Dor*':

> It means something like a longing, like a yearning that you can't explain and you don't know why you have it. It hits you when you look at certain landscapes and listen to certain music, such as music played on special Romanian instruments whose names are untranslatable, flutes with many tubes and instruments like huge horns. Then you see the mountains where your ancestors lived and fought the Turks and the Huns and the Visigoths, and where they looked at the sky and dreamed the way you look at the sky and dream now. You look at all that, and you become melancholy and you yearn for something. That's what *dor* means. (60)

Dor encapsulates everything that nostalgia stands for and, in particular, the nostalgia which Mona's father has for a pre-totalitarian time. But his description also captures the significance of the landscape because, as Pierce F. Lewis explains, our conceptualisation

[52] The term refers to the colonisation of the region by Romans during the early centuries AD.

of landscape is part of how we express both our social and personal identities, 'reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form' ('Axioms for Reading the Landscape' 12). Mona's response to her father's nostalgia for the inexpressible manifests itself in the word 'freedom,' which starkly parallels *dor*:

> And when I write *freedom*, I know I mean the freedom I saw in my father's eyes, because I had never seen that freedom with my own eyes. I've just heard about it from my relatives and from my father, as if it were some kind of mythic creature with wild hair flying in the wind. All I write is the word *freedom*. Only the white page knows everything I'm thinking about when I write that word. (61)

In the scene, then, are multiple attempts at mediating that which cannot be mediated.

However, it is important to highlight at this point that the post-USSR Romanian government used the return to the Dacian 'origins' of Romanians as part of their ethno-communist brand of nation-building. Dragoș Petrescu refers to this as 'the third turn of Romanian communist historiography,' which 'was announced by Ceaușescu's "Theses of July 1971"' ('Can Democracy Work in Southeastern Europe?' 282). Petrescu goes on to explain that after the 'the regime began to place an emphasis on the importance of history-writing in building the "socialist" nation, and the most important step to be taken was to provide the party guidelines for the writing of a "national" history' (282). Interestingly, the rewriting and emphasis on history is similar to Ukraine's postcommunist ethno-nationalist endeavours, which also greatly focused on the question of language. Significantly, however, Radulescu's writing of Romanian history stands in contrast to the state's version. As Mona observes, 'I love my country because I *miss* my

country' (58), and this quote can be read as her realisation that the idea of her nation and its history is but an empty construct.

Returning to '*dor*,' Mona views the word as 'the key to why I love my country' (61), and this becomes even more important to her when she is no longer living in Romania. David Bethea stresses the linguistic connection to exile stating that 'more often than not exile has had a disabling and crippling function precisely because the dual vision which is its essence has not been liberating, but oppressive, a kind of linguistic death sentence' (*Joseph Brodsky and the Creation of Exile* 39). This is precisely what Mona later experiences as an immigrant. When she is on the train leaving Romania, she notes: 'They say of all refugees, Romanians pine the most for their native land and their native language […]' (188). Additionally, this loss of Mona's mother-tongue mirrors Hélène Cixous' discussion on feminine language, and the reason why such a language is fundamental for a woman's sense of identity. For Cixous, feminine language is important because it allows for a rebirth, and without it a woman cannot *be*. Language becomes one of the few ways in which a woman might negotiate her identity. Importantly, 'feminine language' and a 'mother tongue' are not one and the same; however, in the context of the novel's feminist process, the two here resonate with each other.

Tied into the significance of language is the fundamental roles which literature and poetry play in Mona's life, and throughout the novel she refers to various works of prose and how they relate to her own situation in Romania. She often likens her life experiences to certain characters in novels which she has read. One example is when, early in the novel, Mona recounts one of the intimate moments which she shares with Mihai. They are looking up at the orange moon, and Mona wants the moment to be frozen forever: 'Time stops mattering,' she muses, 'just as when Faust asks the devil to freeze a moment

because it's so beautiful' (20). She then goes on to explain to the reader that 'I have just read Faust in my comparative literature class,' and then elaborates that she attends a 'special literature school in Bucharest' (20). This is a strange 'fluke in the system' according to her father, literature being one of the main areas targeted by a totalitarian government in an attempt to stifle an individual's freedom of thought. 'The Party must have overlooked the threat of comparative literature courses,' Mona concludes, 'being so busy destroying everything else' (20). In order to distract herself from the apprehension her father's political underground dissident group and the increasing presence the Secret Police is causing, Mona starts visiting the library at the American Embassy:

