

**Trusted Tales:**  
creating authenticity in literary representations  
from ex-Yugoslavia

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This is to certify that the work presented in the following thesis is my own.

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## Abstract

This research deals with questions of authority and authenticity and how they are expressed, constructed, and appropriated within the Anglophone book market. It considers the body of literature written about ex-Yugoslavia since the 1990s Balkan conflicts by exiled writers from the region which has entered the international literary canon. Books' routes from original publishers into English translation are discussed through practices of trust, one of the crucial social devices underpinning their exchange. Within these cross-cultural processes, the role of cultural brokers is crucial. Symbolic and cultural resources are specifically mobilised through their powerful author brands.

By exploring authenticity in the context of book publishing, I further look at how ideas and practices of community are employed and negotiated by writers and those who promote their books. My field is multi-sited and fluid, reflecting how different individual and national positions are enacted and performed through strategies ranging from unconscious dispositions to deliberate intentions. This research thus brings together ideas of the author as an authentic, representative voice together with exile as a position that grants them a new lease of relevancy in the post-socialist context.

Although ex-Yugoslav books occupy a 'high end' niche of the UK market, constrained by commercial as well as political, cultural, and institutional forces, in public discourse ideas of the 'free market' and 'free speech' are mobilised to produce various types of modernisation narratives. The (post)socialist production of literature is perceived as having to 'evolve' into a capitalist model: this would allow not only healthy competition and consumer choice but guarantee an individual writer 'free speech' as a basic human right. Therefore, the most general question this research raises is what kind of foreign literature gets translated into English, under what socio-cultural conditions and which politics of representation it serves within the project of world literature.

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## **List of abbreviations:**

ACE - Arts Council England

BC - British Council

BCLT - British Centre for Literary Translation

CCW - Catalogue of Croatian Writers

EWI - Exiled Writers Ink

GBE - German Books in English

GFA - Grants for the Arts, ACE funding scheme

ICORN - International Cities of Refuge Network

IFFP - Independent Foreign Fiction Prize

JNA - Yugoslav National Army

MOC - Croatian Ministry of Culture

NBA - Net Book Agreement

NDH - Independent State of Croatia

PEN - Poets, Essayists, Novelists (international writers' organisation)

RaW - Readers and Writers programme within English PEN

STRR - Sample Translation and Reader's Report

TA - Translators' Association

WiT - Writers in Translation programme within English PEN

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*For the writer, whose voice cries in the wilderness*

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Introducing 'Trusted Tales'**

'Trusted Tales' deals with books which are mainly about the Balkan war(s). Its underlying idea and question began during the war itself. I was sixteen at the time. Until then I had never questioned the naturalness of trust; I had never been confronted with having to choose sides, deciding whose story made more sense and why. I vividly remember this: a group of people sitting in my neighbours' living room, watching Slovenian TV. Adults claim they trust the 'neutral' Slovenes most. The Croatian dissident writer Dubravka Ugrešić is a guest on a late-night talk show; she comments on the disrespect for human rights in the newly-established Croatian 'dictatorship'. Several loud men curse and call her names: 'she is a traitor and will pay for slandering her own home country'. They have just come back from the front lines in eastern Slavonia where they have fought and seen things 'they don't want to talk about'. My mother and I leave the room and head home. I feel confused and anguished. My inclination is to support a woman writer; I myself am already starting to write. But the pain of those men that causes them to curse is equally intense.

Later on, as a student, whenever I visited the UK, people would want to know gruesome stories about how I survived the bombing of my small hometown. I told them about 'us kids in the shelter, air-raids, and card games as the only thing that kept us going'; it astonished me how stories of suffering heroes could engage their attention. What seemed to me a boring reality was a tale they emotionally bonded with. The more time I spent with foreigners, the more I learned in what way I had to (re)shape my wor(l)d so that they could 'understand' it. It was only partly to do with brushing up my English.

Finally, when I moved to the UK and began working at English PEN, I was a fiction writer myself. I had been brought up on the work of hundreds of ex-Yugoslav writers, but whenever I worked with UK publishers I was asked about only two or three names: Ugrešić, Drakulić, Arsenijević. They knew only of war-torn ex-Yugoslavia; they only showed any interest in stories where Balkan barbarities were the underlying mentality; and they were excited about being able to 'save' those writers from the claws of autocratic regimes. They treated these books just as my 'stories from the shelter' had been treated by

random acquaintances years ago: as information about the exotic, unknown, uncharted.

When the war, story-telling, and trust converged in my own career, I started to wonder: why do only some writers get translated? What do their stories contain that is trusted? Why are their books read as maps of undiscovered worlds, and what routes do they travel to cross from ex-Yugoslavia to the UK?

## 1.2 How to Read ‘Trusted Tales’: an outline

On one level, this thesis functions as a description of the publishing industry’s and literary field’s ‘backstage’ and ‘frontstage’, a metaphor borrowed from the world of theatre and Goffman’s work on performance and impression management (Goffman 1990). Thus perceived, it researches the information available to ‘backstage’ players and makes sense of that information when compared to what is being performed ‘frontstage’. The opening vignette (Chapter 2) offers a description of the ‘performance’, followed by extensive analysis of the underlying social processes. Additionally, the thesis operates as a narrative aiming to answer the following question: under what conditions can a book from ex-Yugoslavia successfully travel from its original publisher into the UK and its English translation? The chronology of this process starts with charting the socio-political and literary context necessary for the foreign book and its UK readers to meet and connect; it then explains UK editorial policies and the construction of literary tastes and values and ends with a discussion of author brand(ing)s and their role in the project of ‘world literature’.<sup>1</sup> The chapters can thus be perceived as stages of the journey, but they are also woven together with the main anthropological concepts that will be discussed shortly: translation, authorship, authenticity.

**The Arvon Magic (Ch2)** is an ethnographic description of the ‘frontstage’ view of a week-long exiled writers’ retreat in Devon. It represents (this being an

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 8 explores ‘world literature’ in detail. In my research, this concept reflects: a) the unequal distribution of cultural and literary capital between English and non-English literatures; b) the appropriation of translated literature as ‘a window into the world’, i.e. disregarding its artistic quality and reading it as ethnography.

ethnography of dislocated sites and discontinuous temporalities) a concentrated form of most of the themes and concepts analysed in later chapters. Because our interactions took place during a condensed period of time in a small place, our 'role-playing' was more obvious, pointing to the performative nature of the publishing world and its wider context.

Some of the social processes played out include: free speech as a vehicle for helping exiled writers; UK institutional funding and producing the 'right' beneficiaries; negotiations of foreignness; writerly authenticity; individuality and creative genius as part of becoming an author; the writer's positioning towards home and new audiences in assuming moral and literary authority; performativity and literary translation as a social and political enterprise.

**Publishing Yugoslavia (Ch3)** provides a historical and socio-political context for this ethnography. It includes the history of UK publishing, specifically with regards to translated literature, UK literary organisations' role in constructing literary tastes and values, the construction of Yugoslavia as a cultural concept, and the discussion of socialist and capitalist modes of literary production. By delineating the literary field of the research, the chapter discusses both the 'free market'<sup>2</sup> and 'free speech' ideologies that pervade the mental concepts of social actors on both sides of the 'cultural divide'. The relationship between English, as the world's most dominant language, and other languages is discussed in terms of literary capital and the strength of each language's linguistic currency, offering additional insight into the publishing of literary translations in Britain.

Images of Yugoslavia are discussed as a relevant literary trope for the ex-Yugoslav exiled writers and a source of unique selling points for their UK publishers. Although no longer a political entity, the literary Yugoslavia is present as a mental concept to which an organic unity of home is ascribed: this process is charted from the very inception of the Romantic south-Slavist idea to the present day. Finally, the taken-for-granted notion that literature was controlled in socialism through ideology and in capitalism through the

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<sup>2</sup> Placing 'free speech' and 'free market' in quotation marks emphasises that they are not naturally occurring but constructed and historically situated. This thesis specifically questions the notion of 'free' and its understanding and mobilisation in various contexts. Although I shall omit quotation marks when using these terms later in the thesis, an attitude of contention should still be implied.

economy is challenged just as ideas of progress, evolution, and transition have been.

**The Two Silences (Ch4)** discusses how free-speech ideas and practices become instrumental in giving a foreign writer prominence in the UK market of institutional assistance and publishing deals. The case study of Vladimir Arsenijević's 'rise and fall' within the UK book market reflects how heterogeneous ideas, individuals, and strategies can be assembled into a joint project of 'free-speech protection'. Arsenijević challenges the socially-constructed idea of dissent produced partly by Cold War ideology and instead offers a depiction of 'the atmosphere of noise' – a specific Serbian context for free speech. These data illustrate that practices and values of free speech are not universal.

Western<sup>3</sup> free-speech campaigning is discussed as a neo-liberal discourse of development and aid that relies on well-established evolutionist theories. Within such discourse, definitions of persecution are used to single out only those 'endangered' writers who neatly fit the Western criteria of dissent and fundable categories. Such writers act as powerful cultural and development brokers who 'speak the language' of both donors and beneficiaries to 'get things done'.

**Exile (Ch5)** presents exile as a strategy of negotiating foreign writers' position against their home and UK audience and within the publishing industry. This chapter emphasises the narrative and performative character of both home and exile as lived experience. It also challenges a simple relationship between imagined categorical identity and social groups by redirecting the analysis towards the multiplicity of meanings of exile, specifically the social processes in which writers simultaneously invoke 'home' as a literary trope and renounce it by fleeing it and adopting the Western ideas of liberal democracy.

The most prominent level of performing exile is the story of suffering, a highly contested narrative reflecting disparate socio-political constructions of

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<sup>3</sup> I spell all cognitive spaces, such as Western and Eastern Europe and Third World with capital letters but without quotation marks, unless I am quoting other authors. Although I question their fixity and homogeneity, I do not wish to burden the process of reading with additional punctuation.

trauma. Whereas the home audience often disputes the suffering of exiled writers, the Western audience answers the moral and epistemological demands of their testimony. Trauma becomes a specific regime of truth (narrated through the genre of testimony) which, by conflating the positions of witness and victim, provides evidence for and requires compassion from the audience. Testimony thus serves as a structuring device for exiled writers to create authenticity: they are believed because of 'being there and living through it' as much as because they are able to stand back and narrate their experience as an 'objective' account.

**Translated Fiction (Ch6)** focuses on foreign books' routes from original publishers to the UK book market by examining the most common ways of acquiring translation rights, the factors that guide publishers' decisions, and the social relations underpinning those exchanges. By directing my analysis towards the context in which literary translations are embedded, I study a relationship between English as a target language and other foreign languages, global socio-political conditions, and informal relations that all contribute to translation being a political as much as an aesthetic act.

The dominant concept through which the exchange of books is perceived is trust: a social process in which actors negotiate their position of belonging and non-belonging, depending on desired outcomes. 'Objective' disinterest as a position assumed by various cultural intermediaries often results in sealing book deals with the least risk. Trust is thus perceived as both an expression of mutuality and a calculated bond motivated by actors' self-interest. The inside/outside tension is further reflected in the literary text's relation to notions of foreignness and sameness: in order to be included in the domestic literary canon, foreign text has to be close enough to the dominant poetic code to be comprehensible but far enough to be an inspiring source of the unknown.

**Brand(ing) (Ch7)** elaborates on the process of author brand(ing) by challenging the Romantic idea of the writer as a creative genius, providing a general overview of the anthropological study of marketing, and situating authors as cultural brokers in the context of marketing the postcolonial exotic. Modern

authorship mobilises ideas of individual creativity in order to distinguish writers on the increasingly competitive literary market. Translated literature itself is branded as a commodity with a powerful symbolic value: it provides the experience of cultural difference in the *here-and-now*, reflecting discerning taste and a lifestyle that subscribes to liberal democratic values, burdened with evolutionist narratives. My data illustrate that foreign writers are cast into representatives of their cultural 'essences', making their authenticity an increasingly salient virtue.

The chapter is interspersed with ethnographies from many different sites – bookshops, events, interviews – and culminates with the case study of two ex-Yugoslav author brands: Ugrešić and Hemon. As a powerful interface of communication within the book market, the brand(ing) process hinders as much as it allows certain types of information. One such limitation is the narrative of the exotic, a predominant form for foreign writers to gain access to UK literature.

**Big Nations' Literature and Small Nations' Sociology (Ch8)** takes the argument about authors as cultural brokers further into the context of world literature: a specific set of knowledge about cultural difference, a reading practice, and a commodity with a global market-value. Vignettes from literary events illustrate that what is today understood as world literature is fiction from Third world countries translated into English, written largely by exiled and migrant writers for the consumption of metropolitan readers who sample them as ethnographies of unknown places. Contrary to the common understanding that displaced and marginalised writers, by occupying the site of alterity, have easy access to the power of political transformation, these Third World literary works conceal traces of the violence and power struggles that take place in the literary 'conquest' of the world. Authors as cultural brokers feature on the stage of world literature as representatives of their 'culture as a whole'. The only way for them to be consecrated through translation into English is to write a sociology of their 'culture', sustaining that culture's fixed, backward, and romanticised images through thick descriptions of its *ethnos*. So, while white Western authors are allowed to tackle universal themes, Third World authors are read through a specific contract of the anthropological exotic.

### 1.3 Guiding Anthropological Concepts

Three main anthropological concepts are embedded in the foundations of 'Trusted Tales' and developed in every chapter: translation, authorship and authenticity. To outline this map of concepts here is to emphasise that writing about and through them always functions on multiple levels which, though they cannot be unpacked each time, are nonetheless implied in my analysis. These concepts also formulate the main research questions that I am raising:

- how does the exilic position (once an insider, now an outsider) grant the writer both the authenticity and authority to represent their home country;
- how cultural concepts of free speech and free market act as social forces that both promote and censor certain types of narratives;
- how and why testimony and autobiography become preferred literary genres of translated literature;
- what in those autobiographical stories, cultural positions, and lived experience counts as evidence.

In addition, I draw attention to the meta-narrative running through this research, a process of thinking reflectively about anthropology's own epistemological and ethical views concerning these three concepts. I touch upon them here and again in the conclusion.

#### 1.3.1 Translation

*Global assemblage:*

Most generally, I envisage translation as a global assemblage of heterogeneous entities that come together in a joint project. Such an approach, explored in the study of aid and development, draws attention to actor practices and concepts, strategies, and contextual constraints that shape broader international and cross-cultural exchange (Long and Long 1992; Hobart 1993; Escobar 1994; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Mosse 2004; Olivier de Sardan 2005). Mosse argues that the social reality of aid is best illuminated through the role of 'brokers' who, through their social position, control a significant amount of resources in the

mediated cultures of development (Lewis and Mosse 2006). His understanding of brokerage builds on the concept and image of an individual as an entrepreneur who fills the structural hole, a gap between two individuals, with complementary resources or information, thus creating competitive advantages in relation to market transactions (Paine 1971; Boissevain 1974; Cheyfitz 1991; Burt 1992; Huggan 2001). This metaphor can easily include literary translation, where translators and translated authors act as cultural and development brokers.

Equally, this understanding of translation reflects Bruno Latour's (Latour 1993; 2005) work, by which translation involves examining the ways heterogeneous entities – people, ideas, interests, and objects – are tied together into the material and conceptual order of a successful project. Actor network theory (ANT), an analytical tradition related to Latour's work in social studies, has illuminated the ways in which scientists construct and manage social contexts through enrolling and juxtaposing a diverse range of elements that link the natural and social worlds. This approach is valuable because it suggests that the overall system, assembled from diverse elements which 'cross over' various gaps, is held stable through actors' interactions that in turn create coherent representations and common meanings of collective and individual objectives and practices.

Translation as such has contributed to the anthropology of the 'global' that is concerned with new forms of transnational connections between people, information, and ideas. The volume *Global Assemblages* (Ong and Collier 2005) borrows the term 'collective assemblages' from Deleuze and Guattari (2004) to deal with phenomena that are abstractable, mobile, dynamic, which move across and reconstitute society, culture, and the economy: 'those classic social scientific abstractions that [...] seem over-vague and under question' (Ong and Collier 2005: 4). Global assemblages are conceptualised as domains of heterogeneous elements, which, articulated in specific situations, define new material, collective, and discursive relationships. Assembling diverse elements such as scientific expertise, global capital, or disparate regimes of 'ethical' regulation problematises and questions values of individual and collective existences.

This research presents literary translation as relying on the assemblage of a variety of socio-political ideas around free speech on the free market, political and aesthetic values of the creative individual, and historical ebbs and flows of the same ideas that are further mobilised through individual and collective practices. Thus 'global' as studied within anthropology means that the phenomena are perceived as having a distinctive capacity for decontextualisation and recontextualisation, abstractability, and movement across diverse social and cultural situations and spheres of life (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 2000). What is important is how 'global' forms interact with other elements in the contingent and unstable, but still common, space of assemblage.

Myer's (2001) volume *The Empire of Things* contributes to a fruitful discussion of how art objects are 'translated' from one context into another. As translated books are, among other things, material objects, their routes need to be understood as journey through various 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986) by being '(re)discovered', consecrated, and used in various ways by connoisseurs and consumers alike. Thomas (1991: 28-9) thus thinks that the movement of art objects is 'never more or less than a succession of uses and recontextualizations'. Finally the 'traffic' (Marcus and Myers 1995) of books challenges not only their fixed and bounded identity as objects but also the unity and homogeneity of 'places' that they connect.

*Literary translation:*

Literary translation provides a context for this research, as I directly explore translations of ex-Yugoslav authors and their work into English. The history of translation theory has produced various ideas about the equivalence and function of translated work, concentrating mainly on the relatively autonomous text itself (Venuti 1992b; Bassnett-McGuire 2002; Venuti 2004). Many of those theories have been restrictive, disregarding the process of translation and concentrating on a purely aesthetic value of the product. However, recent approaches have recognised the embeddedness of translation within particular historical, ideological, and socio-cultural contexts (Chamberlain 1992; Simon 1996; Bassnett-McGuire and Trivedi 1999; Vermeer 2004; Jones 2006) and are increasingly concerned with its broader communicative and cultural function. This research illustrates that, even in the narrow sense, literary translation

approached anthropologically must be perceived as a step forward from the translation of cultural concepts to translation as a cultural concept.

The famous – or, as the translator Eliot Weinberger (2002) calls it, infamous – saying '*traduttore traditore*' does not refer only to the linguistic level of translation but rather to the translation's more general ability to be not only a version but a subversion of the original. Feminist and poststructuralist thinkers have refuted the utopian dream of equivalence in literary translation for some time (Chamberlain 1992; Simon 1996; Vermeer 2004), with Derrida (1992) in particular questioning the binary opposition between the original text and translation as its derivative. The cultural untranslatability thus gave a new meaning to the famous epigram about translation as betrayal: the living *traduttore*, the contextually-embedded social agent, not some abstract *traduzione*, is denounced as a traitor. On one hand, this relinquishes the importance of literal equivalence, since it is understood as situational and relational. On the other, however, it raises further questions regarding the relationship between language and reality and most broadly the politics of representation. Octavio Paz thus writes about translation: 'No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation – first from the non-verbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase (Paz 1992: 154) [...] reading is translation within the same language' (ibid., 159).

These broader issues are empirically reflected in different strategies adopted by literary translators in various socio-historical contexts. The debate may be summarised by two main approaches, resistant and fluent strategies (see Chapter 6). A resistant translation strategy was first championed by Walter Benjamin (2004) and George Steiner (2004) and later revived during the 1980s cultural turn. Their approach opposes the modern linguistic understanding of translation as functional communication and advocates for signalling the foreignness of the foreign text. Their view of translation is thus ethically restorative: it calls for the target language to allow the linguistic and cultural differences of the source language to influence it, while at the same time keeping the work of the translator visible.

A fluent strategy, on the other hand, effaces the translator's intervention in the foreign text, together with its cultural and linguistic difference. The

translated work of literature is rewritten in the transparent discourse dominating the target language culture and is inevitably coded with target language values and representations. Such acculturation and domestication further speaks of the underlying ideological constraints that make only certain texts 'fitting' to be considered for translation. The fluent strategy, the dominant practice in Anglophone literatures, reflects broader geopolitical relations between literature written in English and the rest of the literary world (Venuti 1992a). Equally, it signals the kind of relationship that the native literary system assumes towards the imported work (Even-Zohar 2004): in the UK, for example, translated literature is always situated on the literary periphery.

*Translation of foreignness:*

In its most abstract form, translation both within anthropology and literature involves rendering what is foreign into what is known. This process is burdened with many complexities, one of which is simply that understanding the unknown means destroying its specificity. Hastrup has remarked that, were this taken literally, 'anthropology would clearly become absurd' (Hastrup 1996: 23); 'a total remapping of the other social space into entities of the translating one' would result in the destination being 'disappointingly familiar' (Ardener 1989: 178). Difference, which matters more than similarity within anthropological writing, would have to be re-established. The metaphor of cultural translation within anthropology, which has increasingly been compared to literary translation, is part of a larger discussion (Asad 1986; Ardener 1989) focusing specifically on ethical and epistemological issues of representing Others. In other words, texts produced through the process of translation reflect the power structure inherent in the legitimisation of language, including the legacy of colonialism out of which anthropology grew. In terms of epistemology, anthropological texts, like any others, must be understood as 'situated' and only partially true (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

The site of literary production, specifically translated literature, bears much similarity to these anthropological issues. World literature, today increasingly envisaged as 'a window into the world', relies on 'discovering', translating, and domesticating foreignness. These processes are undertaken as part of a politics of the exotic (Foster 1982; Huggan 2001) - a political and

aesthetic contract between writer and reader – which aims to interpret and domesticate the foreign but at the same time leave it foreign enough (Crapanzano 1986) to continue producing its function as the Other. This research will illustrate various ways in which such processes unfold. The balancing act between the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ kind of foreignness reveals what Lawrence Venuti calls ‘knowing the ropes’ (Venuti 1992b). In other words, my data suggest that only those foreign writers whose texts share the communicative code with the language and context of UK publishing are able to perform the ‘right’ kind of foreignness. Equally, it points back to translation as a cultural concept, a performance, achievable only when the background context is appropriate and shared by all social actors.

More specifically, the domestication and acculturation of foreignness is presented through the ethnography of UK editorial policy and author brand(ing). Both these contexts illustrate that the demand for cultural difference as a commodity has the power to accommodate much new information content-wise. New locations and new worlds are being discovered, translated, and included in world literature. However, what I call the ‘wrong’ type of foreignness is presented in the form and style of these novelties. Whatever disrupts the dominant poetics of the British literary canon (both in terms of the hierarchy of taste and commercial viability) is not able to cross over either the linguistic or cultural divide (Wilk 1995).

*Translation of and among different forms of capital:*

Mark Shell (1978) draws comparisons between economic and verbal tokens of exchange, arguing that both human speech and money are languages. Languages might differ from nation to nation, but what they have in common is value: language, like money, is a measure. The economy of literature thus seeks to understand relations between literary exchanges and those that constitute economic symbolisation and production. He further writes: ‘poetics is about production (poiesis). There can be no analysis of the form or content of production without a theory of labor’ (ibid., 9).

Not only is literature imagined through a metaphor of economics, it is embedded in economics actually and practically. Bourdieu (1991: 52-61) thus writes that all speech acts are an outcome of two causes: linguistic habitus (a

specific linguistic competence and the social capacity to use it appropriately) and 'linguistic market' (a specific social field which defines what can and cannot be said). Linguistic relations are always relations of power that reveal a complex web of historical power relations between the socially constructed authority of the speaker, their audience, and the groups to which they, respectively, belong. Linguistic differences are 'retranslations' of social differences and the dominant legitimate language is a distinct capital which produces, as its profit, a sense of the speaker's distinction. Bourdieu has explained that different forms of capital (social, symbolic, cultural, financial) to which actors have access depending on their position in a social field (Bourdieu 1977) can easily be translated and transformed into one another. It is not difficult to imagine, then, that a writer's symbolic capital can be enhanced through the right choice of language. This is observable both with particular styles and registers within the same language (e.g. academic language) and across different languages – most notably in terms of literary translations.

Finally, the field of world literature can be perceived in terms of unequal economic and geopolitical relations, since each language is imbued with a literary currency of a different worth (Casanova 2004). Casanova argues that 'the world republic of letters' has its own economy which produces hierarchies and various forms of violence. Contrary to how literature is often studied and written about – as a peaceful domain of aesthetic pleasures – its history is one of incessant struggle and competition over its very meaning and value. World literature, like the anthropological project as a whole, reflects underlying cultural Othering and objectifying, either through evolutionist narratives (Fabian 1983) or various practices of decontextualising (Appadurai 1996). For this reason, different national literatures are not imagined as having the same literary capital (number of 'national' classics, literary prestige, cultivated public, literary institutions, etc.). Apart from the linguistic value of English – as the most dominant and widely spoken language in the world – its literary value is derived from its heritage and connection with writers who are today considered timeless and internationally valuable, e.g. Shakespeare. Translation into English therefore 'counts' for more than translation into any other language in the world. Literary capital is further connected to a specific poetics and a set of techniques devised over centuries as a result of stylistic innovations. In this

sense, the language with the strongest literary currency sets the poetic rules: in turn, poetics produces what can and cannot be written about.

*Translation of lived experience into narration:*

Anthropology has built on Derrida's (1997) concept of the metaphysics of presence which asserts that subjects live lives with meanings and that these meanings have a concrete presence in their lives. Equally, Victor Turner (1986) in his anthropology of experience has written that there is a difference between life as lived, experienced, and told. In this research narrative is important in several ways. Firstly, by organising a life story into a cohesive and meaningful whole, narrative does more than just deliver information; it fosters and constructs social relations between the narrator and their audience; between the present, past and future; between social positions of, for example, inclusion/exclusion or hierarchy/equality (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992; Linde 1993; Cruikshank 1998). In other words, stories explore connections that underlie surface diversity.

Secondly, life narratives and personal accounts of ex-Yugoslav writers feature most prominently as an ethnographic method (see 1.4.2). They lie on the intersection between the local/individual meaning and externally imposed categories and classifications. I have presented and analysed them as multivoiced and variform (Bakhtin 1981) inasmuch as they prove to be more tools for negotiating between various categories, such as ethnic or spatial (Croatian, home, exiled), rather than reified images of belonging to them (Amit 2002; Amit and Rapport 2002; Olwig 2002).

Finally, narrative is the basic building-block of every literary genre. Fredric Jameson defines genres as 'literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a cultural artefact' (Jameson 1981: 106). Therefore, questions regarding ideas and social practices of the protagonists of this research, need to be considered with regards to the specific claims and limitations these genres pose.

Language is an active force in society and a means for individuals and groups to control others or to resist such control, for changing society or for blocking change, for affirming or suppressing cultural identities (Burke 1993). Both personal narratives and translated books by ex-Yugoslav writers speak

about a particular regime of value and what Eagleton calls 'closure' (Eagleton 1991: 35) – a set of dynamics in the receiving canon by which certain forms of signification are silently excluded while others are fixed in a commanding position. Native discourses thus have a way of protecting themselves from the alien material (Ries 1997), which, as Jameson concluded, means that the text is both constitutive of culture and constituting culture. My ethnographic data illustrate that only certain genres are accepted and imported via literary translation to co-exist with the native literary canon: autobiographical genres, such as testimony. Focusing on 'what kind of insight [...] narrative give[s] into the nature of real events' and 'what kind of blindness with respect to reality [...] narrativity dispel[s]' (White 1980: 10) finally brings up questions about the nature of evidence, authority, and truthfulness in writing – the main themes not only of my own research but of enduring debates within anthropology.

Autobiographical discourse, with its specific social contract, makes claims to be a non-fictional account of reality (Lamarque 1990). Truth and correspondence with facts are not naturally occurring but socially constructed through the authority of the narrator. In the genre of testimony, the narrator conflates the roles of victim and witness, involving the audience in a communicative act with specific ethical and epistemological obligations (Felman and Laub 1992; Ball 2007; Fassin 2009). One of the major considerations is the question of evidence and what counts as evidence in the stories of suffering as presented in narratives of ex-Yugoslav writers. As many anthropological studies (Carrithers 1990; Hastrup 2004; Engelke 2008) have argued, evidence does not exist externally to the situation but only in relation to questions: 'Evidence has to be evidence of or for something, and that something is an hypothesis in the broadest sense' (Csordas 2004: 475). In a broader sense, and because evidence is discipline-specific, this discussion has formed a major debate within anthropology. James Clifford's 'Partial Truths' (1986) thus draws the attention to anthropology's rhetorics of authority through the concepts of 'truth' and 'fact'. Although his essay has posed serious questions about anthropology's status as a 'hard' science, Clifford never abandoned a notion of reality: it is worth noting that his essay is titled 'Partial truths', not 'No truths' (Engelke 2008: 57).

### 1.3.2 Authorship

*The construction of creative genius and copyright:*

Authorship today appears as a common and taken-for-granted concept; however, the author as an individual creative genius was not socially constructed until the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Woodmansee 1994d; Woodmansee and Jaszi 1994). The ‘romantic ideology’ by which the writer as genius was perceived as transcending any political or commercial constraints was in reality a set of representations that served to handle competition (Williams and Higgins 2001; Higgins 2005) on a newly-emerging literary market. Similar processes took place in the field of music, where Mozart and Beethoven, for example, were perceived as blessed with divine inspiration (Elias 1993; DeNora 1995).

After the idea of genius had been constituted and applied to a small group of special individuals whose creativity was supposedly unbound by material considerations, modern notions of authorship and intellectual property took hold. The Genius Author as a concept helped to obscure the realities of the literary marketplace because its essence was reflected in its distinctiveness. This process resulted in several outcomes: firstly, the literary market, freeing itself from patronage, was coming under increasing internal control by a number of different consecrative agents (publishers, critics, reviewers, etc.) who together created the symbolic value of the work of art (Bourdieu 1996), judged ‘purely’ in aesthetic terms. Secondly, copyright, which legalised the position of the author, constituted the creator of art as an individual, cut off from the social network of relations that surround and support them. Unlike the Middle Age or Renaissance writer whose work was perceived as a result of communal and collective effort, the modern author has been seen through the narrative of ‘possessive individualism’ (Macpherson, Hobbes and Locke 1964): acquisitive, expansionist, and the proprietor of their own person or capacities (Woodmansee 1994b: 6). Individuality was thus turned into authority, but equally into ownership.

In discussing the concept of Latour’s networks – in which heterogeneous elements that constitute an object, event, or set of circumstances are held together by social interactions – Strathern (1996) points to a difference between Euro-American conceptions of patents and Melanesian understandings of personhood. The former is a claim to invention, thus a property right, also

indicating the alteration of nature by culture. In other words, a network of scientists or artists, 'as string of obligations, a chain of colleagues, a history of co-operation' (ibid., 524) that is sustained by continuities of identity is cut off at the prospect of ownership. Ownership, i.e. copyright, cuts into the network and obfuscates social actors' existence as an aggregation of relations, 'a composite of past transactions with diverse others' (ibid., 526).

The Western discourse of authorship is tightly connected with the notion of 'art's autonomy' (Myers 2001) and the constructed distinction between art and artefact, within which only that which has no use value can be considered 'proper' art. Much scholarship has already challenged these perceptions, Bourdieu (1993) in particular. Annie Coombes (2001) has suggested that 'art's autonomy' functions just as another way of valorising things. A major African art exhibition at the Royal Academy in London, shows Coombes, was presented as a 'purely' artistic project in order to hide the exhibited objects' provenance in colonial (and subsequent) expropriation.

*Individual human rights:*

The ethnography of this research deals with free speech and its mobilisation in the context of UK publishing and through narratives of the free market. In this sense, my analysis feeds into and reflects a long-term anthropological debate around individual human rights versus cultural relativity (Nagengast and Turner 1997; Turner 1997; Cowan, Dembour and Wilson 2001). Ever since the UN Declaration of Human Rights came into being in 1948, universal human rights have been one of the earliest global discourses. Its main principle is that individuals and subordinate groups must be defended against the more powerful, especially the more powerful state. Free speech, together with freedom of conscience and dissent, belongs to those individual rights that are to be practised in the public sphere (Nagengast and Turner 1997).

The individual rights versus cultural relativity debate centres, among other things, on whether anthropology's analytical unit should be the community/group or the individual. Particularly in the last 20 years, since increased globalisation and localisation have brought about 'culturalist' claims invoking notions of culture, tradition, language, religion, ethnicity, and location, human rights have been theorised on different levels and within different

logics. A difference between 'statist' and 'naturalist' rights correlates to the former debate. 'Statist' rights would apply to the juridical and political equality offered by a nation-state, though this has been questioned and taken to supra-national (UN, EU) or trans-national (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International PEN) levels. The 'naturalistic' logic of rights, meanwhile, claims that human rights are universal and take precedence over any types of institutional claims. All these different claims are socially-constructed narratives that continue to compete for space and allegiance in a world-political space today. For example, the UN Declaration of Human Rights itself can be seen as part of the rise of capitalism: a means for individual acquisition of capital, unencumbered by communitarian obligations, traditional custom or localised morality. It fits neatly with what had by then become an established discourse of the free market and Western individualism, according to which the world consists of self-interested, autonomous people, unburdened by any external considerations (Dilley 1992; Carrier 1997b; Hann and Hart 2009).

These debates could equally be described as 'rights *versus* culture', 'rights *to* culture' and 'rights *as* culture' (Cowan, et al. 2001). The first would emphasise the right of an individual, the second the culturalist rights of a group or community. The last one would, however, draw attention to the fact that neither individuals nor communities offer a fixed set of meanings; rather, they are a continuous process of negotiations between different values, intentions, and practices. Nigel Rapport (2002) has advocated an anthropology of rights of the so-called post-cultural turn where the basic unit of analysis is the individual, but an individual who freely chooses to belong to 'personal' rather than to ascribed communities. Even if this debate seems to have reached a certain impasse, it would not be wrong to conclude that anthropology is capable of achieving a kind of mediated and partial universalism (Nagengast 1997). This is possible by focusing on the dialectic between material conditions, power dynamics, and ideas that support the tension between diverging ends of this spectrum. For this reason, free speech in this research<sup>4</sup> will neither be taken at

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<sup>4</sup> Equally, Rosemary Coombe (1994) points out that the individual rights versus cultural relativity debate might be obscuring what is increasingly apparent in the context of freedom of expression in the current age. Free speech supposedly protects the individual from an autocratic state. Assuming a natural division between private and public actors, free-speech legislation protects all 'private' actors, regardless of their power, against the evils of state

face value as imagined in the West nor dismantled in the face of different local/Balkan practices. Instead, I analyse social processes through which this powerful discourse of rights is used in writers' careers to mobilise social and symbolic resources.

*The right to represent:*

The ex-Yugoslav authors in this research are found in a paradoxical situation: they mobilise their (individual) right to free speech and often achieve international literary recognition through this plight; however, they are simultaneously expected to represent the very state/culture from which they dissented. Individuality, as I have argued, has been socially constituted into authorship, but also into authority.

Earlier, I discussed how narrative authority exists in connection to literary genre, such as autobiography and testimony. This, as the epistemological aspect of authority, is pertinent to anthropology as a discipline. Authority as the right to represent further exists as a moral right. Artists have often been perceived as being best able to see and capture the 'essence' of a culture or a nation (Jaszi 1994). Just as copyright resulted as a measure of ideological autonomy in the legal context, the right to represent becomes another expression of authors' moral right towards their culture/nation. Here is another node where this research taps into a wide debate about the politics of representation. This could be summed up with several insightful questions about cultural poesis: who speaks, who writes, when and where, with or to whom, under what institutional and historical constraints (Clifford and Marcus 1986: 13). For example, Coombe notices that, in the context of world literature, it is only Third World writers who *represent* their 'cultures', while their white and English-speaking colleagues are granted universality of themes, times, and spaces (Coombe 1998).

There is an undeniable similarity between positions of ex-Yugoslav authors when representing their 'cultures' and how anthropology has thought about its own project of authorship. The reified, fixed images used in this

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intervention. However, Coombe argues, in the era of mass media conglomerates, threats to the autonomy of speech and public debate are more likely to come from powerful 'private' actors who control the most influential circuits and contents of communication (ibid., 125).

politics of representation within world literature are exactly those anthropology has questioned in its own narratives. Anthropology's postmodern turn also challenged the relationship between anthropological authors and their Others: debates centred on problematics of representation, in particular the propriety of authoring versions of alterity and the role of anthropological representation in constructing those Others whom anthropologists purported merely to describe. Clifford Geertz (1988) particularly highlighted the 'author-function', drawing attention to the fact that ethnographers' presence in the field lent authority to their written accounts, obscuring the partial and situated nature of ethnographic truths.

The literary turn in anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Geertz 1988) has redirected the focus from the innocent analysis of Others to the process of writing ethnography. It has been argued and concluded that anthropological knowledge and its written accounts are constructed in more than one way: contextually, rhetorically, institutionally, generically (according to the genre), politically, and historically. Geertz has called ethnography a 'faction': imaginative writing about real people in real places at real times 'where the "imaginative" and the "imagined" need not be confused with the "imaginary", the "fictional" with the "false", or the "made out" with the "made up"' (Geertz 1988: 141). Even though anthropologists have long become aware of the inseparability of cultural poetics and politics, and they largely no longer respect the fixity of cultures, their legacy lives on in different forms in identity-based politics. Namely, the notion of Others as both possessing and thus representing cultures prevails as a narrative in the project of world literature, where the ethnography of this research follows its protagonists.

### 1.3.3 Authenticity

*The authentic author:*

Trust in the author's words relies on the social contract between author and reader: a set of expectations and intentions that are genre- and discipline-specific (Chandler, Davidson and Harootunian 1994; Ellis and Bochner 2002). In autobiography, just as in ethnography, authors' authenticity is constructed through trusting that their telling is *based on facts*. It has been extensively argued

that *facts* do not exist outside the narrative: for example, Fabian (1983) pointed to literary devices of temporal distancing and sequencing in order to produce facts and not fiction. He writes: 'The *factum* is that which *was* made or done, something that inevitably is "past" in relations to the acts of recording, interpreting, and writing' (ibid., 73). Anthropology formulates knowledge rooted in an author's autobiography: fieldwork comes first, then analysis; the Other as object is necessarily part of the subject's past. The same device is at work with any other literary production, where past experiences are used as material for the literary project: it is at work in constructing ex-Yugoslav authors' authenticity. With autobiography and anthropology, authors make a particular claim – through devices of their genre – that experiences and events in their past constitute facts and not fiction (ibid., 88).

In addition, ethnography as a genre has also been criticised for its use of the present tense: such a device projects a static, categorical view of a society, 'freezes' a society in a time of observation, and implies the repetitiveness and predictability of its social processes. The present tense also presupposes a cognitive stance towards the object as something distant, different, and there to be observed. As Fabian insightfully points out, the use of the present tense should not be considered only a linguistic choice: it is an ideological device through which another culture is depicted and represented by symbolic means. For this reason, '*geopolitics* has its ideological foundation in *chronopolitics*' (ibid., 144).

*The authentic primitive:*

Constructing the Other as different as well as distant has been part of the evolutionist and imperialist narrative that has resulted in many different forms of the *primitive* (Hiller 1991; Errington 1998; Price 2001). Many anthropological studies of art have concluded that it was the West that 'discovered' 'primitive' art: a particular product that reflects the relationship between *centre* and *periphery* in economic and political terms. Primitive art was perceived as 'authentic'. Most generally, it was an expression of nostalgia for the community of the organic whole; more specifically, in the context of art, it was a perception of a 'sensitive' artist – 'in touch with their inner feelings' – and untouched by the market or the monopoly of the West that might eventually destroy it

(Errington 1998: 71). According to this narrative of authenticity, which has been generously critiqued by and beyond anthropology but adopted in public discourse, the authentic (foreign/primitive) author is as much a source of unspoilt literary inspiration as a reflection of the 'essence' of their 'culture'.

Books and authors in themselves are not authentic: they are made such by different discourses and ways of contextualisation. Errington thus argues that the celebration of cultural difference and national history, which belongs to a more general discourse of progress and modernisation, created the idea of authenticity. I explore world literature precisely in this sense: a particular understanding of how people and nation create a meaningful Herderian/Goethian nexus stretched further through metaphors of evolution and civilisation, by which not every nation makes the same contribution to the autobiography of the world (Damrosch 2003c; Damrosch 2003b; McInturff 2003). One way of producing authenticity is decontextualisation (Appadurai 1986). Removing the art object from its original setting and exhibiting it in ethnographic museums (Coombes 1991) is similar to the processes of cultural assimilation and domestication inherent to literary translation. For example, anthropological and sociological studies of marketing (Appelbaum 2004; Lury 2004) point out that the contemporary emphasis on *consuming* cultural difference has created a situation in which an increasing number of 'places' and 'times' can be experienced in the *here-and-now*. Such a demand for not belonging to one 'culture' but for experiencing a cocktail of many at once (Bouchet 1995) produces 'cohesive', 'fixed', 'authentic' images of cultural identity through ethnic food, music, clothes, and, of course, translated literature.

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nation-building process, folklore, and ethnology were mobilised to produce a cohesive notion of 'people', 'tradition', and 'heritage' (Anderson 2006). The ideas of literature and nation, therefore, were invented as correlatives and quickly mapped onto the new idea of continuous progressivist time. The former became the national literary canon, where one work influences another, one school or style influences the next, and all unfold within the line of time. The latter crystallised into the narrative of the nation, in which the 'authentic' character of the people was found to lie in folklore and 'traditional', 'unspoilt' ways of living. Anthropology has reflexively thought about its own uses and abuses of classifications,

categorisations, and representations of 'cultures'. However, the legacies of 'culture', just like those of 'authority', live on in the way 'culture' is produced and represented in public discourse, particularly in the context of world literature. There, the world is still, if not neatly divided into fixed cultural entities, then at least unproblematically 'bottled' and brought to metropolitan publishing centres via literary translation and 'authentic' foreign authors as cultural brokers.

*The authentic performer:*

Ex-Yugoslav authors, as my ethnography illustrates, perform a role of cultural brokers in the process of translating 'authentic' Balkanness into comprehensible concepts for the UK audience. Such a set of actions relies on them being trusted. Over time and through repetitive contact with their consumers, their author brands infuse them with the aura of trustworthiness (Lury 2004). The process of brand(ing) thus obscures the fact that trust is relational and instead objectifies it into a personal trait (Sztompka 1999). In this way, certain people, such as cultural brokers, become perceived as intrinsically trustworthy. They are also viewed as appropriate for the context of translating their 'culture' to consumers in the metropolitan centres.

The notion of appropriateness is connected to Austin's (1975) performative function of language. Speaking, Austin argues, gets things done, it does not only describe. Because it has more than a constative function, performative language is not judged by its truth or falseness but instead by its effect: whether the intended action was achieved or not-achieved. When a performative is achieved (happy/felicitous performative), it is because its relations to other signs in the language system and to a wider cultural context are interpreted as intelligible and meaningful (Alexander, Giesen and Mast 2006).

Austin also argues that the effect of the performative depends on the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution. Although correspondence with facts is not a prerequisite for a 'happy' performative (Austin, et al. 1975: 146), the ability to convince others of its truth is. In other words, J. Alexander suggests that contemporary, complex societies have increasingly come to depend on simplified and symbolic acts of communication

that smooth out ambiguities of meaning and 'generate trust in the validity of cultural contents and authenticity of one another's strategic intentions' (Alexander 2006: 31). Such social performances, in which the author's activities and behaviour are deemed 'authentic' as opposed to artificial and contrived, are the basis of the cross-cultural interaction whose products are literary translations.

*The authentic Balkanness:*

Images of the Balkans as the Other of Europe materialised in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during the two Balkan Wars (Todorova 1997), when the region was described as backward, primitive, and tribal. During that time the word 'balkanisation' came to denote the fragmentation of large and viable political units. 'The Other Balkan Wars', a report published in the early 1990s (ibid.) to determine 'the role of the civilised world in the Balkans', reaffirmed the long-standing stereotypes of the region, concluding that the aggression had been a consequence of deep-rooted ethnic hatred and nationalism, distant tribal past, and barbarity. Balkanism, as introduced by Maria Todorova, is a critical interpretation of Said's Orientalism – a discourse that produces a known, subordinated Other and a superior, knowing Self (Said 2003: 58-9). Its specificity, Todorova argues, lies in historical and geographical concreteness, namely its association first with Byzantine rule and later the Ottoman Empire. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Balkan history were described as an era of 'Europeanisation', 'modernisation', 'Westernisation': processes which involved rationalisation, secularisation, and industrialisation (Todorova 1997). Todorova has described the difference between Orientalism and its Balkan variant, particularly since there was no colonial relationship to the West, as an 'imputed opposition' against an 'imputed ambiguity' (Todorova 1997: 16). If Balkanism is a discourse of ambiguity and liminality – of 'being *in* Europe but not wholly *of* it' (Bracewell 2009b: 148) – then, Bracewell suggests, it opens up a welcoming possibility for self-critique, which has largely been ignored in discussions of Western representations (Bracewell 2009a: 12-3).

Although welcoming Todorova's 'Balkanism' as an attempt to recover the region from 'double marginalization' (Hammond 2007: 16) – from economic as well as academic centres of power – Hammond critiques the homogeneity of

the term. Instead, he argues there are multiple Western representations of the region, which he calls 'Balkanisms'. Within the dialogue between Balkanism and Orientalism, Hammond is critical of the fact that postcolonialism, as a study concerned with the dynamics of power between centre and periphery, disregards those areas that geographically fall outside the once-colonial borders, as with the Balkans. Finally, the very use of the term *post* in postcolonialism implies that the power relations have somehow disappeared. Hammond thus calls for an analysis that would include economic influence, cultural hegemony, and other forms of (neo)imperialism that are spatially non-specific.

Much anthropological scholarship about ex-Yugoslavia from the late 1960s and 1970s has arguably reinforced the pre-existing stereotypes of the region,<sup>5</sup> by concentrating on the integrative aspects of patrilineal kinship and aiming to show the dominance of blood-based relationships over the agency of the socialist state. At the outset of the 1990s wars, the concept of the countryside as the cradle of ethnic purity re-entered anthropological study of the region. Studies by Bringa, Bougarel, and Ramet (Bringa 1995; Ramet 1996; Bougarel 1999) argued that the war in former Yugoslavia was made possible because nationalists, through heavy media campaign, won the majority of the vote in rural areas. The countryside occupied a central place in discourses of blood and soil as a symbol of the nation's naturalness and purity (Jansen 2005b). Most exiled writers were resented for their critique of the nationalist governments by writing against these discourses of ethnic origin, purity, and continuity.

Primitive authentic Balkanness, however, is not a trope used only by the West in its treatment of the region. As seen in Chapter 3, Orientalist narratives can be found within the space of ex-Yugoslavia, e.g. between Croatia and Serbia where Austro-Hungarian heritage is perceived as a pedigree line of modernity; or even within the same country or city. Thus Jansen (2005b) provides an interesting image of the 'frontline peasant' – a political and cultural icon in

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<sup>5</sup> Bette Denich's (1976) work focuses on the general oppression of Balkan women in strict agnatic households, where their role is limited to procreation. Andrei Simic provides an overview of gender relations in the urban, nuclear family, where the interplay between the state and the family is more complex. His ethnographic studies range from descriptions of images of Balkan masculinities (Simic 1969) to critiquing the concepts of power and authority within the nuclear family by introducing the notion of cryptomatriarchy (Simic 1983). Deviating from the scholarly trend to focus on close-knit rural communities (Hammel 1969; Halpern and Halpern 1972), Simic (1973) focused on a specific social category of 'peasant urbanites' as rational and resourceful, reflecting the Yugoslav model of urbanisation.

urban, post-war ex-Yugoslavia – and argues that the urban population of both Zagreb and Belgrade constructed itself in opposition to nouveaux-riches peasants, ethnically pure rural folk. These were perceived as a threat to the Westernised, modern cities because they lacked good taste (Bourdieu 1984) and, among other uncouth things, wore white socks with Armani suits. Primitive Balkanness is also one of the major tropes used by ex-Yugoslav exiled writers: they vividly describe it only to assume a distancing and critiquing position towards it.

## **1.4 Methodology and epistemology**

### 1.4.1 My position and experience in the field

I have entered the field of this research through multiple positions and identifications. I am a fiction writer. I am a Croatian fiction writer who has lived in the UK for the past seven years. I am a Croatian émigré fiction writer who worked for English PEN for five years and has been involved in UK academic life as an anthropologist. The list could go on. I wish to say that the questions and themes of this research have been born from very personal circumstances. It might be inaccurate to say that I identify myself with some protagonists, but I certainly share several life choices with them. I left my ‘home country’, for example, and have started writing for an audience wider than just ‘local’. I am ‘Yugonostalgic’ because, for one thing, I *can*, and like to, remember Yugoslavia, and for another, I believe there is a ‘Yugoslav’ literature that has survived the political entity of Yugoslavia. I support the writers’ *right to write*, which is why I worked for English PEN, and why, ultimately, I find it liberating not to write just for the Balkan audience. The reason for stating all this is the following: the anthropologist’s autobiography matters because it reflects her choice of area and study, the experience of fieldwork, analysis, and writing (Okely 1992: 1).

Hastrup has argued that anthropology is not about discovering ‘the unmediated world of “others”’ but the world between ourselves and others’ (Hastrup 1992: 117). Every ethnographer is thus a positioned subject: reflexivity and critical scrutiny should not be extended only to the realm of writing (ethnography) but also to how fieldwork is experienced as a set of lived (long-term) interactions and embodied knowledge. In the past, anthropologists have

tended to be labelled either as 'real', studying Others' alien cultural worlds, or as 'native', who 'are believed to write about their own cultures from a position of intimate affinity' (Narayan 1993: 2). The implication is that the former are somehow unmarked, while the latter have often been unquestioningly perceived as 'authentic insiders'.

My fieldwork experience supports nothing of the sort. I agree with Narayan that the insider/outsider dichotomy should be transformed and understood 'in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations' (ibid., 2). We can be aligned with or against those we study at multiple and ever-changing positions. In my case, factors other than my Croatian nationality, i.e. categorical identity, defined whether I was perceived as an insider or outsider in a particular context. In other words, as Rosaldo noted about all anthropologists, I had a 'multiplex subjectivity' with many crosscutting identifications (Rosaldo 1989: 168-95).

My fieldwork took 15 months. I spent around one year based in London and three months in Croatia, with short trips to Serbia. By the time I started my fieldwork I had already been living in London for five years, and, although I am not born British, I experienced no 'culture-shock' being based in the English PEN office, attending literary events and socialising with UK publishers. My time in London was thus more comparable to doing anthropology at home, where I made a daily effort to distance myself from what I was experiencing in order to be able to analyse my data. The nature of my PEN work required me to 'campaign' on behalf of translated literature and foreign writers and it was often necessary to draw a strict line between my participant-observation tasks and my duties as the director of Writers in Translation (WiT).

There was a constant negotiation between being 'lucky' to have such unrestricted access to literary professionals and feeling 'uneasy' for having to purposefully distance myself in order to carry on my research. Being 'a PEN person' undeniably opened a large number of doors for me. For example, I was able to arrange with Broadway Books to do a long-term case study which involved me visiting their offices, attending and sitting at editorial meetings, and having access to all employees to chat or ask them questions. I understand that this was made possible because of my PEN involvement and prior personal communication with the Broadway Books editor-in-chief. It would not be

possible to list all the cases in which the PEN background defined me as an insider and thus enabled me access to the industry that thinks of itself as an elite (Shore and Nugent 2002). It was more than just access: working there for several years prior to my fieldwork actually started the inquiry process and put me in touch with many people who contributed to fruitful discussions about issues I am raising here.

On the opposite end, in Croatia, the experience was again ambiguous. Very often, because I had left Croatia and was studying at a foreign university, I was considered a (threatening) stranger. Chapter 6 discusses how translation into English or other 'dominant' language is repeatedly perceived as 'a theft', taking something that does not belong to the person. Exiled writers are no strangers to such treatment. In Zagreb, my Croatian nationality was at times a hindrance, namely on occasions when I was perceived as a 'traitor', i.e. a published writer who had emigrated. Equally though, my embeddedness in literary circles throughout ex-Yugoslavia made it easy to reach and socialise with people. Because the rhythm of life is slower in Zagreb than in London, I was able to spend more time with my protagonists and enjoy more spontaneous 'mingling'.

Being a female researcher in Croatia often kept me on the outside, but for more prosaic reasons: I was not able to drink as much alcohol and as early in the morning so I missed out on some social occasions. In November 2008, during the Inter Liber book fair in Zagreb, I came to realise that the insider/outsider dichotomy was flawed and that the anthropologist's position in the field had indeed more to do with multiple and shifting identities than with strict categories of the people and issues one seeks to represent. I was trying to spend as much time as possible with (male) publishers and observe them in their day-to-day activities at the fair, but noticed I was purposefully being left behind or ignored. Men would simply disappear from their stands, leaving only young assistants to talk to customers. I arranged to meet a Macedonian friend who was visiting the fair. Being an established writer and a man himself, he knew the publishers who kept 'vanishing'. A few phone calls solved the case: we tracked them down in a local bar, drinking and, as they said, 'doing business'. Thanks to my Macedonian friend, who took me everywhere with him, I re-gained my access to bars and restaurants where publishers 'did

business'. Provisionally speaking, it was thanks to an 'outsider' that I became an 'insider'.

On my trips to Serbia, I was mostly apprehensive with regards to my language: whether I would be looked askance at for ordering coffee in a Croatian accent. I found such thinking common among both Croats and Serbs: it grew out of both a deeply-ingrained stereotype (the inability to be civil) and occasional recent experience of those who travelled across the border. I thought my Croatianness would shift the attention of every conversation away from the topic and on to my identity. However, and this was partly because I was with highly-educated and left-wing writers, I felt surprisingly unburdened by my 'origin'. The language proximity, i.e. the fact that I did not need to learn a new language to socialise in Serbia, created feelings of familiarity. My émigré status in the UK made me more 'neutral' and contributed to the overall experience of acceptance and ease of being in the field in Belgrade.

#### 1.4.2 Methods

This research is an example of a multi-sited ethnography that could best be defined through a combination of approaches that Marcus (1998) calls 'following the thing', 'following the metaphor', and 'following the life or biography'. Apart from a week spent in the Devon Arvon house (see Chapter 2), no other site in itself produced ethnographic data for my analysis. Instead, I was following the routes that books took from their original publishers in Croatia and Serbia to publication in the UK, the life histories and career paths of ex-Yugoslav exiled writers, and the conceptualisation and social grounding in different contexts of ideas/metaphors such as the free market and free speech. Tracing the circulation of a material object through different contexts is a common approach to the ethnographic study of processes in the capitalist world system. Well-known examples of 'following the thing' include Mintz's (1985) cultural history of sugar, *Sweetness and Power*, and Appadurai's (1986) *The Social Life of Things*, where he traces the shifting status of things as commodities through different contexts. Equally influential is Latour's (2005) notion of social (re)assembling through which heterogeneous entities from various locations become part of the analysis.

Charting the books' routes was mostly made possible through extensive interviews with writers and other literary professionals involved in their production. In this sense, following writers' life stories, in particular those segments focusing on the production of the imaginative work, featured most prominently in my methodology. This also revealed a social life of ideas such as free market and free speech. Using life histories can open new connections between social contexts that may otherwise be left obscured in the structural study of processes or within ethnographic spaces that are shaped by categorical distinctions (Marcus 1998: 94). Because they point to the intersection of the personal and the societal (Cohen 1994: 7), life histories enable us to understand the relationship between 'private troubles' and 'public issues' (Mills 1999).

This was particularly important for my research because most ex-Yugoslav writers who participated in my research had been in some way influenced by 'major' historical and political events. The way they thought about events such as the fall of Yugoslavia or the restriction of free speech in new successor states revealed their personal motivation for exile but also crucial points of larger discourses in which they were embedded. In collecting these interviews, I was guided by principles of interpretative interactionism (Denzin 1989a; Denzin 1989b; Beverley 2000; Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf 2000), an approach in social research that is interested in the so-called epiphanies, moments that leave marks on people's lives and have the potential for creating transformational experiences. The interpretative method is interested in how the self is constructed through the process of narration, where the biographical self points both inward to the text and outward to the world of events and experience. Thus awareness of the constructed nature of the narrating as well as narrated self is a safeguard against the participants' attitude that 'they know who they are' and that they are 'telling it like it is', which Holloway calls 'the transparent self problem' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 2-3).

Bourdieu (1977) raises several questions regarding the reliability of participants' testimonies and official 'native' accounts: they often take their own everyday reality for granted; or they might generalise, providing only the 'best' or the 'worst' cases of a particular issue to an 'outsider'. In other words, participants' narratives are learned and constructed; they are as much about *doing* something (performative) as are about *saying* something. This has been a

frequent impression in my fieldwork, particularly because I talked to writers who are themselves highly reflexive people and masters of 'doing things with words'. In that sense, even though life histories offer a rich bottom-up approach to social process, they need to be understood as fallible data.