> I devour everything with an indiscriminate appetite: John Steinbeck, Emily Dickinson, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce. I am intrigued by how Stephen Dedalus leaves everything behind in one moment of folly, in one grand gesture: country, family, religion, love. He wants to be free, to find himself. I want to turn into a bird like the girl he sees on the beach. I want to become the bird in James Joyce's metaphor. (88)

This passage highlights the significance of literary discourse in the novel. Perhaps predictably, this reckless intensification of her reading activities prompts her to be more rebellious towards the totalitarian system, and this ultimately leads to a Secret Police officer, one Sergeant Dumitriu, being chosen to monitor her. The officer begins to take more than just a professional interest in Mona, even bringing her flowers at her home, and this fuels her parents' decision to get her out of Romania. Later on, in the novel, when Mona longs to be with Mihai, she can only find comfort in a novel, stating: 'I go back to reading Tess of the D'Urbervilles, trying to quiet the throb of my flesh and to soothe my

heart in the story of a tragic heroine' (122). Language, specifically literary language, or what Kristeva calls 'poetic language' is therefore fundamental to Mona's entire process of becoming. An example of this is when Mona describes her experience of writing the entrance examination for the University of Bucharest:

> For my written exam, I get two of my favourite subjects, Bernard Shaw's The Devil's Disciple and Thomas Hardy's Tess. I am menstruating and writing feverishly, page after page, about the paradoxes in Shaw's main character and the bigoted society around him, and about Tess as a sacrificial victim, about the scene at Stonehenge when she falls asleep on one of the stones of the prehistoric temple, a foreshadowing of her death. Blood and words pour out of me at the same time, in a continuous flood. I'm pale and shaky, and I've lost ten kilos in the last month. I cough all the time. I'm like a tuberculosis patient, and I feel beautiful. (123)

This one paragraph contains several crucial points. Mona's critical thinking is directly tied into her menstruation, what she is physically experiencing in the moment. Disease, menstruation, words, and writing all come together in an almost feverish delirium. Once again returning to Cixous, we see that when a woman speaks, 'she inscribes what she says' (quoted in 'L'Innécriture' 131). Additionally, as Minh-Ha emphasises following from Cixous, actions such as '[s]peaking, writing, [and] touching are closely linked in women's context' ('L'Innécriture' 140). Mona as a character epitomises this statement. She shapes her context such that it includes the literary texts which she turns to as a source of support. Later, when Mona is living in Chicago, she reflects on the significance of literature, explaining that 'I am not certain [the Americans] would understand that back home it was a matter of survival, reading until you became numb or euphoric' (252).

Language and reading also offer an escape from the harsh realities of life for the protagonist.

Once Mona leaves Romania, she resorts to several methods of catharsis for dealing with her trauma. One significant moment is when, while still in Italy, she decides to get her hair cut. She merges her Romanian history with her hair, and explains that, after her hair has been cut, 'I see my Romanian past in my mind, all its passions and fears, all the people and sounds and smells and tastes, being wrapped up in cellophane like a package for me to carry as I move on towards my future' (225). As a Romanian in exile, Mona is torn between relief at being able to leave her country, and grief at, in a way, being forced to leave her country. Therefore, in her relationship with exile, Mona inhabits a space of flux and instability. She renegotiates her relationship to Romania, emphasising that there 'is nothing intrinsically great about being from any particular country' (254).

Mona describes her life in the USA as being difficult; a kind of shattering of her previous self: 'I have to make my way back; I have to hang on and try hard not to lose myself' (257) she tells the narrator. At the same time, however, she renegotiates her relationship to Romania, stating that there 'is nothing intrinsically great about being from any particular country' (254). She highlights the difficulty of being a woman in exile by explaining that giving 'birth, getting a divorce [are] all harsher when you're not on your native soil. You give birth and grieve and divorce all in a foreign language' (321). She lives in the interstices of not only patriarchal culture, but also of a foreign culture; one which, of course, is read as dominant. While she lives with her hosts, Gladys and Ron, in Chicago, Mona is perpetually othered. They introduce her to their friends as '*the young lady from Romania*' (236), highlighting the almost fetishized interactions Eastern European women

are exposed to when dealing with westerners. Chicago proves to be a disappointment to her, and she once again turns to literature as a way of dealing with her situation:

> I experience a moment of hopelessness and think of Hamlet: the whole world is a prison. Chicago is even worse than Hamlet's Denmark, where at least there were murders, suicides, passions and dark, haunted castles. The America of this suburb seems submerged in a thick gooey substance with something poisonous mixed up in it, spreading like a pool. No grandeur, no beauty, no throbbing life. (241)

The USA stands in stark contrast to Romania for Mona, and she suffers severe culture shock when she realises what her new life is going to be like. Radulescu, in her discussion on exile, explains that living in the USA evokes ambivalent feelings in refugees because of the country's role in dictatorships and other human rights' abuses; thus, exiles 'are often tied to America by a double bond of gratitude and resentment' ('Theorizing Exile' 187).

Nevertheless, Mona is determined to live and thus *Train to Trieste* ends ambivalently. As she notes,

> Perhaps my own country will become the country I had once missed so deeply in the composition I had written more than thirty years ago. And maybe I will get used to having two countries, to having no country, to being my own country […] (391).

The ambivalence of her position as an émigré here echoes the ambivalence of the state of being a woman; never fixed, always in process. *Train to Trieste*, as a novel of becoming, also demonstrates the significance of women's representation in literary terms as a form of resistance and transgression. Sally Robinson explains that women's representation

> is most often underscored by a double movement: —simultaneously against normative constructions of Woman that are continually produced by hegemonic discourses and social practices, and toward new forms of representation that disrupt those normative constructions. (*Engendering the Subject* 11).

Mona as a character becomes symbolic of this resistance and transgression against the phallogocentric discourse which characterises so many literary texts. In the first chapter I outlined Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a 'minor literature,' explaining that feminist literature, *écriture feminine*, falls within this scope. Braidotti reformulates the idea of 'deterritorialization' as nomadology, or nomadic subjectivity, which rethinks 'the bodily roots of subjectivity' (*Nomadic Subjects* 3), and thus strengthens the connection to women's lived experiences. In *Train to Trieste*, *écriture feminine* is exemplified in the literary language use to illustrate how Mona goes about building an identity outside of the conventional categories of gender and nation.

Mapping Identity in *Black Sea Twilight*

'[…] every experience of exile is different and woven into a more or less universal canvas out of many hues and textures.'

Domnica Radulescu, 'Introduction' – 3

In a similar vein to Radulescu's first novel, *Black Sea Twilight* (published in 2010), also tells a story of a teenage girl who rebels against the totalitarian system, but from a different place in Romania, and from a slightly later period.[53] Whilst the overarching

[53] *Black Sea Twilight* begins in the early 1980s.

story is quite similar to that of *Train to Trieste*, the protagonist's lived experiences differ from Mona's in the latter. In *Black Sea Twilight*, Nora's reason for fleeing Romania is strikingly different from Mona's: after starting a sexual relationship with her boyfriend, Gigi, she falls pregnant. But, as I go on to discuss, abortion is illegal at the time, and they resort to drastic measures. Furthermore, unlike Mona, Nora has a physical disability – what she refers to as her 'unevenness' (11). She was born with uneven arms and uneven breasts, and her mother once refers to her as a 'cripple'. In addition, Nora is an artist rather than a literary scholar like *Train to Trieste*'s Mona and thus, Radulescu merges the aesthetics of painting with the language of literature. Alexandru maintains that *Black Sea Twilight* presents a 'complex study of the many factors that go into the shaping of female identity' ('States of Exile' 275). Nora grows up under the communist regime and, along with having to deal with this, her identity is also shaped by her artistic abilities and complicated family relations. It is significant to note that Nora's disability was caused because of being a twin in her mother's womb. In the chapter, 'My Brother's Arrival,' the protagonist explains that her twin brother 'had taken all the space for himself while we were sharing our mother's womb, and pushed me so that I came out with this lopsided body' (79). The chapter is significant because it highlights another aspect of patriarchy – the valorisation of the male child. Nora has a contentious relationship with her mother precisely because of the favouritism which she shows her son.

Becoming Through Art

Whilst *Black Sea Twilight* may also be characterised as a 'novel of becoming' or 'development,' it shares characteristics with the subgenre of the *Bildungsroman* known as the *Künstlerroman*. A basic definition of the genre holds that such a novel's protagonist

is an artist, whose development also starts in childhood into adulthood and maturity.[54] Writing about fictional women painters in novels by women, Roberta White explains that the *Künstlerroman* 'by definition, tells the story of an artist's intellectual and emotional growth; usually it describes an inward journey leading to a discovery of the artist's vocation' (*A Studio of One's Own* 13). This definition, however, is specifically related to the male artist-protagonist. As with the *Bildungsroman*, the *Künstlerroman* has its origins in eighteenth-century Germany, and therefore its focus is usually on a male protagonist.