One of the biggest benefits of using life histories as a research method (Josselson and Lieblich 1993; 1995; Lieblich and Josselson 1997; Josselson, Lieblich and McAdams 2003; Silverman 2006) was how it guided my analysis in terms of reconceptualising ideas of community, home, exile, and motion. Several anthropological studies (Olwig and Hastrup 1996; Alleyne 2001; Amit and Rapport 2002; Olwig 2002) have emphasised that using life histories can help avoid the *a priori* categorisation of people as belonging to certain groups such as ethnicity and instead explore how they think about 'community' and articulate their feelings of belonging across time and place. Alleyne (2001), for example, asserts that life narratives are not important for their facticity but for building representational maps or webs of meaning and memory. Olwig's approach moves away from regarding community as a collective unit encompassing individuals, towards focusing on how community is constructed through the negotiation of meaning among interacting persons. This is particularly useful for persons who are not necessarily interacting with the same physical space but who may maintain strong feeling of relatedness through time by telling stories to and/or about each other (Olwig 2002: 128). Equally, an indispensable element in the construction of community is people's capacity for detachment from a group. Detachment speaks of the relational character of community, constructed in respect to the possibility of alternative allegiances or identifications (Cohen 1982; Rapport 1997). Such interactive negotiations between belonging and non-belonging, across space and time, were a frequent theme and device in the narratives I collected. As illustrated through this thesis, ex-Yugoslav writers would mobilise themes of nostalgia for the 'organic' home (in space and time) in their writing. In the context of world literature, they also unproblematically stood for and represented those national literatures and 'cultures'. However, they were granted such socio-political positions through the very critique of the 'community' they were representing. The question was not 'to whom or where they belonged' but 'when and to what purpose certain belongings were invoked'.

The challenge of working with life histories is finding the sources of their coherence, the narratives that lie behind them, and the larger ideologies that structure them. The intent and value of the biographical project are thus to uncover the social, historical, economic, and structural forces that shape, distort, and otherwise alter problematic lived experiences (Bertaux 1981; Bertaux and Kohli 1984). The structural ones point to specific rules and contracts imposed by poetic genres, such as autobiography and testimony (Stoll 1999; Beverley 2000; Tierney 2000), discussed at length in Chapter 5. Finally, this research deals with life histories in two forms: oral life narratives conducted in the form of interviews and material books published in the form of autobiographies. Transformed into a book, a life story becomes a commodified extension and representation of the life in question. It is the book that turns the writer into a concrete object that can be purchased, held, and read about. Elbaz writes: 'The autobiographical practice retains the form of a product – the self, a commodity with an exchanged value. And the saleability of the self in our society makes the autobiography a productive literary form, overtaking the whole field of literature' (Elbaz 1988: 152-3).

My analysis of the written texts is extremely limited: I focused more on the social life of books as cultural artefacts. Literary themes found in the texts guided my analysis only insofar as I considered them topics of conversation with the reading audience or relevant tropes at live literary events. My ethnography is thus more concerned with for whom the texts have been written, how they are read (at home and abroad), who reads them, for what purposes, on what occasions, what is omitted, and what is taken for granted (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 142-3).

So far, this methodological discussion has mostly discussed collecting life histories and observing the social life of books. Narrative forms are particularly important in this research because they are at once its method and topic. Apart from conducting extensive interviews, I was involved in participant-observation in several ways: I worked as the director of WiT and I performed my role as a fiction writer, both in the UK and in Croatia. The former involved working in the office two days a week and frequently attending evening literary events. As a fiction writer, I attended the Devon retreat and participated in a mentoring programme with the organisation Exiled Writers

Ink (Chapter 2). In ex-Yugoslavia, I took part in several literary events and festivals and had regular meetings with literary professionals involved in my own writing career. These two contexts could be tentatively called 'native' to me, as I had been part of them before beginning my research. For this reason, I was especially aware of the importance of reflexivity about my practice. Bourdieu (1977: 1-30) argues that, regardless of the 'native/non-native' categorisation, every researcher needs to 'take two steps back' in order to produce epistemological integrity. He proposes that researchers should employ double distancing or 'participant objectivation'. Their first observations of reality are almost always distorted by questions producing value-orientated statements; the next step therefore involves becoming aware of that distortion in order to avoid reproducing static and reified views of social life. Awareness of this principle made me confident to use data I had collected in roles I already closely knew.

### 1.4.3 Ethics

This research fully complies with the official ASA ethical guidelines. All the research participants have consented to taking part in it and were informed about the purposes for which the information would be used. Mindful that informed consent is not a one-off event, I have continually returned to the topic of how and with what consequences the shared information would be presented. The question of anonymity thus needs clarification. Because most protagonists of this research are public figures, a solution was needed as to how to avoid any potential harm while still featuring them in the thesis. Several, namely Dubravka Ugrešić, Vladimir Arsenijević, Ivan Vidić and Igor Marojević, did *not* want to be anonymised. Instead, we reached an agreement for me to use only the information that was already in the public domain. This included data gathered at public events, information from published interviews, even what was recounted to me in private interviews as a version of published material. I consulted with these writers several times and they consented to this being the best course of action. All other participants were fully anonymised, including the names of publishing houses, venues, and anything else that might reveal their identity. The majority of my interviews were taped, always with the

participants' consent. Whenever I quote a participant, it is from a tape transcript.

Before I began my fieldwork, I had worked for English PEN for three years. I informed the office of my intentions, the nature of my research, and how the gathered information would be used and disseminated. They consented to me using my PEN experience, my observations, and my knowledge of translated literature for the purposes of my research. I weighed my duties, interests, and obligations both as a researcher and a team member of English PEN and decided again to use *only* information in the public domain. Therefore, in this research, I have not revealed or used confidential data that was available to me as an employee and an 'insider' of the organisation.

Hastrup has pointed out that anthropologists can never prove the rightness of their generalisations by calling on evidence or experience, because they are not separate from or prior to their act of writing and interpreting (Hastrup 2004: 456-61). They need to examine the social conditions of their own 'point of view' and 'evidence-making'. For this reason, I need to assert that my *interpretations* of actions and positions taken by organisations and writers from this research are in no way their moral judgement or cynical relativisations. To prevent any potential 'misunderstandings', I find it important to emphasise that this ethnography does not aim to 'take sides' or deal with moral truths. This would be quite impossible, as ethnography 'is not simply knowledge about particular events, practices and ideas, but about the processes by which these come to appear meaningful, perhaps inevitable or mandatory, possibly contestable or even mad' (ibid., 468).

Throughout this research, I have been 'lucky' to be granted access to a social field that constitutes itself as an elite: the publishing industry. Such a position has ethical and methodological challenges. Shore and Nugent (2002) have highlighted three main characteristics that define an elite: consciousness (awareness of belonging to an elite), cohesion, and conspiracy. Methodologically speaking, elites are difficult to access. Even when entrance is granted, the accounts provided by its members need to be understood as limited, and not only in the usual epistemological sense. They are additionally 'censored' with regards to their own confidentiality rules. This makes anthropology question its assumptions about what constitutes the field: for

example, some of my most important data about 'official' policies with regards to translated literature has been collected from retired members of the publishing elite, friends of friends, and family. Ethical questions concern the participants' right to influence the way their social practices are represented by anthropology without compromising the findings of the research. David Mosse (2006) has argued that anthropology's challenge today is understanding the changing relationship between fieldwork and writing: 'how fieldwork relations shape writing, and, second, [...] how writing now alters relationships of "the field"' (ibid., 937). This is because, as Mosse puts it, the division between the field and the desk has collapsed, and the anthropologist is surrounded by her participants who make demands to negotiate public and published interpretations. All this points to the relational nature of anthropological knowledge and the fact that what is known cannot be separate from the relationships with those who provide the data.

Ultimately, these challenges are an opportunity to think reflexively about anthropology's own status as an elitist profession steeped in the traditions and practices of Western middle-class academics. In addition, awareness of the wider systems of power and hierarchy within which anthropological knowledge is constructed points to the limited and situated nature of free speech, not only within literature but also within academic discourse.

## 2 The Arvon Magic

The Arvon Foundation was founded 40 years ago by the writers John Fairfax and John Moat, close friends of the Poet Laureate Ted Hughes. Today, it is a leading organisation, both in Britain and abroad, offering creative writing courses and retreats in four houses around the UK. Each house has its own rich history, usually through connections with a famous writer of the past, and is set in secluded picturesque countryside. The experience of being part of such a course is promoted as 'the Arvon magic'.

### **2.1 The Secret Ingredients of the Arvon Magic**

The Arvon organisation believes its success stems from careful choices of environment and tutors and this combination's ability to draw writers together into a community and enhance their individual creativity. Their promotional material references these ingredients as indispensable for nurturing writing talent. In informal conversations and among people involved in literary production, as well as among young aspiring writers, these assets are revealed as crucial for the Arvon brand. They may be described as follows:

**The setting** – participants live in a historic house, set in inspirational countryside, cut off from everyday distractions: no friends, family, TV or internet.

**Tutors' experience and legitimacy** – the courses are run by well-established writers whose own success carries a promise of future publication for the participants. The tuition is well balanced between intensive one-to-one coaching and encouraging individual writing time.

**Community cohesion** – participants come together to eat and share experiences. They cook each evening in small groups. All the rooms, including the lovely poetry library, are there to make participants feel at home, but are not to be mistaken for a hotel as everyone is expected to clean up after themselves.

**Celebration of individual and unique talent** – participants' imagination and life experiences are considered investments in becoming a good writer.

## **2.2 The Cost of a Piece of the Arvon Magic**

A week's retreat costs £575. The Arvon Foundation, being a literary charity, receives additional money for running the programme and maintaining the houses from Arts Council England (ACE). Most courses are open to the general public and known to be booked many months in advance, but various literary organisations may also pre-book specialised courses. In September 2008, I attended a five-day retreat for exiled writers, fully subsidised by the literary charity English PEN.

## **2.3 How I Got There**

As a published writer from Croatia now settled in the UK, I found myself fitting the category of an exile. This position allowed me to apply for a mentoring scheme run by another literary charity, Exiled Writers Ink (EWI). The eight-month programme scheme helps exiled writers to 'jump-start' their career in the UK by matching them to a mentor with the aim of producing a polished piece of writing, ready for submission to publishers. ACE also funds EWI regularly because its work feeds into most ACE priorities, particularly the one commonly known as 'community cohesion'.

The exiled writer is offered a list of available mentors. Choosing a mentor, I was told, is the participant's most crucial decision. To derive maximum benefit from the grant, the mentor should be an experienced creative writing teacher, with enough free time to devote to the process. They themselves should also be a well-established writer, so that the appearance of their name on the participant's CV engages prospective publishers' attention. My choice was an acclaimed UK author who also has experience in running a university creative writing department: for the purposes of this research I will call him Chris Anderson. I met Chris through my English PEN job and was told by my EWI colleagues that 'I was lucky' to know such a great writer.

## **2.4 How PEN is Connected to Arvon**

In the same year that I received the mentoring award, English PEN launched a new initiative as part of the Readers and Writers programme (RaW). RaW had been bringing writers into schools and promoting the values of literature. Like

all organisations regularly funded by ACE, English PEN too needs to prioritise working towards ‘community cohesion’. RaW had to branch out of schools and reach other communities: prisoners, refugees and exiles. In a matter of weeks, RaW formed a small group of refugee writers who would be offered writing workshops and a week’s retreat at Arvon several months later.

As the pre-booked week with Arvon drew nearer, RaW had difficulties identifying which writers would benefit most from their re-designed programme. They offered EWI places on the retreat for their own writers. The outcomes of the retreat for writers could be anything from contacts with agents and publishers to exposure through publications and public events. Knowing that an understanding of the industry is as important as a talent for writing, EWI welcomed the opportunity to add value to the exiled writers’ mentoring scheme.

As an EWI and PEN joint project, the Arvon retreat allowed both organisations to fulfil their aims, in particular vis-à-vis ACE. Their teaming up revealed that, regardless of the amount of public funding available for achieving community cohesion, identifying the ‘right’ beneficiaries had been difficult (see Chapter 4). Ideal ‘fundable’ writers who might fit the criteria for either writers-in-residence or mentees proved to be more scarce than PEN had thought.

## 2.5 How it Was

From Exeter station, we travelled 30 miles by taxi to the secluded Arvon house. Two PEN representatives – Jane and Frank – came along as facilitators and to remind everyone that PEN had made the retreat possible. Such marketing was necessary for PEN to recruit new members whose donations supported the organisation financially.

As we disembarked from the taxi, I counted 12 people standing in a neatly-landscaped garden: Elena<sup>6</sup> (Cyprus), Asya (Turkey), Saba, Romana (Somalia), Danuta (Lithuania), Hassan, Reza (Iran), Naim (Iraq), Jacqui (South

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<sup>6</sup> The names of all participants – PEN and Arvon staff, my mentor Chris Anderson and the British Pakistani writer Khalid Tarkhan – are fictitious. For further anonymity, I have changed other aspects of their identities such as origin and gender.

Africa), Aziza (Jordan), Jane and Frank (UK) and Andrea/me (Croatia). Jane and Frank also took part in the writing classes.

The mentors, Nick and Rachel, arrived separately and were escorted to the only two en-suite rooms in the complex. Tom and Lily, the house managers, made the sleeping arrangements. My room was small with a single bed, a miniature writing desk, and a chair. A window overlooked the back garden but the view was unimpressive. Everything was designed to prevent guests from spending much time inside their own rooms. We were asked to strip the simple bedding at the end of our visit. The rules of our stay were made explicit quickly: maximum integration coupled with obligatory, scheduled privacy. The course aimed to provide quality learning by balancing time for individual creative writing and social integration.

After settling in, we were taken to a converted barn on the other side of the garden - a spacious room with sofas arranged in a circle to facilitate discussions and thought-sharing. Tom greeted us with a speech about the history of the Arvon Foundation. House rules were given again. They involved details about running the house, a list of rooms available for our use and the request to make ourselves at home. This, among other things, meant we were expected to cook our evening meal ourselves. Both the ingredients and the daily recipe were supplied by Lily and her husband who lived in a nearby village. We were to split into groups of three each night, preferably with someone we did not previously know so that by the end of the week we could all become friends. The cost of food, but not alcohol, was covered for all five days. Hassan volunteered to make a list of alcoholic drinks to buy from the village, which earned him a free bottle of wine.

In the evening we were served a meal, the only one we didn't have to cook. The kitchen and dining room were the heart of the rustic yet functional house. The dining room contained a long, solid polished wooden table with heavy benches on each side. We could hardly wait for the open fire behind the table to be lit, since the house was cold and damp in the evenings. I sat next to Tom at dinner and we started chatting. He asked about my work and where I came from and I suddenly realised he was showing me what we were expected to do here: socialise, integrate, make friends. As the week unfolded, I noticed he

sat down to a different person each night, talking to everyone in the same manner. Integrate *yes*, but get too close *no*.

Lily warned us there was no internet connection in the house. Isolation from the outside world was supposed to kick-start our creativity. However, after I told her I had to answer an urgent email from my publisher, she revealed I might be able to pick up the signal from their office whilst sitting on a wide window ledge in the dining room. Later that night, I indeed discovered a strong enough wireless signal to put me back into the world. As I went through my emails, other writers walked past, complimenting me on my devotion to writing. They thought I was weird, good weird, and the word spread the next morning about how the Arvon magic had already started working on me.

The next day we were presented with the schedule. Writing classes took place from morning to lunchtime in the barn. There were two prose and two poetry days and we were all, regardless of our preferred genre, strongly encouraged to take both workshops. During the prose workshop, as we settled into comfortable sofas, facing each other, Rachel gave us tasks: imagining our character in different situations or drawing symbols that could represent our story or character. When each task was completed, people volunteered to read. Rachel would start by drawing on her emotional response to praise the writing, then offering a constructive critique. She never dismissed anyone's writing. I wondered whether not judging people's work was typical English pedagogy or the case only with paid courses: UK publishers and newspaper reviewers never refrain from fierce critique. Most people expressed positive impressions of my piece, except Reza. In his broken English, he said that my prose was shallow and that my text 'did not invite the reader to contribute anything towards understanding it'. His bluntness, expressed in sentences that people could hardly follow, sent everyone into shock. People could not decide if he was openly rude or if his lack of language skills made his criticism harsher than he meant. From this first workshop, Reza's reaction divided the 12 writers into two groups: one who compassionately accepted and justified his criticism and another who complained about both his criticism and the manner in which he expressed it.

When I asked the compassionate group why they tolerated him, they told me they were just respecting his cultural difference – 'and isn't this why we

are all here?’ Reza himself said that fierce and brutal criticism was a desirable way to interact with colleagues in Iranian literary circles. But the judgemental group would not accept such excuses – they expressed open hostility towards him and criticised his lack of positive attitude and inability to accept different styles of writing.

Rachel did not hesitate to show her dislike of Reza during discussions or evening readings: she would roll her eyes, sulk and go out for a cigarette in the middle of a session, mumbling she ‘couldn’t stand his rude comments a minute longer’. Added to the Reza schism, there started a discussion about ‘the English way’ of doing things that many non-English writers found unacceptable, hypocritical and demeaning. The comments I observed over a few heated occasions slowly defined what ‘the English way’ meant for many foreign writers – a patronising attitude of ‘we know best’, smoothing things over when there was no obvious solution to integrate differences in a discussion, using silly jokes to dissolve interpersonal tension by saying offensive words in a light-hearted manner.

Danuta resented Rachel’s ‘English way’ – not allowing a heated discussion during the writing class or evening readings. Whenever Rachel sensed that Danuta was going to escalate the discussion to the point of open conflict, she would cut her off mid-sentence, instructing her to continue the dialogue outside. This happened when I read a piece of my writing, introducing a Balkan character from my novel who was working as a handyman in London but had a philosophy degree. I explained that my character deliberately chose not to do intellectual work in the UK. Danuta believed this did not reflect reality because East European immigrants ‘really have no choice in that matter’. Their university degrees are not recognised in the UK, she explained, and they end up working beneath their educational level. Pursuing this political argument, Danuta continued in an agitated voice that ‘East Europeans were robbed of their dignity once they came to the UK and had to stoop down to manual labour’. Rachel rolled her eyes once again, raised her voice and sent her outside to ‘continue the conflict with me or with herself, as this is what she seemed to be doing’. As a teacher, Rachel’s priority was to clear the space for more literary arguments, yet she also wanted to smooth things over. Danuta burst out in anger, shouting:

You stupid English, you just can't stand the truth. Whenever someone is saying the truth, even if it means getting into a conflict, you always want to smooth things over and keep a comfortable discussion going. You'd do anything to preserve the illusion of how different people are able to share their opinions, enriching and complementing each other.

Danuta thought that being from different countries was not itself a problem, but that our differences were not given a chance to influence each other when they were nipped in the bud by 'the English way' of smoothing things over.

Mid-way through the retreat, it was announced that 'a famous writer was coming to visit us and read from his work'. That evening after dinner, we gathered in the barn, waiting for a British Pakistani writer Khalid Tarkhan to join us. The choice of writer was significant; the fact that Khalid was an immigrant himself was to show the group that success in a country that was not one's own was possible. He read from his most recent book about free speech and war in the Muslim world. But before opening the book he said, almost apologetically, that although he was Pakistani he had set his novel in Afghanistan. Having visited Afghanistan and interviewed around two hundred Afghan people in London, he was 'able to get as close as possible to a realistic atmosphere and cultural context for his characters and events'. Again, the participants split into two factions around the question of authenticity of the writer's text and the right to represent a country other than one's own. Reza wanted to know why Khalid even considered writing about any other country besides Pakistan. In his view, 'the only authentic voice is the one coming from the lived experience'. Not only did Reza question his actual knowledge of the Afghan context, but also his moral right to represent Afghanistan in Britain. Others offered alternative perspectives by recalling that Khalid's book was a fictional story with little claim to educational purposes; they insisted it be viewed for its literary quality. Khalid was visibly shaken, as he took Reza's comments more personally than the rest of us who already knew him.

## **2.6 ...and How it All Ended**

The last dinner got off to a problematic start. Danuta noticed that someone had drunk her share of wine. When she spotted Tom giving Nick a beer from the house stock, she said that 'giving tutors free alcohol was an injustice'. As we all

sat around our lavish dinner-table, she rose and delivered a few sentences about 'English hypocrisy', her voice trembling with emotion. No-one reacted. People stared at their dinner-plates while the sound of the crackling fire filled the room. To smooth things over, Nick offered her his own beer, but she refused it. We finished eating as quickly as possible, eager to avoid any further incidents. The last evening was to be spent in the barn where all participants were expected to read from their work.

Reza enjoyed too many drinks that night. He was kissing and hugging everyone. Rachel left the dinner-table to avoid his emotional apologies for 'being such a difficult person during the week'. He was advised to go to bed and sober up before the reading. But before he retreated to his room he stammered through a speech about English PEN:

English PEN is a shit organisation, a hypocritical bunch of people who are allegedly helping foreign writers but are only doing this to make themselves feel better. I never wanted to call myself an exiled writer. All I want is to be allowed a safe life out of Iran and to be able to write my poetry.

During the five-day retreat, we spent every evening in the barn, listening to our tutors, Rachel and Nick, and the special guest Khalid Tarkhan read from their work. We received an example of how successful writers present their work and what was eventually possible for us to achieve. The last evening was the participants' fifteen minutes of fame. The last ingredient of the Arvon magic had been made explicit - we were all unique and important in our individual creativity. Nick and Rachel introduced each of us with an anecdote relating to our time in Devon. I was introduced as a writer who liked to ponder the challenges of intercultural relationships and how linguistic differences between people obstructed closeness. The short extract from my story mocked the 'English way' by showing how strict social codes of asking for one's needs to be met could become ridiculous in intimate relationships. People laughed, both the English tutors and the foreign writers.

Rachel showed her emotional side, saying how she enjoyed the company of so many different people from various backgrounds. 'She felt richer for this experience and very close to all of us.' I wondered if that too was part of the rules of Arvon magic: to express emotions of closeness and enrichment? The point of the course was to make everyone translate themselves into an

appropriate 'English way' of expression: first by improving their English, then by letting us know how to fit better with the English poetic rules of writing, and lastly by integrating us into the 'English way' of socialising. The evidence of their success followed the next day. As we departed, all jumbled up together in a shared taxi to Exeter, nobody spoke very much. And though most of us took the same train back to London, we somehow, intentionally or by chance, ended up in different carriages and we never saw each other again.

## **3 Publishing Yugoslavia:** **from Socialist Aestheticism to Market Realism**

### **3.1 Defining the Context: space, time, ideology**

An exhaustive background to this research covers seemingly discontinuous and divergent topics. Partly, as explained in subsection 1.4.3, this is because my ethnography is multi-sited, focusing on movement and flow rather than on fixed spaces. Additionally, the very concept and topic of translation (see Introduction) is a vehicle of bringing together what has previously been apart. Therefore, this chapter maps out and depicts four socio-historic as well as symbolic ‘territories’ from which I have researched the presence of ex-Yugoslav literature on the UK book market: the history of UK publishing, particularly of translated literature as its narrowest niche; the role of literary institutions; the construction of Yugoslavia as a cultural concept through negotiations of and between Yugoslav literature(s); and, finally, relationships between ‘socialist’ and ‘capitalist’ modes of literary production.

Translated literature occupies a ‘high end’ of the UK literary market which differs from general book production: although also affected by expectations of profit, this niche is further influenced by political, cultural, and institutional constraints that both reflect and ‘make’<sup>7</sup> this sector. It is by no means a free market, a pervasive perception in public discourse both in the UK and elsewhere (see below). My professional involvement with the UK publishing industry has enabled me to follow its course over the last five years, but this research covers a longer history. First, because the relevant books have been published in the last 20 years, not five; second, because literary and more general images of ex-Yugoslavia in the UK have been shaped for over a century. This suggests that the *here-and-now* of UK publishing and its literary

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<sup>7</sup> Donald MacKenzie, for example, insightfully argues in *An Engine, Not a Camera* (2006) that economic models are an engine of inquiry rather than a camera to reproduce empirical facts, since financial markets were not only described but also fundamentally altered by authoritative economic theories. Thus, financial models, including the free market, do more than analyse: they are an active force transforming and constructing the environment, not a passively recording camera.

representations of ex-Yugoslavia must be considered with reference to various histories, geographical and cultural spaces, and political ideologies.<sup>8</sup>

Scarce work exists on the topics and 'territories' I have identified. Generally, few social studies have approached issues and trends to publishing from an ethnographic perspective. In addition, in historical overviews of UK publishing, there is close to no mention of literary translation as a special category. This field is not only under-researched in terms of academic or any other critical approach but also lacks reliable statistical data. For example, British Council officials mostly presented me with limited information, fashioned in 'press release'-style answers. Such institutions, which have funded most international initiatives, would be able to comment on trends in literary translation in the last 50 years. Their lack of interest is a telling sign that: a) literary translation, as a subject of critical research and cultural policy, has systematically been neglected; b) the lack of cultural policy regarding literary translation has also contributed to a weak interest for this subject within academia; and c) any research initiated by literary institutions is limited to finding ways of improving the quantity of literary translations, disregarding the complex extra-linguistic factors that shape the status of the English language and influence its relationship with the rest of the world's literatures. Therefore, where I could not find appropriate studies, I turned to my own observations and conversations with the protagonists of the UK and ex-Yugoslav publishing industries. The interpretation of the background information presented here should be perceived with this in mind.

Yugoslav literature studies suffer from a similar lack of resources. Among an array of books on the history of Yugoslav literature(s) and its poetics, only a few approach the subject from a sociological perspective, closest to my own methodology. Here too I turned to my own experience as a creative writer who has emerged from the post-socialist context and I participated in crucial conversations with colleagues who had experienced socialist modes of literary production. These exchanges developed a strong feeling that the lack of anthropological perspectives on the geopolitics of national literatures and their

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<sup>8</sup> I use the word 'ideology' to refer to a wide range of forces and constraints, not necessarily limited to state politics. In that sense, for example, market realism (a specific set of literary themes, styles and ideas of the purpose of literature), which advocates literary uniformity and mass production, can also be perceived as ideology.

exchange is one reason why literature is still perceived as something pure, universal and free among those who practise it and write about it. Relying on my ethnographic data as well as on various anthropological studies that featured some of my concepts, but not necessarily my themes, was my attempt to correct this.

Although these factors made the context of my research 'difficult', the field has also presented itself as constructive and original. In particular, defining the contours and specificities of the translated literature market made it possible to challenge many taken-for-granted concepts and processes, such as the free market, free speech and the universal value of literature.

### **3.2 British Publishing in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: from 'a gentleman's job' to a money-making industry**

This short overview of 20<sup>th</sup>-century British publishing points only to the events, trends and developments that I believe have been crucial in shaping the British literary space as a specific target culture for literature in translation.<sup>9</sup> Three phenomena have shaped the British book market as one of the world's most insular in respect of literary translations: the Net Book Agreement (NBA), the paperback and the conglomerates.

The NBA, established in 1900, was a direct response to the mid-19<sup>th</sup>-century contention between booksellers and publishers where large booksellers sought increased discounts from publishers in order to undercut competitors' retail prices. Hoping to provide a better value for book buyers and a regulated market for publishers, NBA was introduced as a way to set the prices at which books were sold to the public. In place for almost a century,<sup>10</sup> NBA has given the British book trade the strongest institutional structure of any publishing industry in the free world. In the US, for example, price-fixing agreements would be illegal under anti-trust laws (Feather 1988: 192). These institutional structures acted to preserve rather than to foster change: they allowed the trade,

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<sup>9</sup> For a detailed history of the British publishing industry based on the author's personal experience, see Iain Stevenson's *Book Makers: British Publishing in the Twentieth Century* (Stevenson 2010). *A History of British Publishing* by J. Feather (Feather 1988) covers five centuries of the trade since the invention of the printing press.

<sup>10</sup> There were many attempts to circumvent NBA, in particular by book clubs which printed special editions for members.

suspicious of innovation, to continue in familiar ways (*ibid.*, 193). Many were surprised that NBA as such a restrictive practice had survived the Thatcherite era of neo-liberal restructuring and market deregulation. Its final collapse in 1997 was most vociferously supported by big conglomerates and booksellers, who thought that ‘cosy gentlemen’s agreements’ were interfering with their trade and robbing them of much higher profits. The decline of NBA was particularly beneficial for large bookstore chains, which started offering discounts, and later paved the way for supermarket chains to take a big share of the book business – a situation which has since caused 500 independent bookshops to close (Stevenson 2010).

The paperback revolution of the 1930s – as much as it initially challenged the elitism of the book business – contributed in the long run to its conformity and insularity. The vision of two 1930s publishers was to have unprecedented influence on the book trade. Victor Gollancz, the founder of the Left Book Club, a broad grassroots socialist movement that became something of a legend in British life,<sup>11</sup> was the first publisher to focus on selling books. The ‘jacket blurb’ in its modern form was his invention in trying to reach new and bigger audiences (Feather 1988: 91).

Allan Lane, the founder of Penguin and considered one of the most influential and innovative publishers at the time, took the pursuit of sales even further. His books had brightly-coloured covers, with a different colour for each genre, and set the format of today’s paperback. The originality of his idea lay in his confidence that good books could sell in large numbers, if distributed through unconventional channels. The paperback revolution began when Lane sold 20,000 copies of each of the first ten titles through Woolworth’s, making the books available at places and to people they had never previously reached (Feather 1988: 211). By the 1950s, Penguin had turned from just another publisher to a fully-fledged cultural institution: its legacy would contribute to the overall shaping of the book industry.

The 1960s’ emerging corporatism transformed the publishing industry: a focus on business concerns gradually eroded the influence of individual publishers relying on their taste and judgement alone. Book publishing was no

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<sup>11</sup> Stevenson (2010: 94) recounts how Gollancz’s publication of many left-wing philosophers influenced postwar British politics. The Left Book Club, providing discounted editions for its members, was also known for successfully circumventing NBA.

longer perceived as the province of a social elite: a gentleman's job. Publishers, who until then were seen as tweed-jacketed *litterateurs*, privately educated and supported by private incomes, were overtaken by money-making businessmen. The ownership and management of publishing houses also began to change. Remembering the take-over of Pantheon, one of the US's best-known independent publishers, André Schiffrin (2000) recounts the course of a typical merger:

The conglomerate issues a glowing statement lauding the value of the firm it has bought and promising to maintain its traditions. Everyone is assured that no major changes will be made and that as few people as possible will be fired. Later it is announced that simple economies are essential for the sake of efficiency and that 'back office' functions will be merged. Accounting, shipping and warehousing soon find themselves under a common roof. Then the sales forces are amalgamated, since there is no need to have different people covering the same territory. After that an unfortunate overlap in editorial output is discovered [...] A number of editors and their assistants are fired, since, after all, the total number of books being published must decrease. Gradually it becomes difficult to tell which firm is publishing which books. In Random House UK, for instance, the same people are responsible for several lists that were once issued by individual, distinctive and independent publishing houses; now these companies are merely names to be affixed to the title pages of new books. (Schiffrin 2000: 117)

As publishing houses have been taken over by international conglomerates, their standard profit margin of 4% is expected to match other media, such as newspapers, cable TV networks and films. 1980s Thatcherite pro-business politics convinced conglomerate owners that the free market was an ideal democracy, meaning that state subsidies for the kind of culture advocated by elites were seen as interfering with what were perceived as the desires and tastes of a broader readership. Anything that restricted buyers' choice was seen as undesirable and anything that extended it as good.<sup>12</sup>

Changes within publishing reflected broader economic developments that resulted from embracing the free market as an ideal way of buying and selling, benefiting all those involved economically, socially, and politically. The concept solidified its hold in Western culture during the 1980s Conservative rule in the UK. In *Meanings of the Market*, Carrier (1997a) asserts that the free

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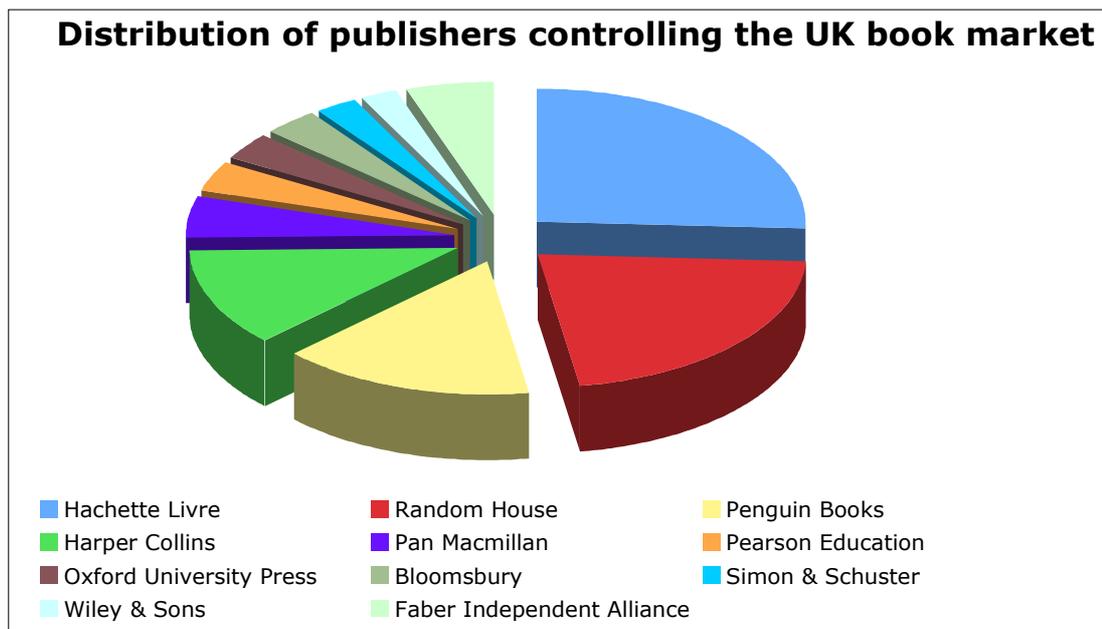
<sup>12</sup> Clearly, *choice* is an idealised conception rather than reality, considering the influence of marketing and information channelled by the media over the formation of choices.

market is not what people do and think and how they interact when they buy and sell but is instead a conception people have about an idealised form of buying and selling. The free market assumes that the world consists of individuals subject to no constraints: they are free, autonomous, and self-serving. Carrier, however, presents various studies which challenge both the freedom of the market and the autonomy of its actors. He thus questions the taken-for-granted assumptions of the concept, revealing it as vulnerable and subject to debate and uncertainty.

Free market and self-reliant individualism, as prevalent narratives of Western liberal democracies, have been studied in various other contexts. For example, Shore and Wright (1999) describe how audit within academic departments consists of measuring 'teaching performance' and 'research quality' to ensure 'accountability' and 'transparency'. They assert that this narrative, while fashioned in terms of 'individual effectiveness' and 'empowerment' – both concepts which sustain the image of an unconstrained individual – is essentially a relationship of power between a scrutiniser and observed. 'Civil society' is another concept not only closely related to the free market but often conflated with it. Hann and Verdery (1993; 1996) argue that socialism has been constructed as artificial and bureaucratic social engineering, whilst civil society is presented as a natural, organic entity composed of autonomous individuals whose solidarity, consensus, and values support a fully human experience. Images and paths to civil society are talked about in terms of modernisation and 'returning to Europe'. Verdery writes that adherence to these values, compounded with 'evidence' of suffering under socialism, often produces and mobilises what she calls moral capital. Economics as a discipline has itself (mis)used the notions of self-interested individualism and contractual exchange. Strassmann (1993) points out that the models and stories on which economic research is based guide not only the kinds of explanations the discipline can provide but what counts as economics in the first place. She highlights 'the free marketplace of ideas', a narrative according to which best ideas rise to the top according to merit. Their worth is perceived as ascertained in a competitive process of bidding and exchange. Strausmann, however, concludes that the judges in the 'economy of the intellect' have not been produced in a vacuum.

In the publishing industry, the 'free marketplace of ideas' assumed that books advocating new theories and different approaches would take time to find their followers and even lose money in the beginning. It implied a distinction between a book as commodity and a book as a source of knowledge. The latter would be subsidised either from profits from better-selling books or by the state. On the other hand, conglomerates are increasingly publishing only books that will dependably turn immediate profit, which automatically eliminates many important books from catalogues. Editorial decisions are increasingly being made by publishing boards, where financial and marketing staff play the pivotal role. Schiffrin calls this 'market censorship': a decision-making process based on the requirement of a pre-existing audience for any book (Schiffrin 2000: 106), leading to aesthetic and political conservatism. As a result of amalgamations, for example, London has lost around 170 significant publishers since the 1950s. Most are now owned by the conglomerates Hachette Livre (French) and Random House (bought by the German Bertelsmann), a direct result of market deregulation and the adherence to beliefs that competition and buyer choice are the most democratic mode of exchange.

Fig. 3.1. Distribution of control of the UK book market: most conglomerates consist of a number of small imprints.



Booksellers have also changed: bookshop chains have grown dramatically and now sell more than 50% of all books. Their control over such a proportion of the market enables them to demand whatever terms they want from publishers, who are pressed to pay large sums for advertising if they want their books prominently displayed.

Because conglomerates own other media outputs, the free market – normally supported by open competition – often gets restricted by their monopoly. Common ownership gives their books disproportionate attention in magazines, papers and TV shows (Schiffrin 2000: 147). In Britain, the paradigmatic merger HarperCollins is owned by Rupert Murdoch's global multimedia empire News Corporation, consisting of William Collins, Sons and Co Ltd (UK) and Harper & Row (US). It owns more than 30 imprints. HarperCollins' corporate strategy involves making acquisitions to be exploited throughout all its various media outlets. These new practices reflect emerging corporate values: they are multinational, profit-driven, ambitious, and supported by a major international media organisation that is thought to value commerce over culture (Stevenson 2010: 272).

The Thatcher era also produced a new type of literary agent. Long-established literary agencies, such as Curtis Brown, had had an important part in the publishing economy but their influence was mainly confined to ensuring publishers' contracts and royalty rates were fair to their authors. A new breed of agent recognised that authors who could feed the hunger of profit-driven publishers could demand serious money in advances. Through auctions, advances soon climbed to six-figure sums. With no relation to books' actual earnings, advances were an expensive insurance policy against possible competitors. Though this trend has generally subsided, the role of the literary agent remains important. Nowadays, most publishers will not even consider projects unless they have been submitted by an agent, who has additionally taken over the editor's job of shaping texts (Stevenson 2010: 284).

The merging of publishing houses that started in the late 1960s came from the need to decrease overheads and thus increase profit (Wilson 1963). The diversification of imprints and multiplicity of editorial policies gave way to profit-driven publishing. Radically experimental or foreign authors who could once expect to be published even without making a profit have been swapped

for books that reflect uniformity and conformity to the median of popular taste.<sup>13</sup> These changes have contributed to British publishing producing 3% of literary translations, the world's lowest rate.

### 3.3 English as an Invasive Species

As a way of tracing the development of translated literature as a special niche of British publishing, I wish to introduce the story of the rise and fall of one of the finest publishers in this category: Harvill Press. Harvill's destiny demonstrates some major trends in the publication of foreign fiction since WW2, revealing the supremacy and cultural imperialism<sup>14</sup> of English as 'an invasive species' (Allen 2007b). Harvill Press was established in London in 1946, by Manya Harari and Marjorie Villiers (hence Har-Vill), who both worked at the Foreign Office. Their idea was to foster cultural exchange between 'East and West before the Iron Curtain politically separated them' (Bozicevic 2004). Through publishing high-quality foreign literature and focusing less on the business of books, they actively promoted ideals of a united Eastern and Western Europe, almost unthinkable in the post-WW2 context. From their small space in Lower Belgrave Street they established a long list of numerous 20<sup>th</sup>-century classics, including Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Harvill soon gained a reputation for publishing world-class translated fiction. After the ladies died, Christopher MacLehose, the inspiring editor who joined in 1984, revitalised Harvill with a host of new exciting authors. Under his editorial guidance, writers such as Octavio Paz, Jose Saramago, Ivo Andrić, Claudio Magris, Ismail Kadare and Haruki Murakami were introduced to the UK readership. MacLehose bought the Danish thriller by Peter Høeg, *Miss Smilla's Feeling For Snow*, one of the first foreign books to become a best-seller, anticipating the translation and popularity of other Scandinavian thrillers. During his 21 years at Harvill, MacLehose became known as British publishing's doyen of literature in translation. In 2002, news

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<sup>13</sup> A full discussion of the construction of popular taste is beyond the scope of this chapter. Here I refer to the reduced multiplicity of editorial policies compared to earlier decades. Conglomerates thus aim to publish fewer titles but sell them in bigger numbers.

<sup>14</sup> By cultural imperialism, I understand the specific ideas and practices both within academia and beyond that created Otherness through narratives of modernisation and progress and through temporally distancing those who are perceived as different. In my case, this includes foreign languages and literatures.

broke that Random House was buying Harvill Press. In spite of MacLehose's hope that Harvill would not lose its independent spirit, it was soon forced to merge with Secker and Warburg, another Random House imprint. The merger was rationalised as an opportunity to cut expenses, connect similar lists and manage the business more effectively.

The growing commercialisation of publishing did not leave literature in translation untouched. If anything, having been perceived as difficult to acquire, sell, and read, it shares the same fate as experimental and innovative prose – the category that has suffered most in the past 30 years. What distinguishes translated literature from other niches is its specific structure of available subsidies that almost always coincide with the intentions and interests of grant-giving bodies. Hence, this market is influenced by more than just the race for profit. Looking back at Harvill's history, many, if not all, titles are seen to be intimately related to global political currents. The Cold War, which first separated Eastern from Western Europe, was the very reason why so many Russian and Eastern Bloc writers were translated into English. The combination of curiosity about life on the other side of the Iron Curtain and the demonisation of communism provided a welcoming context for many exiled writers who wrote against their governments. Their intellectual anticommunism was widely celebrated,<sup>15</sup> securing them a prominent place in the international literary canon. This was the case with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Milan Kundera and, most recently, Herta Müller, who won the Nobel Prize in 2009 – the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of communism. One may also trace how the US 1960s civil rights movement influenced which literary genres became popular. Grand narratives of any kind – political, historical, or social – disintegrated, paving the way for personal testimonies to count as true representations. Hence, autobiography, memoir, and popular ethnography have become some of the most sought-after genres of translated fiction.<sup>16</sup> The Cold War, in effect, had a beneficial influence on publishing because the desire to unveil the mystery of

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<sup>15</sup> Schiffrin argues that, in the USA, the CIA promoted intellectual anticommunism, allowing books that criticised communism to get translated and published (Schiffrin 2000: 39).

<sup>16</sup> This is why ex-Yugoslav writers achieved so much popularity in the 1990s with titles such as *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* or *Balkan Express* (both by Slavenka Drakulić, a Croatian writer exiled in Sweden).

'the other side' provided the raw material for a great many imported books (Schiffrin 2000: 6).

By publishing the series of Central European Classics in 2010, Penguin showed again that its strength lies in timeliness and numbers. The series, which rescues Central Europe from its socialist-era and modern-day neglect, proves that translated literature, like no other niche, reflects global political events and UK governmental responses, since the majority of subsidies available as translation grants or core costs for smaller publishers are offered by ACE, part of the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport. ACE recognises literary quality as an important value, but as a governmental body it also has its own policies that run parallel with the country's overall international relations. Hence, in the early 2000s, both ACE and the British Council announced a redirected focus towards Arabic-speaking countries, only to shift it again more recently towards China. Such national policies are visible in the choice of translated titles available in English. The British Council<sup>17</sup> in particular helps this reciprocity by funding many cultural initiatives and exchanges between writers, editors, translators, and publishers in countries of heightened political interest. Until it funded protagonists of British publishing to attend the Cairo Book Fair – among many networking initiatives – the UK lacked editors who knew how to find Arabic books for UK publication. The most recent interest in China was reflected in money being invested for educational purposes, specifically training more translators from Chinese.

The political and cultural development of literature in translation needs to be explored further with regard to the position of the English language in today's globalised world. Esther Allen, who edited the PEN report on the international situation of literary translation (Allen 2007a), argues that English has become an indispensable language of globalisation without which one dies

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<sup>17</sup> The British Council was founded in 1934 with the aim to promote British culture abroad and foreign culture in the UK. It is a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisation. Its 'sponsoring department' within the UK government is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, although it has day-to-day operational independence. The major criticism of the British Council is its shift in priorities. For example, it announced in March 2007 its 'intention to increase its investment in the Middle East, North Africa and Central and Southern Asia', followed by major cuts in other services, libraries and office closures across Europe. British Council libraries in Athens, Belgrade and Zagreb all closed in 2007 (Donaldson 1984). I learned much about the British Council from retired officers who were my long-term research participants.

a 'speechless death'.<sup>18</sup> Instead of being a *lingua franca*, English is closer to 'an invasive species': more than 85% of international organisations use English as an official language and it has rapidly grown as a second language across the globe. In *Empires of the Word*, Nicholas Ostler (2005) has pointed to extra-linguistic reasons for such domination of English: it is associated with the deliberate acquisition of wealth by supporting the freedom of the individual.

The question of translation into English affects the whole of world literature. When a work is translated into English, it stands a great chance of being translated into other languages as well. Even when that does not happen, a work available in English belongs to the biggest book market in the world and can be read by more people of different linguistic backgrounds, nationalities, and cultures than a work in any other language. A truly transnational level of discourse can thus only be gained via English. But if world literature in Goethe's sense of the term (see Introduction and especially Chapter 8), Allen wonders, comes to consist entirely and primarily of literature written/translated in English, then 'is there really such a thing as world literature anymore' (Allen 2007b: 17)? Answers from PEN Centres worldwide share a common observation and concern: that, all too often, interest in other countries' literary output is little more than the taste for the exotic. Most books imported from Eastern Europe, for instance, portray victims of communism, censorship, and repression and the economic slump in Eastern Europe that followed Soviet withdrawal. The Secretary of Slovenian PEN, Andrej Blatnik, ironically summed up the attitude of Anglophone publishers: 'there's no point in importing love stories or other frivolous fare from far-off lands no matter how well they are written because we've got plenty of that stuff here' (Allen 2007a: 40).

Why does English have the strongest linguistic currency? Pascale Casanova (2004) uses metaphors from economics to offer an insightful account of world literature and claim that the currency of each language has a clearly different value on the global literary marketplace. The world republic of letters, she writes, is populated with players of unequal status, reflecting the specific

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<sup>18</sup> A reference to the Duke of Norfolk (from Shakespeare's *Richard II*) being banished from England and dying in exile a speechless death. Allen claims that today there is hardly a place where a speaker of English wouldn't be understood so the lack of this linguistic skill is considered death-like – quite the opposite from Shakespeare's play.

mechanisms of domination at work in the game of literature (Casanova 2004: 352). Its history is one of incessant struggle and competition over the very nature of literature itself, while its economy – unequal trade, as she calls it – is based on a market where literary value is circulated and traded.

Casanova introduces another useful term to understand such an unequal distribution of power in world literature – that of *literariness*. A language is more literary in the global literary marketplace when imbued with a strong literary capital. The number of texts, their age – the older, the better – and the size of the ‘national classics’ canon all contribute to the accumulation of literary capital. The classics are the privilege of the oldest literary nations with their work being perceived as having a quality of timelessness. In general, she argues, the highest literary capital is defined as non-national and ahistorical. Other elements of literary capital are reflected in an extensive professional milieu, cultivated readership, literary institutions, and prizes. Clearly, this is a social and symbolic capital – a belief by which, for example, a foreign writer can succeed in the UK if introduced by a well-known national colleague. However, this capital cannot be reduced to the strictly linguistic value of a language. The literary value of English, for example, is seen through the heritage and poetics of the language of Shakespeare and other ‘classic’ writers. Finally, Casanova argues, a language’s literariness is measured by the number of its intermediaries: publishers, editors, critics, and especially translators, who make the circulation of texts in and out of the language possible (Casanova 2004: 21). The PEN report shows that books translated from English account for more than half of all imported foreign fiction in other countries. While other European countries have national agencies for promoting their literature abroad, Britain is the only country in the world to subsidise the import of foreign books through translation grants. This measure exists to tackle the problem that Britain is the country where translations represent the lowest proportion of published books. Translation statistics and the current geopolitics of world literature point to a situation where English-speaking readers have a limited literary choice while non-English-speaking writers lack chances to be chosen in this unequal trade (Allen 2007b: 15).

In concluding this overview of translated literature in the UK, a couple of points need to be emphasised which reflect a complex categorisation of

books. First, foreign fiction has traditionally shared the destiny of many other domestic books that have been pushed out by the growing uniformity of the market. And second, though an exception, some foreign books have indeed become bestsellers. These mostly belong to the crime fiction genre, such as the Scandinavian Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* or Mediterranean noir novels. The traditional print run for a foreign novel, therefore, is between 2,000 to 3,000 copies, but occasional print runs of one million are not impossible.

### **3.4 The Legitimising Power of Literary Institutions**

Discussing the role of literary organisations is a necessary step in understanding how ex-Yugoslav books find their way into the UK book market. The cultural and political influences exerted through literary organisations make translated fiction a particular market that must be explored separately from general book production. Many UK literary organisations are regularly funded by ACE and thus their activities reflect ACE's values and priorities. English PEN is one example of how the literary establishment negotiates literary values and influences translation trends. The information presented here is a result of my five-year involvement with English PEN as director of the WiT programme. I have also considered Elizabeth Paterson's (2001) memoirs about her long-standing work as a personal secretary to International PEN's General Secretary.

International PEN is the world's oldest writers' association, founded in London in 1921 to promote friendship and intellectual co-operation among writers. PEN originally stood for 'Poets, Essayists and Novelists', but now includes writers of any form of literature, such as journalists and historians. The first PEN centre was actually English PEN, founded by Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, with John Galsworthy as the first President. The impetus to establish an organisation that promoted literature across national borders clearly reflected the political situation after WW1 and the wartime division of Europe. Many countries established their own PEN centres – there are currently 145 around the world – which contributed to the organisation's overall ethos. Some of its aims include: a) emphasising the role of literature in the development of mutual understanding and world culture; b) fighting for freedom of expression; and c) acting as a powerful voice on behalf of writers harassed, imprisoned, and sometimes killed for their views. In my years of working there, I remember both

PEN members and staff using three catchy phrases that summed up PEN's motto: PEN is mightier than the sword; literature knows no frontiers; writers have the *right to write*.

Most generally, PEN acts as a patron of literature by offering financial help to certain books, awarding writers established literary prizes, and campaigning for them to receive more media attention. The Writers in Prison programme specifically helps foreign writers whose right to free speech has been violated and who have been victims of imprisonment or political torture. This help can have many forms: vouching for the writer to the Home Office if they are applying to settle in the UK, securing legal help, providing each foreign writer with a UK patron to help with their writing, translating, and marketing. The WiT programme<sup>19</sup> supports foreign fiction differently from ACE: grants are exclusively spent on marketing books and live events with authors. A study at the outset of the programme investigated what kinds of support would make the biggest difference to publishers committed to literature in translation. The results proved that translation grants were not publishers' priority; they could apply to ACE or other national agencies for those. Instead, there was a large need for additional funds to market and promote foreign books. In 2005, WiT supported its first book – Anna Politkovskaya's *Putin's Russia* – with a £4,000 grant spent on promotion and live events. The book, which was banned in Russia while Politkovskaya was perceived as dangerous to the Russian establishment (she would later be assassinated), set the tone for the kind of literary values PEN was promoting and the way foreign literature was appropriated.<sup>20</sup>

PEN's effort to intervene by assisting the marketing of foreign literature has been a brave and committed act, especially when most publishing houses

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<sup>19</sup> English PEN's commitment to free speech is reflected in WiT activities through advocating that every writer has the right not only to say what they want but to say it in the language of their origin as a basic human right. In 1996 the so-called Barcelona Declaration (The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights) set the global aim to 'encourage the creation of a political framework for linguistic diversity, based upon respect, harmonious coexistence and mutual benefit' (<http://www.linguistic-declaration.org>). Within International PEN, the Linguistic and Translation Rights Committee lobbies for the protection of endangered languages and those of limited diffusion (Allen 2007a: 14).

<sup>20</sup> Appropriation of foreign literature most notably refers to the way autobiographical genre has been considered a truthful testimony to the 'lives of others' and a 'window into the world' that could provide both information and entertainment, but rarely appreciation of literary quality in the same sense as literature in English.

invest meagre sums on promoting foreign writers. Since marketing budgets are not equally distributed among all books on a publisher's list, foreign ones receive least. The originality of the WiT grant was in making publishers match the sum they would receive from PEN. Clearly, the backing of English PEN has a far more symbolic value than what £4,000 worth of grant could buy in terms of advertising. Each supported book has a 'Recommended by PEN' logo on its cover, contributing to its literary prestige and an aura of exclusivity and authenticity. The 35 books I saw through to publication at PEN were all viewed as rare accounts by dissident writers whose courageous words had almost cost them their lives.

Judging criteria for the grant were literary quality (of both original and translation) and a reflection of PEN's main aims of intercultural dialogue and free expression. Observing the decision-making process, from the arrival of applications from publishers until the committee members' voting, offered an understanding of the organisation's policies and the driving forces behind each grant. Although literary quality was considered, the main emphasis was put on issues of cultural and literary authenticity. For example, I saw books by a French writer about secret paramilitary prisons in Algeria rejected for the grant because a Frenchman 'can never speak of such topics as authentically as an Algerian'. The search for authenticity in foreign writing is also expressed in choices of literary genre: roughly half of the books were non-fiction, of which many were memoirs, autobiographies and journalistic reportage. The remaining fictional books, officially novels, were also chosen for their potential to offer a window into another country, their history or troubled present.<sup>21</sup> The promotion of books relied on emphasising the exclusivity of someone 'telling the truth' about their country - particularly through live events when authors were brought to the UK - and building an aura of authenticity around their stories. It would be impossible for me to guess how each reader understood these books, but at live events with authors their work was, without exception,

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<sup>21</sup> Such are: Evelio Rosero's *The Armies* about the Colombian guerrilla war, which won the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize in 2009; Fatos Kongoli's *The Loser* about Albanian illegal immigration to Italy with reminiscences about Hoxha's communist autocracy; Saša Stanišić's *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* about a child's experience of the Bosnian war; Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Leaving Tangier* about North African immigrants struggling in Spain; Dubravka Ugrešić's *The Ministry of Pain* about a teacher of the doomed language of Serbo-Croatian in Holland after the fall of Yugoslavia (see a full list of WiT-supported books: <http://www.englishpen.org/writersintranslation>).

perceived as educational rather than artistic. They were read as ethnographies of particular places and times.

Beyond WiT, PEN promotes certain writers and their work by inviting them to conferences and festivals and helping them network with UK writers. PEN's general attitude of always being on the side of a dissident writer reflects a much wider set of circumstances and political processes. Whereas during the Cold War it protected and campaigned for writers who criticised communism, with the fall of Yugoslavia – which coincided with the fall of communism – it stood by the side of those writers who criticised new autocracies. These writers, such as Dubravka Ugrešić and Slavenka Drakulić, depicted the new political situation as more dangerous than communism, for which they often expressed feelings of nostalgia. The general mentality of people in their books was often portrayed as primitive and patriarchal. At the same time, some Croatian national(ist) writers who were suppressed during communism (but had not chosen exile) found themselves revived, even taking up prominent political roles. Clearly PEN would never support such a form of 'engaged' literature – the form appropriated by state power – but neither had it supported those writers when they had been suppressed during communist times. This is not to say that one set of writers is better than the other, but instead to highlight that PEN's campaigning work is rarely limited to the realm of literary quality. If anything, its work is an arena where different concepts of literary value, free speech and democracy are constructed, imposed on and traded with.

At annual PEN conferences, the organisation consolidates its opinions of global political and cultural events as well as arranging literary events in a host country. Such instances reflect the organisation's structure and some internal contentions. English PEN functions as a membership organisation or, more accurately, a literary club. The divide between its universalistic aspirations and *members only* exclusivity creates a constant strain. Having been partly funded by ACE and partly through members' donations, English PEN holds a semi-autonomous financial status. Such a position allows it a highly critical and

oppositional stand towards the British state,<sup>22</sup> but also drives its activities to satisfy members' literary tastes.

Certain events in the history of literary organisations reveal how external (socio-political) and internal (structural) forces direct the course of their activities. The 1993 International PEN Congress was an important event for both PEN and Dubravka Ugrešić. She had previously been publicly defamed in a magazine article by being called a witch, for allegedly 'raping her own country' (see Chapter 5). This was a reference to her general anti-nationalist attitude and, more specifically, to her speech at the 1992 PEN Congress in Rio de Janeiro where she argued against Dubrovnik being the next year's host. She feared that the Croatian establishment would use the presence of writers from all over the world to celebrate 'the victory against the demonic rule of communism' and spread its nationalistic propaganda. What happened within PEN was recounted to me by Manu on a late April afternoon in New York. He talked in a hushed voice and claimed 'You would never find this story in the PEN archives'.

Dubrovnik had been chosen as the host city for the 1993 Congress before the war in Croatia started. The choice marked the 60th anniversary of the most important year in PEN's history: in 1933 the PEN Congress had also been held in Dubrovnik, when the organisation had taken an admirable political stand by reprimanding and excluding German PEN from membership for its Nazi propaganda. Ever since, PEN has been proud of its high political responsiveness and its ability to make a difference by influencing literary trends and engagements. In Rio, a year before the anniversary, PEN had not been so unanimous about its political involvement in the complex situation in ex-Yugoslavia. Half the organisation supported the cancellation of the Congress. Finally, and without the vote of the Assembly of Delegates, PEN's president György Konrád decided the Congress should take place under one condition: there would be no meeting of the Assembly of Delegates, only literary events. This, Manu explained, meant that Serbian PEN, which was at the time explicitly promoting ethnic hatred, would not be excluded or even challenged for its hostile politics. 'International PEN failed the exam in 1993,' said Manu. He believed that a full 1993 Congress should have taken place with PEN taking a

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<sup>22</sup> English PEN campaigned for the revision of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act in 2006, fearing that it could seriously curb freedom of speech, especially for the long British tradition of comedy and satire.

firm political stand about the situation in the region. However, after witnessing the Croatian President, Franjo Tuđman, descending on the island of Hvar in his presidential helicopter to visit the 'distinguished delegation of world writers whose presence is of tremendous importance to our country,' Manu understood that Ugrešić's fears were realistic. PEN might have failed the 1993 Dubrovnik exam, but later, when Ugrešić went into exile, it offered wholehearted support to her work and political opinion.