The first chapter of the novel is titled 'How I Painted My First Fish,' and the Nora tells the reader that before she 'could even talk I scribbled and drew and painted on all the white surfaces around me. I couldn't stand plain white surfaces. I want to be a painter more than anything and to fill white surfaces with my own ideas' (13-14). Her goal is to attend the main art school in Bucharest once she has finished high school. The first chapter is also significant as a starting point for Nora's art career because she announces to the reader that 'I want to make my first real painting today on the beach at dusk' (16).

At this point it is important to highlight the role which the sea comes to play in Nora's creative talents. Roberta White explains that images 'of the seashore relate to the marginality of women in society – the possibility of exclusion from or unwillingness to participate in the body politic, with the city and the coast as opposite poles' (20). White draws on Carolyn Heilbrun's conceptualisation of 'liminality' which Heilbrun explains as following: 'to be in a state of liminality is to be poised upon uncertain ground, to be leaving one condition or country or self and entering upon another. But the most salient sign of liminality is its unsteadiness, its lack of clarity about exactly where one belongs and what one should be doing, or wants to be doing' (*Women's Lives* 3). In the novel, Nora herself

[54] See *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* 3rd Edition (1992).

admits that the 'idea of living away from the seashore doesn't seem terribly appealing to me. I don't know where I would find all my ideas for painting' (14), and at several points throughout the novel she stresses the significance which the Black Sea holds for her. In Paris, Nora fully embraces her role as that of an artist, describing her style as one of 'unleashed fantastical forms and colours' (307). Nora's life as an artist is highlighted alongside her one as an exile: the novel uses the trope of the exiled artist in a feminist reinterpretation.

Women's Bodies and the State/Abortion

Lorena Anton explains that 'Romanian pronatalism was one of the most repressive politics of reproduction in Europe,' to the extent that abortion 'was one of the former communist regime's most repressed taboos, and speaking about it was strictly forbidden in the public as well as in the private sphere' ('On Memory Work in Post-communist Europe' 110, 115). This was because, as Anton elucidates, from

> 1966 to 1989, the Romanian Communist Party prohibited by law the right to pregnancy terminations, all in the name of the sanctity of the Romanian communist nation. In the public sphere, reproduction was thus fundamentally associated with the nation and its needs. Every communist subject had to participate in Ceaușescu's projects and, above all, every Romanian woman had to fulfil her role by becoming a prolific 'socialist mother.' (109)

It is interesting to note that Nora is advised against going to the local midwife in her town for the abortion, because she is seen as a 'witch' doctor. Consequently, Nora resorts to

paying a doctor of dubious reputation in Bucharest. The abortion exemplifies an aspect of the horrors of living as a woman under Ceaușescu's rule.

> It happened in the dark, [Nora tells the reader], the metal instruments in the dark while the State was economising on electricity. It's all because of the damn electricity. And because of the leader with his pig lips. In our country women have to make babies for the Communist future, to donate them to the sun, to the future, to the Party. To the State Circus (131).

In relation to this quote, Tamar Mayer explains that, within nationalism

> women's national importance is based on their reproductive roles, which include biological and ideological reproduction, reproduction of ethnic or national boundaries, transmission of culture and participation in national struggles. Their centrality is also based on women's symbolic status, connected to their reproductive roles, as representatives of purity. Only pure and modest women can re-produce the pure nation; without purity in biological reproduction the nation clearly cannot survive. ('Gender Ironies of Nationalism' 7)

Nora's precarious position as a woman in Romania at the time is thus multiply emphasised. Furthermore, she illustrates the multiple burdens women are forced to carry when she blames the pregnancy on herself, saying '*It's all because of my carelessness, I shouldn't have got pregnant in the first place, I should have done this, I shouldn't have done that, I'm ruining everybody's lives. I am my own worst nightmare, a black silent scream just like my first painting*' (140). At this point, it is of interest to note the language being used

in the novel; whilst Mona in *Train to Trieste* merges language of the landscape with her own lived experiences, Nora does so with the language of art.