Evidently, PEN campaigns for writers from all over the world, not only ex-Yugoslavia. Exiled writers might be more integrated into their network of assistance, not only because PEN supports their political stance but often because they are geographically closer to London. The dissemination of PEN's support reveals a certain pattern, namely towards writers from countries affected by political conflicts. As the conflict zones move, so PEN (under ACE's influence) redirects its focus – from the Balkans, to the Middle East, and finally to China. Political oppression and the lack of free speech might be the common denominators for all PEN's interest zones, but it is necessary to understand how specific images of ex-Yugoslavia, the Balkans, Central or Eastern Europe – to name all the labels ascribed to Yugoslav successor states – are constructed and appropriated in Britain.

### **3.5 Spectres of Yugoslavia**

The break-up of Yugoslavia prompted a vast interest for books translated from Serbo-Croatian that offered explanations for the raging conflict in the region and described life in the tumultuous years preceding it. Mostly memoirs and autobiographies, they were read as the 'first-hand' experience of writers who chose to exile themselves from Yugoslav successor states. By accessing the international writing scene, these writers were perceived as having authority to speak on behalf of the nation they had left behind. Their work has in turn been received by literary critics and a general readership as an authentic description of the social and political circumstances of their milieu (Wachtel 2006a).

Images of Yugoslavia that these writers have been writing through and against are a constant theme of their literary repertoire. As they negotiate their socio-cultural position vis-à-vis exile and home, past and future, Yugoslavia has remained the Pole Star against which they have set the course of their artistic

and social practices. Many also display literary legacies of the Yugoslav canon, by continuing dialogue with, in particular, the work of writers whose cultural position had been pro-Yugoslav. Wachtel (2006b), for instance, argues that a transnational post-Yugoslav literature exists, comprising the work of writers who had been largely influenced by Danilo Kiš.<sup>23</sup> In the UK, literary criticism and media in general sustain images of Yugoslavia as a whole, even if only by referring to it as 'the former' or 'ex'. The language, though the hyphenated Serbo-Croatian is no longer used, is viewed as one, especially when it comes to literary translations. The tendency within academia and beyond is to geographically and culturally delineate the region as ex-Yugoslavia or the Balkans rather than by individual successor states. In that sense, anthropology and other social sciences have also contributed to the formation of geographical and ethnic images, often accepting certain stereotypes of the region unquestioningly. For this reason, Yugoslavia, an image and a cultural concept, is still a functioning force in writers' literary opus, their position in world literature and in their critical reception.

The cultural and geographical space to which Yugoslav successor states are perceived as belonging is contested in more than one way. On the largest scale, the West sees it as Eastern Europe – a concept and image invented in the 18th century, during the Age of Enlightenment (Wolff 1994). The Enlightenment, Wolff argues, had to invent Western Europe and Eastern Europe as complementary concepts, defining each other by opposition and adjacency: civilisation vs. primitivism. This division has neatly dovetailed with the rhetoric and realities of the Cold War, which was not just a political worldview and distribution of power but the means of producing knowledge about the region (Hann 1993; Verdery 1996). An anthropology of Eastern Europe was born in such political circumstances. Verdery explains that in the 1970s Western Europe knew more about cultures in the Pacific than it did about

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<sup>23</sup> Yugoslavism can be traced as an idea and a legacy in the writings of several contemporary writers from the region such as Dubravka Ugrešić, Aleksandar Hemon and David Albahari, who look up to Danilo Kiš, often perceived as the last Yugoslav writer. Wachtel explains why Kiš, through his work, was able to act as a role model for preserving the cultural unity of Yugoslavia after its political break-up. Kiš was translated into many languages and had wide international recognition by Western readers; though perceived as strongly pro-Yugoslav, Kiš was never identified with the Yugoslav state or the communist project; he was educated primarily in Serbia, yet he was never connected with any of the major Yugoslav nations; and, lastly, his work shows a combination of postmodernist stylistic devices while Kiš himself kept a basically modernist mindset (Wachtel 2006b: 15).

its neighbours on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The desire to study Eastern Europe was there, but the decision to go and study in the region had to do with how much access a Western anthropologist was allowed. Ceaușescu was the first communist politician to allow Western scholars entry as researchers.<sup>24</sup> Even with the collapse of communism and the Soviet Bloc, the image of the Region as a polar opposite to the civilised West has survived in the public culture of the West and its mental maps (Wolff 1994). Though much recent scholarship about the concept of Eastern Europe has asserted that the region was invented by West European observers, Bracewell (2008) rightfully problematises such unambiguous polarity. In her extensive review of East European travel writing, she argues that travellers from both Eastern and Western Europe, each pursuing their own interests, contributed jointly to defining the limits of Europe, charting not only geographical but symbolical maps of modernity, progress and cultivation (Europe) as opposed to barbarity and backwardness (Orient). In addition, Bracewell's approach to the construction of masculinities in travel writing about the Balkans and by the Balkans redirects us from a regular reconstruction of these cultural images: instead of tracing their origins, we should focus on why they are 'engendered in particular ways in specific contexts, and what functions their gendered discourses of difference serve' (Bracewell 2009b: 138).

Former Yugoslavia left the Soviet Bloc following Tito's conflict with Stalin in 1948. In the imagined map of Europe, it had a reputation of being an important buffer zone between the West and the East. This was further strengthened when Tito founded the Non-Aligned Movement. If from the outside Yugoslavia was perceived as in the middle, its internal politics of representation often mobilised different cultural and historical legacies to prove that some parts were civilised and others primitive. Public discourse in Slovenia and Croatia reflected the so-called 'nested Orientalism' by aligning itself with Central Europe (boasting the cultural legacy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), while perceiving Serbia and Bosnia as the primitive Balkans (Bakic-Hayden 1995). The split between 'civilisation' and 'primitivism' has also been rationalised as the consequence of The Great Schism which in 1054 established

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<sup>24</sup> Cole, Halpern and Hann have provided detailed and comprehensive studies of the emergence and character of the anthropology of Eastern Europe (Cole 1977; Halpern and Kideckel 1983; Hann 1995).

the dividing line between the Roman Catholic (Western) and Greek Orthodox (Eastern) worlds.<sup>25</sup> Hence the geographical and socio-cultural space of Yugoslavia should be understood as a battleground of competing images of civilisation and barbarism. This battle's protagonists have been concerned to prove as much to each other as to the outside world where their allegiances lie. But often these belongings displayed ambiguous and even contradictory narratives. For instance, after the break-up of Yugoslavia, some national(ist) writers engaged with rural themes which purported to uncover the nation's essence. As Croatia's national identity was 'cross-cut by modern, Central-European self-perceptions', the countryside grew into an internally conflicting symbol: it represented both the spring of national identity and Balkan backwardness (Jansen 2005b: 156).

Many anthropologists focusing on the Balkans have faced the challenge of explaining the outburst of Yugoslav nationalisms, aggressions and the ensuing war. Culturalist and essentialising approaches connected the 'success' of nationalisms with atavistic Balkan hatreds, while other analyses centred more on the power of political propaganda. Important studies such as the work of Denich and Hayden (Denich 1994; Hayden 1994) tackled issues of indoctrination and trauma (emphasising the role of WW2 legacies), whilst others highlighted the role of media, manipulated by the nationalist regimes (Glenny 1992; Silber and Little 1995; Sorabji 1995; Colovic 2002).

In *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation*, Wachtel (1998) critiques both 'deterministic-historical and 'fiendish-political' arguments. The former point to age-old religious hatreds and rivalries and the latter blame the more recent actions of an individual or group: Tito, the Yugoslav Communist party, Slobodan Milošević, or the leaders of militant Islam. Although containing elements of truth, both arguments, Wachtel argues, are flawed because they assume that Yugoslavia is somehow different from the rest of the civilised world. Considering economic collapse and the rise of dictatorial regimes as important factors, Wachtel still believes that Yugoslavia fell apart primarily because the very concept of Yugoslav unitarist culture was destroyed. The

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<sup>25</sup> The dividing line between the Catholic and Orthodox areas runs alongside the river Drina, which is also the borderline between Bosnia and Serbia. Croatian nationalist rhetoric has often used this fact to prove that Croatia traditionally belonged to the civilised world whereas Serbia was the dark Balkans.

challenge and disintegration of the supranational Yugoslav vision by particularist national ideals gave rise to dictators – Tuđman and Milošević – rather than the other way around. For Wachtel, the *nation* of Yugoslavia is a state of mind, not a political unity. As such, it had existed for many people who in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lived under the Habsburg and Ottoman empires, just as it died for those who still lived in the political entity in 1980 but had stopped believing in it.

Early South-Slavist ideas (Yugo comes from 'jug', meaning south) coincided with European movements of Modernism and Romanticism. The feeling of togetherness was not a political movement but rather a cultural and linguistic movement, undertaken by writers and artists who dipped into national folk heritage for their inspiration and are still celebrated today as national heroes. The most important endeavours at the time were the codification of the language and the production of artistic work that could express the nation's collective self. The dialect chosen for the standard language was Štokavian, the language of the celebrated Dubrovnik Renaissance writers and the most similar out of three Croatian dialects to Serbian. This laid the potential for the eventual development of a unified Serbo-Croatian language (Wachtel 1998: 27).<sup>26</sup>

The establishment of the first Yugoslav state after WW1 was accompanied by a rather different idea of how Yugoslav culture should look. Instead of following a unitarist model primarily based on Serbian cultural practices, a multicultural model that would draw on the traditions of all three South Slav tribes<sup>27</sup> was proposed, in an attempt to create a synthetic culture and foster a viable Yugoslav national idea. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia (its name after 1929) eventually became a politically centralised country, but the Serbs with only 39% of the state's population were neither numerous nor strong enough to impose their political will on the rest of the country without causing

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<sup>26</sup> Throughout Yugoslav history, a unified Serbo-Croatian literary language, the impetus behind the Illyrian movement, would remain the site of clashes between opposing intellectual elites. As possibly the only historical connection to the original 19<sup>th</sup>-century Yugoslav movements, language reflected the development of cultural concepts of Yugoslavia. Hence the 1954 Novi Sad Agreement on the Serbo-Croatian Language, signed by Croatian and Serbian intellectuals in more unificatory days was followed by the 'Declaration Concerning the Name and the Position of the Croatian Literary Language' in March 1967 as its direct repudiation, marking the beginning of the Croatian Spring.

<sup>27</sup> The 1918-29 Yugoslav state was called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. For a long time it did not recognise other ethnicities (Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Muslims).

conflict. The creation of a Yugoslav national culture was thus pushed into the background.

With the end of WW2, Yugoslav communists introduced 'brotherhood and unity' as the bedrock of a new supranational universal culture, fully compatible with the flourishing of individual national cultures<sup>28</sup>. Such a supranational culture went beyond the national to the ideological and would overarch and connect the national cultures rather than eliminate them.<sup>29</sup> Brotherhood was understood – during WW2 and until the 1948 split with Stalin – as the 'fraternal struggle' of the various nations of Yugoslavia to free themselves from Fascist invaders. The story of the war in this interpretation was the postwar Yugoslav creation myth. But the balancing act between separate national cultures and the supranational culture was inherently unstable.

Whatever the working cultural policy of Yugoslavism was at any given time – a Romantic vision based on (mainly) Serbian folk culture, the synthetic unity of all Yugoslav nations, or the supranational idea of Yugoslav identity – the tools for establishing it rarely changed. The common language and literature received the most attention from cultural authorities, with energetic efforts made to eliminate ideologically untrustworthy or otherwise dubious authors from textbooks, anthologies, and histories of literature. Each decade, depending on the balance between unitarism and separatism, had different sets of writers and information that were either promoted or suppressed. For example, during the Socialist Realist era before the 1950s – an era marked by a prescriptive type of engaged literature focusing on war themes or the reality of the socialist country – some writers influenced by Western symbolism, like Tin Ujević and Miloš Crnjanski, were removed from the curriculum. Equally, in the 1970s, when nationalist sentiments bubbled up in Croatia and later spilled into Serbia, the national literary curriculum became significantly decentralised. There was a clear change of policy between the postwar unitarist approach and the post-

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<sup>28</sup> In his discussion about the meaning of national numbers in pre- and post-conflict (ex)Yugoslavia, Jansen (2005a: 58) asserts that both 'the melting pot and the nationalist traps' can be avoided if nationality is understood as a context-specific variable.

<sup>29</sup> The slogan 'Brotherhood and unity of the peoples of Yugoslavia' was meant to replace the interwar Yugoslavia's title of 'Serbs, Croats and Slovenes'. 'Peoples of Yugoslavia' was perceived as more inclusive because the plural noun implied the recognition and tolerance of diversity. However, the slogan in itself is an oxymoron because unity, if achievable, would result in synthesis, while brotherhood, though emphasising closeness, implies difference and potential disagreements of all kinds (Wachtel 1998: 132).

1970s separatist movements. The former propagated Stalin's formula allowing culture to be 'national in form' provided it was 'socialist in content' (Wachtel 1998: 140). The latter was reflected in the weakening of federal control over education in individual republics, at which time a significant proportion of intellectual elites abandoned the idea of cultural unitarism. In school textbooks, writers were categorised by national origin, and each republic mainly studied their national writers while giving others less space.<sup>30</sup>

Several key literary works in post-WW2 Yugoslavia and their appropriation in political discourse provide an excellent insight into the development of the concept and idea of Yugoslavia. After the Tito-Stalin split, Yugoslavia left the Soviet orbit and was given another internationally important role: a mediator between East and West. The survival of unified Yugoslavia was perceived as equally crucial for the world and for Tito's communist party. Postwar literature, in line with original Russian Socialist Realism, did not produce much great writing, as writers were not allowed room for creativity. In the 1950s, Miroslav Krleža's speech 'On Cultural Freedom' opened a new period in Yugoslav literature known as Socialist Aestheticism. Many writers defended their rights to artistic freedom, removing their themes from the present and exploring the literary form. Even so, the ideas of unified Yugoslavia and a single Yugoslav literature were never challenged (Wachtel 1998: 147). Ivo Andrić's *The Bridge on the River Drina* (Andrić 1996) can be viewed as a typical product of that time. Although not set in the present in the spirit of Socialist Realism, it immediately became proclaimed as a classic of Yugoslav literature, because Andrić chronicled the difficult interaction between Yugoslav peoples through historical time while simultaneously holding out hope for a supranational union that was possible and could bind them together. It echoed perfectly Yugoslav communists' belief in creating a new supranational universal culture while at the same time allowing the flourishing of individual national cultures. Andrić's vision was as important to internal cultural policy as it was for the outside world that counted on a unified Yugoslavia. Its literary

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<sup>30</sup> Although Croatian separatism was crushed in 1971 with Tito removing the Croatian party leadership and punishing tens of thousands of Croats for their support of Croatian nationalism, he also granted many nationalist demands, particularly in the cultural sphere. The ideas and practices of the unitary culture thus developed in this more separatist context.

excellence aside, its contextual appropriateness was clearly not overlooked in 1961 when it won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

By the late 1960s, polarisation between pro-Yugoslav and pro-separatist intelligentsias was taking place primarily in the cultural arena, and the novel was characterised by disillusionment with the Yugoslav ideal. For example, Krleža's novel *Banners* (Krleža 1967), though set in WW1, questioned how much Croatia had benefited from unification with Serbia and laid the foundation for many debates about the relation of Croatian to Yugoslav culture. By the 1980s a nationalist movement had taken firm root in Serbia. It was to a large degree led by educated elites, who had once fervently supported some version of Yugoslavism but now believed their national self-interest would be best met by Yugoslavia disintegrating. A number of unsophisticated novels, dealing with Yugoslavia's historical problems purely on the thematic level, quickly found a wide audience, but members of the most educated intelligentsia did not show signs of separatist thinking until Milorad Pavić's widely-celebrated *The Dictionary of the Khazars* was published (Pavic 1989).<sup>31</sup> Unlike Andrić's worldview, this novel, Wachtel argues, gives a totally opposite message: that differences (between separate peoples) cannot be synthesised into a grand narrative. Though Pavić was not quoted by the proponents of nationalism in Serbia, there is evidence that his work had important effects on Serbian elites' thinking in promoting the end of unitary Yugoslavia (Wachtel 1998: 216-7).

### **3.6 Ideology and Economy: literature's friend and foe?**

The socialist state proudly demonstrated its connection with the production of art and literature on all levels. Through institutions, organisations and writers' clubs that promoted certain kinds of literatures and censored others, the state also influenced book sales, though this was rarely understood as an indicator of their success. Several Croatian publishers pointed out in conversations with me that they 'have had enough of the socialist style of publishing where every fool

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<sup>31</sup> This complex text, inspired by post-modernist ideas of the unsustainability of any meta-narrative, depicts the Khazar ruler choosing the right religion for his people. Each section of the book is a story by a different religious representative claiming that the ruler accepted their own religion. Through his language games, Pavić implies that the search for the single truth is a reckless quest and that the synthesis of the three stories leads not to perfect knowledge but to immediate death and destruction.

can get state subsidies to publish a book'. They were hoping that 'the liberal capitalist market would allow more competition so that the *real* literature finally bubbles up to the surface'. Those publishers, who have experienced book production under socialism and knew all the obvious and covert ways in which the state could control their sector, assumed that the 'capitalist' market functioned free from any constraints besides the commercial. They were also convinced that Western states neither offered public subsidies for books nor 'meddled' in controlling literary values or national literary canon. By analysing how people talk and think about the free market, this research asserts that this concept is neither an idealised mode of exchange nor a naturally occurring phenomenon. Particularly when two 'worldviews' – capitalist and (post)socialist – are compared, as they frequently are, the free market appears as a meta-narrative that conceals its internal messiness and contradictions.

If we could generalise about the socialist book market at all, one could safely say that the socialist writer was an important opinion-maker: a public figure instrumental in building national consciousness. In socialist Eastern Europe, serious national literature had no competition in the form of popular fiction or various non-fiction types of writing. Though print-runs were not massive, at least not in ex-Yugoslavia, the socialist writer's symbolic and cultural status was often paralleled by economic subsidies available from state cultural institutions. Writers' fees for a book could exceed the average annual or biennial salary.<sup>32</sup> The state also provided accommodation and there was no shortage of free writers' retreats where one could cultivate creative energies. Most socialist countries contained not only regime writers entitled to a prestigious status but also dissident writers. Incidents of books banned or censored under socialism proved that the all-powerful state control was continually being shaken up by internal inconsistencies, as such books, once published, could actually make more money than state-promoted literature. Dissident writers who managed to escape to the West were seen as curiosities

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<sup>32</sup> Robert, a Croatian writer who remembers the late 1950s in literature, said that the Yugoslav socialist state, at least initially, had a genuine intention of supporting cultural life and educating new generations of readers. A certain Yugoslav writer, JL, was employed as an editor in a publishing house and his job for the whole year was to commission two books. The rest of the time he could focus on his own writing while receiving a regular salary. Oskar Davičo, a Socialist Realist writer, told Robert that with the fee for his novel *Pesma*, published in 1952, he was 'living like a king for two whole years'.

that promised entertainment, knowledge of the exotic, and subsequent commercial profit. With the fall of communism and the rapid changes of economic and political circumstances in Eastern Europe, writers suddenly had to face the loss of their previous status. With no need to defend socialist cultural values and with the growing loss of a readership seduced by more glitzy products from the West, writers have been forced to think of strategies to remain relevant in the new socio-cultural context. Whereas socialism made it virtually impossible for a writer to fail, the free market, in addition to offering more 'freedom', has also infused the post-socialist writer with anxiety about the future of their profession and its sustainability (Wachtel 2006a).

In ex-Yugoslavia, the situation was somewhat different from the rest of Eastern Europe as the country was afflicted by a devastating war. The need for the writer as a national hero in newly established states increased.<sup>33</sup> Those who stood against the nationalist regime faced public denunciation or even harassment. In the 1990s a number of Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian dissident writers emigrated to the West. The socio-political position of their exile experience and the global cultural context gave those writers significance and relevance they had lost in their home countries. They found themselves in a paradoxical situation – although they had had to leave home, they became more Croatian, Serbian, or Bosnian than ever before through being published in English as representatives of their national literatures.

Socialist Yugoslavia had further differed from the rest of the Soviet Bloc with its softer and more inconsistent measures for enforcing censorship. In *Saviours of the Nation*, Jasna Dragović-Soso (2002) explores why Western literature on dissidents in communist countries rarely discussed Yugoslavia. After the historical moment of the Tito-Stalin split, she argues, Yugoslavia had been perceived as taking a more liberal course and analysis tended to move away from the more unsavoury aspects of its regime. Some sociologists, notably Sharon Zukin (1983), argued that Yugoslavia represented 'a case in nondissent'<sup>34</sup> because it 'inspired few statements of principle that are recognised

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<sup>33</sup> The Serbian writer Dobrica Ćosić was among the intellectuals who, under Milošević's nationalist regime, promoted inter-ethnic hatred. Similarly, in Croatia, Ivan Aralica was celebrated as the greatest national writer (later even a member of the Croatian Parliament) for depicting historical events that were crucial in forging the Croatian nation.

<sup>34</sup> Zukin identified three necessary conditions for dissent: public action, a critique of existing conditions combined with a refusal to conform, and an 'administrative context' which

as dissent and even fewer social groups that claim the status of dissidents' (ibid., 117). An assessment of the Yugoslav case clearly depends on the definition of *dissident*: most broadly, this would include 'anyone politically at variance with official ideology', in which case Yugoslavia would be a serious candidate as a case in dissent. However, Dragović-Soso is right when she argues that several factors made dissent and censorship in Yugoslavia, if not non-existent, then considerably less organised and efficient. First, Yugoslavia's decentralisation after the 1960s created more than one output for writers: what was prohibited in one republic could find a home somewhere more permissive. Second, its regional disparities, which in 1970s critiques of the socialist state tended to put more emphasis on particularist national interests, prevented a countrywide opposition from emerging. Lastly, the personal connection that writers and intellectuals had forged with communists during the early post-WW2 days, and the lack of a systemic approach towards censorship, contributed to a somewhat arbitrary treatment of intellectuals (Dragovic-Soso 2002: 15).

Possibly the only well-known Yugoslav dissident who could be said to properly fit the definition is Milovan Đilas,<sup>35</sup> who spent 15 years in prison for criticising elitism in the Communist Party. For that he was much praised in the West and his book *The New Class* was included among 100 books which have influenced Western public discourse since WW2.<sup>36</sup> Less overt forms of control that did not attract Western academic or popular attention included the work of Agitprop – a federal ideological commission. In a rare sociological account of Yugoslav literary space, Sveta Lukić (1972) argues that Agitprop functionaries censored literature at all levels from recruitment of editors to the selection and revision of texts. Such activities were in line with the Soviet Socialist Realist

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represses minority opinions. In Yugoslavia's case, the political and administrative context represented the main stumbling-block in analysing dissent. Dissent involves voluntary transgression of the socially acceptable boundaries, she explains. This was less present in Yugoslavia than in the rest of Eastern Europe because limits were more flexible and consequences for transgressors more lenient.

<sup>35</sup> Đilas was in the 1950s regarded as Tito's possible successor but soon became Yugoslavia's most famous dissident writer. His two widely-read books *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* and *Anatomy of a Moral*, criticised the new emerging elites in a privileged party bureaucracy which compromised the idea of socialist egalitarianism. For this 'hostile propaganda' he was dismissed from all political functions and sent to prison for 15 years (on and off), while the West regarded him as a hero.

<sup>36</sup> See *Freedom for Publishing, Publishing for Freedom*, edited by Timothy Garton Ash (Garton Ash, et al. 1995).

approach to literature. However, after 1948, if there was any form of censorship left, it was what Lukić calls the verbal type because 'most significant cultural questions were settled verbally and behind closed doors' (ibid., 103). The Communist Party's involvement in literary production can actually best be followed by exploring the changes in literary styles and genres that occurred at that time.

From the mid-1950s an open opposition to Socialist Realism eschewed the movement of Socialist Aestheticism. It expressed a certain climate in literary life in which the 'literary' side of literature was emphasised and literature became its own theme and purpose (Lukic 1972: 37). The majority of writers focused on experimenting with literary form, breaking away from traditional poetic norms. The Party's official line was that it would never intervene in literary questions as long as they remained purely literary. A permanent formula for choosing literary themes and settings was the conformist one: 'far into the past and away from the present' (ibid., 105). Although it ensured literature its creative freedom without touching sensitive points, ultimately it became another tool of political power. Such denial of literature belonging within the overall socio-political arena implied that literature had no content and instead only focused on form. Though it produced a significant number of works of merit, Social Aestheticism functioned negatively as a program for a politically loyal and neutral literature (ibid., 175). The Yugoslav writer, who was once enlisted to create the myth of Yugoslavia and perpetuate ideas of socialism, after the liberation in literature became an uninvolved social actor. Because critical love for the socialist society was not possible, the writer's position was in many ways paradoxical.

By the 1980s, many Yugoslav writers employed post-modern literary devices. My research participant Robert told me that by then literature had increasingly become hermetic and 'written only for one's colleagues and university professors'. Danilo Kiš (1986) argued that writers were censoring themselves by transposing content into a literary figure and creating meaning through the use of metaphors. Such self-censorship, according to Kiš, invisible but present, was a more powerful force of destruction because 'the fight against censorship is open and dangerous, therefore heroic, while the battle against self-

ensorship is anonymous, lonely and unwitnessed, and it makes its subject feel humiliated and ashamed of collaborating (ibid., 44).

Literary production in 1990s Croatia, Robert recounts, was poor and still unable to reflect the horrors of the raging war. Right-wing writers opted for biographical and documentaristic prose, while leftists stuck with post-modernist prose and poetry. With the fall of socialism several writers boasted 'they would finally be able to publish their masterpieces that the previous regime would never allow'. In truth, this never happened, because 'they never wrote anything that reflected the realities of that time and that the regime would even find threatening'. Robert recognised the need for telling stories in real time – a trend that was already in place in Britain, reflected in the work of writers who called themselves the New Puritans. He was one of the driving forces behind a literary phenomenon called FAK (Festival of A Literature), which gathered a new generation of writers who wanted to engage with contemporary reality. One of the first writers to join was Miljenko Jergović, whose book about the Sarajevo siege *Sarajevo Marlboro* (Jergovic 1997) was later published in more than 22 languages, including English. FAK was a break with socialist literary production insofar as it promoted assessing the quality of books according to market demands. Far from the average print-run of 1,000 to 2,000 copies that a Croatian writer could expect, FAK books sold in the lower tens of thousands. The movement also introduced ticketed literary events which were accompanied by music gigs and achieved great popularity across the whole of ex-Yugoslavia, which was still feeling the effects of the war.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The Western perception of socialist literature focused to a large extent on its ideological constraints. This allowed literary markets, particularly the Anglophone, to welcome writers who spoke against their governments and Soviet dogmatism. On the other hand, there is considerably less awareness of the West's own constraints when it comes to literary production, particularly in the perceptions of research participants who emerged from the (post)socialist context. For example, little is written about the Western anticommunist stance as a strong ideological force guiding trends in literary translations (Schiffrin briefly mentions the CIA's support of intellectual anticommunism). The

appropriation of socialist Yugoslav authors, in the 1950s-60s reflected the need to keep the country unified: Lukić (1972: 25) argues that unitary Yugoslav literature was largely a product designed for export. Recent cultural policies for subsidising foreign fiction have largely been influenced by two sets of constraints: one is ideological, involving cultural imperialist attitudes that divide the world into the 'civilised' and the 'primitive'; the other is what Schiffrin calls market censorship, or the uniformity and commercial conformity of book production during the last 30 years.

In Eastern Europe, post-socialist literary production has continued to be married to ideology, now of a different kind. For example, many East European writers who had suffered at the hand of the socialist state by being suppressed, defamed, or imprisoned were revitalised as national heroes by new governments. Milutinović (1999), in discussing mimesis under Yugoslav socialism, argues that literature as a criticism of the authorities was not spared from becoming an instrument of power: it was a reason for the authorities to eliminate the dissenting citizen, while for the writer, in changed circumstances, it offered legitimacy which gave them a position of power.<sup>37</sup> Most recently, now that nationalist programmes to re-introduce once-suppressed authors in Croatia and Serbia have subsided, the new force shaping book production is the need to regain the lost common market of all the Yugoslav successor states. The social-democratic turn in the region's official politics undeniably supports networking and exchange between writers who obviously speak and write in the language they can all understand. However, the desire to reap more profit with book sales – which many publishers I interviewed believe will take place 'once the free market is established' – is mostly why today festivals and book fairs showcase literatures from all over the region. In the last two years alone, several Croatian publishing houses have opened offices in Belgrade and Sarajevo with the aim, if not to re-integrate what are now separate national literatures, then at least to integrate their production and dissemination into a greater profit.

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<sup>37</sup> Being a dissident writer helped Václav Havel, for example, to literally go from his prison cell to the presidential palace in the Czech Republic. Arpad Genz in Hungary, Zhelo Zhelev in Bulgaria, and Dobrica Ćosić in Serbia shared career paths along the similar line (Milutinovic 1999: 208). These life trajectories reflect the production and mobilisation of symbolic and, in Verdery's vocabulary, moral capital.

To properly understand the context of this thesis ultimately means recognising the co-existence of different modes of exchange in both the (post)socialist and capitalist book industries, which cannot be viewed teleologically (Thomas 1991). Understanding the socialist or supply-constrained market as having to develop into the demand-constrained market system (Verdery 1996) is a perpetuation and reinforcement of cultural imperialism and the theory of progress. Literary production was as controlled during socialism as it is now both in post-socialist countries and the UK. Thus many transition studies (Burawoy and Verdery 1999) have critiqued the notion that a socialist model is bound to lead to a pre-given and 'more advanced' capitalism.

A truly critical literature, Milutinović argues, does not criticise current figures of authority only to become authoritative once a change of power takes place. Rather, it illuminates the mode of production and distribution of power in society, never forgetting to reflect on its own production and the dangers of becoming instrumentalised (Milutinovic 1999: 210). Having explored the stances that literature can take towards its own constraints – offensive or defensive – it transpires that literature cannot be perceived as having an immanent history, disconnected and set apart from the global socio-cultural context. Whether in ideology or economy, or in the complex connection between these and other forces that shape it, literature reflects the world from which it is born – even when it chooses not to in order to protect itself.

## 4 The Two Silences: how far tales of free speech go

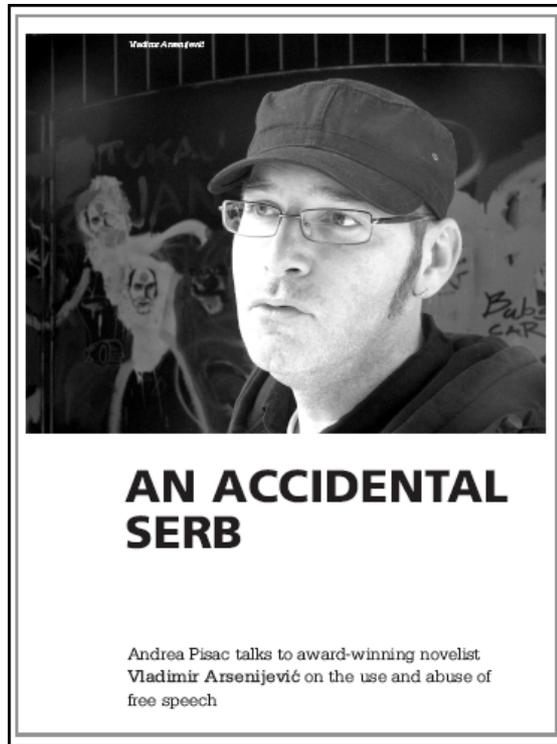


Fig. 4.1. Front page of the *Index on Censorship* interview with Vladimir Arsenijević.

In September 2009, *Index on Censorship* magazine ran an interview with Vladimir Arsenijević, a well-known Serbian writer, to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of communism. The piece was a fruit of the search for a 'new Balkan dissident hero' that I had been commissioned to undertake. Arsenijević's answers challenged Western notions of free speech and the way UK campaigners set out to protect it around the world. It ran contrary to everything that a UK magazine on free speech would want to hear from an alleged dissident writer. I myself campaigned on behalf of

alternative views of free speech and dissidence, trying to have the interview accepted for publication. However, it was not until we added the closing question which set the tone of the interview that the magazine gave consent. There, Arsenijević benevolently 'instructs' UK campaigners in how to 'improve' the aid and protection they extend to persecuted writers around the world. With this, only the ways of helping are critiqued, while the enterprise of aid and development of free speech remains intact. The label of 'accidental Serb', though initiated by Arsenijević himself, is made into the headline, proving that anti-national(ist) allegiance is a prerequisite of a good 'dissident'.

## 4.1 What is Free Speech?

This chapter uses the concept of free speech to outline a specific context in which foreign writers are initiated into the network of UK institutional assistance on the grounds of free speech violations. It is by no means an exhaustive overview of the shaping of ideas and practices of free speech through history: examples of several historical debates are useful inasmuch as they briefly touch on current philosophical and legal representations of free speech issues. They have also been informative in interpreting my ethnographic data.

Most generally, this chapter speaks to an anthropological debate around individual human rights versus cultural relativity (Nagengast and Turner 1997; Turner 1997; Cowan, et al. 2001), which questions whether anthropology's analytical unit should be the community/group or the individual. Free speech is one of many concepts that has, particularly with increased 'glocalisation', become a crucible where different regimes of value and narratives meet and compete, supporting either an uncompromising individualism or community cohesion. The UN Declaration of Human Rights itself, which protects the right to free speech, is the product of a Western liberal individualism connected to capitalism and the accumulation of wealth. For this reason, the processes involved in free-speech protection by Western democracies derive from a particular production of knowledge that sees the world as divided into 'developed' and 'underdeveloped'. As this chapter will illustrate, the project of helping persecuted writers therefore belongs to a neoliberal<sup>38</sup> discourse of aid and development. It not only assumes the difference between 'them' and 'us', which in itself calls for offering assistance, but further objectifies any kind of knowledge that can 'liberate' the 'underdeveloped' and perceives it as a product, packaged and exported to a different context.

This chapter demonstrates the following: first, that interpretations of the right to, value and effects of free speech are produced by a socio-cultural context in general and institutional and personal agendas in particular. Second, culturally-specific free speech concepts are instrumental in constructing the

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<sup>38</sup> Neoliberalism, as defined by Nikolas Rose (1996), is a political rationality that seeks to govern not through command and control operations but through the calculative choice of formally free actors.

authenticity and truthfulness of a persecuted writer. And, third, a persecuted writer's life story assumes a meaning and yields effects only when understood through operational free speech concepts.

#### 4.1.1 Free speech: some underlying principles

Today, most debates around free speech in the UK are based on the tensions between underlying philosophical ideas and their legal interpretations in everyday practices. The meaning of 'free' in the term free speech can be traced back to John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty* (Mill 1998). There, Mill defends the view that extensive freedom of speech is a precondition not just for individual happiness but for a flourishing society, and interference with this right is justifiable only if one person's intention involves harming other people.<sup>39</sup> While Mill's passionate search for truth through freedom of expression has been instrumental in legalising the protection of this right, recent debates reveal that truthfulness may not be the only function and value of free speech. A huge public discord in, for example, perceptions of Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses* – from the Western impression of Rushdie as a free-speech hero to the outcry in many Muslim communities and the ensuing *fatwa* – has steered discussions towards seeing other intentions of free speech. Rushdie's and other writers' critique of Islam has been perceived as not stating the truth but mocking sacred religious beliefs. The dispute thus centres on whether free speech should be limited if certain members of society understand it as offence.

Within anthropology, Nigel Rapport (2002: 124) has argued that it is a mistake to take cultural ideologies of collectivity at face value and further translate this into so-called rights of cultural difference. His idea of a 'post-cultural turn' in anthropology concerns an appreciation of the individual actor: as conscious, intentioning, creative, and ironic. In the anthropological debate over Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and the book's reception by both Western and Muslim readers, he takes Werbner's (1996) side over Asad's (1990). The former advocates Rushdie's universal right to free expression in offering epistemologically pluralist comments on Islam. The latter views the affair as 'a

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<sup>39</sup> Today's UK free speech practices still contain Mill's disclaimer of harmfulness, though the bases against which limitations are calculated and institutionalised differ. The debate around meanings and functions of harmfulness thus undoubtedly points to the performative force of speech as opposed to purely its meaning.

symbolic violence by an intellectual-cultural elite upon plebeian masses' who have allegedly been betrayed by Rushdie as an assimilated Indian promoting bourgeois ideas against his own people, culture and religion. This, and other similar debates, have shown that speech needs to be understood not only in terms of what it means but in terms of what it *does* (Austin, et al. 1975).

The abolition of British blasphemy law in 2008 secularised only the sacredness of the Church of England. Many religious communities, particularly Muslim ones, feel strongly that free speech should be limited when it expresses offence and mockery. This very heated discussion raises questions of the intention and value of communication that can be assessed only when a speech act is perceived within a particular context. As performative force is reflected by the effects of speech, a statement's truthfulness or falsehood ceases to be a relevant distinction. Mocking, offending, influencing, or generally *doing* something with speech is thus not valued by its meaning but by the completion of the intended action (ibid., 12). Austin thus differentiates between happy (complete) and unhappy (incomplete) performatives rather than true or false statements. The completion of a performative is contingent on the appropriateness of three factors: situation, actions/intentions and speakers. So when it comes to issues of offence, regardless of the fact that both the secular and the religious speaker may be exercising lawful rights (and that articles of the European Convention of Human Rights may often contradict each other<sup>40</sup>), the effects of speaking or limiting speech can only be calculated and negotiated in specific socio-cultural circumstances. For example, the public outcry by some members of the Bangladeshi community when Monica Ali's book *Brick Lane* was being filmed in London questions the *appropriateness* of the speaker. The major complaint against filming in *Brick Lane* – the real location portrayed in the book – was that 'Monica Ali had no *right to write* about the Bangladeshi community because she was not of pure Bangladeshi origin'. Those who wanted to limit Ali's right to free speech felt that their way of life was being mocked by someone who in their opinion had no right to represent the whole community – someone *inappropriate* to perform the speech. Even with legal protection of free speech in the UK and the rest of the Western world, various contexts have

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<sup>40</sup> The sanctity of religious beliefs is protected by Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights ('Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion') whereas the next article, Article 10, guarantees that 'Everyone has the right to free expression'.

called for limitations to be adopted. Discussions about freeing or limiting free speech are in fact a battle over its meaning and values, where each case is ultimately a negotiation of priorities and a repositioning of the definitions of personal freedom in a given socio-historic moment.

Many free speech advocates, such as English PEN, think through definitions of harm and apply certain limitations to their practices. The so-called 'no platform' stance (e.g. 'no platform for racists') highlights the problem that unlimited free speech may cause harm by giving credibility and respectability to people whose statements have been verified as false – as was the case with a historian, David Irving, who denied the Holocaust in his books and public statements. Similarly, PEN refuses to campaign on behalf of writers whose statements are assessed as offensive and harmful in any way. Numerous other cases highlight tensions between free speech theories and everyday practices. The aim of this chapter is not to list them or engage in further theoretical discussions but to reflect on the contextual nature of free speech practices and their power to validate certain statements as relevant, true, and authentic. Although truthfulness is not a prerequisite of a happy performative, *recognising* someone's speech as true and authentic is what gives it, in Austin's words, the illocutionary force.

#### 4.1.2 Free-speech campaigners

In Britain, many human rights organisations and charities have the mission to campaign for free speech. This chapter focuses on the work and ethics<sup>41</sup> of one organisation around which my fieldwork was based and two related organisations (I do not mention a vast number of others for this reason alone): ICORN (International Cities of Refuge Network), Index on Censorship, and English PEN. The use of examples from these projects is not intended to present these charities' overall intentions in a denigratory or cynical way. Indeed, having worked at English PEN as a team member, I am convinced that they have done invaluable good in many cases of free speech violations. This discussion, therefore, aims to ask the following questions: under what circumstances does the protection of free speech become possible, and how do

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<sup>41</sup> All three organisations' mission statements are guided by Article 19 (on free speech) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

these circumstances produce specific transcultural relations which can, when reflected in the book industry, create an authentic dissident writer?

Free-speech campaigners offer assistance and protection through mobilising the value judgement about the 'developed us' and the 'underdeveloped them', who need to evolve by recognising the universal value of free speech. The paternalism and cultural imperialism implied in such campaigning have mainly remained unchallenged, as criticising generosity and humanitarianism, regardless of the methods by which those are achieved, would be like 'criticising motherhood' (Hancock 1989: 5).

Campaigns outside the UK target the so-called 'black-listed' countries where the right to free speech is seriously violated, so that writers are threatened, imprisoned, or killed for voicing their opinions. Free-speech campaigners refer to the debates mentioned in the previous section as a way to think of the UK as a democratic place where public dialogue is achieving a protective and conscious attitude towards free speech. Hence, the three organisations' work mostly focuses on writers in black-listed regions, the activities I chose to cover in my ethnographic research. It is not so much that the black-listed regions have changed, rather that areas of campaigning focus have been shifting, depending on the international political and economic situation and UK funding policies (see Chapter 3). In the 1990s, much interest focused on countries that had broken free from communism and formed new nation-states, which often started off as dictatorships. Around this time, several ex-Yugoslav writers were identified as persecuted and, on these grounds, introduced into the project of protecting their right to free speech. Writers are usually helped by drawing international attention to their cases, giving them (temporary) refuge and sustenance to pursue their careers, and, in rare cases, smuggling them out of their country. As an international humanitarian effort, campaigning for free speech and against persecution bears the stamp of an honourable mission, often attributing high social status to organisations and the people who run them.

In the following sections, I argue that free-speech protection, as part of a broader cultural exchange between the Balkans and the UK, is a specific neoliberal discourse of aid and development, governed by institutional and political constraints and socio-cultural concepts (Lewis and Mosse 2006). My aim is neither to define the borderlines of the free wor(l)d nor to list all the cases

of free speech violations. Instead, I explore how free speech is constituted as a vehicle of fostering links between Balkan writers and UK publishers; what criteria are used to label a writer as persecuted; how these facts influence literary organisations in the UK to give support; and, finally, what are the gains and losses in writers' lives and careers once they have been labelled endangered.

## 4.2 The Birth and Death of a Dissident Writer

The production of souls is more important than the production of tanks.... And therefore I raise my glass to you, writers, the engineers of the human soul. (Joseph Stalin, speech at the home of Maxim Gorky, 26 October 1932)

On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ('The Universal Declaration of Human Rights' 1948), in which Article 19 speaks specifically of freedom of speech:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Though in 1948 the Iron Curtain neatly divided the world into two political and cultural spheres, the importance and power of the written and spoken word was recognised on both sides of the Wall. As explained in Chapter 3, the socialist writer was imbued with almost god-like power, responsible for helping to construct the nation by instilling knowledge and evoking patriotism in readers. Stalin's toast to writers reveals both how powerful the writers' word was and how dangerous it could become unless complicit with state ideology. Equally, the UN General Assembly (formed of Western countries) confirmed such power of the word by legislating to protect its freedom. Where communism believed in the constructive force of the word, Western democracies pledged to its destructive force, i.e. its power to counteract any shape of autocracy, both intellectual and political.

This relationship between the then Western and communist worlds allowed a specific literary phenomenon to emerge – the dissident writer. In his book about post-socialist literary capes, *Remaining Relevant after Socialism*,

Andrew Wachtel (2006a) argues that writers such as Milan Kundera and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who escaped communism and saw their books published in English to high acclaim, were made prominent by the socio-political context as much as their literary opus. Both of them were writers of extreme relevance in their respective countries, by which Wachtel understands that their status was characterised by high levels of prestige and symbolic capital. Speaking against the socialist regime from this position of relevance enabled them to broaden their audience – the number of people in the West who were interested in their story grew, as they were suddenly given a chance to hear first-hand experience of life behind the Iron Curtain. Kundera becoming a dissident writer was thus a phenomenon as much socio-cultural as literary. Socialist dissident writing is not a timeless category existing in an abstract world of ideas and essences but is constructed through a particular discourse of power through which the West produced knowledge about communism and the Soviet Bloc. As part of that discourse, the communist East, and later post-socialist autocracies, have been perceived as needing to develop by embracing the ideas of free market, civil society, and respect for free speech and other human rights (Errington 1998; Lewis and Mosse 2006).

The UK campaigning projects represent free speech as a quantifiable product, detached from the social processes that take place in its construction. Campaigners' knowledge about black-listed areas is based on *how much* free speech is practiced there. In this way, what in reality is a complex set of rhetorics, rules, and strategies becomes a bounded entity that, just as any other product, ushers a specific market for itself (Desai 2006).<sup>42</sup> It is thus not unlike the market created by the West's 'discovery' of 'primitive' authentic art (Errington 1998; Price 2001). So, for example, just as 'primitive' artists could not sell anything but 'primitive' art, persecuted writers are known and appreciated only through their free speech plight: it first gives them a platform to speak but then it limits their speech (see Chapter 8). Thus, free-speech protection, through a

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<sup>42</sup> Desai argues that knowledge should be understood as a set of practices, part of a power field that is continually transformed and redefined by ongoing discourses and hegemonies. The discourse of aid and development assumes an absence of knowledge 'out there' that can and must be addressed through a technocratic transfer of Western scientific knowledge. When knowledge is so perceived as a product or an element that can be generated, isolated, accumulated, and transferred, then it is detached from its actors and can be commoditised (Desai 2006: 177).

complex process of identification and selection governed by connoisseurs' taste, offers exciting 'authentic' stories that are 'from the other side' but for the Western audience.

The particular socio-historic moment of the Iron Curtain set the stage for dissident writers to cross the dividing line between the two worlds and double their relevance. If socialist censorship, driven by fear of the power of the word, had driven them out of the country, it was the avowed right to free speech in Western democracies that created a new home for them. Yet, today, borders between countries have become so porous that 'stories about what life is like out there' can easily travel to their furthest-flung readers. Socialist dissident writing has lost its context, yet the universal principle of free speech is still operational in the West. Free-speech campaigners look towards less democratic countries, trying to find dissident voices which need saving and hoping to discover new heroes with engaging stories. Those looking in the direction of the Balkans are finding that such heroes have died together with the socio-cultural context that shaped them. The last 'proper' cases of Balkan dissident writers were Dubravka Ugrešić and Slavenka Drakulić, two women writers who fled Croatia at the outset of the Balkan conflict. Are there really no heroes left in post-socialist and post-conflict Balkan societies or is the whole nature of dissent changing? And does the word still have the power to make or break?

### **4.3 New Hero - Old Task**

#### 4.3.1 Where have all the heroes gone?

2009 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. For editors and publicists in the book industry, communism becomes fashionable once more. At editorial meetings at Broadway Books, knowing a book's unique selling point is crucial for the destiny of the manuscript. Editors pitching book ideas to a team of colleagues consisting of other editors, the publishing house director, and the sales manager, make their cases by demonstrating the books' publicity potential. Similar strategies are embraced in magazines covering a range of topics from politics to literature. Such is *Index on Censorship* - a quarterly magazine published by a human rights charity by the same name, committed to exposing cases of censorship around the world. As the director of WiT, and

coming from the Balkans myself, I am approached by *Index on Censorship* with the following request: 'Can you find us a Balkan<sup>43</sup> writer who has been censored in their own country so we can run a story about their plight, including extracts of their writing in English?' The cases of Kundera in the 1970s and Ugrešić and Drakulić in the 1990s are proof that running a story of another censored writer from a conflict zone can substantially advance their career. I go in search of such a hero.

During my fieldwork in Croatia, I talked to many editors, literary reviewers, writers, and readers at literary events, spreading the word that I needed to find someone who had recently been censored. I was met with bemused looks and a single, unambiguous reply: 'there is no one censored here'. 'How about someone who is at least controversial', I pressed on, 'someone who had trouble with the media, or was denounced for what they had said or written?' But I was still left short of names. My mission as a literary scout was slowly but steadily failing. Yet, as an anthropologist, I became aware that looking for a specific literary hero, defined by Western notions of free speech, was precisely what was preventing me from seeing the social processes shaping censorship and dissent which *have* become present in the post-conflict Balkan literarandscape. One of the models of censorship was named by my principal research participant, Vladimir, as 'the atmosphere of noise': a context in which no speech or writing is officially suppressed or censored, allowing the multitude of voices to create a babble of noise through which any public talk by once-established writers loses its power to influence the socio-cultural climate.

Katherine Verdery (1991) has argued that the Communist Party leaders in charge of controlling literary production were aware that open censorship could sometimes backfire and give a censored writer more relevance than they would ever have had if they had been left free to write as they pleased. Since the Yugoslav model of socialism had broken free from the ideological processes that dominated the rest of the Soviet Bloc in 1948, ex-Yugoslav writers were rarely openly censored or punished for their speech. My writer informant Robert cannot remember anyone who was imprisoned, tortured, or denounced in

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<sup>43</sup> I often use adjectives Balkan and ex-Yugoslav interchangeably, partly to reflect how writers, featuring in this research are referred to in the UK public discourse.

former Yugoslavia. 'If someone was sent to Goli otok,<sup>44</sup> it was for telling a nasty joke about Tito's private life in a bar,' he tells me. As autocratic leaders, Tuđman and Milošević's main agenda was to control the media in order to build their new nations. Writers like Ugrešić and Drakulić escaped those systems at the beginning of the 1990s, claiming their right to free speech had been curbed. I ask Robert whether he knows of any cases of censorship in the last 20 years since the fall of Yugoslavia. He explains:

Both Tuđman and Milošević got their education in the communist system. They were smart enough not to censor anyone, especially not when the eyes of the EU have been on us constantly. There was a satire about political leadership in Croatia in the time of the war, showing for more than two years in one of the biggest theatres in Zagreb. It was offensive, mocking, and potentially quite dangerous, but it was never taken off. There was a rumour that the only thing Tuđman was interested in was who was going to play the part of the leader.

#### 4.3.2 Vlajsa – a reluctant hero

Milošević's regime is based on chaos – in this noise it is not dangerous if someone says something they are not 'allowed to'. Because no-one hears anything anyway. Writers are not put in prisons, not because we live in a democratic state, but because it is not profitable. The state knows the writers don't matter at all – only a tiny minority of people are interested in hearing their words. (Arsenijević 2002: 13)

Not easily discouraged, and having followed the definition of a dissident writer as seen by UK free speech organisations, I found someone who might fit *Index on Censorship's* request. Vladimir Arsenijević is a Serbian writer, born in 1965 and living in Belgrade. In 1994, in the midst of the Balkan conflict, he became the youngest recipient of Serbia's prestigious *NIN* prize for literature for his first novel *In the Hold* (Arsenijević 1996). The book portrays the generation that came to maturity in post-Tito Yugoslavia, suffering the effects of complete economic dislocation, for whom there is no sense of combined, social purpose. Though an anti-war book, it was never censored by the Milošević regime and it was soon

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<sup>44</sup> Goli otok was a high security, top-secret prison for political offenders in Yugoslavia. It was based on an island in the Adriatic Sea called Goli otok, meaning the 'naked island', evoking its arid landscape. The prison operated between 1949 and 1988, during which time many political and other lesser offenders served their sentences working in a quarry in extremely harsh conditions. Most political prisoners were sent there for showing affiliation (whether ideological or practical) with the USSR. This came into force after Tito parted with Stalin's ideas in 1948.

translated into 20 foreign languages (published in the UK by Harvill Press, 1996), placing Arsenijević almost instantly among the most widely translated Serbian writers ever. Arsenijević lived in Mexico – one of ICORN’s cities of refuge – from May 1999 to October 2000, as a writer in residence. He was sent there by the International Parliament of Writers,<sup>45</sup> which recognised him as a persecuted writer under the Milošević regime.

Vlajsa (his nickname) and I first met in a café next to the offices of Radio 101 (a famous independent radio station) in Zagreb and chatted while he was waiting to go on air. He was accompanied by his Croatian editor who sat a few tables away to give us time and space for the interview. Vlajsa was very talkative, and even while eating his sandwich he offered a rich reply to every question I asked. Soon, however, I understood that his story might not fit the magazine’s expectations. He was adamant that his life had never been threatened in Serbia and that ICORN’s residency, in their wish to label him a persecuted writer, had been ‘a hypocritical endeavour to raise their own profile by supposedly helping a suffering hero’.

Their intention is to save writers from deep shit. But if there really is a writer who has been a victim of a serious repression, they could never have them. If the system is seriously out to get you, ICORN has no resources to help you. To receive their help, you first need to reach them. And if you manage to reach them, how are you seriously threatened? While I was in Mexico, I published a text in a widely-read magazine, *Reforma*, about my situation in the Milošević regime. I said I had never personally been endangered or threatened. Not because I was advocating the regime, but because this was a cynical regime that never took notice of the opposition. 1990s Serbia created no dissident writers. The biggest political dissidents were people in power who fell out with Milošević over a financial issue and then got assassinated. But as a writer, you could talk until hell freezes over, you could say whatever you wanted to without being censored. I don’t know if Milošević did this consciously, but he created an atmosphere of noise in which no words had any meaning. I wrote that I was as threatened as any other person in Serbia, regardless of their political affiliations. There was a general repression that affected everyone, I told them. Then they insisted: but you were black-listed by all the state-controlled media. This was true, but it didn’t bother me. At that time, public life was divided into two domains: First Serbia and Second Serbia. I would never even

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<sup>45</sup> International Parliament of Writers was an organisation that listed persecuted writers around the world and recommended them to ICORN. It no longer exists and its function was taken over by the London-based International PEN.

dream of being part of the First Serbia's media: national TV or *Politika* newspaper. I belonged to the Second Serbia: Radio B92, newspapers *Naša borba* (*Our Battle*) or *Vreme* (*Time*). I was vehemently criticised by one of the most established Mexican writers for denying I was persecuted and for denigrating the honourable mission of ICORN. She claimed I hadn't suffered enough! They were expecting to get a Solzhenitsyn in stripy pyjamas, straight from a concentration camp. They could never get a writer from a concentration camp, because, as far as their 'honourable' help was able to go, such a writer would have stayed in the camp for ever. I felt terrible that they implied my suffering had not been great enough, that I wasn't sexy enough in my pain.

Arsenijević's path to publication in the UK was easier than most ex-Yugoslav writers find today. He spent close to no time on self-promotion, nor did his original publisher struggle at book fairs selling his book. The meeting, he tells me, was set up between him and the translator in Belgrade to discuss an already-done deal. Charting the life of Arsenijević's book *In the Hold* to its English publication needs to be understood not only as a cultural biography of the object – from the original idea in the writer's mind, through the production and consumption process in ex-Yugoslavia, and then to a new cultural context of dissemination in a foreign language. It constitutes a process of moving in and out of the state of commodity. In 'The Cultural Biography of Things', Igor Kopytoff (1986) explains that in order to understand the social life of a particular relic we must take into account two kinds of temporalities, two forms of class identity and two levels of social scale. The cultural biography charts the movement of an object from hands to hands and context to context; with classes of things, it is even more important to see how the value, and thus the meaning, of relics as a class may have a larger historical ebb and flow. Crucially, the construction of the literary value of Arsenijević's book should thus be seen as an intersection between the social life of the book and the changing demands of the UK book market that underlie this second type of temporality. Whereas Kopytoff takes into account a single class of objects to trace the change of their state of commodity, my ethnography illustrates that this process of consumption reflects an assemblage (Ong and Collier 2005) of various different or even disparate classes of objects, discourses, and social practices (see Introduction). In other words, when the publication of an anti-war book during the Balkan conflicts coincides with and becomes part of the historical ebb and flow of another socio-political practice (the protection of free speech as a means

of social progress), desire and demand meet, creating favourable conditions for a foreign book to be published in English. Thus, only by assembling the socio-cultural history of writing and book production in ex-Yugoslavia and the project of free-speech protection in the UK can we understand the search for a new dissident hero.

In the context where freedom of expression, among other things, implies revealing missing information, *In the Hold* – an anti-war book written under Milošević’s dictatorship – indeed becomes a book about the war and its implications for the Western audience. Because it speaks against the state mythology of the war, Arsenijević’s book in the UK is read and appropriated as a truthful account about the war. The commodity sold in English is not only its intellectual and informational content but also the truth and authenticity of the story told.

As stated in section 4.1.1, limitations on free speech are negotiated depending on different interpretations of what society’s priorities are. Cases of purposeful limitations of free speech practices can include the protection of religious minorities, the privacy of children, and national security. The Western idea of freedom of expression relies on the concept of the ‘free marketplace of ideas’, itself a corollary to the free market. It was first used by a US judge, Oliver Wendell Holmes,<sup>46</sup> who said that ‘the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market’ (White 2006: 110). It thus purports to offer perfect conditions of competition and perfect freedom. Yet, just like the free market as a model, it obscures its artifice, fluidity, and inconsistencies.

If truth is perceived as a commodity and the demand for it a function of a variety of social practices and classifications, rather than a mysterious emanation of human needs (Appadurai 1986), then it can be validated only through particular stories that can quench this demand. The socio-cultural and historical moment of Milošević’s autocratic regime and the development of the Western notion of free speech make an intersection that can accommodate only

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<sup>46</sup> Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. was a defender of free speech, but he also pointed out that free speech had to be limited by keeping in mind priorities that might be more important. His famous example was that no one should be allowed to shout ‘fire’ in a crowded theatre as this might cause a stampede resulting in injury or even death and the hoax might also undermine theatregoers’ reaction to a genuine warning.

a limited number of truthful stories. Therefore, only certain types of thoughts will be able to function as truths and will enter 'the competition of the market'. Arsenijević's bitterness about ICORN's hypocrisy and the reception of his book in English – where he was described as a 'reluctant hero who didn't show much suffering' – reveal how two classes of social processes, book production and free-speech protection, interact. The initial assumption of the Western audience (by which I understand both UK publishers and readers) that he would quench their demand for a dissident hero was plausible only until he openly criticised the motives and realities of his residency in Mexico. Once he was seen as not 'playing the game', his agent dropped him from the list, which meant that Arsenijević's later books were never published in English.