It is the visit to the doctor in Bucharest which leads to an investigation by the Secret Police, prompting Nora and Gigi to start making plans of escaping Romania. The escape attempt, unlike Mona's train ride in Radulescu's first novel, is far more traumatising as it involves them swimming through a long stretch of the Black Sea. Gigi is caught and Nora forced to escape alone before they have even reached the shore in Turkey. Nora suffers brief amnesia afterwards, stating: 'For what seemed like a long time I was not sure of my exact position in the world. My relationship to space and time was skewed and broken up in chunks' (248). After two years had passed in Istanbul, she re-evaluates her identity: 'I was now the regular traumatised refugee trying to make it in a new world with a small bag of belongings, a cartful of useless memories and a throbbing ball of chaos and confusion in her mind' (274). The only place which Nora can think of going to is France, the one place she believes she can make it as a painter. The summer of her sexual awakening, she and Gigi had saved a woman named Anushka, who had tried to drown herself in the Black Sea. In exchange she had given Nora her details. The way in which Nora introduces herself over the telephone is quite significant: '"Nora from Mangalia': a Balkan girl with a peasant grandfather, an imperfect body and a naïve desire to become a painter' (275).

Life as a Refugee

Later, when she is in Paris, Nora continues to experience the trauma of being a refugee because of the way in which the French treat her. They always refer to her as 'little' and calls her 'a funny girl':

> Yes, I am a real clown, a bona fide circus girl entertaining the Parisian crowds with my tricks: I somersault from country to country from one trauma to the next, one side smiling a Turkish smile, one side screaming an international scream, and always landing on my own two feet. (322)

Nora, unlike Mona, represents more of a nomadic character in the sense that Braidotti has conceptualised it. Braidotti uses the term 'figurations' to speak about nomadic subjects and defines them as 'politically informed images that portray the complex interaction of levels of subjectivity' (*Nomadic Subjects* 4). She continues to explain:

> The nomad is my own figuration of a situated, postmodern, culturally differentiated understanding of the subject in general and of the feminist subject in particular. This subject can also be described as postmodern/industrial/colonial, depending on one's locations. In so far as axes of differentiation such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and others intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity, the notion of nomad refers to the simultaneous occurrence of many of these at once. (*Nomadic Subjects* 4)

Nora is the embodiment of the nomadic subject precisely because she slips in and out of different identities during her journey as a refugee. And, like Mona, she carries her country with her as part of that identity. 'Paris might be sorely deficient where the sea is concerned,' she states, 'but I am becoming my own Black Sea' (307). Radulescu, in her interview, also emphasises the significance of Nora's home, explaining that in the novel, the 'Black Sea becomes part of the action' ('Domnica Radulescu, Novelist, Scholar, Teacher' 2). This emphasis on Nora's home becoming almost another character in the

novel ties into the importance that landscape comes to have as a part of lived experience. Christopher Tilley explains that the

> meaning of place is grounded in existential or lived consciousness of it. It follows that the limits of place are grounded in the limits of human consciousness. Places are as diffuse and differentiated as the range of identities and significances accorded to them. People are immersed in a world of places which the geographical imagination aims to understand and recover - places as contexts for human experience, constructed in movement, memory, encounter and association. (*A Phenomenology of Landscape* 15)

As the figure of the exile, Nora carries her home with her, not simply as an important memory, but because it is integral to her identity as a subject-in-process. In her discussion on longing and belonging in women's fiction, Roberta Rubenstein highlights the significance of home, stating that '*home* is among the most emotionally complex and resonant concepts in our psychic vocabularies, given its associations with the most influential, and often most ambivalent, elements of our earliest physical environment and psychological experiences as well as their ripple effect throughout our lives' (*Home Matters* 1-2). Because of the trauma of her exile, Nora is not fully capable of vocalising what home means to her, but it is constantly there.

It is when Gigi can finally come to her in France, after the revolution of 1989, that she confronts her fragmented identity. As she tells the reader: 'Gigi's arrival and his new refugee status reflected mine like a broken mirror. I saw bits of myself scattered in no coherent order and my own face and heart were unrecognisable' (408). Nora also

displays an awareness of the fluid, 'in-between' nature of not only her identity, but also of Gigi's:

> I had to find myself in order to fully understand what our pre-11 August life had truly meant and what it could still mean for us now. How we had moulded each other by the shores of that enchantress the Black Sea and how we had to begin again in our new moulds: our post-revolutionary-Romanian-refugees-in-Paris moulds. Then we had to break the moulds once more, crush them to pieces and see what was left. We had to see if it was enough, if we could start again with the bloody pieces of those broken moulds (417).

Similarly to *Train to Trieste, Black Sea Twilight* closes with an open ending, a certain feeling of the bittersweet which is not quite resolved. Both novels of becoming and the female textual body are, as Curti, paraphrasing Cixous explains, 'always endless;' 'without limits,' starting 'on all sides, and when [they end], [they start] all over again' (*Female Stories, Female Bodies* xiii). It is for this reason, I maintain, that Radulescu resists a neat conclusion.