I went to Mexico with my ex-wife and children. They gave us a luxurious flat in a marble villa where there was never any peace and quiet. I remember when once some people were having party fireworks, we were sitting outside and almost died of fear. It was like being back in Belgrade during the NATO bombing. Conditions were worse than back home. I kept telling them to move us to a smaller flat – we didn't need a marble palace, just silence. But they didn't understand. Every day, there would be Mexican writers and other intellectuals visiting us and we would be presented to them like circus monkeys. The reason why I'd agreed to come here was to have better conditions for writing than in Belgrade, but we hardly had that at all. I didn't write nearly as much as back home. The reasons why they had invited us were deeply hypocritical and made me terribly sad. I refused to advertise my suffering and still claimed that I was no more threatened in my country than anyone else. I became a *persona non grata* for them and my case started a huge polemic in the organisation.

Vlajsa told me he knew exactly what was expected from him as a persecuted writer: 'most writers who come in contact with international organisations that offer them protection know the game. I knew the game, I just refused to play it.' He thought that meeting their demands 'would not be much different from prostitution'. One Algerian writer, he told me, had known how to tick every box, and Vlajsa had watched in astonishment as his colleague's career started to blossom.

This guy gave interviews for the newspapers about how he was arrested, beaten up and tortured. But to us, he revealed this wasn't the real truth. We asked him why he had made it all up. He said because he knew it was expected from us. The West has this idea of a persecuted writer being abused and humiliated, without even a pen and paper. They

picture him sitting in a dark damp prison-camp, writing a masterpiece of his life on toilet paper with his own blood.

Vlajsa and the Algerian writer's different responses to the same discourse demonstrate the following: firstly, free-speech protection as an intervention of the aid narrative is an ongoing, socially-constructed, and negotiated process and not simply an execution of a pre-specified plan of action with an expected outcome (Long and Long 1992: 35). Secondly, both donors and beneficiaries of aid are active social actors with a variety of interests and perspectives, who not only execute plans but create demands for new projects. And, lastly, development brokers who are positioned as the 'interfaces' of different world-views and knowledge systems, like Vlajsa and the Algerian writer, reveal their importance in negotiating roles, relationships, and representations of such enterprises (Lewis and Mosse 2006). In the case of the free-speech protection project, a broker (successfully) negotiates the truthfulness of his hero's saga through their own authenticity and affectual labour in presenting it.

In his study of the life and value of oriental carpets, Brian Spooner (1986) has argued that what is negotiated on the market is not only the price of the carpet but also its authenticity. In the days when technology did not permit easy travel, the authenticity of oriental goods was determined by the distance between consumers and producers. Similarly, during the Cold War, a dissident writer was a producer of the truth which had to travel if not a long, then an extremely dangerous, route. Authenticity was reflected in the very hardship of their journey and the scarcity of voices similar to theirs. Yet, as dividing lines have become more porous and information is available at the click of a computer mouse, what constitutes authenticity nowadays is exclusivity. Just as the value of an oriental carpet is measured by its exclusivity because international travel is easily available, the truthfulness accepted in the competition of the market is not marked by the difficulty of its acquisition. Hundreds of thousands of writers are now narrating their accounts, and it is the connoisseurs of the trade who recognise some as exclusive and truthful. Connoisseurs talk of their ability to 'spot talent' as inherent and universal, yet they too are part of the complex negotiations between the socio-culturally driven demand of free-speech campaigners and the profit-orientated market. Chapter 6 specifically focuses on literary taste and value.

## 4.4 A Torrent of Language

There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a sly, anguished or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place.

Harold Pinter (Brown 1972: 18)

The protection of free speech was a legal reality in socialist Yugoslavia and continues to be so in Croatia and Serbia. As UN members, all three states had to mirror the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19, in their constitutions.<sup>47</sup> These legal guarantees for free-speech practices in their ideal form mean that the official situations in Croatia and Serbia do not support the Western demand for a new dissident writer. Despite these paper protections for human rights, the general international view of the Tuđman and Milošević regimes nonetheless saw them both as newly-established dictatorships. The Cold War dissent model of writers challenging their state can no longer encompass the realities in Serbia or Croatia. This reality can only partly be explained by what Herbert Marcuse (2007) called repressive tolerance. He argued that a lack of censorship did not guarantee that free expression would be exercised in any worthwhile way: in dictatorships, the general population might have become so indoctrinated and manipulated by those who control the media that no form of dissent would even be attempted. However, repressive tolerance in Arsenijević's Serbia involves more than just media manipulation of the general public. Whereas the media-manipulated population rarely even desires to speak out against the state, Arsenijević testifies that in Serbia 'everyone can say whatever they want to'. This is then not a case of silent consent but of silenced dissent. As Harold Pinter vividly put it, silence is not only when no word is spoken but also when so much is being spoken that the very torrent of language speaks of the underlying impossibility of speech. As words lose their power 'to engineer human souls', build the nation, or voice the truth, what is left is noise – a free speech of semantic nonsense. Whether or not Milošević's strategy of implementing the atmosphere of chaos was consciously

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<sup>47</sup> See Appendix for extracts from all three constitutions.

planned, Arsenijević claims that the reality of free expression in Serbia shows how legal protection can actually work against human rights.

The West insists on free speech, but is blind to see how it functions in Serbia. Here, nobody has ever censored anyone. Anything could be published, anything could be spoken about. Writers were no dissidents – to be a dissident you first need to be given credibility, a status of national importance, in order to lose it. Milošević's regime ignored writers so as not to give them any prominence. He gave them space – 'here, talk as much as you want' – so we became helpless to rise above the noise and make ourselves heard. This is censorship. Because if anyone can talk but nobody is heard, what is the point of free speech, or of curtailing it for that matter?

Arsenijević's understanding of dissent demonstrates: first, how free speech assumes different meanings and practices in varying contexts; and second, how a story's truthfulness is constituted and appropriated in a form of dissemination such as the publishing industry. The truth as told by a writer becomes a commodity only when it can be validated by Western concepts of free speech. But what happens when stories, no matter how freely told, are reduced to semantic insignificance in Serbia and to untranslatable codes in the UK? By untranslatable I refer not only to linguistic translation but also to the lack of shared context for knowing when, why, and to whom a story has been told. In *The Social Life of Stories*, Cruikshank (1998) argues that it is important not only to know and remember stories but also to know when to use them appropriately in different situations to produce a desired effect. Only then can their meaning be understood. And yet, where literary translations are concerned, understanding the meaning of stories is the very impetus to their translation. If human rights organisations and UK publishers do not comprehend what a story told by a Serbian or Croatian writer means because their stories do not fit the model of dissent, this is not only misunderstanding but an annulment of the story's truthfulness. Most importantly, with the change of appropriate circumstances, the speech act loses its illocutionary force because it cannot be completed. The Milošević regime, therefore, did not allow a speech act to produce the same effects it would have done during socialism, nor did it recognise the writer as the appropriate social actor to create such effects (Austin, et al. 1975). Free speech as a concept thus privileges the utterance but disregards

the fact that speech is relational and that someone needs to hear it for it to yield its effect.

The next section discusses how writers are granted persecuted status and what benefits and/or losses this might bring.

## **4.5 What is Persecution and How to Measure It**

### **4.5.1 'The not-too-dissident dissident'**

ICORN can help only those writers who are 'not too persecuted,' I was told by Helen, a former project manager who worked closely with ICORN writer residencies. In ICORN terms, 'not too persecuted' means those writers who are not in prison and may leave their country. The definition of persecution is crucial, as it reflects the practical level of help ICORN is able to offer and, with that, justifies their mission. As an international organisation, ICORN includes cities of refuge in affluent countries, such as Scandinavia and the UK. Each country regulates writers-in-residence's immigration issues locally: Scandinavians offer permanent visas to writers who take up places there, allowing them to settle there beyond the length of the residency, while the UK cities of refuge (Norwich and Liverpool) have not found a way to offer persecuted writers permanent immigration status. When their residency is over, they are forced to return to their country of origin or, alternatively, are rotated to another city of refuge to avoid repercussions back home for accepting Western help. This, as Helen explained to me, poses the organisation several ethical dilemmas. Instead of challenging the overall system of help, which Helen believes is necessary, ICORN is choosing to 'play it safe', protecting only those writers who are 'persecuted just the right amount'. In other words, ICORN has no legal or practical means of helping writers either to leave their totalitarian regimes or to help them settle in the UK to avoid further contact with that regime. Least of all, there is no means of protecting them should they return to the same conditions at home from which they had been rescued by ICORN.

ICORN itself depends on the funding criteria of bigger institutions such as ACE and on other grants available only to a specific category. 'A writer needs to be an exile or a refugee to take up a residency,' Helen says. 'If universities affiliated to ICORN wanted to place a persecuted writer to teach there without

labelling them and by only concentrating on the person's work, they would rule themselves out of a wide variety of funding that is available only for specific categories of writers.' The problem with receiving a label of persecution is that the writer must have denounced their country in some way, which makes their return extremely difficult if not impossible – not only in political terms but also in terms of losing their audience. Precisely because ICORN is unable to help writers with issues arising from their return home, the level of a writer's persecution must only be moderate. In a paradoxical way, the Western ideology of persecution by which a writer becomes sought after reinforces and further produces new experiences of persecution once the writer agrees to 'play their role in the game'.

The level of persecution is closely connected to the writer's life story: the amount of suffering the writer has experienced needs to be big enough to attract the audience's attention but small enough not to have traumatised them to an extent that they cannot lecture and integrate with readers. Moderate suffering also indicates that the writer has a certain level of importance in their country given that their word had been deemed dangerous enough for persecution. 'Though ICORN would preferably choose someone of Kundera or Pamuk's calibre, they know the money they are offering is not enough for international writers of such status,' Helen says. In a tone expressing a mixture of compassion and irony, she describes what ICORN, and other free-speech campaigners, perceive to be the image of an ideal persecuted writer:

For a start they want their writing to be professionally clear-cut, not for there to be any ambiguity about this person being a writer. They want them to be an established writer, so does an internet blogger count? At the same time, they want their persecution to be clear-cut. They want them to be a simple victim. It gets complicated when or if they want to continue their political work in exile. They also want someone whose personal circumstances are such that they are not in a fragile emotional state any more. They want someone who speaks English. Someone who isn't shy about presenting themselves to the world and has processed their experience enough to be able to engage in the intercultural exchange and talk about their life. They also don't want them to have TB from being in prison! Or a wife and children who need to come with them. Or a dependant mother who needs daily care. They probably want them to be this isolated heroic figure who has a tale of woe and is struggling to write great literature. This makes it a very narrow sliver of people who can fit the category of a writer-in-residence.

#### 4.5.2 Community negotiation

The struggle over the meaning of one's story is closely related to negotiating the writer's position within multiple communities. The position of a writer labelled as persecuted confirms Marcus's (1998) idea that community as a socio-cultural place fixed in time and space can no longer offer meaningful understandings of how people think and act as community members. This is because a persecuted writer, as imagined by an organisation such as ICORN, constantly re-negotiates between the abstract idea of community and the practical materiality of how, when, and why a community is re-enacted. Vlajsa's residency experience unveils the process of belonging as consisting of multiple and often simultaneous connections and disconnections. The socio-historical context driving someone like Vlajsa to re-enact particular connections and disconnections is the intersection between Western ideas of free speech and the specific socio-political environment in which his work is emerging. In other words, ICORN's definition of persecution involves, among other things, a presumption that a writer's work in their home country is censored or at least dubbed controversial. If a writer accepts the persecution label, it is assumed that their imagined community of readers who are 'ready to die for the truth of someone they don't even know personally' (Anderson 2006) has been disintegrated – the writer has become an outsider in and to their home country. A persecuted writer thus speaks against either their state or the mentality of their culture. Either way, they are cutting ties with the community into which they had been socialised to become published in the first place.

Occupying such a strategic position, persecuted writers are easily imagined as cultural brokers. If free-speech protection is understood as a particular tale of progress, they become development brokers and translators between their own and Western worldviews (Lewis and Mosse 2006). Brokers, Mosse argues, are made to face 'in two directions at once': they represent the local population and its needs to outside funders and, far from being passive operators of the logic of dependence, are key factors in the hunt for projects carried out in the 'development world' (ibid., 12). As they 'speak' both languages – the beneficiaries' and the donors' – their interpretations of both their local realities and the Western worldview are imbued with performative

power. In short, they make things happen. Free-speech protection as a particular type of aid narrative shows that brokers deal in people and information, not solely financial profit in the narrow sense of immediate reward. The broader effects of their activities are visible in the maintenance of coherent representations of social realities and in the shaping of their own social identities (ibid., 16). Therefore, they create a context in which different rationalities, interests, and meanings can co-exist and produce order, legitimacy and 'success'. However, noticing the social processes that sustain their strategic position of maintaining coherence can also reveal hidden, personal, and unofficial goals that co-exist within the dominant discourse. Vlajsa is in fact a writer who, within the project of free-speech protection, has criticised and subverted its logic. Here is an example of how a fellow internationally-established writer resented him for not performing his role of persecution to perfection:

I was heavily criticised for allegedly being a complacent member of the Serbian nationalistic elite, insensitive to the sufferings of the Kosovo Albanians under Milošević's regime. My colleague published several articles about my unwillingness to write against the Serbian state. In her words, I wasn't enough of a hero and instead of trying to change the state of affairs in my country, as should be the role of any writer with conscience, I was comfortably lounging in my house and googling on the Internet.

A successful negotiation with one's affiliations brings personal goals to the writer and the price they pay for cutting ties with their home community is recouped by attaining access to various forms of funding. Often financial capital is later translated into symbolic and cultural relevance. As shown above, the ICORN residency aims to foster community cohesion between a persecuted writer and their new readers. What Vlajsa perceived as 'showing him off as a circus monkey' is ICORN initiating a persecuted writer into a new space of belonging. Being part of such a community is based neither on kin nor on pure locality and can most appropriately be understood as practices of what Keith Hart (1988) calls making associative links. Even though persecuted writers who perform their duties during an ICORN residency are immersed in personal contact with people in the same locality, assuming association with an abstract idea of what free speech is and how it should be practiced becomes a ticket into

a new imagined community. Believing in the shared idea, similar to Anderson's nation-building process, is based on persecuted writers' association with practices of free-speech campaigners and expectations of readers in the receiving country. Although they both re-enact their experience of belonging to the home community – through their story of suffering there – and become part of daily practices at the residency programme, the community negotiations are also performed on an abstract level. Baumann (1996) has argued that community can be perceived as less a matter of social practice and institutions and more a symbolic framework for thinking and conveying cultural difference, suggesting that persecuted writers' participation in the receiving country can be understood as enacting a socio-cultural worldview. In other words, for persecuted writers to agree to their label means embracing a whole set of ideas about free speech and performing their role as expected by the readership, campaigners, and funding institutions.

Another useful way of understanding free-speech protection is through Latour's metaphor of 'translation' (Latour 2005; Lewis and Mosse 2006) which has been fruitfully employed in the anthropology of development (Long and Long 1992; Grillo and Stirrat 1997; Mosse 2004; Olivier de Sardan 2005). As discussed in the Introduction, 'translation' involves examining the ways in which heterogeneous entities – people, ideas, interests, and objects – are tied together by translation of one kind or another into the material and conceptual order of a successful project. It is thus understood as a process that 'permits the negotiation of common meanings and definitions and the mutual enrollment and co-optation into individual and collective objectives and activities' (Lewis and Mosse 2006: 14).

#### 4.5.3 Knowing when to stop being a dissident

Persecuted writers negotiate their belonging to and dissociation from different communities throughout their lives and careers. The very notion of free speech presupposes that even within a coherent community (as a nation-state is imagined to be) there needs to exist a space for opting out by speaking out. Presented as a basic human right, the right to free speech acts to allow a writer to journey from being 'endangered' to being 'free'. In many ways, my ethnographic data demonstrates individuals' ability to flexibly 'use' abstract

ideas of community in order to fit in or opt out, and often to practice both simultaneously. Herzfeld's (1997) term 'cultural intimacy', which highlights the interplay between official social discourses and daily performances, is useful for understanding how scepticism, irony, and humour become means of cultural critique precisely by sustaining multiple affiliations. Moreover, to truly understand the performative power of cultural brokers, both donors' and beneficiaries' spaces of belonging must be understood in a fluid way rather than as separate and homogenous worldviews (Rossi 2006). Hence Vlajsa's involvement in free-speech protection is not a clear-cut meeting of two separate social and epistemological discourses but a complex set of strategic positions and perspectives by both him and his Western helpers. The 'ways of using' the project can reveal what may be achieved for him by virtue of his recipient status and what may be achieved for the free-speech campaigners as donors.

Once persecuted writers have spoken against their home communities, their inclusion in the new space of belonging is often not without further dissent. For example, Vlajsa accepted the ICORN residency to have free funded time for writing, but both publicly and privately expressed his scepticism about the efficiency of the programme and its underlying ethics. As highly referential people aware of the power of words, persecuted writers often consent to campaigners' paradigms, while still keeping a private space for ridiculing them and dissenting from their principles. In this 'game', it becomes important to know not only the underlying ideas but also practices which are embedded in particular circumstances - when to dissent, from what or whom, and with what intention. The writer's position in a new community might be seriously jeopardised should they understand their right to dissent as universal. One who has been saved by the grace of free speech should also know that speaking *against* free speech does not bring further results.

Helen told me that in more severe cases of persecution - those that ICORN cannot support - writers 'lose all sense of reality and bite the hand that feeds them'. She knew of an Uzbek journalist who had been smuggled out of the country with PEN's help to prevent his detention and torture in prison. When relocated to the USA, he was diagnosed with PTSD and 'transferred his paranoia of the Uzbek state being after him (which was true) to the US state, so he was completely out of touch with reality'. He refused help from anyone and

soon became homeless. As Helen was following his case from London, she was relieved when she heard that someone had eventually managed to help him and 'talk sense into him'. She summarises her opinion of the free-speech campaigning as follows:

You can easily tell yourself that PEN's influence was justified because even if he turned into a crazy street person in California, it is still better than being tortured and persecuted in Uzbekistan. But back in Uzbekistan, he had a large social network of friends and family and he may have been persecuted but he also knew how to survive up to a point. He kept saying 'I want to go back to Uzbekistan'. People who helped him said he'd be crazy to give up his status. But knowing he was out in the street, hungry and completely convinced that US government was out to get him, it is hard to feel good about what PEN had done for him.

#### 4.5.4 Things more important than free speech

Theories of free speech have so far focused on contextual limitations to the underlying ideas of free speech (Warburton 2009). Most free-speech campaigners today agree that some restrictions are indeed necessary and welcome. Warburton refers to such agreement as 'liberty, not licence' - i.e. free speech is not a licence to slander, engage in false and highly misleading advertising, publish sexual material about children, reveal state secrets, and so on. An additional understanding holds that free expression of ideas in peacetime is concordant with the legislative power of Article 19, yet, in wartime, the same ideas should be treated differently (*ibid.*, 10). However, there has been little discussion about the values of free speech, how they are constructed, and what consequences they have on everyday practices in different cultural contexts. Warburton's example of Judge Holmes limiting free expression in wartime in order to protect the nation shows how a specific socio-political context may re-shape free speech's value to the community in an isolated historic moment. This value is by no means intrinsic, so even the most fervent free-speech campaigners agree that total licence to free speech in certain contexts is detrimental.

Limiting free speech in times of 'clear and present danger', to quote Holmes again, has been accepted as an unquestionable principle in protecting the democratic nation-state. Yet the quest for a dissident writer has relied on a

diametrically opposite demand – expecting both socialist and post-socialist writers to speak against their nation in times of ‘clear and present danger’ for that state. Arsenijević’s book found a UK publisher exactly because Western democracies had criticised wartime Serbia for curtailing freedom of expression. Should not ‘clear and present danger’ argument have been recognised as a legitimate reason for Serbia too to limit the practice of free speech? Such clearly different interpretations of similar practices only show that the value of free speech becomes a complex space of power struggle.

Neither did the Uzbek journalist and his rescuers agree on a shared value of free speech. English PEN’s campaign, whose intentions were to ‘save’ the journalist from torture, resulted in his installation in a foreign country where he felt lost and disorientated, almost ruining the mission. His preference was ‘to be left in his own country where the limits of his freedom were familiar to him rather than being sent away on his own, without the support of his immediate family and hope of ever belonging to his wider community’. To him, free speech as practised by UK campaigners was experienced as an immense loss of personal and emotional stability. This, as Helen mentioned, raises ethical questions about Western aid and the insistence on universal free speech practices at all costs.

The 2005 Danish cartoons case – when a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, published 12 cartoon images of Muhammed with a bomb shaped like a turban on his head – has shifted discussions about free speech from an abstract ivory-tower debate into polarised conversations about values of free speech in democratic countries that strive to be multicultural. It prompted some free-speech campaigners, such as English PEN, to re-assess the nature and limitations of their own involvement and created a new awareness of certain contexts when a ‘community’ may value its cohesion much more highly than an individual’s right to dissent. Many writers in non-Western countries do not practise their right to free speech by Western standards, not because those rights are curtailed, but because the ‘community’ sees no value in such practices.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how free speech ideas and practices become instrumental in giving prominence to a foreign writer in the UK market of

institutional assistance. The opening discussion of the free-speech-protection narrative highlights its importance in constructing the credibility and authenticity of foreign writers, who travel from their own language into publication in English. The everyday practices of UK free-speech campaigners create a favourable context for foreign writers to be perceived as dissident heroes. The case study of Vladimir Arsenijević's 'rise and fall' within the UK book industry points to the gap between ideas of free speech and the different contexts in which they are re-enacted: in many ways, Arsenijević occupies the role of a hero reluctant to take up the role of a dissident writer and support a coherent narrative of aid and development. Not only do differing interpretations of legislation reflect limitations on free speech within the same country or valuing 'community', but the meaning of daily practices and values of free speech does not necessarily translate from one 'community' to the other. Two particular instances of miscommunication are: a) assuming that the absence of censorship means free speech is being practised in a meaningful way, and b) imposing the universal value of free speech on writers whose 'communities'' cohesive force lies in consent rather than pluralism.

This chapter also highlights the nature of a writer's agency in negotiating Western support. The position of a cultural and development broker can thus involve a range of perspectives, from open criticism of the support system to conscious acceptance and manipulation of cultural concepts in order to ensure personal benefits. The following chapter explores the latter stance.

Finally, perceiving free speech as a predetermined set of legislative and practical activities results in only a partial analysis: overgeneral statements about the presence or absence of free speech, which campaigners may appropriate, cannot yield satisfactory insights. Understood as a social process with certain effects, free speech involves both speaking (freedom to say whatever one wishes in a public space) and being heard. What desired effects might anyone who seeks the *right to write* be looking to achieve? The interview with Vladimir Arsenijević presented him as desiring to achieve social change and establish his own social position. The legal and actual reality of free speech in Serbia allows him to speak but prevents him from being heard. We could argue that such practices of free speech also exist in Western democracies:

people are free to express themselves as they please in the public domain, yet there is no guarantee their message will be heard. What *is* missing in Serbia is the communicative process, or the completion of the speech act, in which the writer given a platform to speak is also heard. Paradoxically then, in the time of censorship, dissident writers, by being punished for their freedom of expression, were given an audience, if only in the West. The restriction of free speech in their country created the appropriate context for them to achieve relevance and effects. Now, in 'the atmosphere of noise', writers' words are thrown into the wilderness where no-one can hear them: their speech, therefore, lacks its former illocutionary force. The performative is unhappy and the dialogue broken. One may thus easily see how the denial of free speech can actually produce more socio-cultural effects, which is precisely what liberty in self-expression is intended to achieve. With this in mind, the question of whether free speech is present or absent should be reconfigured into what free speech or its lack creates for those who claim that right for themselves.

## 5 Exile: between destiny and strategy

### 5.1 Out of Place and Into Literature

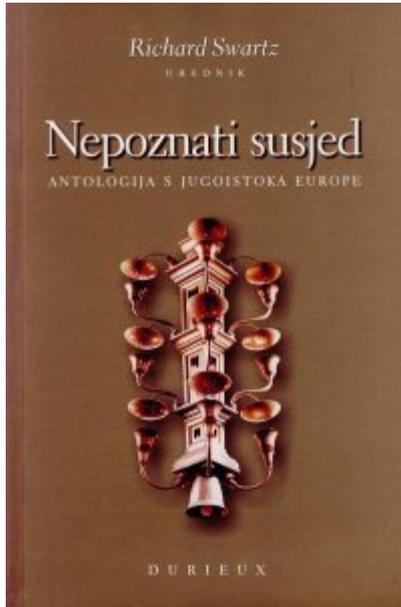


Fig. 5.1. Cover of the anthology *Nepoznati susjed* – in translation Unknown Neighbour – promoted at the Pula Festival.

At the Pula Literary Festival – the biggest international literary event in the Region – a Croatian writer, Slavenka Drakulić, is invited to present a new anthology of writing from South-East Europe. The book is edited by a Swedish publisher, mainly for the English-speaking audience, but is also available in Croatian. She introduces every writer with a few words, sometimes mixing anecdotes of private life with praise for their work. Suddenly she stops and, as she looks at the list of represented writers once again, she says: ‘I’ve never noticed that all of us included in the anthology are writers in exile. Isn’t that interesting!’ Some of the featured writers are Vladimir Arsenijević, Bora Ćosić, Drakulić herself, Aleksandar Hemon, Miljenko Jergović and Saša Stanišić.

This anthology is one of many that celebrate these writers as representative voices of their region.

#### 5.1.1 The aura of exile

By what right can we call the lived experience of others a dream/nightmare? Not because the facts are so oppressive that they can weakly be termed nightmarish; nor because hopes can weakly be termed dreams. (Berger, Mohr and Blomberg 1975: 64)

As a lived experience, exile has generally been understood as one of the most tragic destinies that can befall a human being. In ancient Greek and Roman times, in redemption for their crimes, writers such as Ovid were given a choice between exile and execution. Choosing exile meant their physical lives were

able to continue, yet losing one's home was believed to equal emotional and psychological death. Exilic displacement involved both a geographical rupture and a change in the writer's status. Writers were faceless not only in the new site but also in their lost home, since most exiled writers had their books banned in the country from which they had been banished.

The Ovidian exilic experience has permeated our understanding of this condition to such an extent that most exiled writers of the past and present are expected to produce equivalent personal stories of suffering. The displacement tragedy is based on the assumption that physical home is the most sacred source of knowing who we are in the world and that, therefore, losing this site of self can only be seen as unfortunate. In the past, much scholarship in anthropology and other social sciences have helped reify the home/exile divide. More recent studies have asked for both home and exile to be reconceptualised for a better understanding of lived experience. Only when human experience is perceived as having a narrative character can we accept John Berger's opening quote that facts alone are not enough to judge it as either dream or nightmare. This section briefly outlines approaches in the study of exilic experience before developing my own argument: that exile understood through the story of suffering in certain contexts can be negotiated into a productive strategy of mastering the UK book market. Chapter 4 has already illustrated how writers assume various positions against UK free-speech campaigns and what those entail in practice. Similarly, this chapter focuses on exile as a position which may mobilise much symbolic and cultural capital for a foreign writer in the UK publishing industry. In a way, for those writers who accept the persecution label, exile is what follows their claim for the *right to write*.

### 5.1.2 Is modern mind homeless?

Most dictionaries' generally-agreed definition of *exile* would read as follows: 'a prolonged separation from one's country or home, either voluntarily or by force of circumstances'. So, before considering exile, we should first define home.

Home has traditionally been understood as a house: the organisation of space over time and the allocation of resources in space over time (Rapport and Dawson 1998). In the past, anthropology has produced studies that showed being at home as being environmentally fixed. In the construction of essential

cultures, societies, nations, and ethnic groups, being at home meant being, if not stationary, at least centred and having a perspective on an environment from a single, fixed, and homogeneous point of view. Yet the world can no longer be divided into framed units and discrete exclusive cultures. More people are caught between local origins and cosmopolitan society in which all humanity participates. Exile, migration, tourism, and travelling are central motifs of our civilisation.<sup>48</sup> The experience of displacement can take different shapes: geographically moving from one space to another, or staying in the same place while surrounding borders change. When the latter happens, the new country is inhabited by citizens who all live in a cognitive exile. Exile is thus much more than a physical experience and some studies of modernity have argued that, in a metaphysical sense, we have all become homeless in our mind.

In *Homeless Mind*, Peter Berger (1974) regards homelessness as a metaphysical condition that is present within all humankind. Such a psychologically unbearable condition, he argues, has engendered feelings of nostalgia and longing to be at home in society, with oneself, and ultimately in the universe. This kind of homelessness permeates not only individual senses of identity but also society as a whole and is a direct outcome of the modern world's technical production. Changes have occurred on the level of human consciousness too: what used to be unified and fixed is now segregated into components and fragmented. Hence, for Berger, modernisation stands for the loss of the traditional and the absolute.

### 5.1.3 Home is not home and exile is not exile<sup>49</sup>

Though in many ways an insightful study, Berger's arguments have contributed to essentialising and homogenising of the traditional and idyllic life in the past, defined by unified cognitive and behavioural commonality. In *Migrants of Identity*, an anthropological study that challenges fixed notions of home and exile, Rapport and Dawson (1998: 32) question the existence of the original life-world of traditional absoluteness and fixity where the individual is seen to be

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<sup>48</sup> Nina Glick-Schiller, among others, has suggested that in fact the 'normal' state for millennia was nomadism and that stasis and fixity are products of state control. Her study of transmigration reveals that people nowadays forge connections between and across several different nation-states and are thereby reformulating definitions and practices of modern citizenship (Basch, Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1993).

<sup>49</sup> This is a statement Ugrešić has often made at literary events I attended.

first and truly at home. Seeing the modern human condition as metaphysical homelessness, a standpoint that is not grounded ethnographically in the present, invokes the mythic past as its opposite. But, there is enough evidence of the survival of home, however this may be defined – even as individuals and groups lead their lives in and through movement (cognitive, physical) and refrain from finally and essentially affixing their identities to places. To be able to theorise about exile and general movement of people that has increasingly become our everyday reality, anthropology started to redefine the meaning of home.

Anthropology has largely begun to think of home in terms of fluidities and individuals' continuous movement rather than as a fixed dwelling (Minh-ha 1994). Although Peter Berger (1974) is right to view uprootedness as central to our civilisation, home has not been irretrievably lost. So, if home is neither here nor there, how may we more specifically define it to reflect these recent socio-historical and theoretical changes? John Berger (1984) perceives home as 'an untold story of a life being lived' – a routine set of practices, memories, myths, and stories carried around in one's head. Devoid of geographical fixity, exile too becomes less a condition defined by the loss of home and more a set of performances (Rapport and Dawson 1998). Therefore, focusing on the performative nature of conditions tentatively defined as being 'at home' or 'in exile' allows the age-long opposition of mythic past vs. tragic present to be reframed. In a paradoxical way, displacement emerges as a way of achieving the ultimate sense of belonging by becoming the vantage point from which to best know oneself.

In deconstructing the home/exile opposition, anthropological studies (Malkki 1992; Basch, et al. 1993; Rogge 1994; Malkki 1995; Bascom 1998; Indra 1999; McSpadden 1999; Holtzman 2000) have concentrated mostly on the emotional and cognitive experience of displacement. Narrativity and the telling of one's life story have been seen as the most important tools in constructing the sense of home in the present world of migration and fast political changes. Thus Madan Sarup (1994: 39) has argued that 'individuals are at home in the story of their lives: in the narrative of identity with which and through which they traverse their social environments'. In the context of ex-Yugoslavia, a place that no longer exists as a political entity, homeland can survive only in memories

and myths. Ex-Yugoslav writers published in the UK, as shown below, perform exile at various intertwined levels: they experience exile as everyday reality and they use it as a literary trope. In their writing, Yugoslavia expresses longing for precisely the idyllic and fixed past conceived by Peter Berger. Return there is impossible, as it would involve a temporal and not a physical journey (Jansen 1998: 96). The act of writing, instead, functions as a device of remaining in touch with the pan-nationalist past and serves as a new cognitive home.

This is not all. Writing about home as an organic attachment – narratives set back home, characters from home, mourning what ‘home’ had turned into – turns into a critical cultural resource through which ex-Yugoslav exiled writers negotiate their authenticity. Perceived as authentic voices in the UK book market, it is the suffering caused by the very divide between ‘home’ and ‘exile’ as featured in their narratives that constructs a platform from which their words are accepted as trustworthy and authentic. On one hand, these writers are perceived as belonging to their national culture(s) (representing Croatian or Serbian national literatures) in an essentialist and taken-for-granted way. On the other, the very exclusion from the national(istic) narratives of their ‘home’ allows them to forge different types of allegiances and commonalities in the UK. This peculiar strategic position reflects Vered Amit’s (Amit and Rapport 2002) insight about the dangers of seeing every membership in a particular cultural category as belonging to a ‘community’: assuming a simple relationship between imagined categorical identity and social groups does not itself tell us which categories will actually be drawn on for the mobilisation of social relations and/or resources. The ambiguity and multiplicity of meanings of exile, specifically the process in which a writer simultaneously invokes ‘home’ through writing and renounces it by fleeing, redirects our analytical focus towards circumstances in which these categories are likely to be invoked, by whom, and how these invocations construct social relations (ibid., 19).

#### 5.1.4 Exile as strategy

Minh-ha (1994) argues that, for a number of writers in exile, the true home is found not in houses but in writing. This ‘imagined’ home resonates with Benedict Anderson’s decoupling of community culture from its site in the concept of ‘imagined community’. However, even ‘imagined communities’ can

too easily become reified categories and groups. Here is how: home and nation, considered through Hobsbawm's terms *Heim* (a private and individual routine) and *Heimat* (nation) (Morley 2000: 4), show up as enacted through the story which creates the 'we' that belongs to it and the 'others' that are expelled. Writing about 'the loss of home', therefore, reifies the tragic nature of exile, as it affirms the exiles as 'others', people who were not allowed to have a home in their home country.

Instead of reading these social relations and imaginations purely as a text, my empirical investigation offers a (frequently) tense dialectic between cultural categories, social institutions, practices, and relationships. Exile emerges as a performance and (un)conscious strategy suggesting that: a) human experience cannot be judged by facts alone; b) neither home nor exile can be defined by geographical fixity; c) both are performative acts, constructed through story-telling and negotiation of commonalities.

The next section focuses on various levels at which exile is performed, starting with 'the story of suffering', then investigates how these levels and exile as a literary trope are used within the publishing industry.

## **5.2 'Witches from Rio'**

### 5.2.1 Struggle for suffering

In December 1992, the popular Croatian weekly magazine *Globus* published the article 'The Witches from Rio' (1992), accusing five prominent Croatian feminists of 'raping their own country'. The author (who remained anonymous) claimed that the five 'witches' had made an international case of their 'supposed' suffering at the hand of the Croatian media with 'a calculated aim to improve their careers'. At the same time, they had turned a blind eye to 'the real victims of Serbian ethnic cleansing and sexual genocide - Croatian and Muslim women who were consistently being raped by the Serbs'. The prominent headline 'Croatian feminists rape Croatia' referred to the women's claim that the war in Croatia was 'a male business' - a media manipulation by which, regardless of their ethnic origin or sides in the war, women were forced into submissive silence and subjected to sermons that procreation was their life's only purpose. Whereas the feminists critiqued the overall nationalistic discourse

- a story of ethnic purity that depicted the nation as a succession of male heroes  
- the *Globus* article continued to construct the divide between the 'impure savage Serbs' and the victimised Croatian (and Muslim) women.

By that time, influential foreign media (*The Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN) and human rights organisations (Helsinki Watch) had reported that the right to free speech was being severely breached in the Balkans. The author of the *Globus* article agreed that isolated ultra-right-wing politicians in Croatia who had prosecuted journalists had indeed contributed to Croatia's bad reputation - as a country where human rights have been seriously endangered. However, the succinctly-phrased main point of the article was this: the feminists - who had enjoyed all the benefits of communist life in the past - had craftily used this situation to portray themselves as victims of Croatia's nationalistic regime, whereas in reality 'there was no evidence of their suffering to be found'.

Many anthropological studies of the Balkans dealing with the 1990s conflicts (see Introduction and Chapter 3) have argued that the story of 'blood and soil' enabled nationalistic governments in both Croatia and Serbia to win the vote. The five feminists wrote against the narrative of ethnic purity, national origin, and continuity<sup>50</sup>, for which they were seen as 'raping' and defaming their own country. As further proof of their impurity, the article also claimed that their choice of partners/husbands (ethnic Serbs) had been intentionally anti-Croatian even when Yugoslavia existed and had little to do with their romantic preferences.

Why witches from Rio? The article was published after their talk at the 58<sup>th</sup> International PEN Congress in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In Rio, the feminists had pointed to the nationalistic Croatian government's suppression of free speech and requested that the PEN Assembly of Delegates rethink its proposal to have the following year's Congress in Dubrovnik (see Chapter 3). The *Globus* article understood this request as 'stabbing their own country in the back'.

'The witches from Rio' were accused of blowing their 'cases of suffering' out of proportion and creating international political issues in order to improve their careers. They were called the 'girls of communism' because they had all lived affluent and comfortable lives before the fall of Yugoslavia. The article

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<sup>50</sup> See for example Jansen's (2002) discussion about the prevalence of disambiguous narratives of the past and present ethnic/national identifications in Croatian ethnically mixed villages.

proudly listed their genealogies and their families' implication with the privileged ranks of the JNA (Yugoslav National Army). This, the article claimed, was 'evidence that the feminists are nothing but communist and post-communist profiteers', who were trying to present the world with an alleged gender and human rights war in Croatia where their story of suffering took prominent place. 'But where is there suffering', asked the author, 'while they are easily travelling around the world and writing about their metaphorical pain?'

The 'witches' case has since become a widely used trope, particularly in connection with the life story of Dubravka Ugrešić – one of the most widely-translated living Croatian authors. As her books travel from 'home' into 'exile', the suffering thematised in the article continues to be perceived in starkly different ways: many Croatians suspect that her pain has not been genuine, while the UK readership believes her life story as well as her writing to be authentic expressions of a traumatised experience. Who is right and which evidence supports it?

### 5.2.2 Exile – trauma – truth

My analysis of the 'witches' case conundrum is less concerned with establishing 'who is right' and more with tracing the socio-historical construction of trauma and its political uses. Didier Fassin's (2009) inquiry into the taken-for-granted aspect of trauma offers valuable directions. Without denying the reality of people's suffering or discrediting the work of the psychiatrists and psychologists who, as Fassin explains, have helped to 'invent' PTSD as a condition, he charts the shift in how society thinks and practices trauma. Rather than asking whether a person merits psychological help or financial compensation, Fassin is interested in knowing why trauma, which once excited so much suspicion, now has the value of proof – 'how what was false has become what is true' (ibid., 5). Trauma has not changed; the moral economy that no longer contests it has.

Fassin's historical overview challenges the naturalisation of trauma by taking into account the history of medicine as much as an anthropology of sensibilities and values. He takes us from the realms of WW1, when wounded soldiers' or injured workers' symptoms were deemed of doubtful legitimacy,

through to 1980s feminist and (Vietnam) veteran claims of suffering, which now evoke sympathy and merit compensation. In this trajectory, the memory of the Holocaust, as a paradigm of trauma, marks the change of attitudes towards the authenticity of suffering. On one level, the victim's word can no longer be doubted – their authority and authenticity through testimony is constructed as truthful – and on the other, the focus shifts from the traumatic experience to bearing witness to the unspeakable (Fassin 2009: 81). Ultimately, trauma becomes 'an unfortunate encounter between an ordinary person and an extraordinary event' (ibid., 87), so there is no more need to posit a weak personality or doubt the sincerity of the trauma victim.

Since 1980s sexual politics and the feminist claim that the suffering caused by sexual abuse should be recognised, the traces of trauma are less to be found in physical wounds and more in 'the wounds of the soul' (Fassin 2009: 160). The reality of this 'silent pain', Fassin argues, is not new, but its recognition is. As a specific regime of truth most commonly narrated through the genre of testimony, trauma has recently made a link between violence inflicted on the body and the violation of human rights (ibid., 176). Humanitarian intervention is thus increasingly based on a new moral obligation to help and intervene, reflecting the dual aim: providing assistance and, more importantly, bearing witness to trauma.

The nexus between recognising suffering as legitimate and a moral obligation to help is what in the UK allows the 'witches' case to be perceived as authentic and truthful. But, unlike Fassin's diachronical shift in the perceptions of trauma, the contestations of its truthfulness take place simultaneously, across different socio-cultural contexts. The writers' balancing act between these two sets of circumstances opens up a partly utilitarian dimension of trauma – that of a resource that can be used to support a right or make a claim. The disparate treatment of the traumatic experience is the very resource enabling such claims to entitlement to be made. The following discussion focuses mainly on the strategic aspect of trauma, without judging the realities of these writers' experience or engaging in post-modern relativism about its truthfulness.

The 'witches' case resulted in two prominent writers, Dubravka Ugrešić and Slavenka Drakulić, going into exile. Free-speech campaigners, such as English PEN, have embraced their story of human rights abuse, which I will call

'the story of suffering'. At the outbreak of the war in Croatia, both feminists, previously established as fiction writers, wrote non-fiction accounts of life in the newly-formed Yugoslav successor states for English-language newspapers (*The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and other newspapers worldwide). Their essays and memoirs criticised the Croatian nationalistic government and its ideology excluding those of 'impure' origin. Some of their writing also depicted life under communism from a personal perspective, which was well received on the UK market. Yet even before the two 'witches' had fled Croatia they had become strangers to their nation-state. As Ugrešić put it:

To start with there was a mild, secret counting, then somewhat more obvious dividing, and then very clear branding. How else can one mark one's stock, distinguish one's own herd from someone else's? (Ugresic 1998a: 40)

If the modern state promotes similarity and uniformity, then exiled writers are strangers in their own country before migration because they question the dominant view of the nation as a homogeneous societal structure (Bauman 1990). Many anthropological studies have suggested that migrants may be 'effectively' lost to their home communities long before they actually pack their bags and leave. Not fitting in is, in fact, a primary reason for migration (King, Connell and White 1995). A writer like Dubravka Ugrešić, who speaks against the nationalistic government in the time when all women should 'keep quiet and bear more children' represents the dissolution of a cohesive, unified identity that resists national designations. By breaking the national(istic) uniformity through speaking at an 'inappropriate' time, she thus becomes a double stranger (Kosta and Kraft 2003).<sup>51</sup> Or in her own words:

I shudder at the phantom spectre of my old fatherland, where I have become a stranger, and which doesn't even exist any more. I shudder at my new country, where I'll be a stranger and where I still have to apply for citizenship, because I lost that of my old fatherland. I will have to prove that I've been born there, that I speak the language of my country, even though it's my mother tongue. I shudder at my old-new fatherland, where I'll enter as if I am an immigrant. (Ugrešić, quoted in Jansen 1998: 96)

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<sup>51</sup> The concept of 'stranger in her own country' speaks to Bauman's (1990) differentiation between friends, enemies, and strangers. A stranger is *undecidable* (Derrida's term), neither friend nor enemy, neither inside nor outside, and arises anxiety because they testify to the non-completion of the task of order-building.

Strangers are threatening for another reason – they have the freedom to go. The *Globus* article sees the writers' international travel and teaching residencies as a sign of their lack of patriotic commitment and evidence that their suffering is only 'metaphorical'. This alleged betrayal ('aggravated' by writers being internationally established through literary translation) speaks to Fassin's description of WW1 soldiers, whose *traumatic neurosis* was at best viewed with suspicion and at worst defined as malingering and psychological treason of their homeland (Fassin 2009: 76).

Compared to Arsenijević, who refused to 'advertise' his suffering on the grounds of being endangered in Serbia, Ugrešić and Drakulić have accepted the role of suffering dissident writers. The term 'story of suffering' in no way discredits the reality of their experience or approaches it with cynicism. On the contrary, the 'witches' case led to considerable public denunciations, that is, actual mistreatment, of the two writers. This analysis does not aim at a moral judgement of reality but points out the narrative character of the 'story of suffering' and the specifics of its genre (testimony) that allow the same facts to be read and appropriated in divergent ways. Such an interpretative approach (Denzin 1989b), which views life story narratives not as absolute truths but contingent on the context that in turn constructs their authenticity, draws on Turner's (1986) anthropology of experience, which made a clear difference between life as lived, as experienced, and as told: 'a life history is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context' (ibid., 7).

The 'victim turned hero' narrative, which (as seen below) mobilises various types of aid in the UK, has often been discredited in Croatia. Some literary colleagues have called it 'a fabricated lie' or a 'conscious strategy to promote their careers', based on the 'evidence' that 'no writer, including Drakulić and Ugrešić, was ever endangered in communist or post-communist Croatia'. Clearly the suspicion is directed towards the genuineness of their suffering: exiled writers have often been perceived as 'selfish' and 'looking for a way out' of the shared destiny. Robert told me that 'it wasn't the state, but the Croatian mentality, that was against Ugrešić'. 'People who were never into literature', he remembers, 'would suddenly bad-mouth her in bars, even demanding she be punished for her "lies"'. Ugrešić never wrote that her life

was threatened in Croatia, but she often commented in interviews that staying in such a political climate would have been a moral and psychological capitulation. Back in Croatia, the story woven by my participants reflects a common trope: those who stayed suffered more than those who ‘willingly’ exiled themselves. Saša, a Croatian publisher, tells me his view:

Dubravka had the same choice as everyone else. I could have left too. So, what is braver: fleeing the country because you feel you’re not socially acceptable or staying put and sharing the destiny with others? I don’t think the rest of us, intellectuals, were very socially acceptable either. I chose to stay and live through the war. Mine was the inner exile, which is in many ways harder than what she did. Those who fled across national borders at least had some kind of distance from the atrocities happening here. Her political stand is at the very least unfair: selling your suffering abroad so that you can turn it into a literary and financial capital is really off. But, then again, many people made profit from this war: in the midst of horror, there was a general chaos where everyone looked to make the most out of it. Why should it be different with literature? Writers are only human.

The conflicting understandings of suffering suggest that authenticity does not reside outside the act of narration. In testifying to their trauma, exiled writers are given unquestionable authority over the facts. Trauma, or more correctly the genre of testimony through which trauma is narrated, creates truth. As seen in Fassin’s study, this proliferation of appropriated testimonies is a recent development. Lauren Berlant, for example, talks of a ‘traumatic model of citizenship’<sup>52</sup> which constitutes the subalterns’ political identity through ‘the pain that stands as universally *intelligible*’ (Berlant 2007: 331). A testimony to their trauma is based on ‘the conviction about *self-evidence* and therefore the *objectivity* of painful feeling’ (ibid., 309).

Luc Boltanski’s study of *Distant Suffering* (1999) in the same manner supports the argument that ‘trauma creates truth’. He further suggests that the division and separation between the unfortunate and the fortunate creates ‘a politics of pity’,<sup>53</sup> which in turn instils the spectator with a moral obligation to

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<sup>52</sup> In Berlant’s study, the traumatic model differs from classic citizenship, where an ‘unmarked’, i.e. non-suffering, individual is seen as belonging to a nation and juridically protected. For a clear exposition of these terms, see Berlant’s *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (Berlant 1997).

<sup>53</sup> Boltanski borrows the term ‘politics of pity’ from Hannah Arendt, explaining that: a) it involves the distinction between those who suffer and those who do not; b) the focus is more on the spectacle of suffering and less on the action of power of the *strong* over the *weak*

help (ibid., 13). Without pity, he argues, there is no moral obligation. The spectacle of distant suffering and the urge to morally respond to it has created the grounds for Western humanitarian intervention. And, since traces of trauma are found in the wounded soul as much as on the body, UK free-speech campaigners' efforts to help exiled writers can too be understood as supporting and reproducing the new trauma paradigm. The humanitarian intervention available in the 'witches' case would include not much more than a witnessing of the writers' suffering, which has indeed become the staple of the modern humanitarian project. Also central to humanitarian enterprise is the understanding of individual human rights as trumping cultural difference, which specifically comes to the fore in cases of totalitarian regimes, where singled-out people may need to be 'saved' from their national leaders. By this logic, human no longer equals citizen.<sup>54</sup>

Trauma's authenticity is constructed through a process that conflates two contradictory positions: witness and victim (Ahmed 2001). Vieda Skultans (1998) insightfully argued that Latvian narratives of illness (most expressing terror) were founded upon the act of witnessing in which there was a fusion between the witness and the act witnessed: between experience and representation. On one level, the narrative was constructed through immediacy and 'being there'; at another, structural devices were used for distancing and shaping the 'objective' account.<sup>55</sup>

Testimony to trauma, as I said before, does not reveal any pre-existing truth, politics, or ethics: it creates conditions for its own existence and reception by constituting different configurations of self, space and community. A critical approach to this genre includes considering what 'we are seeking in testimony and, in turn, what it asks us to become by participating in its cultural forms' (Ahmed 2001: 5). As Shoshana Felman (1992) argues, testimony is a dialogical

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(Boltanski 1999: 3). These two classes must have sufficient contact for those who are fortunate to be able to observe the misery of the unfortunate, while at the same time they must be sufficiently distant and separate for their experiences to remain clearly distinct (ibid., 5).

<sup>54</sup> See Introduction and in particular Rapport's essay in *The Trouble with Community* (Amit and Rapport 2002), where he advocates a 'post-cultural' turn and the need for anthropology to recognise an individual as the unit of analysis.

<sup>55</sup> Skultans' study is interesting for focusing on the narrative, not only as a window to obscure and often deviant realities (as is mostly the case with totalitarian regimes) but also as a cultural resource used to make sense of the past and incorporate it into personal history (Skultans 1998: 27).

form of address: it involves a circuit between speech and hearing, which can be difficult as well as enabling. Moreover, participation in the discourse of testimony, through which the exiled writer constructs their subjectivity, establishes a sense of belonging between the narrator and their UK readership. Skultans has shown that 'victorious' narratives which are marked by a sense of meaning and purpose also produce an inclusion of shared values through which the narrator aligns themselves with various dimensions of history and society (Skultans 1998: 68). The communication between Ugrešić and her UK readers is thus a 'coordination of affects' (Boltanski 1999: 42) that produces truth as much as the communication with her compatriots reveals incongruity and contestation. If testimony, as today's dominant cultural genre, is bound up with truth and justice, as Ahmed and Felman point out, then its profusion also registers the crisis in both these concepts, 'for one testifies when the truth is in doubt or when it has yet to be decided' (Felman and Laub 1992: 6; Ahmed 2001: 5).

In a sense, the interplay of witness and victim roles attests to the authenticity of suffering even as it undercuts it. The UK context accepts the sacrosanct character of trauma because the writer has been there (victim/insider) and is now testifying to it (witness/outsider). The Croatian response is mainly suspicion of the emotional pain because the writer did not stay to share the nation's destiny (false victim/outsider) and defamed their homeland by speaking abroad (false witness/insider). The exclusion of the 'witches' from the fabric of the nation-state makes their story untrustworthy because *they* have not lived through the war as *we* have. This order-making resonates with Bauman's use of the term 'human waste', to which he attributes no intrinsic negative values. He summarises his point by borrowing Mary Douglas's famous argument: 'eliminating is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment' (Douglas 2002; Bauman 2003: 18). The article's 'witch' thus denotes a person for whom no space remains in the nation-state narrative and a vehicle through which a collective cleanses itself. By the same logic, narratives rejected as suspicious and dangerous in one place are elsewhere included not in spite of that nature but because of it: the 'witches' story, because it is told by a person who is culturally remote but has had experience of being geographically there, is recognised as truth. Clearly, a

critical approach to witness discourse should therefore be 'the combined study of both *what happened* and *how it is passed down to us*' (Young 2003: 283), while never losing sight of '*what we are doing with it now*' (Douglass and Vogler 2003: 1).

I have so far explained what is meant by 'the story of suffering': a testimony to traumatic experience at 'home' which justifies the writer's decision to exile themselves. The story of suffering is a highly contested narrative because the exiled writer exists between and across at least two socio-cultural contexts. In addition, specific poetic rules of testimony as a genre employed to narrate the traumatic experience allow and recognise only certain stories. This becomes most prominent when the moral obligation of the fortunate engages them in witnessing and affirming the suffering of the unfortunate. In these circumstances, when these two categories of people are separate enough for pity to take place, not only the truthfulness of the victim's pain is in question; so too is the supporting evidence.

How do we convince others that we are right? asks Matthew Engelke (2008) with regards to the production of anthropological knowledge. Ethnography, a highly personal and intersubjective method for collecting data, shares many similarities with the genre of testimony. If in anthropology evidence is also always an argument – 'evidence has to be evidence of or for something' (Csordas 2004: 475), then testimony as a specific genre too creates and is created by its own set of facts. In other words, nothing is evidence unless in relation to some definite questions, and those are disciplinary and form-specific (Engelke 2008: S5).

The 'bearing witness' stance has been used in many genres, ethnography among them, to produce narrative authority. The literary device of an anthropological vignette, for example, is specifically designed to situate the author in the position of someone 'who was there' and thus 'knows what they are talking about'. Interestingly, Bracewell notices that, with Balkan travel writing, the (English) narrator who exhibits a combination of passionate amateurism and desire to go 'off the beaten track' establishes their narrative authority in almost paradoxical way: through 'laughing off' their authoritativeness (Bracewell 2009b: 141). These examples attest to the

constructed nature of authority: a position and a trope brought into force through narrative practice.

## 5.3 Exile as a Literary Trope

### 5.3.1. Poetics of exile

This section examines exile as a literary trope more closely in the writings of ex-Yugoslav authors published in the UK. Though textual analysis is not my aim, a focus on literary stories of exile is crucial insofar as they are able to mobilise various cultural and economic resources in the UK context.

Anthropology (Ries 1997; Cruikshank 1998), literary studies (Bakhtin 1981; Eagleton 1991; Jameson 2002), and the sociology of literature (Lowenthal and Weeks 1987; Griswold 1993) have all widely acknowledged that no narrative can be studied outside the context from which it emerges. The narrative process is dialogical: to understand a story, it is necessary to hear not only its content but how it is told and what it creates when employed as a strategy of communication. This section will show that most stories in translated ex-Yugoslav books are autobiographies, memoirs, or similar personal accounts, where the author is perceived as a source of factual knowledge based on their experience. The poetics of the genre largely contributes to these stories being read as representative truths: a literary and socio-cultural contract between author and reader on which autobiography is based allows for the story's content to be viewed as evidence of the narrator's authority and authenticity.

The frequency with which exile as a theme appears in literature does not simply reflect the realities of human existence. As a literary movement, modernism has had a strong relationship to themes of fragmentation and dislocation with motifs of indeterminacy and pluralism added in postmodern texts (King, et al. 1995). Thus, some literary trends are more favourable for certain themes and genres. The conditions that encourage writing about exile, for example, are produced equally by external circumstances and by laws within literature itself (Moretti 2005).

Through literary translation, the exiled writer's authorial voice begins relating to the literary language as well as other cultural concepts and values of

the adopted country. Terry Eagleton refers to this as 'closure' (Eagleton 1991: 35), whereby certain forms of signification are silently excluded and certain signifiers fixed in a commanding position. Those genres that are promoted in the UK – whether by poetic rules or ideological intentions – allow the exiled writer to tell their story, and, as will be shown later, autobiography qualifies as most conducive for telling the 'victim turned hero' narrative. Skultans has argued that narrative experience stems from the tension between author and agent. The narrative I, which refers to both the teller of the tale and the earlier self, can be shaped as either victim or hero of the story. Western literary conventions normally stipulate that plots should have heroes (Skultans 1998); however, testimony expects the narrator to assume the role of a victim to begin with. The process of witnessing told as a story is what empowers the victim to come full circle and appear as the hero.

The general intention of literary genres can be said to serve to protect the domestic cultural material (Ries 1997) as much as to exclude the alien one. Foreign cultural and literary expressions do not easily traverse boundaries to penetrate native discourse. This argument tells us both that a) a chosen genre situates the exiled writer within the values and beliefs of the adopted culture and that b) a potential audience influences the exiled writer's literary themes and poetics.

Bakhtin (1981) has argued that there are no neutral words and forms that can belong to 'no one'. The word in the language becomes one's own only when the speaker populates it with their own intention. Before this moment of appropriation, the word exists in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions. Thinking of how exile can be a resource to the writer for being translated in the UK, the following starts to make sense: geographical proximity that also leads if not to sharing then at least to knowing the values of the adopted context makes it possible for words and forms to also begin a dialogue. The exiled writer can appropriate words and meanings that already exist in the adopted country in a way that allows the story to transcend the foreignness of its origin. Even when writing in their native language, exiled writers claim words that have once belonged to someone else from their adopted country in order to participate in the shared context. This was apparent in the Arvon Magic vignette which showed exiled writers being 'taught' how to write and

comport themselves in 'the English way'. By the same logic, the cultural gap between a local writer and an English-speaking reader might be too wide to cross for the translation to occur.

### 5.3.2 Exile in the UK book market

The following lists of ex-Yugoslav writers demonstrates that most of those who have consistently been translated in the UK live in exile, while those at home rarely have more than a one-off success.<sup>56</sup> In addition, Croatian authors published in the UK are listed separately from those published in English elsewhere, because publication by a UK mainstream publisher provides generous media coverage, often leading to more international prominence. Small US university presses rarely offer a writer the same representative status. I have further separated Croatian from other ex-Yugoslav writers because Croatia's Ugrešić and Drakulić have been known specifically in reference to their exile.