Conclusion

Both Mona Manoliu and Nora Teodoru's narratives end on a bittersweet note and there are no easy conclusions. Both characters endure multiple traumas: the trauma of being young women living under a totalitarian regime and the trauma of fleeing their homes and having to inhabit the state of non-being of the exile, because, as Julia Kristeva notes: 'Exile always involves a shattering of the former body' (*Strangers to Ourselves* 30). The

open endings of the two novels are significant. As Maria Lauret argues, open endings are often characteristic of feminist novels, and, significantly, they 'illustrate that the feminism of these texts is not a matter of a single ideology or theory underlying all; they are not simple narratives of conversion' (*Liberating Literature* 101). And in her discussion on theatre of war and exile, Radulescu states that as an 'exile from one of the former communist East European countries myself, I have never been able to overcome the "endless paradox" of "looking forward by always looking back" in my life or in my writing' (*Theater of War and Exile* 1). In both *Train to Trieste* and *Black Sea Twilight*, Radulescu's protagonists illustrate this backwards and forwards, this constant state of flux, which is the epitome not only of woman as becoming, but woman as exile.

Conclusion

'[…] in Eastern Europe the past still has a strong hold on the present. There is a mentality that comes of the condition of formal emancipation on the one hand and a very patriarchal society on the other.'

Slavenka Drakulić, *Café Europa Revisited* – 73

'*A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop.'*

Postcommunism Three Decades On

In the first chapter of my thesis, 'Postcommunism, Postcolonialism, and *Women's* Literature,' I gave a brief, general overview of the historical context of Communism and its implications for women then, as well as an explanation for the rise of nationalism with its threat to women in postcommunist situations following the transition from authoritarian to democratic states. As I went on to discuss, the transition to postcommunist, democratic countries following the collapse of Communism across the Eastern Bloc brought mixed bag new realities for the peoples of these countries. Formal emancipation from pseudo-communist, totalitarian governments did not necessarily bring with it the freedoms and benefits it promised. As Sharon L. Wolchik and Jane L. Curry explain:

> Populism has begun to be the order of the day. Corruption is far more significant and democracy less stable than elsewhere in Europe. Economic reform has brought private ownership and multinational corporations. At the same time, it has brought deep divisions between rich and poor, a decline in social welfare that has impacted the health and lives of much of the population, and, for many, real disappointment in what capitalism has brought. ('Democracy, the Market, and the Return to Europe' (3).

Towards the end of Communist rule, when its demise became an ever-increasing threat, political leaders tried to salvage what they could through implementing various reforms. These reforms, however, exacerbated matters. And, as Wolchik and Curry elucidate, for

'all of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the Soviet Union itself, the reforms were destabilizing' (23). The consequences of the reforms played out differently in each Communist country. For example, the situations became more unstable and increasingly violent in places such as Romania and Yugoslavia. However, the overarching issue is the rise of national chauvinism. Tied into the rise of nationalism is the loss of many social assistance programmes, such as maternity leave and childcare services and thus neo-liberalism does not necessarily mean improved realities for women.

The move from a totalitarian government to one where suddenly certain illegal activities are legalised and borders to the outside world are opening, in conjunction with a lack of certainty regarding the future, leaves people with a certain sense of trauma which may be alienating and inexpressible. Transitioning governments is no simple matter and old societal problems such as violence against women and children are exacerbated, while new ones such as human trafficking arise. Sociologists often turn to Émile Durkheim's term, anomie, as a means by which to account for certain behavioural patterns that emerge during periods of transition within countries.[55] Anomie is often used to describe changing societal behaviours that accompany periods of transition on a large scale, such as that from Communist to democratic. As Ruohui Zhao and Liqun Cao explain, 'confusion regarding particular or specific norms is generated from the abundance of new rules and new ways of doing things. This normlessness or confusion of rules is called anomie by Durkheim' ('Social Change and Anomie' 1211). They clarify that the

> transition from a communist authoritarian system to a democracy creates a temporary disequilibrium when new values and norms come into contact with and/or disrupt older social patterns, weakening formal

[55] See Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893).