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<sup>56</sup> Lists cover translations from 1991, excluding authors either translated during communist Yugoslavia or reprinted after 1990.

Fig. 5.2.

CROATIAN AUTHORS TRANSLATED AND PUBLISHED IN THE UK SINCE 1991

Author	Book	UK publisher	Year	Genre	Residency
Dubravka Ugrešić	Fording the Stream of Consciousness	Virago	1991	novel	exiled in the Netherlands
	In the Jaws of Life	Virago	1992	novel	
	Have a Nice Day: from the Balkan War to the American Dream	Jonathan Cape	1994	essays, memoir	
	Culture of Lies	Phoenix House	1998	essays, memoir	
	Museum of Unconditional Surrender	Phoenix House	1998	autobiographical novel	
	<i>Thank You For not Reading</i> <sup>57</sup>	<i>Dalkey Archive Press</i>	2003	essays	
	<i>Lend Me Your Character</i>	<i>Dalkey Archive Press</i>	2005	short stories	
	Ministry of Pain	Saqi Books	2005	autobiographical novel	
	Nobody's Home	Saqi Books	2008	essays, memoir	
	Baba Yaga Laid an Egg	Canongate Books	2009	fictionalised mythology, memoir	
Miljenko Jergović	Sarajevo Marlboro	Penguin Books	1997	autobiographical short stories	exiled from Bosnia in Croatia exiled in Sweden
Slavenka Drakulić	How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed	Vintage	1992	essays, memoir	
Slavenka Drakulić	Holograms of Fear	Women's Press	1993	novel	
	The Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of War	Hutchinson	1993	essays, memoir	
	Marble Skin	Women's Press	1994	autobiographical novel	
	Café Europa: Life after Communism	Abacus	1996	essays, memoir	
	The Taste of a Man	Abacus	1997	novel	
	As if I Am Not There: A Novel about the Balkans	Abacus	1999	memoir, novel	
	They Wouldn't Even Hurt a Fly	Abacus	2004	essays, memoir	
	Frida's Bed	Penguin Books	2008	memoir, novel	

<sup>57</sup> Italicised titles are published by US publishers but have nonetheless had wide exposure in the UK.

Fig. 5.3.

OTHER EX-YUGOSLAV WRITERS TRANSLATED AND PUBLISHED IN THE UK SINCE 1991

Author	Book	Publisher	Year	Genre	Residency
David Albahari	Goetz and Meyer	Harvill Press	1994	novel	Serbian, exiled in Canada
	<i>Words are Something</i>	<i>Northwestern</i>	1996	<i>short stories</i>	
	<i>Else</i>	<i>University Press</i>			
	<i>Tsing</i>	<i>Bayeux Arts</i>	1997	<i>fiction</i>	
	<i>Bait</i>	<i>Incorporated</i>			
	<i>Snow Man</i>	<i>Northwestern</i>	2001	<i>fiction</i>	
		<i>University Press</i>			
	<i>Snow Man</i>	<i>Douglas &amp;</i>	2005	<i>fiction</i>	
		<i>McIntyre</i>			
	<i>Leeches</i>	<i>Houghton Mifflin</i>	2010	<i>fiction</i>	
Vladimir Arsenijević	In the Hold	Harvill Press	1996	novel	Serbian, short exile in Mexico
Aleksandar Hemon	The Question of Bruno	Picador	2001	short stories	
	Nowhere Man	Picador	2004	novel	
	The Lazarus Project	Picador	2008	biography	
	Love and Obstacles	Picador	2009	short stories	

Fig. 5.4.

OTHER CROATIAN WRITERS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH OUTSIDE UK

Author	Book	Publisher	Year	Genre	Residency
Edo Popović	Exit Zagreb-South	Ooligan Press	2006	short stories	home
Gordan Nuhanović	The Survival League	Ooligan Press	2005	short stories	home
Igor Štiks	A Castle in Romagna	Autumn Hill Books	2005	novel	home
Zoran Ferić	The Death of the Little Match Girl	Autumn Hill Books	2007	novel	home
Vedrana Rudan	Night	Dalkey Archive Press	2004	memoir	home
Irena Vrkljan	Silk, the Shears and Marina	Northwestern University Press (NUP)	1999	autobiography	returned home from Germany

OTHER EX-YUGOSLAV WRITERS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE UK

Author	Book	Publisher	Year	Genre	Residency
Nenad Veličković	Lodgers	NUP	2005	fiction	Bosnia, home
Drago Jančar	Mocking Desire	NUP	1998	fiction	Slovenia, home
	Northern Lights	NUP	2001	fiction	
Bora Ćosić	My Family's Role in the World Revolution	NUP	1997	fiction	Serbia/Croatia, exiled in Germany
Andrej Blatnik	Skinswaps	NUP	1998	fiction	Slovenia, home
Zoran Živković	Time Gifts	NUP	2000	science fiction	Serbia, home

Fig. 5.2 shows that Ugrešić and Drakulić are the only Croatian authors whose complete body of work has been translated in the UK. Their international literary status is established enough to guarantee automatic English translation, even with difficult (to sell) genres such as essays. Two Ugrešić titles in italics were published in the US yet received equal attention to other UK releases. The chronology of writers' UK publications is significant: their first UK titles were their non-fiction work, while their early fiction was discovered later. The books' titles suggest that the themes continue to centre on the emotional and cognitive aspects of home/exile with their political stance rooted in opposing their homeland's autocracy, 'primitive mentality', and corruption. Jergović, the third author from Croatia, had a one-off success with his debut book *Sarajevo Marlboro*, released shortly after the siege of Sarajevo began. He himself fled and currently lives in Croatia. This semi-autobiographical fiction about the suffering

Sarajevo people, coupled with his exiled experience, provoked considerable interest at Penguin. Today, Jergović is one of the most prolific writers in Croatia, with more than ten novels under his belt. His work covers topics more varied than just war, exile, and the loss of home and has been translated into more than 22 languages. Yet he has had no further success on the UK book market after 'branching out' of the exilic trope.

In Fig. 5.3, only the exiles David Albahari (Serbia) and Aleksandar Hemon (Bosnia) receive consistent attention from UK publishers. Hemon, whose books depict quirky Balkan characters struggling with typical immigrants' issues of assimilation and nostalgia, has made a remarkable success in the Anglophone world. Although he writes in English, his origin is never forgotten by literary reviewers.<sup>58</sup> Arsenijević shares Jergović's fate: after his first, extremely well-received, novel *In the Hold*, his other work has continued to be translated worldwide, but it receives no attention from UK publishers due to 'incompatible' literary themes and his political positions.

In Fig. 5.4, the list of writers translated into English outside the UK indicates that being based at home brings publications only from small university presses (Northwestern University Press, situated in a strong department of Russian and East European literatures, has been a consistent publisher of translations from the region). These writers have received no media attention in the UK. Most readers I interviewed during my fieldwork in London were not familiar with their work: they regarded only Ugrešić and Drakulić as representatives of Croatian literature today.

These data thus suggest that exile, both as a literary trope and political position, can be comprehended as a strategy to becoming and remaining translated by mainstream UK publishers. The genre of autobiography imbues the writer with an aura of authenticity (what they say is true) and authority (they represent their national literature). The exiled writer is, in Ugrešić's (1998a) own words, a 'privileged refugee',<sup>59</sup> whose position enables them to

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 8 for a full analysis of Hemon.

<sup>59</sup> The multiplicity and ambiguity of the exiled writer's simultaneous commitments to home and abroad can be compared to Amit's (Amit and Rapport 2002) distinction between community and consociation. Community implies both similarity ('us') and difference ('them') whilst consociation is born out of voluntary membership in groups and contexts that do not necessarily qualify as categorical identities. Accordingly, ex-Yugoslav exiled writer could be understood as constructing a categorical type of belonging in their literary imagery which in

write from a double perspective. Insider and outsider both in their home and adopted country, they can offer a 'stereoscopic vision' (Rushdie 1991). Though such vision cannot offer the 'whole sight', the factual and authoritative truth, the genre of autobiography creates an illusion that what has been lived through and what has been told about this experience are one and the same.

Exploration of exiled writers' narrative speaks to the more general problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning (White 1987). Real life seldom involves inner consistency and meaningfulness, whereas the narrative, in order to be convincing, needs to create a feeling of make-believe in its readers. This is why White asks: 'what kind of insight does narrative give into the nature of real events' and 'what kind of blindness with respect to reality does narrativity dispel' (White 1980: 10)? Therefore, what is being questioned is the text's reliability as a witness to events or phenomena extrinsic to it. A critical approach to narrative permits us to see it as a process through which different kinds of meaning are (re)produced, and certain sign systems are privileged, while others remain suppressed or hidden in the process of representing a reality.

This direction in thinking brings us closer to the concept of authority and honesty in narrative. The genre of autobiography calls for a specific contract between writer and reader by which what is narrated is perceived as factual and the narrator is trusted.<sup>60</sup> In autobiography, even though the story is told through narration, the reader perceives it as a non-fictional account of reality. Lamarque's (1990) distinction between a historical (factual) and a fictional account is useful here. Fictional narrative is distinct from historical narrative, he argues, neither in formal (time, structure, voice, point of view) nor semantic (truth, correspondence with the facts, reference) features. Instead, the fictionality rests in its pragmatics: context, attitude, intention, and response that

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turn allows them to consociate in a less categorical way in the adopted country. Their literary bond with the 'organic' home feeds the non-committal, non-categorical, and 'individual above culture' type of collectivity in exile. One cannot exist without the other. For this reason, the exiled writer hangs on to the literary theme of 'home', almost as a face-to-face interaction, without which they would lose the immediacy of their traumatic experience.

<sup>60</sup> The stability and unity of the subject/narrator, widely challenged by 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholars (Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Althusser, etc.), remains protected by the autobiographical contract in the experience of reading.

form a special kind of institutional and rule-governed relation between writer, text, and reader (Lamarque 1990: 135).

In the context of my research, exiled writers are thus imbued with credibility and authenticity largely through the poetic rules of autobiography. The traumatic experience of exile that accounts for the majority of their literary themes sets them up as witnesses of what is a little-known reality for the UK readership. The narrative form of testimony that *a priori* creates self-evidence of the traumatic event and reifies it in the recognition of a victim's suffering has been a topic of extensive debates within anthropology. Among most prominent is David Stoll's (1999) critique of Rigoberta Menchú's (1984) *testimonio* which hinges on the constitution of evidence. Where Menchú positions herself as a witness to the suffering not only her own but of her whole people – 'My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people' (ibid., 1984: 1) – Stoll questions the objectiveness and truthfulness of her accounts, suspecting that some were actually invented or fictionalised. The argument over the objective truth of mass killings in Guatemala is not about what really happened but about who has the authority to narrate and represent. What must be explored is not facts alone, but how they are used, which determines how we think about truth, and how we read a text (Tierney 2000: 543).

To understand how *testimonio* works ideologically as a discourse, it must be understood as a genre that sets up special epistemological and ethical demands. Epistemologically, testimony posits the narrator as an unquestionable witness whose authority and authenticity are never questioned. Berlant encapsulates it as follows: 'trauma's tautological quality protects the subject by assuring his/her expertise over the ground of his/her claim. It's the gift (of loss) that keeps giving' (Berlant 2001: 43). In addition, Berlant's thought speaks of the ethical demand that is congealed within the testimonial genre. As the story is brought to the attention of an audience, the author is constituted as being entitled to receive help, if only by the recognition of their suffering, and the reader embraces their moral obligation to do so.

Having one's story of suffering accepted as truthful and referring to exile as a literary trope both contribute to what I earlier named the 'strategy of exile'. The former is enacted as a conversational story of a writer's life at literary

events, while the latter features as a theme of their books. They are negotiated simultaneously and one could not exist without the other. This will become clear as I discuss the nature of assistance offered to exiled writers, which is largely born out of the privileges and claims that ethically constitute testimony as a genre.

## 5.4 Performance of Exile

### 5.4.1 Being eligible

Testimony is conducive to expressing entitlement to assistance for another reason: it is always personal. To arouse pity, suffering must be conveyed in a way to affect the sensibility of those more fortunate. Boltanski has revealed that this is achieved in a paradoxical way: the singularity must be projected in such a way to make suffering concrete, yet it must simultaneously convey a plurality of situations of misfortune and what they have in common (Boltanski 1999: 12). The autobiographical work of ex-Yugoslav writers, as shown above, has been published to a high acclaim in the UK. Several books also received subsidies from literary organisations that support literary translations (see Chapter 3).

Public funding from ACE plays a decisive role in the future of a translated work. ACE's 'grants for the arts' (GFA) scheme can help publishers cover production and marketing costs. In the competition for subsidies, exile (as a political position and literary theme) provides a fair amount of chance for success. My interview with Amber, an ACE literature officer, explains how exile has become a fundable category in the assessment criteria. Boltanski has claimed that the classification of those eligible for aid has connected singular suffering actors to collective entities, such as states, classes, and ethnic groups, or collective persons such as political prisoners, the oppressed, the unemployed, and exiles. Such reduction of uncertainty with regards to who should be helped is necessary since financial, emotional, and media resources of those who extend help are by default exhaustible (Boltanski 1999: 160). What follows is a transcript of my conversation with Amber, which took place in the relaxed atmosphere of her house.

Q: What are the judging criteria for translation grants?

A: The two main criteria are artistic quality and public benefit. Artistic quality involves both the quality of writing and translation. We also want to know how a particular book fits with their general editorial policies. Because we have limited funds, we prefer to fund translations from languages that are not very well represented in the UK. Public benefit means getting the book out there to the readership. This is why publishers have to include their ideas of marketing and promotion in their ACE application. There is really no point funding translation if publishers won't sell the book!

Q: Do you judge success of the grant according to the book's sales?

A: There are so many reasons why a book wouldn't sell. We won't ask for the money back if this happens. The important thing is that the book is out there. The publisher has to show that they are good at publishing and promoting but, if the book doesn't sell because of their inability, that might affect their next application.

In this conversation, Amber affirms that subsidies need to be justified by several factors, such as availability of books and public benefit. Publishers need to be well versed in marketing and persuading book chains to stock their product. They also need to invest considerable money for that to happen. For ACE, public benefit is almost always found in 'community cohesion', which for Amber means the following:

A: Individual writers can apply for a grant that would provide them with time to write. This is open to UK and EU citizens who can argue for public benefit. So if a Dutch writer is writing a book that would benefit the UK public, they can apply. People who apply usually write in English. We have had an odd application from people based in the UK but writing in other languages. It's not something that we would encourage, because it's difficult to argue for the public benefit. If there was a Croatian writer writing in Croatian about London and had a publisher lined up, of course they would stand a chance, but if they were writing for a Croatian readership, they wouldn't be eligible. For example, Hamid Ismailov [Uzbek writer] applied for the translation costs for three of his novels. We asked to see a letter of support from the publishers. The public benefit was obvious: he is the only Uzbek writer in England and there is so little literature in English from that part of the world so it was really good to be flexible and give him the funding. If he was French, we wouldn't have the same argument behind it.

Q: Are there specific categories of people that are more successful than others in receiving funding? And if so, who establishes these categories?

A: Yes, there are preferred categories that receive funding. Take the case of 'Decibel' - this was an initiative around the British Black people who came here after the Second World War, but who are still under-

represented in the arts. For a while they featured as a category that received a lot of funding. The point has been made over and over that the demographics in the UK has been changing rapidly – there are more people from Eastern Europe and conflict zones. This is especially important for the translation scheme. People coming from the New Europe pose a different challenge because they speak a foreign language whereas people who came here in the 50s came with English as their mother tongue. It's obvious that we need re-adjusting. The boxes will start changing and Eastern Europe will find itself on our equal opportunities form.

Interestingly enough, a UK-resident author writing in a foreign language qualifies as an eligible category. Though none of the exiled writers from this research fits this category, most of their books can demonstrate an ability to foster community cohesion. As Amber emphasised, the most important factor is for which audience the writer writes. The fact that exiled writers live abroad and consciously choose to write for audiences wider than their homeland makes them a perfect category to receive public subsidies. Their literary themes of suffering under (post)socialism and subsequent journey into exile at first sight seem irrelevant for the UK readership. But the average UK reader's relative ignorance with regards to the Balkan conflicts, followed by extensive media coverage, created a 'gap in the market' for authentic accounts from the region. And, even before Eastern Europe has become the right box to tick, 'exiled writer' as a general category has already proven its eligibility. Organisations such as Exiled Writers Ink have been established to support and promote literature written by exiled writers who have settled in the UK (see Chapter 2).

In the next section I present ethnographic data from several literary events where the performance of exile is as important as reading of literature.

#### 5.4.2 Performing exile

I have followed Ugrešić's literary work and its presentation in the media and at live literary events since 2005. Her book *The Ministry of Pain* won PEN's WiT prize the year I began working for PEN. In 2006, the book was short-listed for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (IFFP), the most distinguished literary prize in the UK for a work of translated literature. Ugrešić thus became one of the most successful of all 'PEN recommended' authors, which has ensured consistent moral and financial support from the organisation: she has been

invited to major festivals of international literature and hosted by many established UK writers.

After the success of *The Ministry of Pain*, Ugrešić launched a collection of essays, *Nobody's Home*. The book was widely promoted at three London events, all of which I attended. There I observed several curiosities: firstly, when compared to launches of her other books, the discussion between her and the chair of the event always emphasised her personal life over literary work. Questions from the audience repeatedly focused on the details of her persecution, loss of home, the pain of exile and the role of writers and intellectuals at the time the conflicts started. Secondly, she was asked, and expected to know, about the current situation in the Balkans (political, cultural, or linguistic) though most people knew she had not lived there for the last 18 years; she was undoubtedly perceived as a representative and authoritative Croatian/Balkan voice. And, thirdly, she complied with these expectations and performed the role of an outsider with an insider's knowledge. Had there not been for a display of books in front of her, it would have been impossible to know which of her work she was there to launch. The events promoted largely her story of suffering and only marginally her literary work.

### 5.4.3 A dangerous woman, a grumbling old lady, a polymorph

It is October 2007 – Marina Warner hosts an evening with Dubravka Ugrešić in the *London Review of Books* bookshop. They are here to promote her new essay collection, *Nobody's Home*. The space is filling up with men in tweed jackets and cords, carrying casual leather bags with overflowing papers and books. A few faces I recognise as being from UCL literary departments or other academic institutions in the Bloomsbury area. People drink free glass of wine and chat to their friends – most of them speak in English. There is almost no Croatian or Serbian spoken.

A desk with two microphones is set up for the conversation. All Ugrešić's books are displayed there, stacked in multiple copies. She will sign them at the end of the evening. None, however, are her fiction books – only her essays and autobiographical writings, which seem to attract most attention. There is a whisper of other Slavic languages in the audience which makes me think that Ugrešić's work attracts readers from a wider, post-socialist region. I

ask people next to me why they love Ugrešić's work: some because she 'knows' about the communist experience, feminist struggle, campaign for free speech, difficulties with fledgling democracies, and troubles with dictatorships. Some regard her as a rare writer who never succumbed to populism and 'who still distinguishes between good and bad literature'. Some think she can teach them about the region and the past war. Others came in order to belong to a community, not only Croatian, but also Slavic, East or Central European.

After settling down at the desk, Ugrešić gazes confidently into the crowd, trying to recognise faces of fans she knows personally. Her eyes are sparkly and inquisitive. She wears a simple black skirt and a jacket, adorned only with a discreet dark necklace. There is a strong sense of familiarity and closeness between her and Marina Warner. They met a long time ago at a writers' conference in the late eighties, Warner reveals. She then turns to her papers and, as if marking the official start of the launch, begins reading about Ugrešić's work. While she praises her literary achievements in an academic style, Ugrešić leans her chin against her hand and peeps into the distance, only now and then nodding to signal that she agrees with what has been said.

Though Warner begins with Ugrešić's literary career, the discussion quickly turns into stories about her life in ex-Yugoslavia. As a well-trained duet, Warner prompts Ugrešić to talk about one of her favourite topics: the manipulation and manufacturing of the past. With fervour in her voice, Ugrešić recounts the erasure of the collective past as one of the most atrocious things that happens with the birth of new nation-states. She dresses her talk in simplified anecdotes to engage the audience further: she describes Tuđman as 'a failed historian who woke up one day and, having realised he owned a state, he had to think of all the things he could do with it'. 'Why does he do them?' she asks, then pauses, for more effect. 'Why does he burn "inappropriate" books from libraries, rename streets and squares? Because he is able to.' This pathos-filled story tells the audience of the atrocities she has been exposed to. For those who have not experienced the war, it is intended as information. But mostly it is told to create an emotional bond between her and the audience.

Finally, Warner brings up the 'witches from Rio' case and Ugrešić happily answers her questions, peppering them with gory details. By now, the audience is as emotionally involved as they can be – there is no other sound in

the room but Ugrešić's heavy voice. She scans the room for a while and asks if there are any anthropologists out there: 'they can confirm that I am right in saying that in times of cultural homogenisation, it is usually the woman who is made into an enemy.'

'Melancholy, gloom and suffering are major traits of Central European literatures', Warner suggests, to which Ugrešić largely agrees: 'a writer needs to almost parody their identity to be able to market themselves as different from others, as special, peculiar and interesting.' When she talks about the literary canon, Ugrešić turns sarcastic and angry. She believes the literary canon worked well for the last 200 years, giving people grounds by which to judge good literature from bad. 'In the publishing industry today, everybody can publish a book, and the number of sold copies is the only arbiter of its value,' she shakes her head in disapproval. 'Are you still a dangerous woman?' Warner asks her in the end. Ugrešić asserts that her struggle to redeem the 'classical' value of literature as a norm in today's world is as dangerous as was her mission to write against nationalism in Croatia during the war. She considers herself dangerous because she is always writing against the grain. After the reading, many people from the audience linger to have a moment with her. She is approachable and enjoys chatting to her fans, even when she hasn't met them before.

The next day, Ugrešić's publisher – Saqi Books – organises a more intimate launch in the small and friendly Saqi bookshop near Paddington. The space is modest: there is no stage set up and people either sit on the steps or remain standing, leaning against bookshelves. Different venues that host literary events can be a sign of a writer's existing social status or can contribute to improving it. LRB is certainly known for having a peculiar taste: they are rarely willing to host a writer who does not agree with their reputation. This is reflected in the audience. Ugrešić's LRB event attracted people who have a passion for and a professional interest in East European literatures. At the Saqi bookshop, I can hear many more people from the region, chatting before the reading begins.

Ugrešić is introduced by Lisa Appignanesi, the President of English PEN and her friend. Appignanesi praises Ugrešić for being able to 'make people laugh and cry at the same time'. '*Nobody's Home*,' she says, 'is a book with a

perfect title which reflects the heart of Ugrešić's writing. It means both that there is no person at home and that home belongs to no person.' When asked about her experience of being in exile, Ugrešić says she has always felt an outsider: not only in her home country, but in her exile as well. Someone she easily identifies with is a beggar in the street, talking to themselves – mumbling and grumbling about the injustices of the world. 'I'm an old grumbling lady,' she says, 'but I feel lucky and honoured because, being a writer, this gives me the opportunity to grumble in an official way, to even earn money doing it. The harsh side of being a grumbler is having to remain a permanent outsider.'

Ugrešić then reads a piece about exile titled 'The Basement'. She reads slowly, word by word. 'Exile reveals the absurdity of the human condition,' she says as an introduction, 'one flees the home country because they don't agree with the political system but in the adopted country, they soon realise it's impossible to flee because ideology is everywhere. The surface situation looks different, but the everyday reality, always controlled by political ideology, is the same. To be a writer means to constantly be subverting the ideology that shapes one's life.' The characters of the piece are her Russian friends who emigrated to the USA and believed that by lazing on the bed they were subverting the ideology of the 'American dream' which brainwashes people to work hard and become a cog in the wheel. The Russians eventually buy into the American ideology. They buy a house and decorate their external life according to American expectations but, in the basement, they keep a bed where they lounge around and subvert the system. There, they invite only family and close friends to join them.

These two events illustrate that the interplay of the story of suffering and exile as a literary trope, when performed together at public events, establish a complex position for a writer called the strategy of exile. As described, Ugrešić continues to emphasise the woeful position of the writer who, whether in a hostile home country or a frightening new world, remains a permanent outsider. She achieves this by referring to her personal pain of exile and writing about it as a dominant theme of her work. Most of all, through her testimony, she engages the audience in an emotional and ethical response that is appropriate for this genre. Brian Alleyne (2001) has written that engaging the audience so as to cause them to make an investment in the narrative event

requires verbal and dramaturgical skill: 'To render to others a convincing account of the self requires the narrator of the self to know what to tell and how to tell it. A life story then is both knowledge in itself and knowledge for itself' (ibid., 27). This emotional contract, however, can better be described with the term 'economies of affect', coined by Richard and Rudnyckyj (2008) as a way of emphasising the relational and reflexive nature of affect. The capacity of affect, they argue, to affect others and oneself (be both its subject and object) is what makes it a more useful analytical concept than emotion, which still bears the spectre of psychological individualism. Affect, unlike emotion, 'illuminates the reflexive and reciprocal relationships between subjective experiences and social orders' (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2008: 61). Because it is practiced between individuals, it can 'enable certain types of circulation and foreclose others' (ibid., 59). Thus, just like the narrative is not an optional extra for the telling of the story (Skultans 1998), affect is not an object that might be exchanged between writer and audience: it is the medium which allows their communication to take place.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter argues that exile in the context of the publishing industry needs to be seen as a dynamic process of negotiations between the writer's story of suffering, their writing about exile, and how both are employed to give a meaning and authority to their experience of living in exile. I have called this process the performance of exile. Instead of ascribing exiled writers *a priori* categories of belonging, I warn against conflating the shared forms of communality and cultural expression with the multiplicity of meanings that could be invested in these forms (Cohen 1985). This processual view of culture emphasises the social dynamics of negotiations between the exiled writer on one hand and their audience and the commercial and ideological constraints of their adopted country.

This is far from suggesting that in the process of gaining recognition (and entitlement) for their suffering exiled writers should be reduced to calculating strategists, consciously maximising their chances in all circumstances. Rossi (2006: 30), in fact, reminds us that a major challenge to anthropologists studying 'development' settings today consists precisely in

distinguishing between conscious strategic actions and attitudes and dispositions that are produced unconsciously. Although both could be understood as negotiations, it is often nearly impossible to conclude whether patterns of behaviour are merely shaped through socialisation, beyond conscious awareness, or whether they reflect conscious strategic stances of social actors.

When it comes to the realities of exiled writers' suffering, this research intends neither to discredit nor support it as a personal experience in itself. Instead of 'taking sides' between irrefutable discourses of the right either to individual expression or to cultural difference, I believe it is more useful to question which cultural concepts and forms are being invoked in which circumstances in order to produce desired effects. To be more clear, it is a belief in universal human rights that has become the basis for any type of humanitarian intervention, including the support and protection of exiled writers who suffer at the hand of their totalitarian regimes. Rather than taking either a universalist or culturalist position (unlike Rapport (2002: 124) who aligned himself with the former when analysing the Salman Rushdie affair, see Chapter 4), I propose to explore which social conditions enable the suspicion of suffering in the homeland to affirm its authenticity in exile. Because the universalist right to testify to one's authentic suffering is precisely allowed by invoking the fixed and homogeneous category of home, which in the eyes of UK audience is perceived as culturally different, i.e. primitive, backward, and totalitarian. Lastly, no matter how clearly a socio-cultural context presents itself to us, individual reactions to its structural rules will always remain unpredictable. This was reflected in the cases of Arsenijević (Chapter 4) and Ugrešić (this chapter) who shared a similar context but made very different choices.

The depiction of public events with exiled writers, which focus on testifying to their story of suffering, informs us of the autobiography genre's epistemological and ethical rules. The conflation of the witness and victim roles has resulted in two outcomes: a) their literary work, understood as factually based, gains authenticity; b) their authorial voices become representatives of their national literature. The fact that distant suffering arouses pity only when depicted by a concrete example that must also be able to stand for a

communality of pain makes the 'witches' affair a 'successful' device for creating a connection with the audience. Although it is not literally a photograph, it still functions as a memory freeze-frame, which, in an era of information overload, provides a quick way of apprehending. The benefits of such a strong image speaks to Sontag's (2003) argument about 'the sleight of hand' achieved by war photographs. They unite two contradictory features: their credentials of objectivity are inbuilt (seeing is believing), yet they always have a necessary (personal) point of view. This allows photographs to be both an objective record and a personal testimony. Sontag further noticed that pictures showing less artistry are thought to be less manipulative. I would suggest that a similar logic contributes to the authenticity and objectivity of autobiographical genre.

This chapter began by referring to anthropological and broader discussions about exile. Earlier approaches to exile have emphasised social, demographic, political, and economic aspects of migration. This rich and diversified literature is still limited in its objectives, aiming to shed light on a single aspect of migration such as the decision to leave or residential location on arrival (King, et al. 1995). Earlier studies have also reified concepts of home and exile as discrete opposites, leaving no other way to view exile than as a tragic loss of home. Most recent arguments point to the fluid and narrative character of both home and exile, shifting the understanding of displacement towards a ritualised enactment of home. Home became viewed more as a performance and less a static location. My contribution to these discussions have been to introduce exile, in the context of book production, as a strategic negotiation which ensures the exiled writer a bond with both their home and adopted countries, while also significantly helping their career.

The performance of exile - which includes the story of suffering and its literary representation - should be perceived as an interplay between the publishing industry (itself governed by institutional and commercial constraints), a wider socio-political context, and the personal aspirations of all social actors. Thus, it functions, not in spite of but because of its location between two languages and between what are conceived of as two different worldviews (autocracy and democracy). It is created on and re-creates evolutionist narratives of the world divided into civilised and primitive. Because the West already owns this narrative, the story of suffering is not only

accepted as true but also provides good publishing material in the book market. Supporting this, the list of translated ex-Yugoslav authors proves exile to be a privileged position from which the writer is seen both as a knowledgeable insider and a dispassionate outsider: essential factors for remaining relevant in literary translation. In addition, the writer's exilic position provides knowledge of publishers' and readers' expectations and poetic and socio-cultural norms that might not be visible to those who write from home. The exiled writer occupies a paradoxical but very real position of writing both against their home country (as a literary theme) and for their home country (as a representative of their national literature abroad). Ugrešić has said that a post-communist writer has no choice but to do this balancing act and in the process of satisfying 'all three imaginary addressees,<sup>61</sup> [...] [s/he] has become the perfect morph, slider, polymorph' (Ugresic 2007: 190).

As a closing note, I wish to consider another Croatian writer who lives at home, and 'refuses to ride the Balkan war wave to get published'. Currently the most popular Croatian writer in German translation, Edo Popović has only one book published in English by a small university press. His novel *Zagreb, Exit South* (Popovic 2005) received no media coverage, he tells me, and the royalties are smaller than the commission to cash the US cheque. Edo never writes about war: his fiction depicts local, everyday situations in urban Croatia. It took him and his translator five years of concentrated effort to build a reputation in Germany. He says it is because he never wanted to use sensationalist subjects to make a speedy breakthrough:

I don't want to be seen only as a Balkan writer who has nothing else to write about but war, blood, and suffering. I know very well that what has the power to make me a writer also has the power to break me. What will happen when the Balkan war becomes water under the bridge? Will I disappear as a writer too? That's why I choose not to write about the war, even if it means I never get established in English.

Although during my fieldwork I was mostly struck by overwhelming patterns with regards to exile and literature, I find Edo's case important for opening up the grey zone of complexities, multiplicities, and even ambiguities of meanings and practices. This inclusion is in a way a structuring device with which I as an anthropologist wish to point to the relational and situated nature

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<sup>61</sup> I.e. local readers, Western Europe, and the global marketplace.

of evidence-finding and evidence-making. Chapter 6 continues opening up zones of contestation and uneasiness as it focuses on the routes that books travel from their original publishers to the UK market and the informal networks that make translated literature possible.

## 6 Translated Fiction: roots and routes

### 6.1 Translation: aesthetics and politics



Fig. 6.1. PEN's Writers in Translation Programme leaflet, usually distributed at literary events and festivals.

When Daljit Nagra – a British poet of Indian descent – calls his poetry collection *Look we have coming to Dover!*, he thinks ambiguously of those white cliffs, the first sight of the British Isles. For an immigrant, they are at once a promise of a prosperous life and a border that can possibly never be crossed: neither geographically nor culturally. The white chalk glistening on the horizon is for many as hopeful a sight as land was for Christopher Columbus.

This metaphor is picked up by PEN's leaflet, intending to send the following message: 'we look forward to reading foreign fiction'.

Yet the negative connotations of Dover and how suspiciously immigrants have been treated there fail to convince one that the English language is opening up to Otherness, unreservedly.

#### 6.1.1 Translating text in a context

This chapter focuses on foreign books' routes in entering the UK book market. It examines how UK publishers acquire foreign titles, the most important factors that govern their decisions, and the social relations that underpin those exchanges. Chapter 3 has discussed at length the realities and limitations of the free market of books and ideas, specifically regarding translated fiction as a

'high end' niche of the overall UK publishing: concepts of free market, free speech, competition, and buyer choice exist in public discourse both in ex-Yugoslavia and the UK as taken-for-granted ideas. They are not only left unchallenged but are often consciously mobilised to shape the way people think about literature as an autonomous, unbound, and purely aesthetic human endeavour. Several ex-Yugoslav publishers, for example, believed that 'the Western capitalist approach to literary production would put a stop to the nepotism and favouritism' with which the ex-Yugoslav (post)socialist literaryscale struggled. On the other hand, in the UK, I often encountered the following belief about translated literature: 'whatever gets published in English must be the finest selection from other languages'. Because of the strong literary currency of English in the geopolitics of world literature, and because England imports so few foreign titles, a common understanding in public discourse is that 'if it's available in English, it must be good'. Chapter 3's discussion of the ideological and socio-cultural constraints that shape the market for translated literature in the UK (state regulation through subsidies, global political trends, the role of literary organisations, and power relations between English and the rest of the linguistic world) concluded that the idea of the free market of books and ideas was not only fluid but highly contestable – book production is without a doubt embedded in particular socio-cultural and ideological contexts. This chapter turns to the micro-level of the social field that allows foreign books to be exchanged, examining the close-knit social relations forming the basis of mutuality in the 'rational' business of publishing. The networks between ex-Yugoslav and UK publishers and translators are as important for the writers at home as they are for those in exile, since the latter largely still write in their mother tongue. Even if they live outside their home country, they still come to be translated via their language and local publishers.

Immaterial resources such as trustworthiness, reputation, and prestige act as a powerful and durable social glue allowing exchange between UK and foreign publishers. Important anthropological debates suggest that trust is a process rather than an inherent quality of people and things. My aim will not be to list 'trustworthy' resources UK publishers rely on (although they are part of my ethnography), but rather to question how trust is constructed: in the context of translated literature, what does trust make and what makes trust? Ultimately,

I seek to explore whether trust can be understood as a sign of social mutuality – which would indicate imperfections in the free market – or a self-interested rationality that serves to mitigate publishers’ risk in the race for profit.

The first section considers recent scholarship on translation, ranging from literary studies, critical theory, and anthropology to feminist critique, and provides a necessary context for understanding how translated literature in the UK builds its image and relationship with the national canon. Translation is a political as much as an aesthetic act, reflecting the relative and context-specific nature of literary values according to which foreign literature enters the UK market. There are no simple answers as to ‘which books get translated into English’ though this was possibly the commonest question that I, as a researcher and a PEN person, was asked in ex-Yugoslavia. If literature is viewed as a system in its own right, then certain predictions can be made about internal (poetic) and external (socio-cultural) factors that influence the exchange of books. However, no matter how strongly the system of cultural reproduction defines what can and cannot be published, micro-level personal negotiations reveal that there is always space for literary anomalies.

This theoretical overview is followed by ethnographic data describing resources on which UK publishers rely when buying foreign rights. Publishers’ trust practices reveal that personal interest in a book’s destiny, or anything that indicates favouritism, alerts the decision-makers to a level of risk and uncertainty. Such findings thus problematise the common assumption that being an insider always helps ‘make things happen’. In these informal networks, trust and belonging are a complex process with no permanent, innate quality of trustworthiness. Additionally, this section will discuss poetic factors that contribute to books being viewed as desirable objects of translation, introducing ‘literary quotas’ (unwritten rules that influence UK publication lists) and their opposites, ‘literary fads’, to which publishers refer as an anomaly. My ethnography suggests that UK publishers and editors unquestioningly position themselves as connoisseurs of literary taste. As I explore the functioning of the sample translation and reader’s report (STRR) as the most important evidence of foreign books’ suitability for the UK market, I will demonstrate that through this medium they preserve their ‘taste for talent’ as legitimising power.

The third part of the chapter re-traces the books' route to their origin, with examples from Croatian publishers, writers, and funding institutions. Contrary to my early hypothesis that there would exist an organised system of promoting Croatian literature abroad, my data show that the books tend to travel to their foreign publishers exclusively through informal channels, helped by intermediaries who 'speak the same language' as the buyer. Such 'bilingual' individuals, as well as writers who do get translated in the UK, create social friction among their literary peers and the general public. Often they are seen as outsiders purely by virtue of having become available in a foreign language.

I conclude by reflecting on a Croatian writer's personal experience of translation abroad. Understandings of what it takes to be translated in English are diverse: a random stroke of luck, a matter of knowing the right people, an expression of literary values, an effect of understanding the language of the UK market. None are right or wrong in themselves; all point to the embeddedness of translation in a specific context, which is additionally defined by a relationship between source and target languages, the book market, global socio-political conditions, and informal relations. An emphasis on this very context, which not only surrounds but organically creates the text, is the invaluable anthropological contribution to both literary and translation studies.

### 6.1.2 Roots of literary translation: some theoretical perspectives

In his *Translation Studies Reader*, Lawrence Venuti (2004) reviews 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholarship about the nature of the translated text and translation process. Disciplines such as linguistics, literary criticism, philosophy, and cultural theory have all shaped the distinctive field he calls translation studies. The latest contributions have come from experimental studies, feminist critique and, most importantly, anthropological fieldwork.

Translation theory has traditionally been concerned with the relatively autonomous translated text, producing various ideas about the equivalence and the function of translated work. These restrictive understandings have since been expanded. For example, Susan Bassnett (2002) argues that to view translated text as a product disregards the very process of translation, which in turn foregrounds the aesthetic over the ideological nature of translation (Bassnett-McGuire and Trivedi 1999). Most recent theories that focus on the

communicative function of translated text agree that translation involves more than language; it reflects the historical moment and the cultural and political systems in which it is embedded.

The two main approaches to the practice of translation, the fluent and resistant strategies, have developed as a reflection of how the native literary system 'sees' the value and position of translated work. Evan-Zohar (2004) argues that the canon of translated work can assume either a central or peripheral position in relation to native literature. Translated work can thus have either innovative or conservative functions, and this status partly governs the translation process. Finally, as explained further in section 6.1.3, translation always reflects a particular historical moment and its cultural and ideological constraints.

Today, fluent translation is the dominant UK approach, unlike the first half of the 20th century which was dominated by resistant translation, also known as the hermeneutic approach. Its main champions, Walter Benjamin (2004) and George Steiner (2004), both questioned the modern linguistic understanding of translation as functional communication and instead argued for translators to signal the foreignness of the foreign text. The target language, they argued, must allow itself to be influenced by the source language's linguistic and cultural differences while expanding and enriching itself. In 'The Task of the Translator' Benjamin (2004) perceives translation as an experimental literary practice in which the translator must broaden and deepen their own language with the foreign one: they have to convey the unfathomable, the poetic, not just information. According to Venuti (1992b), resistant translation precludes the illusion of transparency and makes the translator's work visible. Because such texts read as strange and estranging, they prevent the target culture's literary values from imperialistically domesticating the cultural Other.

Conversely, the fluent translation strategy assimilates the foreignness of the source text into the target language and its cultural concepts, effacing the translator's intervention and producing a text coded with target language values and representations. This acculturation of the foreign text makes it intelligible and familiar to the target-language reader. As a consequence, most publishers, editors, and reviewers think that a good translation is achieved when the text reads fluently, giving the appearance of not having been

translated at all. When considering a foreign text for translation, their idea of it 'fitting' the British culture expresses an imperialism that operates in the linguistic and cultural exchange between English and other languages (Venuti 1992b). Because fluency produces translations that are easily readable and therefore consumable, Venuti further argues, it contributes to UK publishers' cultural and economic hegemony (Venuti 1992a: 5). The dominance of fluent translation in the Anglophone book market also contributes to global geopolitical relations between different languages and cultures (see Chapter 3).

### 6.1.3 (Translated) literature as a system

Viewing literature as a system within a wider socio-cultural context is another useful way of exploring the relationship between English literature as a target culture and foreign translations. The reception of ex-Yugoslav literary work in English can thus benefit from theoretical perspectives developed by Andre Lefevere and Itamar Evan-Zohar (Lefevere 1985; Even-Zohar 2004).

Lefevere's theory of literary systems considers how processes of writing, reading, and rewriting are governed by the system itself and its environment. Though his work has been criticised for focusing too closely on the reception of a foreign text while neglecting its cultural background (Bassnett-McGuire 2002), Lefevere's focus on how translation influences the evolution of the native literary system is particularly valuable. His arguments apply to cases in which translated literature occupies the central position in the native canon. Though in the UK this is almost never the case, his concepts are useful for understanding the factors that determine the self-image and position of translated fiction as well as under which circumstances it travels into English.

The writing and rewriting<sup>62</sup> of literature and the interaction between them influences not only the canonisation of specific authors or works but also the evolution of a given literature: rewritings in particular are designed to push a given literature in a certain direction (Lefevere 1985). Literature as a system, Lefevere argues, acts as a series of constraints on the writer, reader, and rewriter, who can choose to stay within the delimited parameters or operate against dominant poetics and ideologies. The control function is exerted both

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<sup>62</sup> Rewriting in this context implies any form of writing about literary work, such as reviews or academic research and also literary translation.

from outside and inside. The former – patronage – includes people (publishers, reviewers, teachers of literature, book traders) and institutions (academies, critical journals, funders, the media) that either promote or suppress writing. Patrons influence the form and subject-matter of literature through offering economic support and social status to those who comply with the existing rules. The internal forces of literary control are reflected in poetics. This code that exists between writer and reader regulates literary devices, genres, motifs, prototypical characters, and situations, and the idea of what the role of literature should be. Poetics is crucial in the selection of themes, which must be relevant to society for the work of literature to be noticed. Once established, it exerts a powerful conforming influence on the further development of literature and is responsible for legitimising authors and works that fit its code.

Lefevere's work certainly reflects Bourdieu's theory of intellectual fields and creative projects which questions the apparent independence and autonomy of the intellectual. Bourdieu recognises the intellectual's embeddedness not only in the intrinsic demands of the creative project but also in the overall socio-political space (Bourdieu 1969). Though modernity brought liberation from earlier types of constraints (i.e. Church or Court influence), the intellectual field is now defined by new authorities of legitimisation and consecration that are internal and compete with each other for cultural legitimacy. In other words, what was once controlled by a small number of people now falls under a specific set of constraints often referred to as 'market forces': a large number of agents, such as publishers, editors, and critics, joined in the social construction of legitimate taste. While my analysis undoubtedly draws on both Lefevere and many of Bourdieu's concepts, this chapter explores not only what happens within a single cultural field but also how different literary systems meet and relate. As my ethnography demonstrates, the routes of translated fiction towards canonisation should be studied as a process of constant negotiation between foreignness and similarity, inside and outside, belonging and non-belonging to both these literary systems.

Itamar Evan-Zohar's (2004) approach helps to explain differing relations between two literary systems. He imagines the body of translated literature as occupying either central or peripheral position, thus respectively performing innovative or conservative literary functions. Translated work correlates to the

home literary system on at least two levels: that of selection, governed by the poetics of the target literature, and that of adoption in the home literary system as a result of 'fitting in' with the native poetic and ideological codes. Translated fiction in the British literary system may be seen to operate from the peripheral position: it influences native poetics extremely rarely and, in order to be accepted, undergoes cultural and linguistic domestication through fluent translation.<sup>63</sup> On rare occasions, certain literary trends, such as Magic Realism or Scandinavian crime, have created literary ripples on the poetic norm. These phenomena point to the limitations of perceiving literature as a static system and suggest turning the analysis towards the webs of inter-personal interactions that shape the overall literary (con)text.

## 6.2 Who to Trust

### 6.2.1 Risk mitigation: publishers' point of view

Translated fiction in the UK undoubtedly has an image as difficult to acquire, sell, and read. Publishers perceive various obstacles and risks in the way of making a profit with a foreign book. One major difficulty is the linguistic divide between the commissioning editor and a foreign manuscript. Unless the foreign book is available in French or German and they read those languages, the editor's only contact with the text is through a sample translation of a few thousand words. For a small or even medium-size publisher, this spells a risk of considerable proportions. Added to such restricted access to the foreign text, sample translations can be costly and difficult to obtain. For small or non-European languages, there is a noticeable lack of professional readers whose opinion and literary taste is perceived as reputable. In such cases, publishers tend to commission more than one report, adding to the overall cost even before they have chosen whether to buy translation rights. Most importantly, for a publisher to rely on a professional reader's assessment requires full trust in their judgement; otherwise, to quote one of my participants, 'the risks are as high as walking blindfolded through a minefield'. As my ethnography illustrates, there is more than one way of acquiring foreign fiction. However, unless in a rare case

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<sup>63</sup> Translated literature assumes an innovative role when the native literature is in the process of being established, or when there are turning-points, crises, or literary vacuums. English-language literature holds a central role in the ex-Yugoslav literary system(s).

a UK editor is a polyglot, all these ways rely on intermediaries: translators, professional readers, literary scouts, foreign publishers, or foreign agents. How these middle-(wo)men are positioned with regards to their literary taste, social capital, and personal allegiances will affect exchanges between foreign literature and native publishing.

In many ways, my ethnography speaks to the scholarship on brokerage, specifically on the function and content of what Granovetter (1973) calls 'weak ties' and Burt (1992) refers to as 'structural holes'. These highlight the strategic position of those able to connect people, 'cultures', or languages that would otherwise not be able to communicate. In order to foster communication, these brokers must actually be others' 'weak tie' or 'structural hole'; or, as I will show, an outsider to a group that defines itself through strong ties.

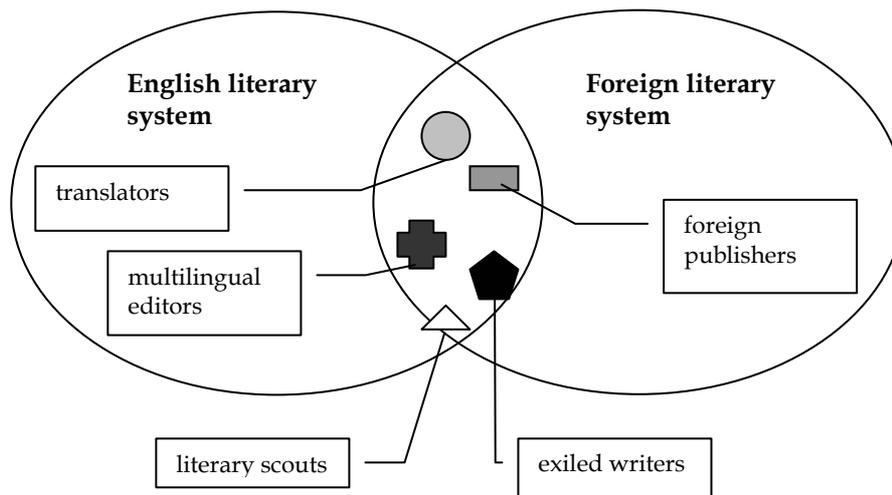


Fig. 6.2. The contact of two literary systems: each system is governed both by internal and external codes, while there are intermediaries who are able to understand and interpret both.

Anthropology and other social sciences have widely theorised the importance of trust to social life. Particularly in times of uncertainties and sudden social changes – of which the fall of Yugoslavia is a good example – the concept of trust is useful in analysing complex inter-personal relationships and those between individuals and larger entities (states, institutions, etc.) (Gambetta 1988; Misztal 1996; Sztompka 1999). Some scholars distinguish interpersonal and institutional, or, as Giddens (1990) calls them, 'facework' and 'faceless',

types of trust. However, perceiving family and state as polar opposites – where the former signifies warmth and security and the latter uncertainties and contingencies – has contributed to several theoretical dead-ends. Namely, to just ask ‘who is trustworthy’ wrongly implies that trustworthiness is an inherent quality and has subsequently directed much research towards closely-knit relations as the only real form of trust. Conversely, my data prove that ‘facework’ and ‘faceless’ trust (if at all separate) co-exist and are equally constituted through various positionings which social actors, like entrepreneurs (Boissevain 1974), secure and negotiate for themselves. Keith Hart’s notion of associations<sup>64</sup> possibly best describes the kind of mutuality evident in the niche of translated fiction, which itself resides in the interstices between corporate publishing and fully-subsidised literary projects. My question therefore changes from ‘who is trustworthy’ into ‘what does trust itself make’ and ‘what makes trust’.

Just as I challenge what types of relations constitute trust, I also reconsider the value and meaning of trust in the narrative of the free market. It has been suggested that familiarity is usually desirable because it fosters trust. However, in the research on immigration (Sztompka 1999), cutting ties with ‘amoral familialism’ (Banfield 1958) and escaping obligations typical of intimate and multi-stranded communities could in fact facilitate trust with more impersonal entities, such as agencies or institutions (Carsten 2000). My data frequently suggest that the exclusion from UK publishing or the foreign book’s country of origin contributes to information being perceived as risk-free. On initial inspection, this rejection of favouritism dovetails with the image of the free-market actor: autonomous, rational and self-serving, as opposed to being bound by external obligations, personal allegiances, and impulses (Carrier 1997c; 1997a). However, non-belonging is precisely what facilitates relations between UK publishers and their intermediaries. The question then is the following: is trust a sign of the UK book market’s mutuality, its contingency, or both?

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<sup>64</sup> Associative links, according to Hart, are forged in zones where social relationships are made by choice in the expectation of mutuality. Their strongest form of expression is friendship, which lies between blood-based relations and those created through legal contract. In this type of mutuality, trust plays the dominant role.

Gudeman (2009), who in the volume *Market and Society* explores Karl Polanyi's notion of embeddedness,<sup>65</sup> regards all economies as depending both on dialectically-connected mutuality (commitment-type behaviour) and impersonal trade (contract-type behaviour). Trust as a rational calculation can be explained as a means of ensuring more profit. Yet, if betrayed when it stops serving its calculated purpose, it jeopardises a shared base – immaterial, symbolic capital – which makes 'a person [...] the product of others from the past and in the present' (ibid., 19). Though caught between commitment and calculation, Gudeman concludes, trust is based on motives other than immediate opportunism.

Apart from personal contacts, many UK publishers consider foreign cultural agencies as trusted sources. My analysis refrains from separating face-to-face and institutional trust. Such approaches have already been criticised by socialist and post-socialist studies.<sup>66</sup> Instead, I will illustrate that both so-called interpersonal and institutional trust are a set of dynamic negotiations based on ever-changing feelings of belonging as experienced and interpreted by individuals. What follows are three case-studies of the most frequent routes foreign books take to reach their UK publishers.

### 6.2.2 Shapeshifters of the publishing industry

After successfully negotiating with Garry, the editor-in-chief of Broadway Books, to feature his publishing house in my case-study (see Introduction), I frequented its offices twice a month, or whenever I was called to attend editorial meetings. On my initial visit, I was given homework: to research the national agencies of wealthy European countries that promote their writers abroad. Garry directed me to look into the Dutch agency (the best, in his opinion), New

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<sup>65</sup> Karl Polanyi's work *The Great Transformation* ([1944] 2002) has been widely explored within anthropology, particularly since the backlash from 1980s market deregulation. Polanyi rejects the belief that free market enables the 'survival of the fittest' and recognises that several modes of exchange (reciprocity, household, redistribution) co-exist as primary principles of economic behaviour, with the market necessary but only marginal. He calls capitalist society with its laissez-faire liberal attitude towards the market 'disembedded'. Conversely, the embedded economy relies on mutuality and the necessity of social relations and is shaped by its wider social context (Hann and Hart 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Ledeneva (1998), for example, in her work on Blat (Russia's informal economy of favours), problematises the clear-cut division between the family as trusted and the state as distrusted. Though the socialist state did originally create an atmosphere of distrust, the very system which imposed scarcity and insecurity among people was sustained through the informal economy people undertook within the system.

Books in German and several Scandinavian agencies. All publish a booklet showcasing their best national authors selected by a board of local literary professionals. The choice, Garry warns, is not guided by the books' commercial success: 'it's based purely on the literary values of the home literary canon'. They certainly have no stake in translations' future success: agencies are more interested in promoting their national literature as a whole rather than expecting a raving success from a few selected authors.

Garry is happy to rely on the agencies' recommendations because, for one reason, they provide free sample translations, and, at a later stage, can be expected to contribute at least 60% towards the translation costs. He normally receives regular updates electronically and by post, so 'there is no frantic search for a new talent or angst about their quality': the agency can be trusted. However, Garry keeps in mind that 'no institution can be completely objective' and that their choices reflect their own cultural policies. Even so, his experience has proven most titles from their lists to be viable in a literary as much as a commercial sense. 'Agencies do have faces,' Garry tells me. When he does business with them, it is literary professionals whom he meets every year at book fairs that he trusts.

For languages not covered by promotional brochures, Garry cultivates a pool of 'trusted professional readers'. A magazine editor from St Petersburg is his connection with contemporary Russian literature. Why does he trust her? 'Because she won't hesitate to tell me that she has nothing suitable for Broadway Books. If she can say that,' Garry explains, 'it means she has no personal interest and is only concerned in promoting good literature'. He claims he has never been wrong with her.

Often, Garry considers the opinions of foreign publishers from countries other than the origin of a book he is offered. Such a disinterested recommendation counts as a reliable source. Finally, English translators from foreign languages recommend books because they can read them in the original. 'When a recommendation comes from a translator,' Garry recounts, 'I need to be very interested in order to commission a reader's report.' It is not uncommon for him to commission two reports from different readers. 'In an ideal world,' he tells me, 'you should have at least ten reports on the same book. Sometimes there is a masterpiece out there and nine reports may not recognise it, but the

tenth will.' Because Broadway Books, a small UK publisher with around 15% fiction in translation, cannot afford such thorough scrutiny of literary quality, this means that 'there will rarely be an undiscovered masterpiece translated into English with a destiny similar to Joyce's – criticised during his lifetime and celebrated as most progressive afterwards.' Because of the language barrier and the risk of making a wrong choice, Garry tends to buy books from countries which offer free sample translations. This partly explains the unequal distribution of foreign literatures represented in translation in the UK (see below).

I was interested to know how far Garry relies on books' previous success in other big European languages. In ex-Yugoslavia, for example, publication in German is considered the first step towards becoming established internationally. There are also many books that never travel from German or French into English. 'If I'm considering a book that's just been out in the original language,' Garry explains, 'I'm not concerned about its success in German or French. But if something's been out for many years and hasn't been picked up by the Germans, it might be a sign that it's not really good.' Very often German and French publishers' choices function as a book's line of pedigree. This correlates with Sally Price's (2001) discussion of 'primitive' art in the Western world, in which she argues that one element reflecting the identity of a 'primitive' artwork is its subsequent history of ownership. Like a dog's pedigree, she argues, it constitutes an authenticated line of descent, guaranteeing the value of the purchase to a potential buyer (*ibid.*, 103). So, whereas Western art is recognised by the signature of its individual author, 'primitive' art becomes desirable on the basis of its collective, namely Western, ownership. Foreign books, similarly, become more 'interesting' to UK publishers if they have been picked up by the French and Germans, whilst recognition in other countries carries fewer points. And again, for Garry, this sort of validation is important because it signals 'no personal interest' for those who had already published something he is considering.

UK publishers thus conduct business founded on trusted social relations: such mutuality relieves them of many potentially risky outcomes for translated fiction. These can be either investing too much money in pre-production through having to commission more than one reader's report or

suffering low sales post-publication. The position of 'no personal interest' seems to be a powerful proof of literary quality – at least the type of quality that a UK publisher knows would score well on the market. Being a disinterested but trusted outsider thus ostensibly supports the self-interested and calculative nature of free-market actors. What could be more rational than the objective assessment of an expert under no personal or moral obligation to any UK publisher? However, looking closely, these 'disinterested' relations between publishers and their intermediaries have taken years to cultivate, making all those involved a product of a communal past and projected future togetherness. Hence, no matter how distant an intermediary must be so as to be trusted, they contribute to maintaining order and mitigating risk in the publishers' social world.<sup>67</sup>

The most complex case of trust-building can be observed with translators. They are true shapeshifters of publishing, constantly changing positions between inside and outside. On one hand, they belong to and co-create the national literary canon.<sup>68</sup> As providers of sample translations and readers' reports (STRR), their experience of UK publishing and knowledge of the native poetics make them a valuable asset to publishers. Ethnographic observation suggests that STRRs are never commissioned from non-native speakers (see below). On the other hand, a translator is also positioned outside publishing, as a client who earns a fixed salary and is entitled to no additional profit should the book sell well. They do not work on publishers' premises, do not attend regular meetings, and have neither knowledge of nor access to overall editorial policy. Most publishers tend to trust their assessment in cases when a different, more 'disinterested' informant recommends a book. If a translator themselves pitches it, the publisher might doubt their motives: i.e. they fear that translators are not commercially savvy enough and that, because they are paid a fixed fee, they are not accountable for books' 'losses and gains'.