> as well as informal social control. Transitional societies, therefore, are associated with growing cultural heterogeneity, or the state of anomie. (1210)

Anomie, then, may be one way of examining and explaining the escalation of crime, corruption, and particularly violence against women. Critically, according to Amy Linch,

> political liberalization did not always represent a net improvement in people's lives. In some cases, cultural narratives long contained by the communist state – or developed in reaction to communist ideology – created conditions for public endorsement of patriarchal, national chauvinistic attitudes that had dire consequences for the relative social and political freedoms of women and minorities. ('Introduction: Postcommunism in a New Key' 1)

Communist regimes, as I argued in the first few chapters of this thesis, often suppressed cultural and ethnic identities in order to present a homogenised, united 'communist' ideal. Ironically, however, postcommunist national revivalist movements attempt the same thing. As Zillah Eisenstein explains, postcommunist 'nationalisms fictionalise ideal ethnic-linguistic homogeneity while they are more readily recognised as plurinational and pluricultural states' ('Writing Bodies' 40). It is the refusal to recognise heterogeneity and multiculturalism which has led to many ethnic clashes, the greatest of which, to date, is the Yugoslav Wars. However, these conflicts are not relegated to the past only. Currently, the Russo-Ukrainian war, which began in 2014 partly as a result of mounting postcommunist ethnic antagonisms going back to the pre-Second World War era, is still ongoing with parts of Ukraine occupied by Russian forces. In Romania, there is growing concern around attitudes towards ethnic Hungarians living in the country. There is also

the matter of the treatment of the Roma and Sinti people and the discrimination which they face daily.[56] And in Bosnia and Herzegovina today, ethnic divisions are still very much alive, sparking fears of further conflicts to come.[57]

Whilst I addressed ethnic conflict in certain sections of this thesis, my primary focus has been on the treatment of woman within these postcommunist countries. Women within the hegemony of national chauvinism, I maintained, fulfil the roles of either victims or culprits (when belonging to a rival ethnic group). As Joanne P. Sharpe stresses, women 'are not equal to the nation but symbolic of it' ('Gendering Nationhood' 99). Writing during what may be seen as the beginning of the end of the Soviet Union, Zbigniew Brzezinski asserts that national conflicts 'have ruptured the illusion of communist brotherhood and the mirage of some sort of supra-ethnic Soviet nationhood. Henceforth, the ongoing crisis of communism within the once homogeneous Soviet bloc is likely to define itself through increased national assertiveness and even rising national turmoil' ('Post-Communist Nationalism' 1). And, as I have discussed, these national conflicts were not limited to the collapsing Soviet Bloc. Joanna Regulska and Magdalena Grabowska argue that more than 'twenty years after the fall of state socialism, marginalization in social, economic, and political life remains a fact of daily existence for many women around the globe' ('Social Justice, Hegemony, and Women's Mobilizations' 139). Any attempt to change this situation, I maintain, must include a consideration of difference and feminism. Although difference, alterity or 'Otherness,' is the focal point of attacks

[56] Unfortunately, the Roma and Sinti have been discriminated against since before the postcommunist era, and this is not an issue isolated to Romania, but is occurring in several European countries.
[57] See 'In Bosnia, Entrenched Ethnic Divisions Are a Warning to the World' (https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/19/world/europe/mostar-bosnia-ethnic-divisions-nationalism.html).

made by nationalism, I have gone on to illustrate why difference is fundamental to a feminism that would destabilise and subvert nationalist patriarchal hegemonies.

Embodiment, Sexual Difference, and Women Writing Bodies

Context, I went on to argue in Chapter 1, is fundamental for an understanding of not only the treatment of women but also for that of their embodied experiences. Notably, as Adrienne Rich highlights, background, or revision – 'the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in new cultural history; it is an act of survival' ('When We Dead Awaken' 18). In my chapter, and throughout this thesis, I drew on several feminists in order to explain and emphasise why difference feminism is an appropriate theoretical framework within which to examine the roles that women are forced to take up today due to various hegemonic social 'rules' within society more globally and generally, as well as within postcommunist societies more specifically. My examination began with the heteronormative concept of 'body' and why this is problematic as well a dangerous for women. I would like to emphasise this by turning to Grosz who maintains that if

> feminists are to resuscitate a concept of the body for their own purposes, it must be extricated from the biological and pseudo-naturalist appropriations from which it has historically suffered. The body must be understood through a range of disparate discourses and not simply restricted to naturalistic and scientistic modes of explanation. There are other ways in which sexually specific corporeal differences may be

> understood than those developed in more conventional and scientific representational contexts. (*Volatile Bodies* 20)

All three authors examined – Slavenka Drakulić, Oksana Zabuzhko, and Domnica Radulescu – attempt, in various ways, to present 'sexually specific corporeal differences' within their novels selected for this study. My theoretical framework encompassed a consolidation of several feminist theories which, I maintain, are all concerned with sexual difference even when they do not explicitly state this,[58] whilst it turned to the primary developers of the theory. Whilst I cautioned against restrictive determinations of what constitutes a 'feminist' text, and, indeed, this is an issue difference feminism is greatly against, I did go on to illustrate the lengths to which each text's feminist investment goes to, emphasising that both Drakulić and Radulescu's novels are more illustrative of *écriture féminine* than those written by Zabuzhko.