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<sup>67</sup> Trust and reputation have always been understood as elements of an economy's embeddedness. Beckert (2009: 54) explains that trust was as essential in pre-modern as in modern economies but that the establishment of trust shows structural differences. With traditional social relations dissolved, formalisation of the bases of trust has increased, as seen in the growing importance of formal organisations, intermediaries, and guarantor agencies. The lack of face-to-face or more intimate relations, traditionally understood as creating trust, does not mean that trust has disappeared from the social field of economic exchange.

<sup>68</sup> In the UK, literary translation is understood as a form of creative writing, partly as a result of campaigning work by associations such as The British Centre for Literary Translation (BCLT) and Translators' Association (TA).

Publishers' ambivalent attitude towards translators was confirmed to me by Hugh, who translates from German and French for Canongate, Faber and Faber, and Verso. We met for lunch at a trendy Exmouth Market café. I recommended my favourite dish: a Portuguese casserole. Hugh assured me he was not hungry and ordered only coffee. As I insisted on treating him to lunch, he said with a benevolent irony in his voice: 'this is a translator's reality - we never know when we're getting paid'. Over lunch, Hugh confessed:

There is a suspicion amongst publishers that translators come to them with the idea not only because it's a really good book, but because they are desperate for work. I have always been honest in reader's reports and went into great details to explain both good and bad things about a particular foreign book. Publishers look at translators as un-worldly people who know all sorts of obscure things about foreign cultures but will not necessarily know what people want to buy and read here. 'Translators are very intellectual, but we publishers have to make money' is how they think. Everybody - translators, writers, editors, and publishers - have their own self-interest in the game of publishing. It's great when all those particular interest come together but it's also not surprising when they don't.

If translated literature is such a risky business for a UK publisher to pursue, why do they still go the extra mile to find a 'foreign talent'? 'Nobody wants to miss out on the next big name,' Hugh tells me. Clearly, a certain prestige relates to publishing names such as Milan Kundera, Haruki Murakami, and José Saramago (for more on literature as a lifestyle choice, see Chapter 7). It can even bring hidden profit. For example, when an international writer who has been largely unknown to English-language readers wins a Nobel Prize for literature, the publisher who discovered that 'foreign talent' years ago will reap the dividend. In 2009 this happened to Northwestern University Press who ran out of copies of Herta Müller's books - that year's winner - and had to reprint several of her titles. This not only brings profit from book sales but places a small publisher prominently on the map of international publishing. 'No publisher, of course,' Hugh tells me, 'wants to invest a lot of money in sample translations and talent hunting in case one of them might turn out big in the future - so it's a vicious circle'.

Trust between a UK publisher and its intermediary is constructed on the basis of non-belonging, being 'distant', or not having 'personal interest'. When it is clear that the intermediary cannot profit commercially from a book deal and

is perceived to be concerned only with literary quality and a UK publisher's editorial taste, they enter a circle of trust. UK translators, on the other hand, negotiate their position between the inside and outside of the publishing industry. When recommending books they are often viewed with a doubtful eye, but their additional commentaries about an already-chosen book are respected and taken seriously. Through the medium of the sample translation and reader's report, translators become established as trusted intermediaries.

### 6.2.3 Authenticity of the native speaker

UK publishers normally commission two sample translations and readers' reports (STRR) before deciding to acquire a foreign book. For £250, an average STRR provides around 3,000 words of translated text: this is publishers' limited but only access to the foreign title. When they do opt to purchase, it is because a sample translation reads extremely well and the two reports match in their assessment of the book's commercial potential. The report part of STRR has traditionally been designed to provide the following information, in order of importance:

- writer's biography (important for brand-building);
- writer's willingness to take part in events; fluency in English is paramount to avoid interpreting costs;
- short synopsis of the book and relevance of literary themes for a UK readership;
- commercial potential and target readership;
- quality of writing

A person who can provide this information needs to be an insider to UK publishing as well as speak the foreign language in question. Here the translator becomes a trusted intermediary. Often they are also called professional readers.

Lou, a young editor from a small publishing house in London, tells me that most publishers 'hunt for new titles on the basis of national languages'. They frequent book fairs, collect promotional material about foreign literatures and trade information with foreign cultural institutes.

We rarely have the knowledge, contacts or time to talk to each individual foreign publisher. Instead, we find information from an authoritative body which can offer a broad overview of the whole

national literature. If I want to buy a book from a particular country, I contact their cultural institute and ask them for an up-to-date list of what has been published at home.

Like many other UK publishers, Lou categorises foreign literature by language and country of origin. Several years ago, English PEN set up a STRR funding scheme: WiT would solicit titles from foreign publishers and commission STRRs on their suitability for the UK market which were offered free on English PEN's website, in the belief that providing information on the commercial viability of a foreign book and offering it for free would reduce risk and entice publishers to print more translated literature. Thus the function of the PEN STRR was to 'sieve through' books and reject those that read as 'too foreign' or 'too dense', recommending only 'safe bets' to UK publishers. In other words, it was a conservative vehicle which safeguarded the native poetics. During its five years, the STRR scheme facilitated few book deals. I asked Lou why she never considered any of the free STRRs and how the scheme could be improved:

PEN has not created an image of itself as an outlet for such reports. Normally, publishers go to foreign cultural institutes to get recommendations for new books; they wouldn't expect to get this list from English PEN. As an organisation, it lacks the cultural and historical context to provide these reports. Yet, PEN can't go through cultural institutes because some writers whose work it promotes are not allowed to write in their own country – there is a clash of interests between some country's mainstream politics and a dissident writer. PEN should market itself as an organisation which disseminates human rights reports.

Lou argues that, unlike foreign national agencies, English PEN has not been recognised as a trusted intermediary by potential UK publishers. One of its strengths, she believes, could be to 'teach' publishers how to find books in ways other than sorting them according to original language. Coming from a publishing house which champions experimental fiction, Lou has strong opinions on what STRR's real function should be. Instead of perpetuating the dominant poetic code, 'it should provide UK publishers with a variety of the world's writing, both with respect to themes and styles'. She would like to see the STRR challenging prescribed literary values, allowing translated fiction to leave its peripheral role and influence the British canon to a much greater extent.

Within UK publishing, STRR negotiates with concepts of sameness and foreignness in a complex way. On one hand, it offers a window on to something different by providing local colour. Stylistically, however, the difference cannot be too large to stop UK readers from easily engaging with the text, as this would limit the book's commercial profit. Lou continues:

The STRR scheme is very political: it either promotes a foreign book because it is different or it rejects it because it is too different. Either way, the professional reader's opinion has less to do with the literary quality than with the considerations of the UK book market. If their role is only to sieve through books that could be commercially viable, in the long run, it will reinforce the insularity of the British literary scene.

Such protective measures can be observed in the case of German Books in English (GBE) – a catalogue of German-language books aimed at UK publishers. Unlike other foreign agencies, it is run from the UK by a committee of native English-speakers. German, Austrian and Swiss cultural institutions jointly fund the publication. The titles entered for the catalogue are read by English students of German, who are trained to write readers' reports. These are then judged by five regular Committee members (senior translators from German) and several rotating members, mainly publishers. STRRs bypass the judgement of original publishers or national agencies, whilst the authority is given to intermediaries (UK, mostly postgraduate, students) who, by being insiders, are more able to reflect an average UK reader's needs and likes.

GBE illustrates that belonging to a national literary canon, as professional readers and translators do, creates authenticity and trustworthiness. Compared to the situation when translators recommend foreign books themselves, the context of a national literary canon negotiates a different position for them. As native speakers and indicators of domestic literary taste, they are viewed as insiders, welcome intermediaries and gatekeepers. Trust is thus constructed by the context in which insiders and outsiders keep changing their positions and commitments. Some of these positions can be merely accidental, such as being a native speaker of a certain language. The visible performance of any role (either insider or outsider) can be and is done as a conscious choice, for example when translators promote themselves as knowledgeable of a foreign literature or when other intermediaries emphasise their 'no-personal-interest' stance. Adding to the

complex web of mutuality underpinning the exchange of books are literary principles which either allow or hinder foreign fiction to cross into English.

#### 6.2.4 The literary matrix

Editorial meetings at Broadway Books take place every fortnight, when Garry, other junior and senior editors, and sales and marketing directors head towards a sleek airy meeting room on the ground floor. This is a rare occasion when everyone involved in book production meets in the same space, away from their desks. Alice, a senior editor, brings minutes from the last meeting. Afterwards, books are discussed: offers accepted, offers made, offers to be made, seriously considering, on hold, rejected books. Each editor has a list of what they are considering. While everybody sips their tea, editors pitch new books, presenting evidence of potential success. They talk about the theme, style of writing, the writer's background, recommendations from anyone reputable they already know, the translation rights situation, the possible readership and how they envisage the writer will develop professionally – all this counts as a pedigree of a literary product they are about to buy. Although the seating arrangement at a long white table suggests no apparent hierarchy, the body language confirms that editors really pitch the idea to Garry and the sales director.

A third of the books discussed are foreign. They mainly reach Garry's attention through national agencies from Northern Europe. For example, they have taken on a Dutch novel which they described as 'page-turning, witty and beautifully written, with filmic qualities and great commercial appeal'. Two STRRs came back with matching praise: 'a rare treat to read such lucid and elegant Dutch prose'. The book satisfies Broadway's main conditions: it is sexy, targets female readers (who are generally a larger proportion of the market), not too 'culture-specific', the prospect of a film secures increased sales. As icing on the cake, the Dutch agency covers 80% of the translation costs.

Amongst the rejected books is a Danish novel. Two STRRs provided Garry with a 60-page sample translation. He rejected it, mostly on stylistic grounds: 'it's *over-cooked*, with too many explanations, overstretched metaphors and similes; nothing is left for the reader to engage with'. Garry can never be sure if this is due to the translation or the original. But, because money cannot be invested in a longer sample, this concludes the discussion. Simultaneously,

however, an English novel about masculinities and the Falklands War is faulted with the same shortcomings. Garry likes the atmosphere of the book and, though the writing is 'very problematic, the writer has talent and can be mentored to improve the book'. Throughout the meeting, a literary style is discussed as an impersonal set of rules that can be judged, gauged and evaluated against poetic principles which guide the current trends in English literature. 'I want a good story', Garry says. 'Narration cannot be too dense, scenes need to be clear and not frustrate the reader by not revealing information, one needs to be careful with the amount of metaphors and similes, careful with dialogues, I can always notice if idiosyncratic speech is appropriate for a character or if it's far-fetched.' Garry will meet with the writer and ask him to re-write the book: 'editorial work will be heavy, every sentence will have to be corrected'.

The English novel shares poetic untidiness with the rejected Danish novel. However, for Garry, the former can be rewritten whereas the latter is an insoluble problem. This is because he is not willing to invest more money in a longer sample and, more importantly, if he found the Danish original 'untidy' he would have no way of asking for the novel to be rewritten: editorial control does not cross linguistic boundaries. Compared with my experience of working with editors in ex-Yugoslavia, UK editors expect to be allowed substantive changes to the body of work: from choice of themes, the pacing of plot, voice, and character dialogues, all the way to sentence structure. This amount of control is never possible with foreign fiction because translation, as much as it tends to be fluent, is expected to remain as close to the original text as possible. Heavy editorial control creates a predictable and conforming style that mitigates the risk of low sales and unpopularity. Translated literature, therefore, almost always sits on the periphery of the domestic canon, unable to influence what has already become the dominant poetic code. Only if the literary style and themes can communicate with what is already codified and relevant in the UK will the publisher invest money in translation, even when it is not partly subsidised by foreign agencies and institutes.

Acquisition and editorial meetings at Broadway Books, where editors unquestioningly discuss a *good style of writing* and recognise *new talents*, bring into focus the mystique of connoisseurship. These literary arbiters position

themselves as having an innate ability to discern talent and literary quality. Sally Price's comments on connoisseurship refer to the art world, but similar principles apply to literary connoisseurship: the entire system, she argues, 'is a well-defined and well-defended hierarchy of authority, in which some [...] are assigned responsibility for recognizing the intrinsic beauty of masterpieces and others [...] are expected to nod our heads in assent' (Price 2001: 15). Her argument corresponds with Bourdieu's relativity of taste, i.e. contesting the ideology of 'natural taste' that one is born with. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) is clear that tastes are acquired through 'education': a subtle process of acquiring the socio-cultural norms of one's environment that masks its own arbitrariness until culture is experienced as nature. Broadway editors speak of *good style* not as an individual choice that some might like and others not but as a legitimising taste of the highest hierarchy. In that respect, *talent* is only that which complies with such poetic expectations.

Translated literature satiates another, extra-literary demand: it provides an air of the unknown. My conversations with readers of translated fiction confirmed that one of the biggest incentives for reading it is to learn about foreign people and places. Whereas domestic literature is valued in aesthetic terms, translated fiction is mostly expected to offer local ambiance and information about the unknown (see Chapter 8 for a detailed discussion of reading foreign literature as ethnography). However, the appealing foreignness, in order to become profitable to a UK publisher, needs to be fashioned through comprehensible concepts for an average UK reader. The relationship between belonging and non-belonging is again revealed: the story's setting must be 'exotic' and foreign, yet the narrative should not be 'too dense' or estranging. Hugh described the tension between similarity and foreignness that guides UK publishers' expectations:

Publishers are either looking for things they think they had already found out about these new cultures to prove and solidify their knowledge. For example, lots of people think that French writing is only about alienation and therefore they will look for those sort of themes. There is no doubt there's a great tradition of existential writing in France but this is not all. So they are looking for something similar. They are also looking to discover something new. It was so profoundly amazing when Márquez was first translated – a new literary tradition was discovered. Human nature is looking for both familiar and the

unknown. Both extremes can be dangerous and limiting. Since language and culture are so inseparable, there is also a question which line the translator takes to be able to render a book understandable. We know we have to provide the reader with all the things they want from a book! The reader will always look for what is specific about some culture, but those specifics can only be conveyed through universals that are understandable to all.

Earlier I have written about the unequal distribution of languages represented in translated literature in the UK. Most translations (see Fig. 6.3) come from French, Spanish and German. These languages have an established literary tradition and conform to the Western narrative in the presentation of the story. Their writing style, therefore, travels easily across linguistic and socio-cultural boundaries: specific details will be easily rendered through universal codes. The lower number of Arabic and Chinese books, although the global political situation has created a demand for them, suggests that it is far more difficult to universalise non-Western poetics. East European languages score poorly. With the end of communism and the Balkan conflict, and with still no official UK funding policy for the new immigrant communities from Eastern Europe, there is little interest in those literatures. This chart is not exhaustive but compares the best- and worst-represented languages. The figures reflect only entries for IFFP (see Chapter 5): around 80% of all translated books enter this award.

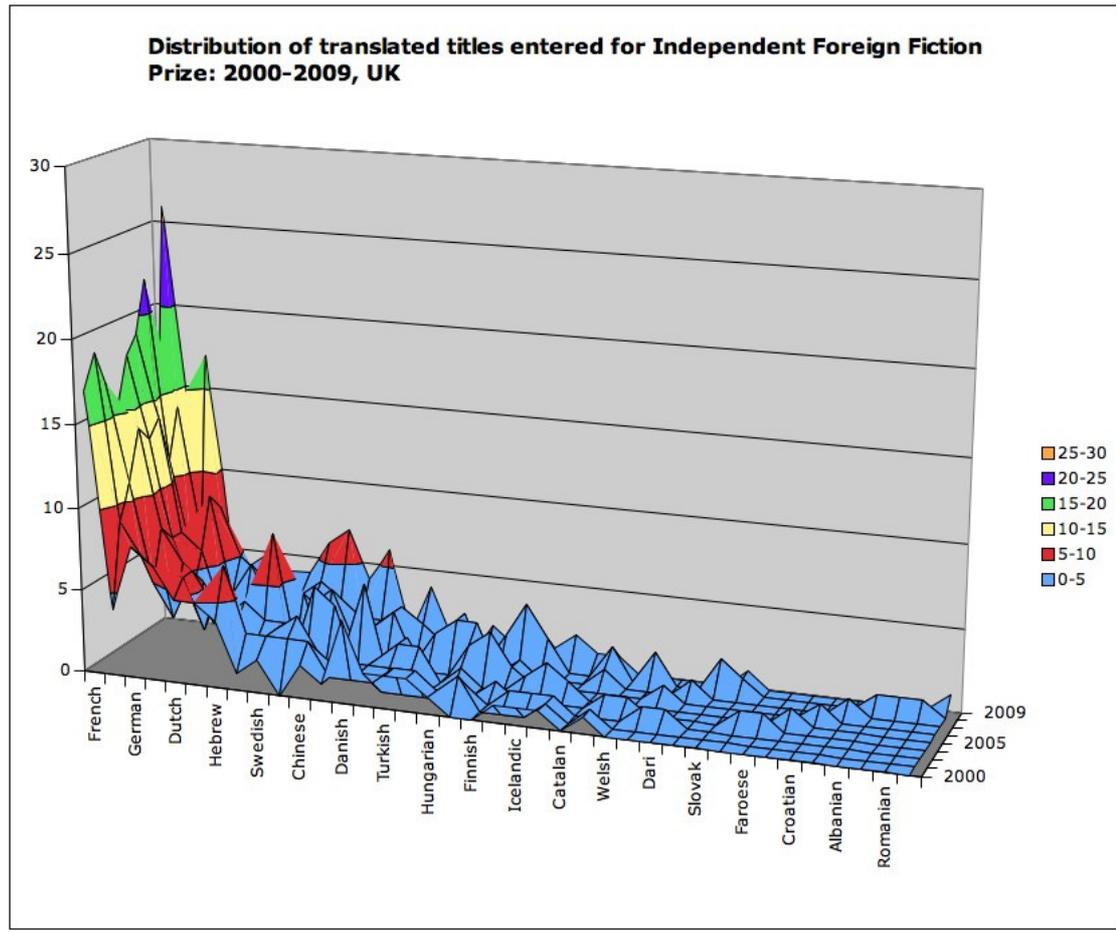


Fig. 6.3. The information for this chart has been provided by ACE, official sponsor of IFFP.

This chart has been presented in order to better understand a literary principle I discussed with Lou: is a book translated from one foreign language able to open doors for more books from the same language? Two forces are at play, Lou tells me: quotas and fads.

It's about placing the book, so it can work both ways. Some publishers will say – OK, we've got our East European and that's it. They're not interested in anything more, no matter the quality. Informally, they have a quota of how many books from which region they want to publish – unless something blows their minds. If they get one East European book which is about East European stuff – whatever that might be – they're not going to go for more. On the other hand, there are fads, cool things. Scandinavian crime writing is a fad. You can jump on that bandwagon. That can work if there's a bit of some critical mass as well. The Scandinavian crime was a big surprise to publishers here. Instead of being caught out, publishers should aim to produce new fads and trends, and not only stick with the same old same old.

Following this argument, if ex-Yugoslav literature is imported on the basis of quotas, the number of books per year would remain low. These literatures' position since 2000 is peripheral, particularly compared to the beginning of the 1990s. This suggests that a foreign literature can enter and exit commodity status. During the 1990s, some Croatian books helped others be selected, though this hardly amounted to a literary trend. Compared to the country's size and local book production, it was certainly a success to have a few titles reviewed in UK broadsheets. Quotas and fads are not essentialising, never-changing principles favouring certain national literatures; they also function as a negotiation between being inside and outside. A very good ex-Yugoslav book might be rejected because a publisher's quota has already been filled. However, the quota is never a fixed measure, as the commodification of certain regions and genres changes, always reflecting wider political and socio-historical contexts.

Book routes, furthermore, are not only charted by the demand side of the market but start with their original publisher. In illustrating book routes from the Croatian side of the journey, I will focus on trust and the process of negotiating commitments to the national literature as I interpret the haphazard context of book suppliers.

### **6.3 'Knowing the Ropes'**

#### **6.3.1 Promotion of Croatian authors abroad**

In the neat Austro-Hungarian centre of Zagreb, a few streets are famous for their cafés. They are at their best in warm weather when their garden furniture takes up most of the pedestrian space. Yet, even in the winter months, many people whose offices are located nearby prefer to do their business in one of those cafés. Some years ago, Bogovićeveva street (the biggest realm of cafés), acquired its first 'mega' bookshop, sprawling across three floors. At the very top, there is a trendy café, separated from the bookshop space only by a glass wall, where many publishers, editors, and other *literati* do their daily tasks. There I met Nik, an editor in one of the most successful Croatian publishing houses, which I will call Aperture. Many of my writer colleagues who are signed to Aperture have told me positive stories about their rate and speed of

pay – something that ex-Yugoslav writers have struggled with in the last 20 years. They also assess Aperture's publicity and promotional work as above average. I was interested how this obviously above-average, successful publisher negotiates deals with foreign book markets: what do they do to promote their authors abroad?

Nik told me that Aperture keeps in touch with foreign agents and publishers because they buy many books for translation into Croatian. He talked about the success of Croatian literature as a whole on the German market, but did not give me any specifics about his own strategy. 'Every contact I make with a foreign publisher who might be interested in one of my authors,' he concluded, 'I pass it down to writers themselves: I have no time to deal with promotion'. Finally, to my question which of his authors have been successful in pursuing these contacts or even striking foreign deals, he said he 'couldn't remember: I've stopped paying attention to what goes on with my writers abroad'.

Without the institution of a literary agent, Croatian writers nonetheless depend on their publishers to support the marketing and legitimisation of their work. My initial hypothesis, deduced from my own writing experience, was that Croatian publishers were undertaking a planned strategy to sell their authors' translation rights into as many languages as possible. My ethnography continually suggests the opposite: in most cases, Croatian (and ex-Yugoslav) publishers consciously refuse to act as agents for their writers. Reasons vary: they complain of a lack of informal networks, shortages of staff time, or their own inexperience, particularly with the UK market. Many told me that when it comes to the UK 'they don't see a purpose in investing any effort to sell Croatian literature there: it feels like banging your head against a brick wall.'

Numerous people from the ex-Yugoslav literary scene talk of translation into English (see Chapter 5) as the result of writers' personal contacts. This perception is often combined with a feeling of resentment. Whereas, for example, the books' literary quality is praised in the UK, it is often disputed at home. Jokes and anecdotes about how these writers managed to get translated into English 'pepper' informal literary conversations, though official literary reviews tend to assess them more positively. Recently, with the general democratisation of media and state politics in Croatia, books by Drakulić and

Ugrešić (the two most controversial exiled writers) have been short-listed for several literary prizes. Informal resentment nonetheless persists. Other European book markets reflect contested literary values: those whose books have been translated into an important European language are usually seen as a threat to those without such success. This is normally expressed through doubts about the value of their writing, anger at 'foreigners who never know what good Croatian literature is', and disapproval of translators' efforts who 'only push their own friends' (I discuss the 'right to represent' in section 6.3.2 and in Chapter 8).

Another Croatian publisher, Martin, showed more sensitivity with regards to promoting his authors abroad. Although convinced that writers themselves should do most of the work in cultivating relationships with foreign agents and publishers, he also assisted their promotion. Martin concentrated on the German market, writing off any potential success in the UK because of the lack of personal contacts there. He funded his writers to give promotional readings at book fairs, showing strong awareness of what type of writing could do well with which foreign publisher. I asked him how he selects authors and matches their style to particular foreign expectations:

Most importantly, the book needs to show the kind of literary quality which surpasses a transient fad. Because our writers don't stand a chance abroad with such writing; foreign publishers will always favour their own genre writers. A book needs to be specific and representative of its own background and locality, but at the same time, it has to speak in the language that is universal enough to travel across languages. I never recommend authors who are localised to the point that foreign readership can't relate to their language or themes. I could sell such a book to Slovenia or Macedonia, but never to France.

Martin's commentaries illustrate that, although still without much success in the UK, his awareness of the literary geopolitics as well as of differences in poetic codes qualify him as a knowledgeable intermediary. In the past nine years, he has also donated his time to get another project off the ground: The Catalogue of Croatian Writers (CCW). This bi-annual publication is unlike promotional brochures sponsored by national agencies from Scandinavian countries, he reported. CCW is produced by a group of volunteers, who all work full-time. The Croatian Ministry of Culture (MoC) partly subsidises the project, but with each round of application 'they struggle to convince the MoC how important

the Catalogue is for Croatian literature'. So far the funding has been random and is, paradoxically, administered by the 'Department for the Promotion of Croatian Literature Abroad', which has no budget of its own. I asked Martin what resources they use to keep track of literary production. He confessed it was 'a difficult task because no central source of information is available'. He relies on personal contacts with editors from the majority of publishing houses, whom he asks to supply the information on their authors' work: 'I think I manage to cover pretty much everything, but it really depends on who I know personally.' Despite financial difficulties, CCW continues as the only promotional material for Croatian literature. He distributes copies at each book fair he visits because 'he can't rely on MoC to pay for postal distribution'. As I leaf through CCW, what strikes me most is the lack of editorial policy: the number of included writers seems too large and the length of the sample of their work too short. I told Martin that a UK publisher would find it extremely difficult to navigate this selection: it is actually not a selection at all. He agreed that CCW does not have a strong editorial policy, and this is why:

Our aim is to cover everything that vaguely stands a chance of attracting foreign publishers. This year, our funding was cut even further, so the selection was fiercer. We had no money to pay for sample translations of everything that was published in Croatia.

CCW is a heavy A4 book that would weigh down any foreign publisher who collects it at a book fair. It has no online version, which for someone like Garry would present easy access to what is still an unknown literary space. My conversations with UK publishers revealed that CCW remains unknown in the UK. Even if its distribution reached him, Garry told me, it would not be of much help: 'I'm looking for a clever and focused selection done by an editor who understands the UK book market; I can't be bogged down with too many titles and names I can't pronounce.' The lack of funding is not the only reason why CCW operates without editorial policy. I was told that MoC showed reluctance to adopt the project and authoritatively vouch for a 'clever and focused' selection of Croatian authors, which would have a larger impact at foreign book markets. I was intrigued by this lack of any coherent approach to publicity and went to talk to Vesna, officer in charge at MoC.

Vesna invited me to her office – a roomy space in an old Austro-Hungarian villa that has recently been refurbished – and asked her secretary to bring us coffee. I took a seat on the other side of her desk and started small talk. Vesna soon apologised that ‘she won’t be of much help to me’ and would prefer me to ‘coach her in how to better organise the promotion of Croatian literature: I must know better, I work for English PEN’. She did not appear to be a woman lacking in self-confidence so I assumed that her request was partly to conceal any information that might not be for sharing outside the institutional walls. In the role of a consultant, I told her that CCW needed to be reworked: it should highlight five to six Croatian writers and offer sample translations and reports of their work, with synopses, all free of charge. Some foreign publishers, she admitted, complained to her that CCW was confusing: ‘they didn’t know whether it included the best Croatian authors or all the authors from the current year’. Despite agreeing with my assessment, Vesna categorically replied: ‘MoC can’t take responsibility for selecting writers. We are here to support the national literature as a whole, not to make these difficult choices.’ She would be happy to give a grant to someone to improve CCW, but ‘MoC can’t put their name and a stamp of authority on this’. Again, as a consultant, I gently drew her attention to the following facts: if an independent Croatian publisher edited it, many would question their selection; parallel publications could turn up claiming to represent overall Croatian literature; foreign publishers would be completely at a loss with whom to trust; and they would lose interest in Croatia altogether. She sipped her coffee and nodded in agreement. She told me she perfectly understood, yet repeated that ‘MoC could never act as a selector’. After a short silence, she invited me to wheel my chair around her desk and take a look at the screen of her computer. She wanted to talk about something else.

A few years ago, MoC introduced a subsidy programme for foreign publishers choosing to translate Croatian authors. Vesna has had much success with German and other Central European publishers who have taken advantage of this funding scheme. UK publishers, on the other hand, have never once applied. The programme offers around €2,000 towards translation costs, which can represent anything from 20 to 70% of the overall figure, depending on the translator’s fee. Vesna thinks of it less as an incentive on

Croatia's part and more as an opportunity for foreign publishers to 'compete for a writer they want'. Because it never offers full subsidies, the outcome really depends on the foreign publisher's willingness to match the grant. The non-negotiable sum of €2,000 hardly covers 20% of translation costs for a UK publisher, so they would have to top up this investment considerably more than their European colleagues, I explained to Vesna. In my consultant role, I suggested MoC should make an exception and offer more money if someone from the UK were interested in publishing a Croatian author: that way they would make contacts with English-speaking publishers but could lower subsidies for subsequent applications. 'This is not right' Vesna said, 'we can't do that. German, Dutch, French publishers, they all got €2000 for Igor Štikš. If we gave €6,000 to the British for Igor Štikš, no other foreign publisher would publish him after that. No, the British must show us how much they want him.' I assured her that the British had thousands of other books they could publish instead of Štikš and that only a good rate of subsidies would interest them to pursue a small literature like Croatian. At this point, her henceforth-composed demeanour started giving off conflicting messages: she would ask for more advice but simultaneously reject any idea my consultant self came up with. Finally, she brought up the application form on her computer to ask me how best to advertise the programme. This is how our conversation unfolded:

Me: This application form is in Croatian. How will a foreign publisher know how to fill it out?

Vesna: In the appendix, there's a rough translation of all the fields that need to be filled out.

Me: This might be confusing. Why don't you put the application form online and make it available in English?

Vesna: The applications are dealt with electronically and each field is read by the computer so it needs to be in Croatian. Other foreign publishers have managed to fill out the application form, why would it be a problem for the British?

Me: They prefer to have things as simple for them as possible.

Vesna: If filling out an application is complicated for them, they shouldn't be given any money at all (pauses). As a good patriot, you could send these application forms to all the UK publishers and help them fill them out.

Me: Of course, I will gladly do that.

In the name of reciprocity, I exhausted my bag of marketing advice for Vesna. Mostly she appeared content with new insights and sometimes even put things down in her notebook. Just before I left, however, she concluded: 'none of these official methods make as much impact as personal contacts I have made, especially with the Germans'. Then she opened a drawer and showed me a letter from the German publisher who published Miljenko Jergović. 'Liebe Vesna', she read the beginning of the letter. 'See how they address me', she looked at me with her glasses on the tip of her nose. 'Liebe: not "respected" but "dear". This is what counts, friendly relationships.'

Informal networks and personal endeavours that, as Vesna claims, are 'pursued for pleasure as much as for business' are central for the promotion of Croatian literature abroad. Without any coherent and organised approach, writers, publishers, and translators all carve out their own channels to reach potential foreign publishers. Many times, their personal investments, which also make them partial, are what determine a Croatian book's destiny on the foreign market. Their 'subjective' choices are by default contested and devalued by those who, for various reasons, feel resentful or threatened by their results.

### 6.3.2 Committed enthusiasm or 'amoral familialism': translators and the foreign promotion of Croatian authors

Booksa is an independent book club in central Zagreb: its friendly atmosphere makes it a place to share opinions on literary happenings and 'scandals'. Drinking coffee with the dynamic duo of its owners often turns into a relaxed debate. Some 'scandals' appear too complex for an outsider to grasp, so, as naïvely as I can, I ask why Alida Bremer, a translator from Croatian into German, has recently been defamed in the newspapers. Tanja, a regular there, believes that Alida Bremer is 'one of the greatest heroes of Croatian literature: she single-handedly promoted Croatian literature at the Leipzig book fair in 2008.' Many writers confirmed that Bremer's personal efforts made a significant breakthrough on the German market. This year's results – 30 book deals signed for Croatian books – point to her mammoth commitment and profound understanding of the region's context and German publishing scene. 'But what happens back home', Tanja commented bitterly, 'there are journalists who are

so jealous *they* didn't make this happen, writers who are angry *they* weren't chosen to be translated, that they slag her off in the newspapers.' And more:

They wrote: who is this Alida Bremer to represent Croatia abroad; who chose her; and who chose those books that she put forward for translation? While Bremer worked, those who sat back home raged at her. Her whole project was discredited, thrown out like a baby with the bathwater. She was made into the enemy number one of Croatian publishing. It's a circus here: people are stabbing each other at the back; nobody works towards a mutual goal.

Earlier, I have argued that trust is created through a complex play of commitments and positions, where insider and outsider knowledge can be diversely interpreted depending on the desired outcome. Trustworthiness is negotiated, not given, and many publishing actors are aware of how and why they position themselves the way they do. Following in Bourdieu's (1977) footsteps, if we imagine cross-cultural publishing as a social field, then social actors (writers, publishers, editors, critics, translators) all occupy positions that are internally structured in terms of power relations (domination, subordination, equivalence). Each position is defined by the amount of goods to which a person has access, and these can be described as economic, social, cultural, or symbolic capital. In the context of translated literature, in which literary values are defined locally and the relationship between languages reflects a wider geopolitical dynamics, the value of the resulting publications is constantly contested. Depending on the source of judgement, they can be perceived as heroic acts of enthusiasm or incompetent nepotism. Translators' expertise and efforts can therefore contribute to them being seen as trusted intermediaries in the UK, while in ex-Yugoslavia they will be publicly defamed for their 'nepotism'. Clearly, such disparate perceptions also influence how much social/symbolic capital a translator has in a given context. So for example, Bremer is seen as an expert and trusted translator by the Germans, but is largely critiqued for 'daring to represent Croatia abroad' by her Croatian colleagues. Boissevain (1974) argues that, although brokers only 'pass information along', their success and consequently their social power relies on securing the desired communication. Applying this argument in a cross-cultural study makes it easy to observe how a 'successful' deal can either put the broker in credit or discredit

them. What is regarded as a bridging endeavour by Western publishers is simultaneously doubted or even considered threatening.

A number of English native-speaking translators, particularly from smaller Slavic languages, told me about the massive effort they had to invest to pitch their favourite books to UK publishers. Because this is often such a struggle, translators do choose books 'dear to their heart'. If they strongly believe in them, they even translate a sample for free or agree to be paid a reduced rate. Clearly, they are 'sentimental' and partial when it comes to the books they promote to UK publishers. With writers they love, they forge a committed long-term working relationship of translating all their work. Is this nepotism or enthusiasm; an example of free-market competition or its imperfection?<sup>69</sup>

In *Market and Society*, James Carrier (1997c) describes the apparent difference between a typical Smithian market actor and a certain Mr Hawken who believes that his business grows through his focus on 'who he is' rather than 'what he does'. Carrier argues that such a narrative of sentimentality and personal worth over exchange value does not exclude dispassionate calculation. Actually, the narrative is mobilised to promote the ambition of growing a business and making a profit. Carrier, thus, does not perceive the social obligations of long-term relationships between market actors as imperfections of the free market but as expressions of both individuals' pursuit of self-interest and of social mutuality.

Translators' personal commitments to foreign books and languages are perceived as double-edged. At best, many books that would never be published in English become part of the international canon. At worst, translators' 'possessiveness' and need to establish themselves as the only intermediary for a certain language is perceived as detrimental for the overall literary scene. 'Being a specialist for an obscure language like Serbo-Croatian,' one writer told me, 'can benefit such a small literature; but it also gives the translator a monopoly

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<sup>69</sup> Francis Jones (2006) exemplifies his role as a literary translator of ex-Yugoslav poetry as that of a deeply-embedded social actor who constantly faced many ethical dilemmas: 1) whether to translate work from only one Yugoslav successor state, or continue translating from a pan-cultural pool of authors (with whom he kept personal ties); where the latter was often understood as relativisation of 'Bosnia's victim' position; 2) whether to stylistically improve the source text in order to have a better chance at communicating with the target readership, particularly in the time when the region needed to be represented in images beyond those of 'primitivism'.

over it: it's like owning an island in the Pacific Ocean.' Disputes over what constitutes successful promotion of Croatian literature abroad indicate that the exchange of books should be theorised as a qualitative process, not a quantifiable measure. Books' routes are negotiated through acts of sliding in and out of various commitments to ideas, categories, and people. Bremer's example illustrates that close personal ties are often felt as oppressive, even though they are exactly what support the traffic of books, ultimately making financial profit possible.

## 6.4 Conclusion

As director of WiT, I was once asked by a senior editor specialising in foreign fiction to recommend a new Croatian title. 'Whatever you suggest,' he told me, 'I would seriously consider'. I suggested Miljenko Jergović. The editor recognised Jergović's name and said he read his most recent work in French: 'it's too dense; it wouldn't sell here; besides, the war is over.'

A few months later in Zagreb, Jergović told me that 'Europe and Britain, when it comes to the reception of his books, are two different planets.' Major European publishers release his books only months after the original, while the critics focus on their literary quality, not the war. In the UK, *Sarajevo Marlboro*, a war diary, sold well because it was 'a book of the moment'. Being widely translated, as I found out, is more than just a literary thing. Jergović told me that 'in practical terms, it meant as little as €3,000 more per book.' Although recognition from a variety of literary critics 'gives you a sense that your work is meaningful', the hardest aspect of being translated is negotiating success with people at home:

There is a strange belief among writers in this part of the world that by being translated I somehow wronged the rest of them. They think it's like being on the bus: there were five seats on the bus for ex-Yugoslav writers and, allegedly, I've taken them all up. This is not just silly talk in cafés: I've been slagged off in newspapers and on TV. They said: the West doesn't understand us, they translate some shit writers like Jergović and ignore the really good ones.

The interaction between the two systems of British and foreign literature reflects global socio-linguistic geopolitics, which in turn influence books' routes. Translated fiction's peripheral position in the UK literary canon means, in

practice, that foreign texts become domesticated not only to native poetic codes but also to socio-cultural expectations of the UK literary establishment. Strong editorial control which focuses on the 'right' elements for a foreign book – acceptable style, pertinent themes, the right amount of foreignness, commercial potential – is the main gatekeeper, protecting the domestic canon from being influenced by difference. This control is further sustained by trusted intermediaries, who themselves need to prove their suitability to vouch for certain titles. As this chapter illustrates, what makes books travel across the linguistic divide is the principle of trust. Those who act as trusted intermediaries and informants establish their trustworthiness in various ways. Far from being an inherent quality, trustworthiness is negotiated by switching positions between belonging and non-belonging either to UK publishing or the books' country of origin. Thus, within literary translation, it is more important to explore the process of how book deals are made than to count the number of translated books.

These findings confirm the argument of recent scholarship on translation: that translation needs to be studied as a political as well as an aesthetic act. I contribute to these debates by including a micro-level analysis of the social relations that underpin global structures of power between dominant and more obscure languages. Additionally, I discuss how narratives of the free market and autonomous, rational market actors are expressed and mobilised on both sides of the linguistic divide: sometimes they are merely unchallenged concepts, but at other times they reflect resentment and hostility by those who believe they have been wronged by the literary establishment.

Finally, this research challenges the idea that national literatures are imported into the English language through a structured and organised project (the reality portrayed for UK readers and students of literature). Personal interests, institutional agendas, and national cultural policies are all forces competing over the meaning and value of a national literature. Such struggles are crucial to understanding diverse attempts to define and promote a national literature. They are an attempt to control what becomes consecrated as literary canon, but, in the context of cross-cultural book exchange there is also – as Bourdieu (1991: 52-61) would say – a 'retranslation' of linguistic into socio-political difference. Yet the brokers and intermediaries involved in this process

are not solely persons. Brands, as shown in Chapter 7, function as *impersonal* brokers: they, too, pass on information and facilitate relations.

## **7 Brand(ing):**

**'your most powerful tool is your authentic self'**

**(Peters 1999)**

### **7.1 What's in a Brand?**

The sensory roundedness of how foreign 'culture' is represented, marketed and experienced is best observed in the categorisation of translated books in UK bookshops. While fiction written in English is classified according to the genre (classics, crime, SF, poetry, essays), translated fiction is shelved by region. At Daunt Books on Holland Road in London, ex-Yugoslav fiction is stacked together with cookery books, travel guides, and socio-political essays: all titles purporting to reveal the 'essence' of Balkan culture. The new paradigm of consuming 'culture' instead of belonging to it contributes to most foreign fiction being read for the experience of and information about the Other. Readers of translated books are not only buying books as commodities but are also constructing a particular lifestyle connected to such literary taste. Late-20<sup>th</sup>-century marketing has focused on *alterity* as a product with high symbolic value. Cultural difference that can be consumed *here-and-now* is, among other ways, represented by writers as cultural brokers. Less their books, more their personalities, have become perceived as authentic.

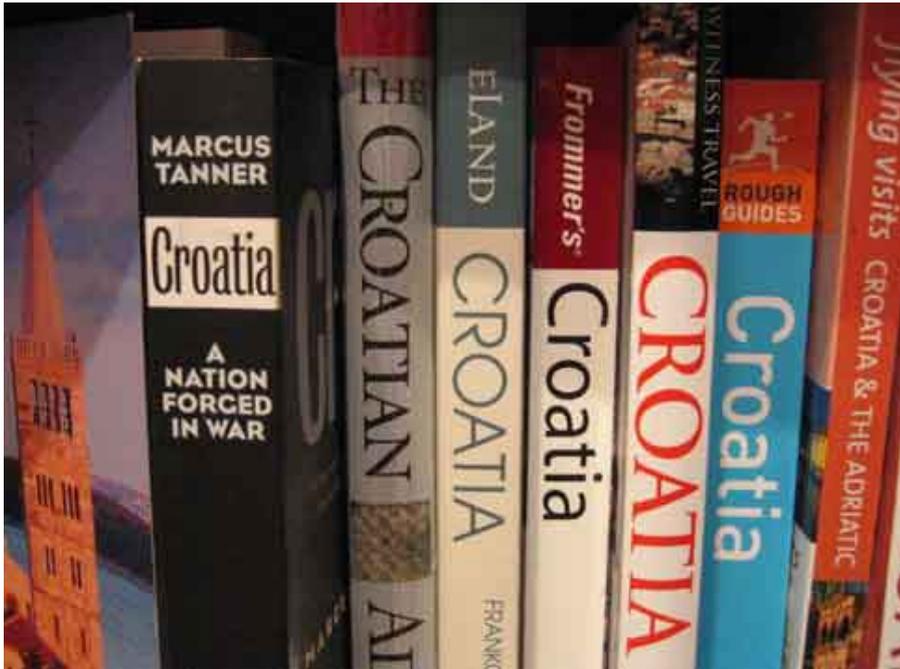


Fig. 7.1. Travel guides to Croatia mixed with Marcus Tanner's history and an anthology of Croatian writing by Eland, which normally publishes travelogues.



Fig. 7.2. S. Drakulić's *As If I Am Not There* (subtitled 'the novel about the Balkans!') accompanied by Misha Glenny's political essays and Noel Malcolm's history of Bosnia.



Fig. 7.3. Andrić's Nobel-winning *The Bridge over the Drina* juxtaposed with Rebecca West's famous travelogue through the early-20<sup>th</sup>-century Balkans, Glenny's political essays, and several history books on the region.

A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another. [It] used to be ... a logo or a design... Design is essential but design is not brand. Seth Godin (2009)

The attitude *I consume, therefore I am*, often used to describe the socio-cultural practices of our increasingly globalised world, is easily observed in the world of literature and writers. Many of my participants told me about brands: 'brand is everything', they reiterated. Some ex-Yugoslav writers also asked me to reveal the recipe for creating a brand strong enough to travel over to the UK book market. Since I was perceived as a researcher as well as the director of WiT, they asked for my 'professional' advice. Although this chapter does not aim to list the 'ingredients' of a successful brand, my indebtedness to my participants inclined me to sketch out some generalisations. I presented them with what I noticed was a widespread formula for a successful foreign author brand in the UK:

- the foreign writer lives in exile (in the West) and is immersed in the new culture.

- They intentionally write for the world audience: whether in their mother tongue or in English, they translate source cultural concepts to appear comprehensible to the target audience.
- Their life story (of surviving a war, human rights violations, imprisonment etc., and coming to the other side of suffering as heroes) is told as a testimony both in their literary work and at public performances. Any form of autobiography predominates in translated fiction.
- They usually come from an obscure country that has been in the public eye because of its political situation.
- The UK book market favours shocking, sensationalist, and gruesome stories: it does not want a love story from Russia but a personal testimony of the Chechen war.
- The foreign writer is limited to representing their 'culture' whilst English writers choose universal themes such as love, alienation, or technological advancement.
- As part of their UK promotional tour, they are asked political questions about their country and perceived by the audience primarily as 'native informants'. Aesthetic judgement of their work is overshadowed by the work's ethnographic insight.
- They objectify their 'culture' by either fitting a pre-existing image - 'unspoilt' but 'backward' - or by writing in favour of Western liberal values.
- They forsake some parts of their foreignness to be understood by the UK readership whilst keeping enough to remain exotic and different.

On receiving this 'holy grail', most of my participants agreed with its accuracy. However, they felt that purposefully creating such a role for themselves 'would go against their true nature' and would mean 'they had sold themselves'. As I probed more deeply into the nature of 'fraud', I was told that brand(ing) 'had more to do with selling yourself than with the quality of literature'. In many ways, they were right: the brand's symbolic value is constructed through a meaningful and emotionally-charged experience between writer and reader. When compared to literature in English, foreign fiction is considerably less appreciated in aesthetic terms (see Chapter 8). The open animosity towards

brand(ing) as I outlined it to my ex-Yugoslav participants raises the question of why literature continues to be perceived as 'pure' and untouched by 'market forces'. This chapter offers several explanations.

The idea of the writer as creative genius begins with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century emergence of the literary marketplace. This concept of an inspired, original artist was additionally merged with the belief that creativity was free from any political or social constraints. However, it was the notion of a creative genius that was mobilised in order for writers to become differentiated and competitive on a literary market freeing itself from court patronage. These ideas eventually lead to the invention of copyright, through which process the writer became an author. As natural as they appear to us today, they are also products of so-called 'possessive individualism' (Macpherson, et al. 1964), a thought that has prevailed within the Protestant ethic and laid foundations for the free-market model.

The contemporary book market is organised around literary brands, powerful symbols that perform authorial authenticity and replace foreign literature's use value with symbolic value. If writing 200 years ago was perceived as a craft, no more elevated than book-binding, proof-reading, or other activities necessary to produce a book, literature today is consumed mainly for its symbolic value. Translated literature itself is branded as a source of cultural difference and a sign of liberal democratic values, and reflects a discerned taste positioned extremely highly in the legitimising hierarchy. The consumption of literature, thus, involves more than communication between reader and text: it reflects a particular experience and lifestyle that both distinguishes and unites people along those lines. In the brand(ing) process, authors appear as authentic personalities and cultural brokers, who anchor readers' desire to sample varieties of (ethnic/different) spaces and times in the *here-and-now*. My ethnography comments not only on the process of constructing authenticity, but also on its salience. Within the narrative of alterity and cultural difference, authenticity has become the crucible through which cultural values and beliefs between foreign writers and domestic readers are aligned. Trust that the writer is a 'genuine' voice from abroad is achieved through social performance, made possible only if both performer and audience speak the same cultural 'code'. Brand is a product of this performance.

This chapter is interspersed with sections from an interview with the Croatian playwright Ivan Vidić. The interview took place in a cosy jazz club in central Zagreb, on a quiet night when our conversation was not disturbed by live music. My understanding of Vidić's life story, however, developed as a result of our frequent social and email exchanges in autumn and winter 2008. We were in the habit of attending many literary events together, where, enveloped in cigarette smoke, we would discuss, or more accurately lament, 'whatever has happened to literature today'. In the mid-1990s, Vidić had moved to London to work at the Gate Theatre where one of his plays had a several-week run. Afterwards, he stayed for another year, hoping to have more work commissioned. None of the offers, he described, were enough for a decent living in London. His perception of a foreign writer's position in London echoes most of his Croatian colleagues: they share his scorn for 'having to sell yourself as a package' or 'compromise your literary style'. Vidić's comments complement this chapter's case study of two 'successful' author brands – Dubravka Ugrešić and Aleksandar Hemon – and their reception on the UK book market.

## **7.2 Craftsman v. Artist**

The construction of modern authorship has its roots in the Romantic ideology and narrative of the creative genius, which took hold in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In his study of that era's literary magazines, David Higgins (2005) argues that Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley were portrayed as transcending the political and commercial constraints of their time by the force of their artistic originality. Shown as fundamentally different from 'normal' people, the creative genius was thought to be divinely inspired; as such, their personalities and private lives became of growing interest (ibid., 3). Raymond Williams (1988) and Pierre Bourdieu (1969) explain the rise of this model of artist at that particular time as, in part, a compensatory response to the decline of patronage and the growth of a reading public that had enabled the literary field to form. Relatively autonomous from political and religious authority, this social field enabled the artist/intellectual to feel obliged mostly to the demands of their creative project. Bourdieu further notices that, the more autonomous the creative field, the more the idea of 'pure aesthetics' prevails as a force arranging the hierarchy of social positions. His critique of pure (Kantian)

aesthetics argues that a number of consecrating agents (publishers, reviewers, editors within the literary field) jointly create the symbolic value of a work of art (Bourdieu 1996). The genius author, perceived as unbound by material considerations, was an important strategy for achieving distinction in the late-18<sup>th</sup>-century literary marketplace, suddenly saturated with products. The authorial aura of divinity obscured marketplace realities. Standing out from the crowd became a sign of artistic quality at a time of rapid literary production (Higgins 2005: 8).

Martha Woodmansee, who writes extensively on the construction of modern authorship, argues that '[a]uthorship does not exist to innocent eyes; they see only writing and texts' (Woodmansee 1994b: 1). Her well-known essay 'The Genius and the Copyright' (Woodmansee 1994a) elucidates how socio-economic and cultural as well as philosophical and aesthetic factors created what is now represented as a timeless and universal phenomenon of authorship. Before Romanticism, art was seen instrumentally rather than aesthetically, whilst those involved in producing books – the writer, papermaker, typesetter, printer, bookbinder, and publisher – were perceived as deserving equal credit and profits from the final product (ibid., 49).<sup>70</sup> A writer was first and foremost an artisan: 'a skilled manipulator of predefined strategies for achieving goals dictated by his audience' (ibid., 36). It was the German writers of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century who fought for the recognition of their labour as intellectual property<sup>71</sup> and who ushered in the modern idea of authorship and copyright. In order to claim it, writers, caught between limited patronage and the emerging literary marketplace, first had to be portrayed as individual original creators. The introduction of copyright entitled writers not to a small honorarium, as before, but a profit from what became their distinct property.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This instrumental treatment of the writing craft could be thought of as literature's use value as opposed to its symbolic value (see below).

<sup>71</sup> The anthropologists Hann and Verdery (1998; 2004) reconceptualise the universal, natural, and neutral concept of private property by recognising its historical contingency and social embeddedness. In *Property Relations*, Hann asserts that the essential nature of property lies in social relations rather than in inherent qualities of an object called *property*: thus, property relations are social relations. Verdery in *Property in Question* similarly emphasises the relational view instead of conflating *property* with *thing*. She goes on to question the boundedness of either *person* or *thing* within property relations, suggesting that people might not be unified and consistent through time while objects might consist of assemblages of social relations rather than antedating them.

<sup>72</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte's 1793 essay 'Proof of the Illegality of Reprinting: A Rationale and a Parable' was instrumental in defining authors' intellectual property. Distinguishing the

Today, the Romantic concept of authorship and assumptions about creativity as an original individual inspiration still have a hold on both the legal and aesthetic treatment of literature. The most valued literary work is thought to be unique – not derived from prior texts but deviating from them (Woodmansee 1994c: 17). Unlike in the Middle Ages or Renaissance, when the text's authority rested on its affiliation with precedents,<sup>73</sup> the Romantic view of creativity centred on breaking away from tradition and creating something utterly new – in this sense, a Romantic writer often implies a dose of social transgression.<sup>74</sup> Woodmansee, however, engages with Foucault's essay 'What is an Author?' (Foucault 1979) and asks several questions in order to recover the collectivity of the writing process and author attribution. The three questions that are most relevant for this dissertation are: how the author became individualised; when studies of authenticity and attribution began; and the origin of the interest in authors' lives as heroic.

Woodmansee's argument that most writing, whether scientific, legal, or creative, is in reality a collaborative process speaks to Bourdieu's notion of the collectivity of the creative project (Bourdieu 1969). There he concludes that 'the relationship between the creative artist and his work [...] is affected by the system of social relations within which creation as an act of communication takes place' (ibid., 161). The work is always collective, Bourdieu argues, because it becomes the object of others' valuation through which its public meaning is established. A collective judgement of the 'value and truth of the work' defines the author and ascribes them a position in the web of social relations. Yet the notion of the creative genius obscures this very collectivity to establish itself as a natural, taken-for-granted phenomenon, or in Bourdieu's words, *doxa*. In more recent studies of how such narratives affect law, Rosemary Coombe (1994) has shown that celebrities' so-called image rights also assume the originating individuality of the author. She asks 'who authors the celebrity' and concludes

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physical and ideal aspects of a book, Fichte argued for three distinct shares of property: when a book is sold, ownership of the physical object passes to the buyer; so do the author's thoughts and ideas; but the form in which these ideas are presented remains with the author for ever (Woodmansee 1994a: 51).

<sup>73</sup> This position also implied a place in a 'literary genealogy' and a relation with previous and subsequent texts. See in particular Strathern's argument that a Western notion of patent is a vehicle for 'cutting the network' with collectivity (Introduction).

<sup>74</sup> Transgressor and 'neglected' 'suffering' genius were common social positions, imbued with much symbolic capital and political charge when socialism fell (see Chapter 5).

that any such persona is always a product of collaborative efforts of studios, the mass media, photographers, fitness coaches, ghost-writers, etc., and in particular the audience themselves. Moreover, a celebrity is always socio-historically situated, and these conditions give the meaning, resonance and authority to their image (ibid., 111). Similarly, Peter Jaszi claims that, because authors' value and popularity is embedded in their socio-cultural context, they are also perceived as capturing the 'essence' and 'truth' of a culture or nation (Jaszi 1994: 35). Unlike copyright, which legally protects authors' intellectual property, representing 'their tradition' could be understood as authors' 'moral' right or duty. The concept of authorship is thus revealed as a composite of various meanings, including a) individual originality expressed as authenticity, and b) authority or the right to represent.

### **7.3 The Social Pragmatics of Authorship**

The functions of the representation of the author as a creative genius, which came about partly to obscure the social and economic relations of the newly-emerging literary marketplace, were at least twofold: securing profit from individual intellectual property and providing a sense of distinctiveness and artistic quality. Being different and distinguished on the market was a necessary strategy to deal with competition, and authorial authenticity became a crucial resource and source of symbolic value. Marketing and brand(ing) can in many ways be understood as social performance. The insights of Jeffery Alexander (2006) into how such socio-cultural pragmatics can create a desired effect and affect explain that, in contemporary, complex societies, elements of performance<sup>75</sup> have been defused: actors do not necessarily share the same beliefs and values nor accept the validity of one another's acts. Such stratified, differentiated, and reflexive contexts create a greater need for simplified and symbolic acts of communication that generate trust in the validity of cultural contents and authenticity of one another's strategic intentions (ibid., 31). The goal of a social performance, he further argues, is the same as that of a sacred

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<sup>75</sup> According to Alexander, elements of performance are actors, observers/audience, means of symbolic production (standardised expressive equipment as described by Goffman (1990) in his study of impression management, such as clothes, speech, or distribution of space), and social power.

ritual: producing psychological identification and cultural extension. When this is achieved, the elements of the performance have been re-fused and the act experienced as authentic and convincing. Authenticity thus depends on the actor's ability 'to sew the disparate elements of performance into a seamless and convincing whole' (ibid., 55). This line of argument echoes Bourdieu's contention that culture stops appearing artificial only through the act of denial. Then, social powers manifest themselves not as external hegemonic forces but merely as means of representation, as conveyors of the intended meaning.

Any social performance, including the author brand, is embedded in a socio-cultural context, which allows it to be effective. Brand(ing) thus depends on what Alexander calls background representation – a cookbook of narratives, codes, and rhetorics that are dominant in certain times and collectivities (ibid., 59). This information allows the audience to understand the performance and to participate in the affectual exchange. This is particularly important in the context of translated literature, as the foreign author, in order to appear authentic, draws on the background representation of UK culture. They can only do so, of course, if they have already, to a large degree, internalised this dominant code, precisely what a position of living in exile provides. In constructing their brand, as seen below, ex-Yugoslav authors thus intuitively rely on and cite the UK cultural code. For some, this will mean blending in, but for others authenticity will lie in constant transgression. Either way, whether talking for or against the UK cultural code, their performance will be achieved only if the brand is able to speak to the audience *through* the background representation on which they too can draw (Alexander and Mast 2006: 14). Marketing is thus a performative that *does* things through its repetitive and even ritualistic communication with the audience.

## **7.4 Marketing: the object-culture-person-experience cycle**

### **7.4.1 An introduction to marketing**

Celia Lury's study *Brand: the Logos of the Global Economy* (Lury 2004), gives an historical overview of marketing, which emerged as a consequence of an increasing number of products and services able to fulfil their functionality. At some point, she argues, these had to be defined in their similarity as much as in

their difference from other objects that could occupy the same place in relation to competitors and in terms of their integration into social life. The first sale of wrapped soap under a brand name in England, in 1884, began a major economic transformation: formerly indistinguishable generic items came to be marketed as distinctive through corporate signatures or brands.

By 1960s, marketing specialists were focusing on buyers' rather than sellers' needs and gathering statistics about consumer behaviour and preferences through market research. While this initially concentrated on consumers' response to *functional* properties of products – their *use value*, it soon became evident that the product was more than its physical existence. A product's essence was defined through a pattern of customers' needs identified by behavioural science (e.g. Maslow's hierarchy of needs<sup>76</sup>). Products were classified according to how consumers perceived, used, and bought them, creating categories such as 'convenience', 'shopping', and 'speciality'.

In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marketing reached a key stage in its development: the producer–consumer relationship was no longer viewed as stimulus–response but increasingly as an exchange. In the UK, this is often referred to as 'creative advertising' (Lash and Urry 1994). Consumer research has since aimed to construct an imaginary lifestyle for consumers within which the product's emotional and aesthetic values were elaborated, emphasising sensory experience rather than logical propositions (Mort 1996: 96). Products' and services' *use value* was directed towards their *symbolic value*. As Applbaum (2004) elucidates, many critical theorists, such as Adorno and Baudrillard, have described the suspicious relationship between human needs and the objects purportedly created to fulfil them. Baudrillard thus argues that consumers do not purchase commodities but commodity signs, whilst cultural images replace functional associations (Baudrillard 1998). However, for the translation from commodities into commodity sign values to be successful, marketers and consumers must share the same sign-value system. Mary Douglas (1996) insightfully argues that objects are meaningful along the dimension of

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<sup>76</sup> Maslow's hierarchy of needs classifies human needs into categories from basic biological to universal self-actualisation in the form of implied progress. Western marketers have frequently used it to conquer the Third World or post-socialist East European markets (Applbaum 2004) by implying that certain products symbolised progress and 'cultivation'.

collective, not merely individual, consumption and in their relation to other objects within a field of signifiers. With the shift from the commodity market towards brand markets, commodities have come to be defined not by their use but by their signification.

With this change, the classic four Ps of marketing (product, price, promotion, placement) receive an important addition: the fifth P = people. Intuitive marketing sees it as the personality of the brand or the person as an 'embodied trademark' (Coombe 1996). This has already been illustrated in Chapter 5's discussion of literary events with Dubravka Ugrešić – which, regardless of the book being promoted, all focused on her personality and life story. She herself was perceived as a 'transgressing artist', a strong element of her 'embodied trademark'. However, her social and symbolic capital draws on the personality and brand of many other consecrating agents: her publisher, her translators and reviewers, as well as venues where her launches are performed. Brand creates authenticity, an overwhelmingly important ingredient and value in the marketing process. As marketers and customers explain it, 'products, buildings and machines – even ideas – can be copied, but the only unique elements in a company are its people. They constitute the soul of the brand.' (Marzano 2000: 58)

#### 7.4.2 Academic approaches to marketing and branding

Anthropological approaches to marketing that focus on the flow and promotion of Western consumer goods have been questioned by Kalman Appalbaum's (2004) study *The Marketing Era*. Such limited perceptions, he argues, have started a crude debate between those who argue that Western symbols are hegemonically taking over the world over and those who believe that 'local' peoples instead resist or creatively domesticate them to their own purposes. In this way, marketing focuses either on its 'object' or the power dynamics between the West and the Rest of the World. Instead, Appalbaum perceives marketing as an agency-centred 'system of provisioning' (Appalbaum 2004: 2): a shared project between producers and consumers to satisfy needs. Marketing constitutes 'a providential moment when both marketer and consumer experience the revelation of needs as desires, and in the same instant [...] these are satisfied' (ibid., 5). Repetitive engagement with consumption-related

behaviour reveals the performative nature of marketing: it conditions an individual into a particular type of self-classification, self-definition, and self-image that all contribute to the construction of a lifestyle (e.g. what one wears, reads, listens to, which leisure activities they engage in, what jobs they choose to do, etc.).

Additionally, Applbaum asserts, consumers' needs are never permanent. The most immutable requirements of our physical existence – food, shelter, healing, reproduction – are satisfied with the greatest of difference, sensitivity, and social significance. This observation forces us to reconceptualise ideas of commoditisation as a self-propelling tendency or a passive and historically non-specific progression. Thus, he criticises Keith Hart for understanding it as an evolutionary process (Hart 1982: 42) and Igor Kopytoff for thinking of it as a 'built in force, a drive inherent in every exchange system toward optimum commoditisation' (Kopytoff 1986: 72). Though he finds Appadurai's work (1986) extremely productive, specifically his notion of the 'regime of value' and how objects may enter and exit commodity status, he nevertheless questions the universalist theory of commoditisation that Appadurai suggests. Overall, these approaches' ethnographic and theoretical blind spot is anthropology's continual focus on the site of exchange 'rather than on the predominant at-a-distance constructions that impinge upon commodity exchange transactions' (Applbaum 2004: 70). Marketing theory should hence study a larger environment than just the site of exchange.

Applbaum's final point is that anthropology should not consider the market solely in the service of hegemony, a source of power and conspiracy that either keeps ordinary people subdued or against which they must battle (*ibid.*, 10). Applbaum's 'system of provisioning' sees the market as a co-participation of producers and consumers and a mutually-constituting relationship: 'marketers themselves cannot be outside the system, but the two groups animate separate aspects of the constitution of a common order' (*ibid.*, 11). My own ethnographic data, considering more than just the site of exchange, supports such a notion of co-participation. It further shows, however, that in the context of literary translations symbolic value must be understood in terms of the purpose it serves for the customer: often, a brand's meaning differs across contexts whilst its symbolic value remains the same. As my case study

illustrates, a foreign writer in the UK serves a considerably different purpose from that intended for their home audience, although their desirability remains the same.

### 7.4.3 Consuming culture

The Western world has expectations from the Balkan people: we can either be very Balkan or uncompromisingly anti-Balkan. It's a choice between being an idyllically primitive, irrational drunken thug or a neglected genius hollering insults against their own people. Both brands make you authentically Balkan, but, for this, you are selling either your face or your arse. This is not literature, this is a strategy of success.

Ivan Vidić, Croatian playwright

Two shifts that took place in the late 20th century – one from ‘belonging to culture to consuming culture’ (Firat 1995) and another from consuming commodities to constructing lifestyles – help to explain how translated literature as an expression of a foreign culture becomes a desirable commodity for constructing a particular lifestyle. When it comes to marketing, globalisation points to a contradictory binarism that fosters both extreme fragmentation and extreme connectivity (Appelbaum 2004). The fragmentation process is reflected in the dissolution of existing geo-social boundaries (‘deterritorialization’), the rise of the agency of individual imagination, and the consequent emergence of culturally intermingled identity and lifestyle patterns (Appelbaum 2004: 75). Firat (1995) offers a valuable insight into how perceptions of culture have changed from modernism<sup>77</sup> to postmodernism: nowadays, culture – by which he means any expression of ethnic or regional culture – is made available to people through marketing their qualities into consumable goods. While

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<sup>77</sup> Firat writes that, in modernism, culture was perceived as a means by which people exerted control over nature to improve the basic conditions of living. Through scientific principles, the modern (Cartesian) subject could develop valid and accurate representations of reality, a belief which led to the separation between mind and body. Many modern ideas of inferiority and superiority were based on such privileging of the detached observer over the immersed participant, producing the supremacy of vision (Berger 1972). Further developments compartmentalised culture into components such as economic, political, social and cultural. Thus, according to Marx and Weber, culture has become a superstructure modelled on the conditions and relationships of infrastructure (material and economic conditions of life). The critique of the modernist view of culture recognises the symbolic and cultural over the material and economic as the engines of society; according to theorists such as Baudrillard and Massumi, the narrative of the material and economic was solely a narrative, symbolically and culturally woven and bought into as reality.

Western brands reach faraway places so 'the whole world' can drink Coca-Cola and listen to Madonna, the globalisation of available information is simultaneously thought to create a demand for knowing more about the world. However, this does not promote one form or style's domination over others but rather the diffusion of different forms and styles all around the world. So, although consumers' experience is fragmented, the same fragments may be had all over the globe. At the World Showcase in Disney World, Florida, writes Firat, tourists can visit and experience France, Italy, China, Morocco, and Norway, taking in their sights, sounds, and tastes. The postmodern consumer can sample dislocated places and discontinuous times *here-and-now*, not as a detached observer but through a multisensory experience of sounds, tastes, and smells. Culture has thus become not something to study but something to experience and consume. Not just a single culture but all cultures are marketed so as to be experienced *here-and-now*.

Within this process, singular qualities, such as literature, food, music, and clothes are translated into marketable experiences by isolation from their original socio-cultural context. They become relatively autonomous yet authentic brands of particular idea or experience. This process of objectification allows the culture to preserve its livelihood but also conceals the social practices and relations that create them (Costa and Bamossy 1995; Hutnyk 2001). I return to the construction of the exotic near the end of this chapter.

The mini vignette that began this chapter illustrates Firat's point. Ex-Yugoslav literature is shown as an isolated quality contributing to the 'essence' of (Balkan) culture as a whole. Through books, a consumer can experience images and sounds of people, places, and objects different from their own, even in the *here-and-now*. Appelbaum (2004: 111) refers to this as the production of three types of space through marketing: a) conceptual space (a brand occupies cognitive space in consumers); b) reterritorialised space (by drawing an object/service/idea into the state of commodity); and c) reaggregated space (consumers 'use space' which is geographically discontinuous to them but becomes conceptually unified and relocated in the embodied experience). The commodity of translated literature produces all three types: by satisfying the need for novelty and knowledge about different cultures it occupies consumers' cognitive space; no matter how small its volume, it still *is* a commodity for a

certain category of people; and it embodies the experience of dislocated spaces in real-time experience.

Studies of marketing in the postmodern era (Firat 1992; Firat and Venkatesh 1993; Firat 1995; Applbaum 2004; Lury 2004) have stressed its importance in the construction of cultural identity, as experiencing cultural difference becomes a growing customer need. Dominique Bouchet (1995) writes about how marketing redefines ethnicity in second- and third-generation immigrants: instead of perceiving ethnic identity as a belief and practice of belonging to a group of people on the basis of blood or symbolic meaning without choice (Isajiw 1974), people increasingly provide themselves with ethnic identity by a creative cocktail made up from the diversity of images they confront in a postmodern society. Bouchet thus redirects her inquiry towards the salience of ethnicity and the matter of choice, which proves to be the dynamic element: the choice is not between one's ancestors' culture and that of the society in which one lives, but a building of self-image and a lifestyle. 'Traditional ethnic groups', she concludes, 'kept their tradition, postmodern ethnic groups keep up with their style' (Bouchet 1995: 89).

Though this research deals with ethnicity and migration only marginally, these arguments about the salience of ethnicity are extremely valuable in the context of marketing translated literature. Cultural difference and knowledge and experience of an 'ethnic' culture have become a predominant reason given by my research participants for engaging with translated literature. Some members of the reading group who read Dubravka Ugrešić's memoir-style novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (Ugresic 1998b) told me that 'though they had to struggle their way through the fragmented and dense narrative, they still wanted to read it to find out more about the Balkans'. Also, PEN's WiT programme marketed the supported books with the slogan that 'one of the most important roles of translated literature was to educate UK readers about a culturally diverse world'. Every two years when the WiT team renegotiated the continuation of our sponsorship with Bloomberg, we were told that 'through bringing foreign cultures closer to home' in promoting translated literature, the programme 'fit the ethos of their company: celebration of multiculturalism and liberal political views'.

The classification of books in bookshops and newspaper review sections contributes to the symbolic value translated literature as commodity holds for the consumer. Most literary professionals who campaign for more foreign books in the UK told me that positive discrimination would be detrimental to its image: if 'marketers kept emphasising the geographical origin of the book, instead of advertising it just as a good book, it would further ghettoise its already frail position in the UK literary canon'. On the other hand, practices from several London bookshops illustrated that translated literature appealed specifically in its foreignness and novelty. Larry, who used to work at Waterstone's, said that 'people responded well to being offered books according to geographical and regional categories'. 'Some people, he continued, 'would self-consciously read books from a particular language or region, particularly if it was a smaller niche, e.g. Romanian fiction. We could safely treat *translated* as genre, and happily offer someone more translated fiction if they already seem to enjoy it. People buying travel guides or history and politics books about a region or issues were also often interested in suggested translated literature. In my bookselling experience I was most aware of the readers who saw translated literature in a positive light, as *interesting literature*. Grouping books together on a "fiction in translation" table encouraged people to be more responsive, especially to more mainstream translations, which were often packaged in a generic way: for example hazy desert pictures on the cover of Middle Eastern writing and close-up dragons on Chinese and Far Eastern novels.'

Similarly, Henderson, a deputy editor at the literary magazine *Granta*, told me that over the last 25 years *Granta's* editorial policy had 'changed both for good and bad: the new editors, as much as they popularised travel writing, realistic writing, East European writing (there was a whole issue on the fall of communism), also dedicated issues to world regions which had nothing to do with writing, but more with the representation of those parts of the world and how Britain as a cultural empire relates to there. This was also the time,' Henderson pointed out, 'of the end of the English novel and the beginning of British fiction; it was all about bringing in ethnic writing and making literature engage more with the outside world. All this seemed as if the middle-class boys were giving a small space to some ethnic writers to spice up what has become a boring and dusty English novel and conservative English reality.' Translated

literature's movement into a commodity state is further reflected in how IFFP markets prize-winning books. Amber from ACE (Chapter 5), one of the Prize's judges, said that 'as opposed to other literary prizes which filter through the sea of books and narrow down the number of high quality titles, IFFP works in the opposite direction by drawing people's attention to cultural diversity and celebrating different kinds of writing in translation. People would eagerly wait for the announcement of the long and short lists and the winner, not in terms of competition but promotion of new exciting titles.' So although it appears limiting that translated fiction in the UK is not eligible for any other literary prize, the aura of exclusivity thus built around the genre is what constitutes its symbolic value.

The above examples speak vividly of the change that marketers have adopted in the last few decades: instead of advertising commodities, they have directed their effort to categorising customers by lifestyle choices. The foundation of this approach is that each market segment has points of communality: they can include shared values and concerns, preferred leisure activities, common membership in clubs, organisations and institutions, a shared generational experience, or heroes and role-models (Swenson 1992). The emphasis on consumers' freedom to choose marketers' particular service or product addresses consumers' right to individualism, all the while implying that values such as choice and liberty are natural signs of human development and progress towards self-actualisation. The lifestyle concept has also replaced the type of relations through which rights and obligations constituted group membership for individuals with a concept of self-image: people who buy and read foreign fiction, are not actual groups but imagined communities consuming the same product. Such groups are composed of people in front of whom individuals wish to maintain smart images but with whom they do not form actual moral communities (Swenson 1992: 87). The narrative of progress towards self-actualisation stems from the concept of an autonomous individual, which resonates with the idealised model of the free market. Carrier argues (1997a: 29) that this model contributes to the representation of the Western world as modern and the rest as pre-modern and backward. The West is thus seen as dynamic, active, rational, and free, everywhere else as static, passive, sensuous, constrained.

The globalisation of fragmentation in the context of translated literature has made the genre itself a packaged product/experience under the name of world literature (Chapter 8). The marketers have developed consumers' taste in such a way that more languages and regions can be included while its symbolic value remains the same or even grows. Amber, for example, mentioned that IFFP judges 'felt very proud that more and more languages featured in the submissions for IFFP every year'. Although a discrete product/experience, translated fiction subsumes an ever-growing number of different cultures. As a commodity, it has become imbued with the meaning of progress and evolution because it speaks directly about consumers' choice to construct their identity through championing individualism and liberal democratic right. As the Western idea of progress carries moral and political meanings, especially the connotation that commitment to only one type of experience and narrative conformity engenders oppression and totalitarianism, translated literature becomes a loaded commodity sign for liberalism, the celebration of free speech, and tolerance. A typical reader of and campaigner for translated literature constructs and displays in the world precisely this self-image. In Applbaum's language (2004: 99), this reveals the temporal dimension of marketing: in the marketer's imagination, the consumer moves up Maslow's hierarchy of needs towards self-actualisation by concentrating on purchasing self-oriented commodities, most relevant to their lifestyle and self-image.

With entertainment a smaller part of its appeal, translated literature occupies the highest 'sphere' in what Bourdieu (1984) calls the 'hierarchy of legitimacies' with respect to cultural goods and tastes: it is considered highbrow, 'intellectual', and liberally orientated towards cultural difference. This small but exclusive niche rarely offers huge financial gains. However, as Bourdieu writes, economic capital is not the only interest to social actors. Goods in any social field may have different types of capital – economic, social, cultural, and symbolic – based on the internally-structured positions of power relations. Rather than being static, capital can move upwards, downwards and, most importantly, transversely. Thus, with a large degree of symbolic capital, translated fiction actually does bring economic value to a small group of participants in the field. These people – literary professionals who think of themselves as specialists in translated fiction – distinguish themselves according

to their taste. So 'like every sort of taste,' Bourdieu argues, 'it unites and separates [...] And it distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has – people and things – and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others' (ibid., 56).

For culture to survive, it had to become commodified and popularised. This involves simplification and packaging it in specific genres. Literary genre was born in America and then spread to Europe. Here, in the Balkans, we have always considered culture to hold universal values. When you have genres, you think in terms of who the book is written for: crime for a man, romance for a woman and some book with bunnies for a child. If you look at the list of top-selling books, you'll find they are written by authors of poor artistic abilities, but good at marketing. The need for content has been replaced with the charisma of packaging. Before, the manufacturers worked on improving the quality of the function. Cars served us half our life; TVs lasted twenty-something years; books were for life. Today, they are so trashy I don't see why I wouldn't throw out half of my collection. You can see that in London: people leaving books behind on the tube, supposedly for some higher purpose. I don't think anyone would give away a really good book.

Ivan Vidić

## 7.5 Brand(ing)

### 7.5.1 Consuming 'embodied trademarks' as culture

I wouldn't go as far as calling my London experience a success. It would be comical of me to wave around a few good reviews from UK broadsheets. Why did I come back? Because I had no money to stay. If I did, it would mean having to suck up to everyone, work in jobs I didn't like and having a low standard of living. 'You just need to eat a bit of shit and you're there,' I was told. I decided not to. And let's face it: the only person who really succeeded in London was Goran Ivanišević.<sup>78</sup>

Ivan Vidić

During my fieldwork in London, I attended a PEN-hosted event in the space called the Free Word Centre – a modern building on Farringdon Road that also houses offices of most organisations which campaign for free speech. The event called 'Easy Come, Easy Go' was attended by some 200 people and marketed as

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<sup>78</sup> Goran Ivanišević is a Croatian tennis player who won the Wimbledon Open in 2001, entering the tournament on the wild card. He is famous for having entertained the audience with his 'juicy' swearing (at himself), breaking rackets and performing a prayer to god on the court before serving for the match point. Apart from winning a large sum of money, he is remembered as an extremely likeable sportsman in the minds of the British.

a celebration of immigrant writing within British literature. George Szirtes, Marina Lewycka, and Daljit Nagra, however, are all writers who write in English as their mother tongue. Their 'immigrant experience', promoted as central in their artistic development, was confined to childhood memories of their immigrant parents. George, who was eight when his family escaped the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956, could barely remember his mother tongue. In his adult age, he travelled back to Budapest and re-learned it. After this reconnaissance trip, he included more Hungarian themes in his poetry: his publisher also consciously divided the poems into Hungarian and non-Hungarian, which increased the sales of his books. Marina Lewycka was one year old when she arrived in the UK: she told the audience she had been ashamed of her origin most of her life, especially when 'her parents served pickled herring to her English friends, or made her wear plaits'. She had only recently discovered the value of her cultural heritage, which she can express in her flawless English. For this, 'she is very grateful, knowing how difficult it is to sell translated literature in this country.' She said it is a good place to be: 'a native English speaker, assimilated in the culture, but with a sexy immigrant story to tell.' Nagra concluded the evening by saying that 'dislocation starts as a curse and a place where one doesn't enjoy being, but soon becomes a place where one goes back to.' When the audience asked why it was good to be in the place of dislocation, all three writers agreed 'there were advantages to being an outsider in a society: the *difference* and the fetishism surrounding it brings profit to the book trade.'

The catchiness of the event's title 'Easy Come, Easy Go' speaks of the nature of the literary market: different regions come into fashion as easily as they go out; what remains in vogue is cultural difference itself. The three writers are native to the British context, making them skilful at representing the cultural authenticity of their origin. This cleanses the very foreignness from the clunkiness of a foreign language and the density of foreign cultural concepts that would otherwise remain obscure or require numerous footnotes. When a writer begins their story with 'Let me tell you about my exile in English', is not the process of them becoming known and understood in a different culture smoothed over by this socio-cultural mediation? Who are these people who

fluently connect the two disparate worlds; what are the gains and losses that take place as they do it?

This section specifically focuses on authors as 'embodied trademarks': semantically and symbolically the most loaded brands in the publishing world. In the surrounding social web, their symbolic value is hyperlinked with brands of other agents and that of translated literature itself. So, for example, Ewan as a literary reviewer influences his peers' and readers' taste with his cultural and symbolic capital – he rarely needs to pitch ideas to broadsheet editors. He also might write of a new Serbian writer that 'he is a Serbian Hemingway' in order to tap into the common cultural 'code'. Hugh as a translator vouches for the quality of a foreign text that a UK editor is unable to assess themselves – based on his proven track record (quality of translation) and his allegiance to only promoting good literature, Hugh is imbued with a strong reputation. Broadway Books constructs its symbolic capital from its list of titles, which have, over time,<sup>79</sup> put it on the map of the most successful and trusted publishers of foreign fiction. Such relatedness of social agents and their brands creates not only linguistic but also socio-cultural translations of the symbolic value of the author brand. Lastly, a UK writer might also help to strengthen their foreign colleague's brand by recommending their book as night-time reading. I was once told that 'if Hanif Kureishi said in an interview he was reading a new Croatian author, they would be huge by Christmas sales'.

Lury (2004) begins discussing brands by debating whether a brand can be perceived as an object. Although not external, fixed, closed, or tangible, the brand, she argues, satisfies some other common dictionary definitions of an object: 'it is 'some-thing' to which some feeling or action is directed; it is objective in that it is the object of 'a purpose or intention'; and it is also 'a noun or its equivalent acted upon by a transitive verb or by a preposition' (Lury 2004: 1). It

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<sup>79</sup> Doris, a senior editor for Broadway, used to work for Random House. She explained why big corporations profit from buying small imprints such as Harvill Press: merger, for a small publisher, means escaping bankruptcy. The imprint will have to change their list but can probably retain at least 60% of its previous editorial policy, and will benefit from supporting facilities such as publicity and marketing. As a corporation, Random House aims to retain its status as a highbrow publisher, and Harvill's list provides exactly that, plus the entire backlist and all accompanying rights. With the most comprehensive list of major classics from all over the world, Harvill's backlist is worth millions: it is a source of steady money as well as growing reputation.

is thus possible to perceive personalities as 'embodied trademarks', the point at which their corporeal and immaterial existences merge. Furthermore, she insists, the brand is an open and extending entity, implicating social relations and patterning activities in time and space. I therefore find it more accurate to use the verb 'brand(ing)' than the noun 'brand', since it denotes a process and can more easily point to perceived inherent losses and gains to social actors. In isolation, the brand as a commodity sign hides the congealed social relations between people involved in communicating and producing meaning. This section is particularly concerned with deconstructing and unpacking these cross-linguistic and cross-cultural connections.

Brand(ing) fulfils several functions: a) it mediates the supply and demand of products through the organisation, co-ordination, and integration of the use of information; b) it creates imagined communities or reference groups of consumers by connecting people in non-face-to-face relations; c) as an interface of communication, it fosters a two-way exchange of information between consumers and producers about how they relate to each other. This section focuses primarily on how brand can be both 'revealing of some relationships, [while] keep[ing] others very well hidden' (Pavitt 2000: 175).

As one of the most significant symbolisation strategies, brand represents a shift from the use value to the symbolic value of a commodity: an abstract concept residing in the customer's mind (Applbaum 2004: 54). Marketers' increasing focus on the personality of the brand creates a compelling emotional effect which might be the only deciding factor for a consumer, while a consistent personality is easily recognisable and thus easier to advertise over time: this is why authors as 'embodied trademarks' are imbued with such strong symbolic power. Through constructing their authenticity, authors are able to mobilise trust in commodities, i.e. their books, that are often perceived as having been tainted in the process of commodification. To refer back to the social performance, trust is the currency that fosters the re-fusion of the author, audience, background representation, and symbolic capital: it purports to provide the *real* experience. In the context of 'primitive' art, which is useful to consider here, Errington (1998: 71) has argued that 'authentic' expresses nostalgia for the community of the organic whole, untouched by the market that might eventually destroy it. She defines the 'authentic' object as being of high

quality, handmade, of traditional design, and produced by a pure 'primitive' for traditional purposes.<sup>80</sup> The concept of authenticity, she adds, has most relevance in the Western market, as 'primitive' art is often intentionally being produced for that audience. Errington also observes that authenticity has increasingly been transferred from the object to the author. The building of the author brand, in the context of translated literature, should thus be understood as a set of practices by which the author is perceived as a provider of authentic and incorrupt experience. The charisma of their personal brand is then translated into their books. This argument should be understood in the light of narratives of entitlement and the genre of testimony discussed in Chapter 5, which illustrates how the personal story of suffering is what initially mobilises the demand for the foreign writer's work to be translated.

Personality brands have become recognised not only as something to 'fill up gaps in the market' but to imbue the customer with a sense of meaning and purpose in their life. In fact, and this is where Applbaum's view of marketing as an agency-driven system is useful, personality brands themselves *create* those gaps that are later filled with their books. Applbaum and Huggan (2001) refer to such sets of practices as cultural brokerage. Through reading Paine's *Theory of Patronage and Brokerage* (1971), Applbaum explains the following: people who transport messages or instructions faithfully are recognised as go-betweens, those who manipulate or process messages are seen as brokers. Similarly, literary translators could largely (but not always or necessarily) be perceived as go-betweens, authors who consciously choose to write for the metropolitan audience as brokers. Paine also adds: 'rather than facilitate the relationship between two different groups separated by social, economic, or political distance, the broker actually constitutes, moulds and redefines the very nature of that relationship' (Paine 1971: 6). Ex-Yugoslav authors in translation do not only influence the supply-and-demand ratio but are able to invent new commodities with which to fill gaps in the market for exoticism that do not currently exist.

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<sup>80</sup> Traditional design in the case of foreign fiction could be understood as literary subjects focusing on the people's 'mythology' and 'ethnic' culture (see Chapter 8).

### 7.5.2 The exotic as a system

The reason why I didn't stay in London was a matter of recognition. I didn't care for them; they didn't care for me. I didn't want to assimilate or market myself in an idiotic way, which is the *only* possible way when it comes to marketing. To have my work available is OK, but I personally want to stay as much away from the public eye as possible. You ask me if I want to succeed; the answer is 'not necessarily'. If I stayed in London, I would have had to work all day long. If you don't hit the jackpot with your writing straight away there, life is less humane than in Croatia. Here, I write from home and comfortably make a living out of it. In London, with having to survive, I would have no free time to write. Where's the logic in that?

Ivan Vidić

Cultural difference as *the exotic* is produced and marketed under particular material conditions. Graham Huggan's study of marketing the postcolonial exotic (Huggan 2001) explores the global commodification of cultural difference by focusing on authors as cultural brokers, who mediate this trade by speaking through the narrative of the exotic. Huggan asks several important questions: to what extent is their cultural and symbolic capital operating under the sign of the exotic; how are these exoticisms marketed and made palatable to the UK audience; and how do these authors negotiate with 'neocolonial' market forces? Huggan engages with the critique of postcolonial discourse by revealing its inner contradiction: on one hand it is a discourse of rewriting the social text of continuing imperial dominance, while on the other it is a token of symbolic value in a globalised commodity culture. If postcolonialism is a discourse of translation, rerouting cultural products from the periphery toward audiences who see themselves as coming from the centre, Huggan questions why the possibility of being translated is available only to a handful of famous writers. Bourdieu (1993) has written that cultural capital is never evenly distributed: it is acquired and transmitted through a complex process of legitimation negotiated between the producers and consumers of symbolic goods. Therefore, 'the literary field of cultural production is the site of continuing struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer' (Bourdieu 1993: 42). The question of how

'postcolonial' writers claim their position as cultural brokers within the field of cultural production can also be understood as a struggle between contending 'regimes of value' (Appadurai 1986). Struggles and disputes over the value of translated books (see Chapter 6) provide an example of such contingency of value. The commodifying process by which generalised cultural differences are manufactured, disseminated and consumed allows metropolitan readers to experience foreignness while literatures and cultures of the 'non-Western' world are turned into saleable exotic objects (Huggan 2001: 10). The value of these *localised* literatures in the *global* market of cultural otherness certainly reflects unequal relations of power. Cultural difference also has an aesthetic value, which can be understood in terms of the exotic. So what is exotic about an autobiography in translation (which is often how Dubravka Ugrešić's work is read) and how is this exoticism coded?

The exotic is not an inherent *quality* of people, objects, or places but is constructed through a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* - 'one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery' (Huggan 2001: 13). Stephen Foster describes the exotic as 'a symbolic system, domesticating the foreign, the culturally different so that the phenomena to which they apply begin to be structured in a way which makes them comprehensible and possibly predictable, if predictably defiant of total familiarity' (Foster 1982: 21). Foster's definition is particularly pertinent to the type of cultural translation that takes place in the production of foreign literature because this production thrives on keeping the exotic from being totally assimilated. As seen in Chapter 6, UK publishers' editorial control aims to domesticate the linguistic and socio-cultural awkwardness whilst allowing the experience of reading foreign books to create surprises. When smoothed over by the UK editor's hand, every foreign book functions along predictable lines of domestic literary poetics but with unpredictable content. A very similar process has been noticed in the context of beauty pageants by Richard Wilk (1995). His study of 'being local' in Belize reveals that cultural hegemony, though changing, is not disappearing: it promotes rather than suppresses difference, but difference of a particular kind. 'Its hegemony is not of content, but of form' (*ibid.*, 118). Wilk calls this process 'the global system of common

difference': a common code through which the 'local', 'ethnic', 'different' becomes a constitutive part of the global insofar as it is expressed in increasingly narrow and limited range of images, channels and contents.

Among several practices listed by Appadurai (1986) that produce *the exotic*, one is decontextualisation: a process in which the exotic value of an object depends on their removal from the original cultural/historical context. At the same time as an object becomes decontextualised and domesticated, it becomes perceived as authentic. This is not true only of 'ethnic' or 'tribal' art, but can also be applied to perceptions of translated literature and its authors. Through the process of translation, foreign literature offers the experience and understanding of the world and of *difference* as much as a dislocated writer (in exile) becomes an authentic voice of that knowledge through what Appadurai calls sympathetic identification. Authors and places they write about become reified into exchangeable aesthetic objects concealing the social relations that contribute to the construction of their brand.

The delivery of continual novelty (in content) into the UK literary canon contributes to the commodification of marginality; simultaneously, alternative literary forms are drained of anything that might challenge the system as a whole (Ferguson 1990: 11). This tendency is echoed in the WiT application form for the marketing grant:

English PEN is concerned that the British literary marketplace is weighted against writing in translation, and that this narrows our horizon and reduces our understanding. Since 2004 PEN's Writers in Translation programme has addressed this concern by championing writers from other parts of the world whose work is published in translation.

Celebrating marginality should not be critiqued *per se*, Spivak argues, but there should be an awareness that the perception of marginality as exotic becomes a legitimising category for palatable versions of cultural Otherness in society at large (Spivak 1990: 223; Huggan 2001: 23) This is at work when exoticism as a category is stripped of its political aspect.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> 'Cultural translation' through which the marginalised Other is appropriated and apprehended in familiar terms, Huggan argues, is not about cross-fertilisation, convergence, and mutual intellection. Instead, it superimposes the dominant way of seeing, speaking, and thinking onto marginalised peoples and expressions of their socio-cultural experience (Huggan 2001: 24).

In the exotic as a system, where does a cultural broker stand? Huggan illustrates this socio-political position with the example of the 'translatio imperii' (Cheyfitz 1991). This particular type of person, a barbarian, could speak the empire's language and helped impose Western Christian values on those barbarians who could not. The imperial mission, Cheyfitz argues, has always been one of translation: 'the Other was to be translated into the master code of empire through the agency of an "eloquent orator" who understood the empire's workings' (Cheyfitz 1991: 112). In the context of UK literary production, where editorial policy tends to homogenise foreign texts from all over the world to read the same, the question is: are foreign authors somehow persuaded to represent their respective cultures and translate them for the UK readership or does the value ascribed to their texts depend on their capacity to be representative of their culture? Linguistic translation in this context takes a back seat to cultural brokerage as the writers are mediating the global trade in exotic - culturally Othered - products and ideas (Appiah 1992: 149).

This type of cultural brokerage connects with studies on networking (Granovetter 1973; Burt 1992) which present brokers as entrepreneurs, bridging groups of persons who do not ordinarily have contact with each other and allowing timely access to information. In this process, the broker manipulates the strategically positioned resources, i.e. their connections and knowledge of 'the ropes' in achieving desired goals. Crucially, the more networks to which a broker belongs, the more influence they are able to exert: the more weak links they cultivate, the wider their area of influence. This is because strong links, which might hold a family or a close friendship together, are normally situated close to home. Boissevain's (1974) classic study of brokerage in Sicily focuses on 'friends of friends', a network managed by skilful brokers who are often able to translate their social capital into political positions and consequently material possessions. Catherine Alexander (2002) describes the process of brokering between a Turkish village and the state. There the communication is being negotiated by a village headman, who speaks on behalf of his villagers, with the state authorities. Without the headman's skill, the villagers would not be able to understand the language of the state and would be permanently 'caught in the interstices rather than intersections of networks of communications that might connect them to the state' (ibid., 2002: 150). Clearly, the broker's role is to make

different systems of meaning understandable to others: this can involve translation of the literal language, as in translated fiction, but equally includes managing cultural, social, and ideological codes that remain hidden to groups that would without a broker remain disconnected.

Though the ex-Yugoslav writers who feature in my research are not as well known as, for instance, Salman Rushdie or Chinua Achebe, they still prove adept at manipulating the codes of UK literary realpolitik: they are today's 'eloquent orators' who use their first-hand knowledge of the empire's working. They are considered 'native informants' in the discourse of the exotic. As they find their place in the repertoire of UK literary taste, for some, being a permanent transgressor is the very allure of their brand. This is especially true for Dubravka Ugrešić who has countless times been called 'a proper dissident'.

This theoretical overview of the exotic as a system does not intend to oversimplify ex-Yugoslav writers into lackeys to the system that ascribes them symbolic value: this would be to underestimate their agency in 'the global system of provisioning'. It would also devalue both the individual and collective agency of their readers, who do not constitute a homogenous consumer group. It is these writers' very position – between home and exile – that contributes to their literatures being read in many different places in the world and by many different readers. Their readership is not a fixed social group of valuing community because their texts are multiply dislocated and dispersed. By attending various launches of Ugrešić books in London, I found her readers relating to her through multiple categories: Croatian, ex-Yugoslav, post-socialist, Central European, exiled, marginal, etc. Every act of reading, hence of ascribing value, is specific to the particular regime that organises it. The concept of regime implies that no object, text, or cultural practice has an intrinsic meaning or value or function but that they are always the effect of specific (and changing/changeable) social relations and mechanisms of signification (Frow 1995: 145).

I now present the brands of two ex-Yugoslav authors: Dubravka Ugrešić and Aleksandar Hemon, Balkan warrior and Balkan hero.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Hemon was never explicitly called a Balkan hero: I use this expression to compliment Ugrešić's nickname of the Balkan warrior and also to reflect reviews of his work which largely emphasise his 'victim turned hero' position.

### 7.5.3 Balkan warrior and Balkan hero

There is one thing stronger than censorship and that is commercial viability. The thought 'I won't do this because it won't pay' in the mind of a writer is what creates self-censorship. This affects how books are written. You start wondering why write the way you really want if it doesn't pay. An attitude of that kind ruined literature as we knew it. Before, the drive for writing made you want to *write* the best book you could possibly muster. Nowadays, you wonder what is the book you can write that can *sell* best. What you can *sell* best is already limited to only a few themes, styles and narratives – this is called self-censorship.

Ivan Vidić

There is a curious fact about the word *brand* and its perception in marketing: it seems to have lost other meanings apart from 'trademark', e.g. the best brand of coffee. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, brand also denotes the following: 1) a mark made by burning or otherwise, to indicate kind, grade, make, ownership, etc.; 2) a mark formerly put upon criminals with a hot iron; and 3) any mark of disgrace; stigma (Soanes and Stevenson 2005). It is also quite common to refer to cattle as being branded (with hot iron) to refer to their ownership. These images conjure up unpleasant sensations of pain. Yet, within marketing, brand(ing) is perceived as a skill and an art: a strong brand is one of the most desirable capitals someone or something can possess. So, by retrieving the 'negative' meanings of brand(ing), which point to a restriction of freedom via ownership, this case study opens with the following question: what is lost in the process of author brand(ing)? Few studies, except Lury (2004), deal with brands as vehicles of limitation. She is clear that brands, as interfaces of communication between producers and consumers, conceal as much as reveal certain types of information. This case study is concerned with how brand(ing) limits the socio-cultural positions of their owners in the field of cultural/literary production that they mediate and organise. Many writers, as shown in Vidić's earlier quote, are aware that brand(ing) can function as a strong form of self-censorship: it defines the repertoire of themes, styles, and narrative roles once they are represented as particular 'embodied trademarks'. The cases of Dubravka Ugrešić (the best-known Croatian writer in the UK) and Aleksandar Hemon (the best-known Bosnian writer in the UK), nicknamed the Balkan

Warrior and the Balkan Hero respectively, illustrate the process of foreign author brand(ing).

It is certainly very prominent that both Ugrešić and Hemon keep writing about and through the images of the Balkans in each book they publish (see Fig. 5.2 and Fig. 5.3). Apart from Ugrešić's first two novels, written while she still lived in ex-Yugoslavia, her books have mainly been perceived as highlighting themes of experience of life under communism, exile, the fabrication of history, a critique of all forms of dogmatism (nationalism, chauvinism, the linguistic purism which caused the separation of Serbo-Croatian into two languages, Balkan primitivism as a mentality) as well as the commodification of literature in international book production. Although she has often emphasised at her literary events that her writing 'doesn't pretend to offer a universal account of exile', she has been described as a dissident of all regimes and narratives through abundant references in the UK media (emphasis added):

- 'Ugresic's work is unflinching and provocative, forever forging a balance between her *cynicism of the West and her despair of, and obvious love for, the Balkans*. This is a disturbing read (for *Ministry of Pain*) that should have you in its thrall.' *The Times*.
- 'Ugresic's cunning, subtle technique is at its most powerful here. Tragedy mingles with pastiche and bizarre humours. The novel's conclusion is *a profound and beautiful meditation on lost homes and territories, on the broken syntax of memory, on the self-inventions of rehabilitated refugees* and on the capability to return and find what we left behind.' *The Independent*.
- 'She has produced *a novel of insights and shocks*. It is one that is both profound and brilliantly illuminated by a very humane clarity... After reading Ugresic, I felt that if I'd had to be in a Balkan foxhole in the early 1990s and had had *her for company, I wouldn't have lacked for jokes, or a decent chance of survival*. So sure is her grasp of her themes, in fact, that it really constitutes a further pillar of her own argument: that perhaps the only way to attempt to make peace with events is to write about them. *Exile equals defeat*, Tanja reflects, and then *the return home equals the return of memory*. It is therefore a kind of death, so *the moment of departure is the*

*only true moment of freedom.* Or the moment of picking up a pen, she might have added.' Julian Evans, *The Daily Telegraph*.

- 'Can be placed in the company of such *landmark chronicles of dissent* as Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind* and Vaclav Havel's *Living in Truth*' (about *The Culture of Lies*). *Literary Review* (Susijn n.d., emphasis added).

Contextualising Ugrešić in the international canon of literature by comparing her to well-known Czech satirists Milosz and Havel is an example of the socio-symbolic translation of her value. Within the UK, Ugrešić's symbolic capital draws on such established names as Marina Warner, for whom she is a 'wise jester and aphorist with a madcap wit', and Lisa Appignanesi, who relishes her 'acerbic sense of life, and Eeyore grumpiness' (Jaggi 2008). Both, at a recent launch of *Nobody's Home*, have praised Ugrešić for 'still being a dangerous woman'<sup>83</sup> despite the fact that the Balkan wars have come to an end. Dissent from both Balkan mentality or state politics and Western values has become a well-moulded role for Ugrešić. Although her essay collections *Nobody's Home* and *Thank You For Not Reading* mostly focus on more universal themes of the commodification of literature and the demise of modern intellectuals, her socio-cultural capital is still fuelled by her position as a Croatian writer. This is because her life story, perceived as an authentic hero's journey, is defined by the socio-cultural and historical context from which she has emerged and which continually informs her writing.

Instead of presenting an exhaustive list of UK press reviews about Ugrešić's life and work, I will refer to just one, called the 'Balkan Warrior', written by Maya Jaggi for *The Guardian* (Jaggi 2008). This is a paradigmatic example of how Ugrešić's brand is constructed and disseminated in the literary field of production. Apart from its content, one should consider when and with what purpose the article was published. Through my fieldwork, I learned that Jaggi interviewed Ugrešić in October 2007. However, *Guardian* editors 'sat' on the article for four months, in anticipation of more breaking news from the Balkans. It was around the time when the announcement of Kosovo's separation was expected: a particularly good moment to run an interview with a Balkan

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<sup>83</sup> 'Dangerous woman' as an expression of Ugrešić's eternal dissent goes back to the article 'Witches from Rio' where she was called a 'whore' and a 'traitor' (see Chapter 5), two labels that she likes to 'boast' with at her book readings. Her current dissent is reflected in her critique of late-capitalist (literary) values.

writer who, as a representative of the region, could be asked to comment on the socio-political situation. Jaggi intended to write a review of *Nobody's Home*, as the book had just been launched in London. However, the text was edited into a review about Ugrešić's (exiled) life, interspersed with short references to each of her books written through the themes of her dissent and political struggle against 'all kinds of madness'. Only one short paragraph at the end of the article stated Ugrešić's opinion on the separation of Kosovo: 'it was understandable in reaction to Serbia's "chauvinistic arrogance" but she remains cynical about the nationalist rhetoric on all sides' (Jaggi 2008). As author and a bearer of ideas 'that can fill the gap in the meaning of people's lives', Ugrešić was celebrated for criticising nationalism as the 'ideology of the stupid' (*Culture of Lies*), insightfully dissecting the literary marketplace (*Thank You For Not Reading*), bravely exploring trauma, flight, and the violence done to selfhood by political upheaval (*Ministry of Pain*), and for lamenting the passing of underground culture (*Nobody's Home*) while charting nostalgia, not for communism but for its mundane souvenirs. Her ferociousness in struggling against any forms of banalisation and dogmatism were presented as continuing far beyond the bloody events of Balkan wars – as an eternal outsider and a lonely figure in the dehumanised capitalist world, her position was portrayed as one of a warrior. And, in that context, the word *warrior* implied a continuing fight; possibly even a battle that can never be won, no matter how romantically brave the dissident or how acerbic and potent her words. I have no knowledge of how Ugrešić feels about being called the 'Balkan Warrior' or being continually linked to the Balkans. However, the very 'origin' in the 'primitive' Balkans allows her to keep writing about and through its images which construct her author brand. The decontextualised substance of Balkanism, objectified into a commodity experience, and her perceived connoisseurship and authority over it, is what specifically *makes* her a 'unique and authentic' voice on the world literary stage.

Lastly, an important contribution to the set of practices constructing Ugrešić's brand(ing) is her choice of language. This is particularly pertinent when compared to Hemon's case. In 'Balkan Warrior', Ugrešić states that she continues to write in her mother tongue 'not because she thinks the mother tongue is holy or romantic, but because it's the easiest language for her to express herself in' (Jaggi 2008). As seen frequently in this research, however,

issues of language are always shot through with political intentions. For Ugrešić, who has critiqued linguistic purism in both Croatia and Serbia while mourning the loss of what used to be known as one language (though with two separate dialects), expressing herself in this now officially-uncategorised language can be conceived of as another form of dissent: a return to the communist and pan-national past before its pollution with nationalistic forces of separation. This *is* a political statement directed to *home* of not taking part in and not agreeing with state control of language or the way national histories were rewritten and fabricated. It is also a message to the international readership and the book market; a dissent from an overwhelming homogenisation of cultural and linguistic differences, especially noticeable in English translations. As much as Ugrešić's brand(ing) is fed with and supported by her cultural difference as a desirable commodity, her dissent from and critique of this very position that allows her to speak becomes even more powerful capital. She speaks in her own (now distinct) language, addressing both the pan-national valuing community of readers but also – as she translates herself conceptually and culturally – she speaks the language of the empire – albeit through literary translation.<sup>84</sup> In Alexander's language of social performance (see section 7.3), she speaks through the code even when she speaks against it. A strong author brand, therefore, is *not* based on keeping with one's mother tongue; the choice of language must be seen as a complex negotiation of positions and purposes in which authors engage at the site of cross-cultural literary production. This is precisely the case with Hemon, who uses his choice to forget Serbo-Croatian and embrace English in order to create a strong brand.

If it weren't so germane to his standing theme, it would seem crass to mention that Aleksandar Hemon was pushing 30 by the time he got around to learning English. One couldn't guess it from his exuberant prose: anyone who can catch a group-photo tableau as it 'ungrinned and disassembled' is clearly beyond good and evil as far as English usage is concerned. But the experience of cultural displacement – specifically, of uprooting from Sarajevo and making a new life in Chicago, as Hemon did in 1992 – is his recurring preoccupation. (Lake 2008)

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<sup>84</sup> When I first read *The Ministry of Pain* in English translation, I noticed nothing unusual. Yet, when I bought a Croatian copy for a Croatian friend, she remarked after reading only the first page: 'who is she writing this for? We all know what Yugoslavia was and when it fell apart. She could have at least edited it for the home audience.'

This review of Hemon's 2008 book *The Lazarus Project* in *The Independent* points to the two main socio-cultural anchors that have continually attracted the attention of the kind of literary readership that values cultural difference. One is Hemon's mastery of the English language – more precisely understood as his heroic journey from his 'tourist English' to mastery in the style of Nabokov, to whom he is laudingly compared. The other is the theme of displacement, a fruitful resource of Balkan themes and quirky main characters that abound in Hemon's prose as he constructs it as a play between history and fiction, with neither ever taking the upper hand. Although Hemon's literary allure was visible even after his first collection of short stories *The Question of Bruno* (Hemon 2000) – for which the London publisher Picador reportedly paid £154,000 (Schwartz 2000) – Hemon entered the literary limelight with *The Lazarus Project* (Hemon 2008). This could partly be explained through the narrative of his linguistic hero's journey. In 2004, Hemon won the US MacArthur Foundation's 'genius grant', worth \$500,000, in recognition of his effort to expand his already-enviable level of literary English. When *The Lazarus Project* came out, and literary reviews began to praise his 'overcooked style' with 'overstretched metaphors' he had deliberately developed as a critique of Carver/Hemingway simplicity, his transition from 'tourist' to 'master' of English was complete.<sup>85</sup>

Within the rich media coverage of Hemon's life and work, I have found only one scathing review by Stephen Schwartz (2000) who accused him of stealing the literary style of his compatriot Danilo Kiš – an ex-Yugoslav writer well-known among scholars of East European literatures. Schwartz also questions the quality of *The Question of Bruno*, which he calls 'a collection of pastiches and immigrant sketches, which would not have done credit to a college freshman'. He also claimed that Hemon never wrote *The Question of Bruno* in English, but had translated his 1997 volume of short stories *The Life and Work of Alphonse Kauders*, published in Bosnian in Sarajevo. Whether the latter is true or not, the fact is that Hemon never mentions Kiš as his literary role model,

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<sup>85</sup> The literary critic James Wood has recently described Hemon's English as 'remarkable for its polish, lustre, and sardonic control of register'. Harrison adds: 'His writing, as many have observed, is reminiscent of Nabokov's. Both fizz with similes; animating the inanimate, reimagining the commonplace. Here is a slug in Hemon: "The dew on its back twinkled: it looked like a severed tongue."' (Harrison 2008)

while he continually refers to Nabokov's *Lolita* as his linguistic crucible. Not a single review of Hemon's work fails to mention this heroic journey from literary frog into prince. One from *The Guardian*, called 'Brave New Words', reads like this:

Hemon soon ventured far beyond *Lolita*, becoming possessed by what he calls the 'library demons'. 'I read everything all the time,' he said, all the while obsessively hoarding his stock of words. He transcribed them onto hundreds of index cards, and if he could not immediately remember a word he had already looked up, he would punish himself with the laborious process of leafing through the weighty dictionary once more. The hoard became a 'mental warehouse' of industrial proportions, jammed with a bookish vocabulary that went far beyond the requirements of his employment - which, at that time, consisted of going door to door raising funds for Greenpeace. He would drop words such as 'thwart' and 'hirsute' into his casual banter, and then wonder why his would-be contributors looked at him as if he were a salesman from Mars. He learnt his next lesson: 'Every word has its context. You have to learn the context.' Memorising an entire language by rote was an arduous and often dispiriting process, and for a long while, Hemon found himself in the tongue-tied limbo of the hapless exile. 'I was between languages for three years. I couldn't write in Bosnian or in English. Whatever I said in English, I was lying, cheating. I was misrepresenting myself.' (Borger 2000)

The 'new Nabokov - an outsider who has come to English as a second language and shown us how it should be written' (Borger 2000) has been praised for even braver words than Nabokov or Conrad themselves (his two literary references). Borger claims that Nabokov, raised in a trilingual household (speaking English and French as well as Russian), and Conrad, plunged into an English-speaking institution (the Merchant Navy), had it much easier than Hemon, 'a mere refugee, one of many in an immigrant-filled city where most get by for years on the sort of tourist pidgin he arrived with.' And while the divination of Hemon's linguistic victory fills around two-thirds of each review, I found only one reference revealing that the 'Balkan Hero' had actually received a degree in English from the University of Sarajevo (Harrison 2008). Hemon confirmed this information to me in person when I attended his book launch in London in 2008. Having myself received a degree in English from the University of Zagreb (and I doubt that the fall of Yugoslavia affected the academic curricula in Zagreb and Sarajevo, which used to be the same), I can with a high degree of

certainty claim that his English could not have been on a 'tourist level' when he arrived in Chicago. Even without knowledge of these facts, Hemon's symbolic and cultural capital clearly rests on the fact that his extremely difficult journey towards the mastery of English occupies a central space in his brand(ing) practices. So, in addition to the perceived effort that this journey must have taken, Hemon is compared to and hyperlinked with the charisma of two giants of international canon rather than Danilo Kiš.

'Balkan Hero' and 'Balkan Warrior', as a choice of words, imply an interesting difference. Hemon has successfully completed his journey to the other side, the way mythological heroes are victorious once and for all. The warrior, instead, continues her battle as a mode of existence. Yet both modes of being, arriving or having arrived at success, provide a similar effect and purpose for the two ex-Yugoslav authors. If they seem disparate at first, they nevertheless belong to the same narrative of suffering and entitlement. Hemon's linguistic displacement, an 'amputation' (Borger 2000) from his earlier life, is contrasted with his writing that continues to be flavoured with everything Balkan,<sup>86</sup> forms two focal points through which he negotiates his position between insider and outsider. Quite differently from Ugrešić, who continues to be called a Croatian writer, Hemon is now known as a Bosnian-American or simply American writer. In various interviews he claims that he is a much better writer in English than he ever was in his mother tongue. 'In English,' he reports, 'I have the linguistic sensibility of a child, and the mind of an adult.' In his view, this is a result of his experiences between living in Sarajevo and settling in Chicago as a refugee. His linguistic exile from his mother tongue simultaneously makes him an insider to his English reading audiences, yet the constant reminiscence of his immigrant hardships – as literary tropes in his prose and references to his personal life – perform a constant change of direction towards being a cultural Other. While Hemon is adamant that he 'does not want to be the voice of Bosnian suffering', the particular English-speaking context which decodes his messages undoubtedly hears him as the (alluring) voice of the suffering Bosnian.

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<sup>86</sup> Hemon's themes centre on Bosnia in all its modern ages – from Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination through the long years of Tito's rule to a few brief golden years between the extinction of communism and the explosion of rabid nationalism, when Sarajevo flowered as an exciting and magnetic cultural centre (Borger 2000).

Another difference between Ugrešić and Hemon lies in which facts their audiences perceive as tragic. Ugrešić has continually been seen as suffering from the autocratic regime of the nationalistic Croatian government and as an insider of the tragic war that happened in the Balkans. Hemon, who in 1992 came to the USA as a young journalist on an exchange programme, was caught in the country and unable to return to his native Sarajevo. Even though he was spared both the bloody horrors of the Sarajevo siege and the political repression Ugrešić faced, the sympathetic identification with his story is based around the fact that the war prevented him from going back to his home country. Whether he really wanted to go back is unimportant; the tension between him being perceived as wanting to go back and not being able to is what creates a moment of suffering in his reader's mind. Narrated through Hemon's life story, entrapment in the USA as an immigrant almost equals imprisonment. Even though he says that his family life with an American wife and a daughter is settled in Chicago, he points out that 'immigrants and outsiders are in the best position to be good writers, with their blurred affiliations, because they are one step removed from both a society's language and its everyday reality' (Borger 2000).

Specific narratives of suffering and heroism have enabled both writers to construct their authentic selves, which is, according to new marketing gurus, the most powerful tool for creating a brand. In the brand(ing) process, why and how they have struggled become less important than the character (Balkan Warrior and Balkan Hero) through which the narrative is being shaped. A different character role might present the narrative's meaning and purpose in an opposite light: an eternal dissident or grumbler might be seen as an enviable position and being stuck in the USA when the bombs are hitting Sarajevo a stroke of luck. It is a particular type of reading and construction of meaning that sees suffering as the most dominant function of these two writers. Whether ongoing or completed, that construction of meaning is additionally made possible through the negotiations of their positions of being inside and outside. These positions are not fixed to a specific moment in their biography: they were not first insiders then outsiders then insiders again. Instead, the positions are re-enacted simultaneously through the evocation of their literary themes, the facts

of their lives and their translation into new cultural concepts that shape literary values in their adopted countries.

Although this is not comparative research, it should be emphasised that Ugrešić and Hemon are not isolated cases in the UK literary marketplace. Similar brand(ing) practices involving the production of authenticity and language negotiations are also found in authors from other regions. For example, an Uzbek writer, Hamid Ismailov, was able to increase the symbolic value of his writing because of the extremely rare status of his mother tongue. This also played an important part with funding institutions that support literary translations. Both Ugrešić and Ismailov thus negotiated their exclusivity to strengthen their authentic brand. On the other hand, similarly to Hemon, Xiaolu Guo (a Chinese writer who lives in London) has recently made her debut writing in English with the novel/memoir *A Concise Chinese-English Dictionary For Lovers*. In her native China, Guo had published five novels before moving to the UK; two have been translated into English, with very limited commercial success. Her publisher, as I was told, was 'savvy enough to turn Guo's lack of English into profit and a powerful brand'. The new book, deliberately written in a broken English, has been widely accepted and read as an authentic story of someone who is struggling to understand the British and their culture.

Can these powerfully branded authors be more than their brand, or has the practice of brand(ing) reified only some of their qualities and positions into commodities that are then appreciated as authentic? My argument throughout this chapter has been that brands conceal as much information as they reveal, particularly the process and practices that make the final product available. Brands allow and hinder. In the age of mass information and profusion of life stories, brands allow the writer to assume a speaking platform from which they can find their readers and be heard. Paradoxically, what they also produce in the writer's life and work is a form of self-censorship; the branded writer can only exist between a limited number of character roles and socio-cultural positions that additionally shape their artistic practice.

Ugrešić and Hemon, as illustrated above, hold very strong author brands. Their symbolic value resides in the authenticity of their work, but even more importantly in their life stories: they purport to offer a *real* experience to English-speaking readers. In ex-Yugoslavia, however, their success is often a

topic of informal literary conversations that echo a tone of resentment and complaining. At first sight, these conversations seem to express people's feelings of helplessness towards the global literary politics yet a simultaneous decidedness against such brand(ing) policies. As I became immersed in this culture of complaining, I noticed it served a different purpose – it was close to being cathartic. Writers complained about commodification and the exoticising that limited their options in the UK; ex-Yugoslav publishers complained that publishing local writers did not bring them enough profit; ex-Yugoslav readers complained about the quality of local writing and 'preferred to read books by writers who have experienced the world'. Brands of successful writers occupied a great deal of public and cognitive space in these conversations. Although their brands' symbolic value *did* travel across national and linguistic divides, the purpose and function those brands served was quite different for home and foreign audiences. Whereas Applbaum brings examples of Western brands travelling to various localities around the world, easily adapting and crossing 'cultural' differences, my ethnography has shown that authors engaging audiences beyond their home country must be understood as their brands having diverse purposes and functions to these dislocated readerships. Transcending nation-state commitments for writers has to be understood along the lines of their brand's purpose and function for dislocated readerships. Therefore, while as authentic 'native informants' in the UK they satiate the demand for the cultural Other, in ex-Yugoslavia they provide a topic and a social glue that engages people in conversations of complaining. Brands' disparate purposes as they cross into various contexts reveal their inner tensions. Despite these contradictions, they nonetheless function as powerful interfaces of communication while at the same time mediating the literary market. In other words, they are resourceful impersonal brokers.

## 7.6 Conclusion

This analysis of the brand(ing) process in the context of translated literature in the UK looks specifically at the set of practices that allow a foreign author to become a cultural broker. Reconstructing this process begins with the argument that the Romantic notion of a creative genius, which celebrated individual

creativity, enabled a modern understanding of both authority and authorship to take hold.

My perspective on marketing views both producers and consumers as resourceful social actors who co-participate in mediating the supply and demand ratio: an agency-driven set of practices. This approach allows a focus on consumers' demand not for objects but for multisensory experiences of, particularly, 'cultural difference' and ideas and practices that shape their lifestyles and self-images. Reflecting on the processes of globalisation and commodification explains how translated literature becomes branded as one way in which a desire for consuming cultural difference is satisfied. In this process, the construction and reading of the foreign author as exotic is experienced through their authentic voice. The exotic qualities of ex-Yugoslav writers and their stories become objectified and, as much as they are given visibility, they are largely stripped of their power to influence domestic literary practices. As writers become 'embodied trademarks' and cultural brokers, their literary expressions are read and valued as accounts of 'native informants'. Brand(ing) thus allows them to engage in the communication process with their English-speaking audience, at the same time limiting the number of meanings their messages can provide and literary ways in which they can be told.