Literature, as I argued throughout this study, is an important aspect of society and can be a useful tool employed by feminists. As Cora Kaplan emphasises, literary texts

> give these simultaneous inscriptions narrative form, pointing towards and opening up the fragmentary nature of social and psychic identity, drawing out the ways in which social meaning is psychically represented [....] Literary texts tell us more about the intersection of class and gender than we can learn from duly noting the material circumstances and social constraints of characters and authors. (*Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* 167)

[58] And, indeed, resisting definition is integral to sexual difference feminism.

And, as she goes on to emphasise, feminist 'fiction and poetry [are sites] where women [have] actively structured the meaning of sexual difference in their society, especially and powerfully as it [has] applied to difference between women' (3). In each chapter I have provided an in-depth examination of the ways in which and the extent that the chosen novels have engaged in the feminist project of sexual difference, keeping in mind what Maria Lauret refers to as the 'feminist fictions of subjectivity' (*Liberating Literature* 101). As Lauret emphasises, feminist 'fictions of subjectivity create, on the contrary, a feminist subjectivity which is always positional, provisional, or […] "subject to change"' (101). And as I have underscored in my study, it is important to keep in mind that, sexual difference *resists* definition. Or, as Hélène Cixous so poetically puts it, a 'feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop' ('Castration or Decapitation?' 53). Difference feminism, as feminist such as Braidotti, Cixous and Luce Irigaray argue, is not only relevant to a study of literature, but is essential to real, lived experiences as well. Many postcolonial feminist writers have taken this up as a means by which to create solidarity – solidarity *through* difference. Chandra Talpade Mohanty stresses this in *Feminism Without Borders*:

> I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities. Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here – to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances. (7)

Any feminist project, then, whether it be literary or otherwise, must consider the value that difference offers.

Going Forward?

'These are strange times, and strange things are happening,' Braidotti writes in the prologue of *Metamorphoses*, some nineteen years ago, continuing, 'times of fast-moving changes which do not wipe out the brutality of power-relations, but in many ways intensify them and bring them to the point of implosion' (1). Significantly, and interestingly, entering into the 2020s, we are still observing strange times, albeit ones quite different from those in the early 2000s. And, as Braidotti wrote then, transformations, 'metamorphoses, mutations and processes of change have in fact become familiar in the lives of most contemporary subjects' (1). In *Café Europa Revisited*, Drakulić notes that in 'the course of about two years, the media and especially the populist rhetoric of right-wing party leaders like Marine Le Pen equated refugees with Muslims, potential rapists – and terrorists. In the meantime, an already existing anxiety turned into fear of real and imagined dangers' (11). Nationalism has now expanded and become entrenched in not only the postcommunism landscape, but that of Europe as a whole, raising the question: how many potential threats are there for women?

I write this conclusion to my thesis in the midst of the Covid19 pandemic which has seen an unprecedented rise in violence against women, particularly here in my home country, South Africa. Additionally, 2021 marks the twenty-seventh year of democracy in South Africa and yet little change in the treatment of women has been realised in the post-apartheid years. Violence in the home and elsewhere against women rose significantly with the collapse of the Apartheid state and, similarly as in the case of the postcommunist countries, has to do with the anomie which I briefly discussed. Periods of transition have

long-lived existences, and almost three decades later, post-apartheid South Africa can draw many parallels with postcommunist Europe. The question remains, what are the futures of women in these transitory spaces? I have not been able to do more in this thesis than to suggest that feminist texts which highlight and embrace difference might be useful for thinking through what futures in which difference is valued could look like. To end then on the words of feminists who have come before me, as Braidotti positively maintains, against 'the centuries-old habit that consists in pathologizing and de-valuing all that is "different," we may be able instead to re-configure transformations and processes of change positively' (*Metamorphoses* 267). As Mohanty asserts, our 'minds must be as ready to move as capital is, to trace its paths and to imagine alternative destinations' (*Feminism Without Borders* 251).

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