Brand(ing) can, therefore, be seen as a dialectical process of constructing and practising free speech in a free market of stories. On one hand, it provides the writer with a speaking platform, often on the basis of free speech/plurality/liberal rights; on the other, it creates a powerful self-censorship as the writer begins to be reified into a limited number of themes, poetics, and roles. The idea that the free market creates opportunities for plural voices and stories and a perfect competition - which in itself implies notions of progress, civilisation and cultivation - is a contested model that in reality reflects many 'imperfections' and limitations to individual autonomy and 'freedom'. In addition, because foreign fiction as exotic content is judged by a certain type of aesthetics, always socio-culturally embedded, it is stripped of most of its 'speech' or 'political' efficacy.

Ex-Yugoslav writers as cultural brokers and 'embodied' trademarks' travel across national divides, and their symbolic power is communicated both to home and foreign readership. They reflect an increasing globalisation of

fragmentation. In the context of marketing, they also rightfully redirect anthropology's focus away from only the site of exchange. As they are involved in various types of socio-linguistic (re)translations, their brand's symbolic value is often internally conflicted and so it is beneficial to look for the function and purpose they fulfil for their various consumers.

## 8 Big Nations' Literature and Small Nations' Sociology

### 8.1 Literature as a Window into the World



Fig. 8.1. The 2007 *World Voices* festival had a theme 'Home and Away' and put great emphasis on motifs of exile, migration, and diaspora. This was a header for its marketing material.

Since 2005, American<sup>87</sup> PEN's literary festival *World Voices* has taken place every year in April in New York. It is marketed as the largest festival of international literature: a celebration of literary diversity. Writers, publishers, and editors from all over the world gather for a week full of exciting readings and literary discussions. The festival's message could be read as follows: the whole world is *here-and-now*; the centre of *here-and-now* is New York. Over the last two decades, topics of displacement and migration have densely populated the world of letters. In 2007 this was reflected in the festival's annual theme: Home and Away. Writing from a migrant or exiled position has become fashionable. As much as academic discussions count on these positions to deconstruct the national(ist) nature of literary canons, the literary marketplace mobilises them in the 'old' ways. In other words, no matter how displaced writers are from home, their literature is still expected to provide local images while they continue being classified according to that 'lost' home.

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<sup>87</sup> American PEN is the name commonly given to PEN American Center, based in New York City. Another PEN centre in the USA, called PEN Center USA, works with writers from the West Coast.

### 8.1.1 Introducing the 'world republic of letters'

Chapter 7 has shown how authors' ethnic origin, their Balkanness, becomes a salient feature in constructing the authenticity of their brands. The world literature explored in this chapter further reflects this process's geographical, temporal, and aesthetic embeddedness, particularly as contextualised at live international literary events. My ethnography centres on one large festival and several smaller events. My arguments about how world literature is read, performed, and marketed thus refer to these public discourses and do not purport to cover perspectives from individual readers or university departments.

Throughout this chapter, I engage with the concept of world literature as: a) a specific set of knowledges produced about the world and cultural difference; b) a socio-political and cultural perspective through which certain texts are sought after, read, and canonised; and c) a commodity with a global market-value. Understandings of world literature have changed throughout history, particularly in relation to wider socio-political events and movements. This trajectory starts with Goethe, often perceived as a founding father of the *Weltliteratur* project, runs through Cold War images of the world, and leads into other more recent ideas of nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006) or a process of 'narration' (Bhabha 1990). Common to all these is the connection between literature and nation. Whether world literature is about a better understanding *between* nations, a better understanding *about* unknown nations, or challenging the coherence of the nation itself, a writer can only become internationally known via their national origin.

Ethnographic accounts from the *World Voices* festival, which purports to represent the global community of writers, illustrate how national representations are produced and appropriated within the international book market. Much scholarship has been concerned with world literature as a university subject: one of the most recent challenges has been balancing the growing diversification of writers' localities with the intensity of scientific rigour (Moretti 2000; McInturff 2003). Although these insights have been valuable for my research, my ethnographic data focused on non-academic contexts, adding a pertinent aspect to studying world literature – its commodity value.

My main argument revolves around the notion of world literature as a window into new uncharted lands. Similar to the mobilisation of (ethnic) culture in the brand(ing) process (Chapter 7), world literature offers a form of intellectual tourism, entertainment, and a desired lifestyle. What international literary professionals' circles call world literature is, therefore, the literature of small<sup>88</sup> nations available in English translation. It is most often written by exiled, migrant, or otherwise displaced writers – cultural brokers – who 'speak the dominant language' and offer a view into their 'culture'. Written, marketed, and read as such, works of world literature today are mostly read as *ethnographies* of places to which metropolitan readers seek access. They are perceived as authentic accounts of foreignness. In this communicative process, their readers, while being educated about various 'cultural' differences, also establish themselves as politically liberal. Works of world literature are thus appreciated in aesthetic terms only insofar as they conform to the dominant metropolitan poetics. In a political sense, they conceal traces of the violence and power struggle that take place within the literary geopolitics of the world.

Ideas and practices of foreignness are central to how the project of world literature functions. Just as the postcolonial exotic exists as a specific reading practice, world literature should be understood as a particular political worldview. Amid growing globalisation and localisation, it provides easier access to diverse national literatures, yet in terms of literary poetics it diminishes diversity and creates a uniform expression dotted with bits of *ethnic* information. The foreignness of translated fiction is also understood differently from the non-conformity of domestic narratives. My ethnography shows that it is important not only to establish the aesthetic value of foreignness but also its socio-political function in the process of communication between the reader/consumer and the writer/cultural broker.

Finally, the last section provides ethnographic data from two positions I enacted simultaneously: researcher and literary agent. This endeavour to introduce a Serbian writer to the UK audience highlights a variety of factors, discussed throughout this dissertation, that form part of a foreign writer's path into English-language publication. Their position of representing their country

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<sup>88</sup> 'Small' in this context refers to countries of small or limited literary capital (see Chapter 3 and below).

at international literary festivals points to a paradox of their cosmopolitanism: the detachment with which they offer an ethnography of their country is necessary for their story to be trusted and understood as evidence, yet that same cosmopolitanism is based on a concrete locality and an image of home – the same home left behind or no longer desired.

### 8.1.2 My window into world literature

In April 2007, I was given the opportunity to travel to New York and 'see for myself' what was marketed as the world's largest literary event. As a representative from English PEN, I travelled there to present the WiT programme to our US colleagues and to learn about their support of translated literature.<sup>89</sup> I was given two goals: one was to find out how the two PEN centres could pool funds and more efficiently support literary translation; the other was to observe and report back on 'why *World Voices* was successful'. This would help English and International PEN in setting up a sister festival in London the following year.

When I arrived at the American PEN office in Manhattan, I found a compatriot on the organising team: a Croatian woman, Ivana. We quickly fell into the habit of drinking coffee and having lunch together throughout my stay. This informal setting helped me to learn how the likes of Sam Shepard and Patti Smith had been lined up for this year's readings. The secret answer to my question was simply 'one important name', as my colleague drawled: Salman Rushdie. He had moved from the UK to become the President of American PEN and the patron of *World Voices*. Ivana told me that 'when he picks up the phone and invites someone to take part in the Festival, he never gets a *no* for an answer'. Many people hold him to be a literary legend, both for his work and his personal triumph against fundamentalism: 'everyone wants to be associated with a project he's endorsing', Ivana told me. She also said that 'most of his work on the Festival is just lending out his name to attract big-name writers'. Rushdie, as I experienced throughout the Festival, also gave opening and closing speeches: he delivered them monumentally and charismatically.

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<sup>89</sup> American PEN's translation programme funds translators rather than publishers. Proposals are judged solely on translator's and works' merit. This is done with the understanding that any US publisher invests considerable sums into marketing and would not need support from a public body, unlike the English PEN model.

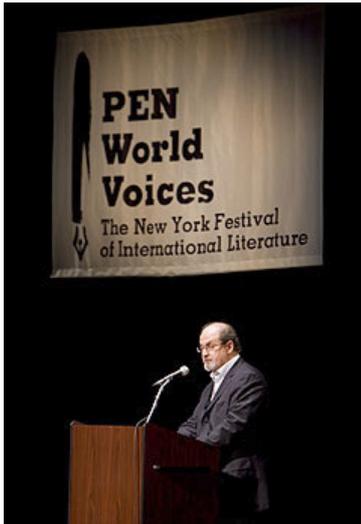


Fig. 8.2. Salman Rushdie at the opening talk in New York, April 2007.



Fig. 8.3. Patti Smith, singing at the closing night (the PEN Cabaret) in April 2007.

At *World Voices*, my five-year experience of the international literary scene culminated in the following realisation: there existed a front and back stage, and not just literally, although that too was part of the metaphor. A particular rhetoric about world literature was being produced and mobilised, which often did not match what *really* went on. Three major messages were sent to the audience: 1) we are all a big, diverse, and happy Family of Man, embracing everyone around the world; 2) literature, as a pure and purely aesthetic endeavour, independent of utilitarianism and commerce, speaks the universal

human language accessible to everyone; 3) as 'literature knows no frontiers' (PEN slogan) and campaigns against nationalisms, migrant and exiled writers are those who have the power to subvert such destructive forces: i.e. alterity is a site of political power.

As I attended readings and round table discussions, where I communicated with and 'consumed' literary diversity, the definition of *world* in the world literature presented at *World Voices* became apparent. It was similar to what today is understood as world music: 'commercially available music of non-Western origin and circulation, as well as all musics of dominated ethnic minorities within the Western world' (Feld 1995: 104). World literature, therefore, even though it is promoted as an equal brotherhood of literary voices, comprises that opus which has non-Western origin and is available in English. Thus, the choice and range of authors taking part in *World Voices* reflected a specific literary geopolitics (see below). Additionally, *voices* were not random 'authentic' sounds of literature, but were assigned as serious functions to certain writers: those from small nations were there to represent their 'culture', though most of them were actually displaced from the 'homes' they stood for. Providing a window into their 'culture' through their literature seemed to have become their ticket into world literature. In this sense, universality of themes or aesthetic disinterest were reserved for Western writers, as illustrated in the structure of various festival events.

Some events focused on a single country or region: one hugely successful event was called 'The Mediterranean Noir', celebrating the detective novel from countries that share a Mediterranean coast (Spain, Italy, Morocco), but also depicting the region as distinct, exotic, and mainly homogenous. Others highlighted a certain theme. One of the most frequented events, attended by almost two thousand people, focused on the political power of literature: it featured a writer from Africa, an Australian Aboriginal, and a Haitian writer. The message was obvious: only non-Western countries *need* literature to be political, and they need it to be *political* in the same way. Events featuring travel writing also revealed literary geopolitics. For example, a round table discussion about 'The Other Europe' was conducted by writers who were either Westerners travelling 'on the edges of Europe' or were native East Europeans who lived in exile.

The concrete numbers of writers and countries covered by *World Voices* support this argument. Charts of statistics collected from festival promotional material covering the period 2005–09 illustrate two important facts: first, small nations dominate world literature, contributing to the new meaning of the concept; and second, migrants, exiles, and émigrés from small nations make up the majority of *voices* perceived to be representative of their 'culture'.

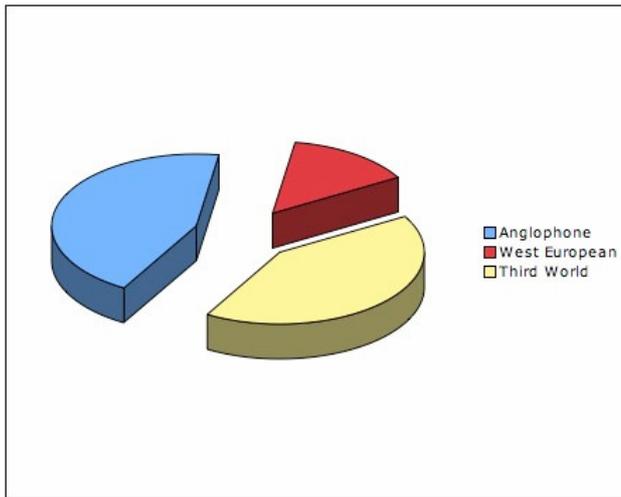


Fig. 8.4. The overall participation of countries at World Voices (2005–09). **Anglophone:** USA, UK, Canada, Australia, South Africa; **West European:** Italy, Germany, France, Spain, Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Portugal, Norway, Belgium, Switzerland, Denmark; **Third World:** **Eastern Europe** (Russia, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, Croatia), **Near and**

**Middle East** (Turkey, Israel, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Algeria, Palestine, Morocco, Libya); **Africa** (Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Somalia, Martinique, Zanzibar, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Congo), **South America** (Peru, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Nicaragua, Brazil, Argentina, Columbia, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Haiti) and **Asia** (India, Pakistan, Malaysia, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Korea, Indonesia).

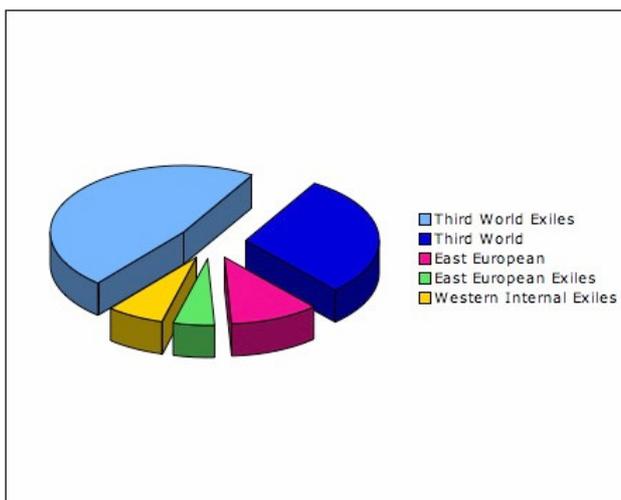


Fig. 8.5. The breakdown of the Third World category within which exiled writers constitute a majority: these are the writers from Third World countries settled mainly in Anglophone countries or elsewhere in Western Europe. I singled out Eastern Europe because of my regional interest. Only one of 378 writers was from ex-Yugoslavia: Dubravka Ugrešić. East European exiles are writers who

have settled, (again) mainly in the English-speaking world, with a few in Germany. Western Internal Exiles refer to minority writers, for example Catalan or Basque writers within Spain.

This information illustrates that the concept of world literature has changed significantly since Goetheian *Weltliteratur*. In addition to its historical contextualisation, which I shortly provide, world literature needs to be understood as a project cross-cut with divergent political and ideological intentions. I specifically comment on its universalist 'ideology' marketed and performed at festivals such as *World Voices* and socio-political conditions which allow it to assume the literary front stage.

Lisa Appignanesi, a British writer of diverse cultural and linguistic background and currently President of English PEN, has commented on the 'ambassadorial' role of writers around the world:

It seems to me that it is largely through fiction from elsewhere that we begin to understand the minds and lives of people from other cultures. The tensions in the world today make it all the more imperative that we do. In their capacity as writers, no writer represents a nation, and certainly not a state. Nonetheless, writers and their work serve as ambassadors – and very effective ones – for their cultures as a whole.  
(extract from written personal communication)

Lisa Appignanesi, President of English PEN

Foreign writers as 'ambassadors of their cultures as a whole' are precisely the kind of *voices* American PEN celebrates as part of world literature: the same recipe underpinned English and International PEN's aspirations for their own festival in London. Attributing writers such a function implicitly sets a quota for festival organisers: the lesser-known or more politically pertinent a place, the more writers from there are invited to represent their 'culture as a whole'. Globalisation and commodification of literature (see Chapter 7) has meant that world literature covers more stories from diverse localities; at the same time, their differences are flattened out, so what is preserved is only the form of a consumable exotic. In such a context, the ambassadorial role includes the following functions: a) the writer offers 'a native's point of view'; b) they do that from a detached position of exile, temporary residence abroad, or Western education; c) they fashion the information in an accessible way for the metropolitan reader (e.g. Rushdie (1991) writes that they translate themselves before the linguistic translation takes place); and d) they embrace and re-enact

the foreignness of their 'culture as a whole'. When I asked Lisa what makes a national writer international, she answered: 'the fact that their work is important enough to cross boundaries'. Interestingly though, becoming part of world literature also means remaining in their own 'culture as a whole' in order to be considered a *voice*.

## 8.2 Nation and Literature Hand in Hand

### 8.2.1 *Weltliteratur*: origins of world literature

From its earliest critical conception, world literature has been understood as having a national, even a nationalistic, component (McInturff 2003). Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, one of the first visions of world literature as a category, acknowledges this power of nationalism. He famously said: 'national literature does not mean much at present, it is time for the era of world literature and everybody must endeavour to accelerate this epoch' (cited in McInturff 2003: 225). Scholars of Goethe argue that he advocated for nations becoming aware of each other 'and if love proves impossible, they should at least learn to tolerate one another' (ibid., 225). While Goethe pointed to the productive possibilities of an international community of writers and readers, he did so fully conscious that national identifications in his time were extremely powerful – it was partly as a result of violent conflicts that the idea for (at least literary) understanding was being born.

Goethe's *Weltliteratur* was inspired by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, whose ideas expressed tension between a cosmopolitan humanity and national distinctiveness (Lawall 1994: 17). Herder emphasised both the unity of humanity and the importance of national character, suggesting that the nation's culture, as the product of the natural relationship between the people and their land, is precisely what allows a nation to contribute to civilisation in general. Such expectations and ways of reading translated fiction continue to be practiced at international literary festivals, with national writers' educational and ambassadorial roles being a constant part of *Weltliteratur*.

Kate McInturff explains that Herder's idea of particular national contributions towards civilisation in general was, in England, appropriated by

Mathew Arnold. However, while Herder never conceived of world nations in a hierarchical order of 'objectively'-established worth, Arnold believed that a tribunal of civilised nations should judge where on the continuum of civilisation each nation had its place. These ideas of progress and the ability of civilised nations' literatures to prompt others towards modernisation reflect the colonial and imperial socio-political context of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The literary 'conquest' of the world can easily be compared to the anthropological project of creating the Other as its object of study. Fabian (1983) argued that this happened when social Darwinists secularised, naturalised, and spatialised time, in other words when they conceived of the geographical space of the world as the chronology of human evolution. What Fabian calls 'typological' time was used to describe and differentiate parts of the world into qualitative opposites, such as literate vs. preliterate, industrial vs. peasant, urban vs. rural, whereby time became not a measure of movement but a quality of states (*ibid.*, 22-3). All cultures, past and present, were imagined as placed on a temporal slope of evolution (or its derivatives: civilisation, development, modernisation, industrialisation, etc.). The crux of Fabian's critique of anthropology's colonial logic rests in its denial of the coevalness of those it studies, i. e. their contemporaneity with the West. The geographical difference across space thus became perceived as a historical difference across time (McClintock 1994: 40), but most importantly difference also became distance: creating of the Other.

The evolutionary 'family' offered the indispensable metaphor for social hierarchy (synchronic) and historical change (diachronic). It provided an 'alibi of nature' for imperial interventions by which paternal fathers benignly ruled over immature children (McClintock 1994: 45). Sally Price (2001) has critiqued the apparent universality principle in the context of the Western market for 'primitive' art: for white Europeans and Americans, she argues, the mingling of races is an expression of their tolerance, kindness, and charity. This attitude implies that equality is not a natural reflection of human equivalence but the result of Western benevolence. International literary events and the inclusion of diverse voices into world literature thus imply that they have come about due to Westerners' broadmindedness and enlightened appreciation (*ibid.*, 26). World literature, which is represented as a happy Family of Man, therefore hides the geopolitical and chronopolitical premises of inequality on which it

rests. Such ideology is institutionalised within academic literature departments, where European national literatures are studied specifically while the non-European world is predominantly studied as regions that correspond to racial categories.<sup>90</sup>

The map of world literature thus might be envisaged as a geography of nations characterised by their present level of literary development. As my data illustrate, their inclusion in the 'family' is often an exchange between offering 'a window into the world' as commodity and receiving symbolic capital in the way of literary translation.

### 8.2.2 Reading *Weltliteratur*

In *What is World Literature?*, David Damrosch (2003a) argues that literature in general and world literature in particular are perceived in three ways: as a) an established body of classics; b) an evolving canon of masterpieces; and c) multiple windows into the world. The 'classic', he explains, is a work of transcendent, even foundational, value, often identified particularly with Greek and Roman literatures and closely associated with imperial values (Kermode 1983). The 'masterpiece', however, can be a recent, even a contemporary, work, without having to exhibit foundational cultural force. As 19<sup>th</sup>-century literary studies began to shift away from the dominant and long-established Greco-Roman classics, the 'masterpiece' was elevated to near-equality with them. Finally, as Goethe was developing his idea of *Weltliteratur*, he mentioned Chinese novels and Serbian poetry as his night-time reading. These kinds of books cover the third definition of world literature – that of 'windows into the world'.

Pascale Casanova (2004) describes today's geopolitical space of world literature as 'a world republic of letters' with its own economy that produces hierarchies and various forms of violence. Relations between literatures are governed by the amount of literary and symbolic capital defining both the centre and periphery; the latter's distance is understood in aesthetic terms. Although it is more practical to speak of small and big nations, world literary

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<sup>90</sup> One of the chief advocates of institutionalising the study of world literature at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Richard Moulton, supported the notion of literary evolution. He famously said that 'world Literature is the autobiography of civilization' (McInturff 2003: 231).

space is actually best imagined as a continuum, with dominant and dominated literatures at each end. This field's unifying force is the existence of a common standard for measuring time, an absolute point of reference unconditionally recognised by all contestants: Casanova metaphorically calls it the Greenwich meridian of literature. It is at once a point in space and a basis for measuring time, i.e. a way to estimate relative aesthetic distance from the centre of the world of letters. Casanova writes: 'The temporal law of the world of letters may be stated thus: *it is necessary to be old in order to have any chance of being modern or of decreeing what is modern*' (Casanova 2004: 89). This argument confirms Damrosch's definition of world literature as a repertoire of classics with transcendental value. Classics thus always come from literatures that are old and have chronologically achieved 'modernisation', at which point they are decontextualised from time and space and come to stand for all humanity: classics are always universal.

Because English is the world's most dominant language, there are no classics which are unavailable in English. In other words, literary translation into English is the foremost example of consecration. When a source literature is small, Casanova adds, translation is more than just the exchange of texts: it means obtaining a certificate of literary standing, in her words a *littérisation* (ibid., 135). Similarly, Bourdieu (1991) argues that linguistic translation always involves a translation of social and symbolic relations.

This theoretical review of the spatialisation and temporalisation of literary aesthetics in the context of world literature is illustrated by my ethnography. *World Voices* and other international literary events made me wonder which countries could be considered literarily big or small. Among Anglophone literatures, the UK and US canons are certainly the strongest, followed by Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. It is, however, common to find nesting Orientalisms (Bakic-Hayden 1995) applied to writers who write in English. For example, all types of writing that are not white, middle-class and male but are labelled ethnic, minority, working class, feminist, etc., are read as small nations' literatures – a good example is Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, a novel that was celebrated as a window into an obscure sub-culture. Former imperial powers, such as France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, even Russia, fall on the dominant end of the

continuum. Interestingly, Scandinavian countries, though economically powerful, are mostly also read as literary small nations. The rest of the world occupies the literarily-dominated end of the spectrum.

What is the difference between big and small nations and why is this important for world literature? Igor Marojević, a long-term research participant of mine and an established Serbian writer, said:

Small nations practically have no right to literature, only to sociology, judging from what most readers in dominant languages expect to get from their books.

Discussions with Igor and the following ethnographic data reveals that big nations' literature, almost as a rule, deals with universal themes, such as love, redemption, or scientific progress. The settings of these novels are rarely foregrounded. Small nations' literature, however, is largely perceived as an ethnographic, educational, and exoticised text offering a rich context of cultural specificities and peculiarities: the more exotic, bizarre, estranging – the better. Only a certain type of exotic which can be easily assimilated to the dominant cultural and poetic codes is sought after (see Chapter 7). Such reading practices situate small nations' literatures in a specific geographical and temporal context – they are denied universality. However, because they are also made into the object of the literary 'conquest' – the literary Other – their cultural specificities are flattened out. What remains is a decontextualised and commodified text in English, offering a window into the world. 'Writing small nations' sociology,' Igor told me, 'is the only way a foreign writer from a small country stands a chance of being translated into English.'

Several challenges arise within world literature as a window into the world: increased diversification and reading world literature as 'national allegory'. Firstly, in recent years the opening of so many windows into such varied times and places has driven the field to expand enormously. Similar concepts, such as world culture and world history, have been challenged by the inclusion of new or previously-silenced voices. Yet the expansion itself raises questions: are 'these newly visible texts [...] testimonies to a new wealth of cultural diversity, or are they being sucked up in the Disneyfication of the globe' (Damrosch 2003a: 10)? Damrosch substantiates his argument with two case studies of the reception of Japanese (Masao Miyoshi: *Off Center*) and Italian

(Lawrence Venuti: *The Scandals of Translation*) literatures into the English-speaking market (Miyoshi 1991; Venuti 1998). These studies show that the post-war reception of texts from Japan and Italy had more to do with American interest and needs than with America's genuine openness to other cultures. Even today, Damrosch argues, foreign works will rarely be translated in the USA unless they reflect American concerns and fit comfortably with American images of the foreign culture in question (Damrosch 2003a: 10).

If world literature today is the body of literary work in English translation that opens up a window into the world, what is its target 'culture' – what is *world* in world literature? Damrosch argues that literary works become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture; a space defined in many ways by the host culture's poetic tradition and the present needs of its own writers (see Chapter 6). In a nutshell, it is always a set of relational practices:

World literature is thus always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about a work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone. (Damrosch 2003a: 14)

Damrosch concludes that, as long as readers are aware they are reading foreign literature to acquire a window into the world, there is no danger in delegating it this function. I contend, however, that this makes for a reductionist approach. As a cultural artefact imbued with social capital, foreign fiction must be understood as a product of various ideological and symbolic forces. For example, several literary critics have pointed out that global consumerism restricts literary diversity while allegedly introducing and celebrating the multiplicity of voices. Steven Owen (1990) exemplifies his concerns in the case of the Chinese poet Bei Dao who writes in Chinese but specifically writes for the world audience. Owen argues that, in order to build their particular literary style for such appeal, these writers have to first imagine themselves being translated and then also imagine that there is such a concept as world literature. Owen vehemently opposes this kind of world poetry as 'it floats free from context, merely decorated with a little bit of local ethnic colour'. And though he

sees such poems as lacking real literary power, Owen claims that 'it may be that international readers of poetry do not come in search of poetry at all, but rather in search of windows upon other cultural phenomena' (Owen 1990: 29). In the UK, Tariq Ali calls the trivialisation and levelling-out of literary thought and style 'market realism' (Ali 1993), a direct reference to the Socialist Realism imposed during communism as a set of socio-literary norms (see Chapter 3). Ali writes that market realism has become a 'self-imposed strait-jacket' (ibid., 10). He sees literature reduced to just another branch of the entertainment industry and famously portrays the effects of globalisation as follows:

From New York to Beijing, via Moscow and Vladivostok, you can eat the same junk food, watch the same junk on television and, increasingly, read the same junk novels. In the newly marketised countries of Eastern and Central Europe, a book can be consumed just like a McDonald's hamburger... Just as the rival hamburger concerns advertise their respective wares, so the giant publishing concerns of North America and Britain buy authors and exhibit them like cattle. Potential best-sellers are auctioned by a new breed of literary agent. Such books need to be sold and it is at this stage that the hype-merchants enter the fray and the promotion begins. (Ali 1993: 8)

Specifically in the context of world literature as an academic subject, there has been a concern that a growing diversification means national literatures will be studied with less intensity. The problem arises when comparatists, as Damrosch calls them, want to broaden the focus beyond one or two periods of national traditions: who can really know enough to know it well? (Damrosch 2003c) This problem so far has presented only two solutions: either staying within a limited range of material due to the lack of deep knowledge of more than a few (West European) cultures or succumbing to a kind of scholarly ecotourism. With global visions, and more small nations' literatures entering the world scene, the Goetheian *Weltliteratur* project becomes increasingly unfeasible.<sup>91</sup> However, what should really be challenged is the nature of the mutuality Goethe advocated. The happy Family of Man and universal aesthetics, projected as literary values applicable to all, actually rest on power relations that underpin the process of translation and consecration of world literature.

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<sup>91</sup> Considering the dizzying multiplicity of cultures and texts, comparatists are experimenting with grounding their work in broad patterns and movements that would reduce or even eliminate the need for close study of individual cultures. Franco Moretti's idea of distant reading goes as far as to suggest not even reading individual literary works but analysing broad literary patterns (Moretti 2000).

The second challenge of world literature as a window into the world comes fore through the academic argument between Frederic Jameson and some postcolonial scholars, namely Aijaz Ahmad. In 1986, Jameson (1986) wrote that Third-World literature should be read as a national allegory. Even when, he argues, it is written in predominantly Western machineries of representation, such as the novel, 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society' (ibid., 69). Ahmad's critique, considered paradigmatic, calls this postulation colonialist in character and tendency. First, he argues that there is no such thing as an internally-coherent object of theoretical knowledge that can be called 'third world literature' (Ahmad 1987: 96-7). Secondly, Ahmad calls Jameson's notion of 'third world' literature his 'rhetoric of otherness' because Jameson portrays it as backward and still embroiled in those tasks that have already been completed in the West, such as nation-building. Clearly, Ahmad points his finger at the specific chronopolitics which denies 'third world' literature thematic and stylistic universality or contemporaneity with the West. More recently, however, Neil Lazarus (2004) has defended Jameson: it is not that Jameson thinks 'third world' literature is not as good as 'first world' literature; 'it is rather that the (Western) canon serves in the 'first-world' thought as a false universal, preventing any concrete engagement with 'third-world' (or culturally different) texts' (ibid., 55). My contention is that Jameson did not advocate an *a priori* allegorical reading of every Third World text; it would be correct, however, to assume that the allegorising process as a structural tendency has largely been defining how the West reads the Rest of the World.

The two challenges of world literature discussed so far raise the question of the writer's 'culture': how it is represented (as a stable, fixed, and decontextualised set of images), the salience of writers' 'cultural' belonging (ethnicity), and their function of representing it (cultural brokers). Georges Devereux (1978) pointed out a few decades ago the dangers of performing one sole type of social belonging 24 hours a day to the exclusion of the multiplicity of a person's wider set of social practices. The interesting phenomenon lies in how exile, migration, and ideas of cosmopolitanism are appropriated in the context of world literature. Since exile and writing away from home was the topic of 2007 *World Voices* festival yet a vast majority of displaced writers were

still expected to represent their home 'cultures', *home* remained present in all the narratives of cosmopolitanism, even if only as a reference point or vivid image to which the writers frequently returned. 'No one actually is or ever can be a cosmopolitan in the sense of belonging nowhere', writes Bruce Robbins (1992: 260). 'The interest of the term *cosmopolitanism* is located, then, not in its full theoretical extension, where it becomes a paranoid fantasy of ubiquity and omniscience, but rather (paradoxically) in its local applications'.<sup>92</sup> Many examples of how Dubravka Ugrešić exists between her home and foreign audience illustrate that she is not devoid of local connections but rather is multiply linked to the events and audiences at home and abroad. This position of being an ambassador of their 'culture', of offering a window into their world, is therefore highly negotiable (with the insider/outsider switch at hand). In concrete terms, it re-enacts the tangible experience of *home* as a static space that can be easily accessed through reading world literature.

Anthropology has widely used the word 'culture', mostly thinking of it in terms of fluidities and complexities. 'Culture' becomes a problem when it turns into a shorthand, either for the discipline or a wider political context, only to avoid enquiry into the causes of social processes. My ethnography suggests that the project of world literature has used 'culture' precisely in this static, reified way, which Chris Hann (2003) argues is not much different to the invocation of superstition. Hann's study of the Greek Catholic Church in eastern Poland shows that different traditions of sacred music have co-existed and influenced each other for centuries. However, in the public discourse, music is used to demarcate a singular national or ethnic identity, during which process 'culture' is equated with the group.<sup>93</sup>

The position of a cultural broker is compounded by questions of literary production itself. Whether exported from postcolonial countries and written originally in English or translated from a foreign language, a growing proportion of works in recent years has been produced primarily for foreign

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<sup>92</sup> Hannerz (1990) asserts that cosmopolitanism is a mode of managing meaning rather than a signal of belonging. As 'cultures' are less space-bound and more diversified, cosmopolitans' relationships take place beyond face-to-face situations. However, Hannerz further argues, this is not a way of becoming a local, but rather of simulating a local culture.

<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Miranda Joseph (2002) has critiqued the representation of a uniform 'community' formed of members with common features. She not only debunks the feelings of warmth surrounding 'community' as a place different from the outside world, but shows its internal social hierarchies.

consumption (Damrosch 2003c). In the context of world literature, having one's literary work translated into 30 languages only a few years after publication is a fundamentally new literary development. Damrosch reminds us that Dante, for example, never thought of writing something that would be viewed as world literature. He actually wrote his *Commedia* in the vernacular precisely in order to be read by the widest possible audience in Italy, instead of using Latin to appeal to the European audience. So although 'writing for publication abroad can be a heroic act of resistance against censorship and an affirmation of global values against local parochialism', Damrosch concludes, 'it can also be only a further stage in the levelling process of a spreading global consumerism, and this levelling process may affect the writers themselves as much as their readers' (Damrosch 2003a: 11).

The implicit imperial logic in the project of world literature, the representation of 'cultures' as stable and fixed entities in a subordinate position to the metropolitan centre, has been heavily criticised by Homi Bhabha. However, Bhabha has also argued for reviving the concept of world literature specifically to challenge this issue. In his article 'The World and the Home' (Bhabha 1992) he advocates the productive possibilities inherent in Goethe's *Weltliteratur*:

The study of world literature might be the study in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of 'otherness'. Where the transmission of 'national' traditions was once the major theme of a world literature perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees – these border and frontier conditions – may be the terrains of World Literature. The centre of such a study would neither be the 'sovereignty' of national cultures, nor the 'universalism' of human culture, but a focus on those 'freak displacements'... that have been caused within cultural lives of postcolonial societies (Bhabha 1992: 146)

Bhabha's proposed focus on the 'freak displacements' that would trouble representations of national coherence is a fundamentally important revision, additionally re-evaluating and challenging core notions of world literature that are both nationalistic and imperialistic. In other words, nation has always been the basic category by which writers were accepted into the international literary canon. Today, exiled writers whose lives are endangered in their very home countries get categorised according to no literary criterion, just according to the

nation they have fled. Bhabha's argument leaves aside challenging the imperialism inherent in the literary mapping of the world, appealing instead for the nation itself to be demonstrated as lacking coherence. Thus his (anti)canon would include specifically those works of literature concerned with a form of cultural dissensus and alterity, where non-consensual terms of affiliation and articulation may be established on the grounds of historical trauma (Bhabha 1992: 145-6). Bhabha's picture of world literature is a defence of the migrant or, as he has written elsewhere, 'culture's in between', against the nation's self-declared centres (McInturff 2003: 234).

As migration becomes a more common human experience in the age of globalisation and definitions of 'home' and 'away' are reconceptualised, Bhabha's suggestion to introduce a migrant writer as the main sovereign of world literature makes perfect sense. However, this thesis has demonstrated that the exilic position and writing produced outside the home country are already anything but neglected in world literature. In the case of ex-Yugoslav authors (see Chapter 5), precisely that 'in between' position gives those writers a new lease of prominence, from publishing deals to literary festivals and readings. However, even as exiled writers, they are still recognised and categorised through the nation they have left behind. And if that nation with time becomes less politically troubled – for example, Croatia has turned from a wartime frog into a touristic prince – then they are labelled and read through their position as 'freakishly displaced'. Small nations' literatures are, as a rule, read through the rich repertoire of their particularities, while big nations' literatures are 'allowed' the humanistic universalism Goethe advocated so many years ago. Although Bhabha's project of decentralising and deconceptualising the coherence of the nation is welcome, it seems not to help overcome the constricting labelling of writers who are not creating in metropolitan centres.

## 8.3 Sampling World Literature

### 8.3.1 Which foreign is the right type of foreign?

The aesthetics should neither be reduced to sociology nor counterposed to rationality and politics.

Galvano Della Volpe: *Critique of Taste* (cited in Ali 1993)

Heather is a literary translator who contributed regularly to this research. I used to meet her at the Royal Society of Arts, an impressive building off the Strand, where she is a member. She translates from four languages and is widely known and respected in UK literary circles. She also has a great sense of humour, particularly when it comes to the 'problems of literary translations in this country'. When she was only starting out, she told me, she was instructed to use as few foreign words as possible in translation. The difference today is that linguistically the presence of foreignness is smoothed over through editing while the cultural peculiarities are what attracts attention. Heather shows no satisfaction with such a turn of events and comments on the 'hypocrisy of UK publishing':

When you read *Lord of the Rings*, you find a mass of stupid neologisms and names that you can't even pronounce. Isn't that foreign too? Why do people buy it like crazy? Only because the guy who wrote it was English...

I soon discovered that Heather was right: isolated foreign words for objects and practices revealing a new 'culture' have stopped being a problem and become an attraction. Anything that can be explained away and 'tamed' by using language and literary style which in themselves do not stand out or repel the reader becomes a desirable kind of foreignness. I witnessed this at a session of the Bloomberg<sup>94</sup> reading group which had chosen a work by the Icelandic writer Sjón, *The Blue Fox*. The meetings took place shortly after a Sjón event at the *Free the Word* festival in London – the sister event to New York's *World Voices*. While the participants were helping themselves to free lunch – sandwiches served on richly-decorated platters – I asked Sjón's translator how she had managed to get the work commissioned. The book had been published in 17 other languages before being picked up in the UK, she told me. The final push came from a German publisher who vouched for the novel's quality with Saqi (its UK publisher), but the translation had also largely been funded by the Icelandic institute for the promotion of national culture. 'Iceland is one of the best countries for a writer,' she joked. 'There is so much public support for writing; around Christmastime, there's nothing but programs about writers and their books on TV.'

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<sup>94</sup> Bloomberg is WiT's main sponsor and also funded the first sister festival of international literature in London.

Most participants of the reading group shared concerns about the narrative being disjointed and difficult to follow, resembling poetry more than prose. On the other hand, they found the book's topic very stimulating: it tackles difficult social issues, such as abortion policy and the social exclusion of Down's-syndrome children. Ideas of strong national identity are played out through images from old Nordic mythology, weaving in stories about Viking warriors, deities, and supernatural creatures, all dotted around the majestic snowy landscape. Most participants seemed to have enjoyed the 'fantastic' aspects of the book: even the Blue Fox is an allegorical creature. No matter what they called this non-realistic layer, the readers invested effort to sift through the 'disjointed' narrative in order to enjoy the deliciously foreign parts. Finally, the translator reminded us that *The Blue Fox* is Sjón's only book with magical and folk elements. Otherwise he writes 'realist, everyday' prose with 'normal' characters who have 'problems just like anyone else in the world'. *The Blue Fox*, interestingly, is Sjón's only book available in English, though he is well known for his collaboration with Bjork.

I spoke to Sjón after his event at *Free the Word* festival. '*The Blue Fox*,' he told me, 'made it into translation precisely because it was exotic enough for the UK readership.' He also emphasised:

Readers don't want to hear how *similar* two cultures are, but how *different* they are – they want to learn about another country by focusing on the differences only if those differences are told in the language that is communicable enough for them. An Icelandic writer writing about something universal, such as marital problems of a couple, is boring to the UK reader because they can read about it English books; but if they talk about snow, magic, and everlasting darkness, the UK readers will have satiated their needs.

The content of the exotic may change, but its aesthetic and socio-political reception remains the same. In that sense, what a Nordic mythology of fox-hunters and ancient Viking warriors provides for Sjón's novel is the same that images of gory Balkan war and primitivism provide for ex-Yugoslav writers. This, I argue, becomes the right type of foreignness, even if UK readers have to struggle a little through the dense narrative style. Especially if the foreignness can be presented in the form of glossaries, annotations, images, or charts, the window to the world opens up even more.

Ugrešić's novel *The Ministry of Pain* (2005) ends with a peculiar type of annotation, offering a window into Balkan 'culture as a whole' – it is a list of curses. Ninety curses that, written one under another, resemble a poetic chant conclude the novel as if with a message from an insightful researcher: this is what life is really like in the Balkans.<sup>95</sup> My personal observation whilst reading those curses was that I had heard of less than a quarter of them. Ugrešić herself said at one book launch that it had taken her quite some effort to collect them. This example supports Owen's depiction of world poetry as specifically written for the international audience. Similarly, in Ugrešić's non-fiction book *The Culture of Lies* (1998a) she assumes the position of cultural broker most openly and distinctly. Throughout the book she talks about both Serbs and Croats as equally 'primitive', and by introducing a surprising number of very specific historical and cultural details (even references from Slavic mythology) her intention is to represent the Balkans as a homogeneous region. In several essays, she addresses the imaginary foreigner learning about 'her culture as a whole' from reading her text and accepting the descriptions of everyday Balkan reality.<sup>95</sup> The position she takes is the same one Ivan Vidić (see Chapter 7) calls distancing oneself from the 'primitive, violent, and tribal' Balkans, and its performance is reflected in a kind of mock glossary at the end of the book. There, Ugrešić explicates 'a few brief notes for those readers who still find the author's position unclear' (Ugresic 1998a: 269). Glossaries normally introduce new linguistic expressions or cultural practices; yet, in this mock version, Ugrešić lists concepts such as: homeland, identity, patriotism, nationalism, fascism, communism, national history, language, a nation's writer, a writer's nation, exile, witches. A denotative level of information is offered, providing new knowledge about the 'culture'. However, the mock glossary allows Ugrešić to clearly state her position as a writer who wants to belong to world literature – a concept Goethe envisaged as relying on universalistic human values. In embedding herself in the position of a writer who writes against Balkanness in order to represent that very flavour on the international market of *voices*, she rarely questions the naturalness of either 'primitive' or 'universal' values or the division between them. Her performance of being a *world voice* hides the artificiality of such constructed concepts.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> For all extracts from Ugrešić's work mentioned in this chapter, see Appendix.

In his account of changes in teaching world literature at universities, Damrosch (2003c) argues that increased contextualisation, i.e. embedding the work of world literature in time and space, is a 'healthy' way of giving readers information about new 'cultures': translators had used to omit or smooth over such information to preserve the fluency and apparent purity of the text, though in reality 'they had to distort the text in order to avoid disrupting a supposedly direct encounter of reader and work' (Damrosch 2003c: 521). This argument is only partly true. Both examples from Ugrešić's books indeed demonstrate more footnotes, explanations, annotations, references to quite obscure information even for a native speaker. Linguistically speaking, however, the introduction of such new information has not radically altered or challenged the dominant poetic and cultural code. The way a story is narrated remains essentially very accessible to the English-speaking reader. What *has* happened is that the narrative is now additionally peppered with information that, though foreign, is *desirably* foreign: it represents the right type of foreignness, easily lapped up (see Chapter 7). A foreignness that becomes more prominent through added contextual information does not endanger domestic literary or socio-political practices and can easily be integrated and domesticated by consuming it as a ready-made product. Such contextual framing might, on one hand, inspire university departments to a more intense study of 'different cultures'. However, a broader understanding of how such processes are appropriated in public discourse, such as international literary festivals, raises concerns about this newly-found enthusiasm. Clearly, many readers do read world literature out of genuine interest in these countries. It would be unfair to say that, for example, the liberal-democratic convictions propelling them towards such a lifestyle are somehow wrong when they choose to buy a book from a Third World country. The majority of readers are, however, likely to be unaware of the culturally imperialist power struggles underpinning the project of world literature. Without such awareness, those readers will never know which other books and reading experiences have never made it into translation. When it comes to representing cultural difference in world literature, it is certainly never a strict either/or choice between total immersion and airy vapidness: world literature requires us to see it at once 'locally inflected and translocally mobile' (Cooppan 2001: 33).

Despite scholars' numerous critiques of exoticising tendencies, wider public discourse has still clung to a model of Otherness. Casanova describes the position of a foreign writer as neither too near nor too far from the metropolitan centre (Casanova 2004: 156). She quotes Jean Cassou, who back in 1924 wrote of the Spanish writer Ramón Gómez de la Serna: 'We ask foreigners to surprise us, but in a manner we are almost prepared to indicate to them, as if their role were to serve, on behalf of their race, our pleasure' (from the magazine *Nouvelle Revue Française*, quoted in Casanova 2004: 157)

Proponents of new historicism have also practised the contextualisation of literature with the so-called classics and masterpieces. The new historicist school of literary theory, primarily known through the critic Stephen Greenblatt in the 1980s (Greenblatt 1980; Greenblatt and Gunn 1992), argued that the work of literature needs to be understood through its historical context as much as cultural and intellectual history is revealed through literature. H. A. Veesper (1989) named the key assumptions of new historicist discourse: literary work's embeddedness in material contexts, the inseparability of literary and non-literary texts, and the contingency of 'unchanging' truths. A well-known analysis of this kind is Stephen Orgel's (2002) reconceptualisation of Shakespeare, less as a creative genius and more as a clue to the world of (collaborative) Renaissance theatre. Clearly, this is an example of Western texts receiving an anthropological reading as well as aesthetic appreciation. However, such practices have largely been limited to academic contexts, while my ethnography centres on literary events and broader public discourse.

### 8.3.2 The anthropological exotic

The reading and marketing practices of world literature so far described is what the Serbian writer Igor Marojević calls small nations' sociology. When Marojević talks about literary geopolitics, he exudes irony and disappointment. Having lived in Spain for five years, he had tasted the Western style of publishing, of having to be 'a Balkan poster boy'. In Spain, he had a play staged and a novel published, but he also grew tired of 'writing for other people and always having to know what they want', so he returned to Belgrade. In 2007, he published an engaging and somewhat radical novel, a semi-historical account of life during the Croatian fascist state (NDH), set in a town called Zemun, now part of

Belgrade (Serbia). The theme itself – writing about Croatian rule over (Serbian) Zemun, which has been a taboo for the local readership, in what is now the post-conflict climate – proved additionally charged by having Hugo Boss as a supporting character. Boss is credited as a designer of the original SS uniform. Though Marojević's literary relationship with historical facts has always been playful, the truth about Hugo Boss's involvement with the Nazi establishment was thoroughly researched and backed with evidence; yet, it was something few people in the West knew about. I offered to help him approach several UK publishers with a sample translation, which he himself funded. Based on my UK literary experience, and given the country's 'obsession' with WW2, I was expecting Marojević's novel to stir considerable interest. I was wrong. Six publishers with whom I had worked very closely in the past ignored my suggestion. The one publisher who replied told me that 'Igor's literary style was too experimental and disjointed'. He also said that 'though Hugo Boss was an excellent sensationalist element in the book, for it to work, the book would really have to be about him, not about Croats, Serbs, and Germans'. In this publisher's view, the amount of ex-Yugoslav WW2 history an average reader would be assumed to know in order to appreciate the 'Hugo Boss sensation' or the politically subversive power of the novel was 'way too much to expect'. And, as a postscript, there was the inevitable question: 'has the writer had any problems with authorities – censorship, imprisonment, public defamation?' I said no, (un)fortunately not. 'How about any problems with the Orthodox Church – that would be interesting?' I said no again. The publisher then apologetically told me he would not be able to take the book on, though he himself, 'knowing the region a little, could really appreciate its potential'.

Acting as an agent to help a deserving writer be translated in the UK, I momentarily forgot what was expected from a national literature as an export product. Though he lived in Spain, Marojević was not prepared to change his writing in order to act as a cultural broker or the native informant of his 'culture as a whole'. Not writing exclusively for the world audience directed his poetic style, type of foreignness, and amount of local embeddedness. His novel provided 'too much of the wrong type of ethnography': a narrative that was too foreign for an imagined reader who has never been there. His intention was not

to interpret, translate, or represent his locality; rather, the locality was the background code shared among people of the same collectivity.

Graham Huggan (2001) writes of a specific writing/reading contract that he calls the anthropological exotic.<sup>96</sup> He specifically looks into the marketing and consumption of African literature on the Anglophone market:

It (the African literature) invokes the familiar aura of other, incommensurably 'foreign' cultures while appearing to provide a modicum of information that gives the uninitiated reader access to the text, and by extension, the 'foreign' culture itself. Thus, the perceptual framework of the anthropological exotic allows for a reading of African literature as the more or less transparent window onto a richly detailed and culturally specific, but still somehow homogeneous – and of course readily marketable – African world. (Huggan 2001: 37)

Huggan uses 'anthropological' in the sense of mobilisation of a series of metaphors for the reading and writing of foreign cultures. I similarly ask to what extent writing and reading of ex-Yugoslav literatures deploy these anthropological metaphors. Some authors write about and through these metaphors (Ugrešić) while others (Marojević), consciously or otherwise, refuse to. What might be some of the implications of such anthropological writings and readings? And are such practices the only way for world literature to exist in the age of globalisation?

Some scholars (Asad 1986; Gikandi 1987), while agreeing that reading foreign literature as anthropology might be a useful tool for students, indicate dangers of misunderstanding and misapplying anthropological models: they might result in assuming literature 'to be a mere reproduction of reality, and language a tabula rasa that expresses a one-to-one correspondence between words and things' (Gikandi 1987: 149). Huggan further insightfully argues that inaccurate views of what anthropology is, does, and represents may reinforce rather than dispel the misconceived notion that a literary text can provide unmediated access to a foreign culture:

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<sup>96</sup> Huggan's term 'anthropological exotic' is a non-anthropological use of 'anthropological', referring largely to exoticising practices of foreign fiction in public discourse. Latour (1993: 94-106), who attributes anthropology's asymmetrical nature to two great divides, provides an anthropological self-critique of the narrative of the exotic: the first divide, which took place within 'us', was between nature and society (human and thing), followed by the second divide between 'us the modern' and 'them the premodern'. The rise of science initiated the first divide and made 'us' think we have become modern. Latour's anthropology of science calls for the rethinking of these distinctions.

'By latching onto the cultural information putatively presented in the text, readers reproduce and reconnect with the already available body of Western cultural myths. What is at stake here is not so much the referential validity of the text, its degree of ethnographic "accuracy", but rather the *politics of representation* in which it is embedded and in which its writers and readers inevitably intercede' (Huggan 2001: 40).

The discourse of the anthropological exotic places the foreign author in the position of having to represent their 'culture as a whole'. Bhabha's otherwise-welcome project of deconstructing nationalism(s) within world literature should come with reservations (8.2.2): although migrant, exiled, or displaced writers have become the sovereigns of world literature, they are still burdened with the function of representing their 'cultural difference'. Rosemary Coombe has written that only foreign authors are expected to do so, and are often critiqued while representing their 'localities'. No-one asks white authors who gives them the authority to speak about artistic licence or universal values. She writes further: 'Those who have intellect are entitled to speak on behalf of universal principles of reason, whereas those who have culture speak only on behalf of a cultural tradition that must be unified and homogeneous before we will accord it any respect' (Coombe 1998: 243).

Additionally, within this narrative of Otherness, Hal Foster (1995) has challenged not only the artist's role as a 'native informant' but also the assumption that alterity is the primary point of subversion of dominant culture, which would imply that Bhabha's 'freak displacements' automatically have access to transformative political power. In Foster's view, these assumptions risk the artist as ethnographer becoming part of 'ideological patronage' (ibid., 302-3) and enable a cultural politics of marginality. His review of site-specific art with ethnographic mapping of a local community - a practice easily compared to world literature - has revealed that values such as authenticity, singularity, and originality, long banished through the postmodernist critique of art, come back as properties of the site or community. In this way the artist/writer's practice 'is read not only as authentically indigenous but as innovatively political' (ibid., 307).

Weighing the positives and negatives of the anthropological reading and marketing of African literature in the UK,<sup>97</sup> Huggan duly asks: what are the long-term consequences in the politics of representation of small nations and world regions? And what happens to literature itself? The anthropological exotic, as a set of writing and reading practices, serves to celebrate the notion of cultural difference, yet it simultaneously assimilates that very foreignness into familiar Western interpretative codes. For a small nation whose literature is virtually unknown, such a marketing strategy provides space and a specific market-value on the international literary market, but that value is derived from its status as an object of intellectual tourism. Ultimately, this is far less a debate about the level of anthropological understanding of a foreign 'culture' in the context of world literature, far more a question of the specific material conditions under which such understandings are constructed. What needs to be considered is a wider historical sense of how and in whose interests cultural knowledge about foreign cultures is produced, both in general and more specifically in the context of literary production.

Much analysis in this and the previous chapter relates to recent scholarship on globalisation and deterritorialisation within anthropology. The symbiotic relationship between worldwide social relations and local happenings has had implications for both anthropology's theory and methods (Kearney 1995: 548). Several worldview universals, namely space, time, and classification, have undergone radical reconceptualisation. For example, time is less perceived as stretching from the beginning to the end of history, while the division of space into centre and periphery has increasingly been challenged. The German Romantic vision of a culture being rooted in national territories has thus failed to account for social phenomena in a world where more than a hundred million people are displaced or stateless. These facts have seriously undermined ideas about cultures being coherent and bounded entities. Kearney argues that there

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<sup>97</sup> For promotional reasons, Heinemann, a UK publisher, has maintained an African literature series for several decades. The implied invitation to read it as ethnography, Huggan claims, helped perpetuate the exoticisation of Africa. African writers' books emerged as a valuable tool for the student of African 'culture', a notion reinforced by the provision of glossaries and other forms of annotation, which did little to correct stereotypical views of a romantic Africa of primitive, tribal existence (Huggan 2001: 53).

is a call for a more complex, non-unitary definition of identity: a new process of classification that will perceive subjects not in either-or but in both-and-and terms (ibid., 557). Social relations thus envisaged would resemble a system of networks between decentred subjects, not unlike the Internet or hypertext (ibid., 549).

These conceptual changes have been exemplified throughout my thesis in the way a sense of belonging to Balkanness has been mobilised in the construction of author brands and the marketing of foreignness as commodified experience. Such deterritorialisation is in contrast to the idea of diaspora whereby people imagine themselves part of a nation outside their home country: in the case of this research, writers can 'be anywhere in the world and still not live outside the state' (Basch, et al. 1993: 269). My ethnography also relates to insights into how symbolic and cultural capitals circulate globally, just like ores, plantation crops, and other raw materials formerly brought to the metropolises for consumption. 'Ethnic goods' such as cuisine, dance, music, and literature are nowadays turned into commodities and consumed as symbolic capital. Albeit tangentially, my research thus also speaks to studies of tourism, possibly the largest world industry of a commodified experience of foreignness which promotes the consumption of fleeting images and experiences (MacCannell 1989).

## 8.4 Conclusion

Though the idea of world literature dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its practices have changed with time and in tune with global political movements, yet it has nonetheless always been related to ideas of nationhood. This fruitful partnership began as an effort to create a world of more understanding, built on universal values to which each nation would contribute its specific worth and flavour. Today, as the coherence of nation is continually questioned, we see migrants, exiles, and 'in-between' writers fitting the position of representing their 'culture'. Although nation and home have been reconceptualised, images of stable and permanent 'culture' – something that can be understood and consumed – are still employed in everyday practices of literary representations.

My ethnography from the *World Voices* festival of international literature questioned the concepts of *world* and *voice* as appropriated in the context of

literary production, discussed the imperialist logic of the project of world literature that still perceives the world in evolutionist terms, and concluded that world literature today consists of Anglophone literature and translated Third World fiction, specifically written to provide ethnographic information about a foreign 'culture'. Several international literary festivals proved that, whereas English-speaking writers were not burdened with the role of representing any particular 'culture', writers from small nations were expected to act as ambassadors of their 'culture as a whole'. Universal themes unburdened by contextual information were continually reserved for English-speaking writers. Small nations could buy their ticket into world literature only by agreeing to the specific contract of the anthropological exotic. This set of practices positioned the foreign writer as a cultural broker who offered plenty of contextual background – the right type of foreignness – fashioned so as not to disrupt or challenge the dominant narrative of literary and cultural representations. This position of the writer as ethnographer and cultural Other, however, may not automatically become the site of transformative political power that public discourse seems to assume.

Reading world literature as ethnography does give space and visibility to previously-neglected literary traditions. However, it also contributes to the commodification of cultural difference and the continued cultural imperialism of the whole project. Ultimately, to understand the project of world literature one must consider the broader social and historical conditions that produce such a politics of representation of cultural difference and their consequences on the lives and works of foreign writers.

## **9 Trust Me, I'm an Author: A Conclusion**

This concluding chapter answers the empirical question raised in the beginning of the Introduction of how a foreign book ends up in English translation by drawing on my own experience as a fiction writer and amplifying this response with conclusions drawn from previous chapters. This is followed by an explanation of how my research has contributed to various academic disciplines and what new avenues have presented themselves as useful to pursue. I lastly return to the story of how anthropology and literature speak to each other by highlighting the author-function in both ethnographic and fiction writing and commenting on translation as a cultural concept. Thus, the closing remarks sum up my personal and professional engagement in this dissertation's themes.

### **9.1 'Authonomy'**

'Authonomy' is a neologism; a linguistic cross-over between the words 'autonomy' and 'author'. It is also a website (<http://www.authonomy.com>) run by a publishing giant HarperCollins where unpublished writers submit their work and are judged by a wide online community. The idea behind this project is for HarperCollins to mitigate the risk of publishing a flop and increase its likelihood of spotting a bestseller. The website, however, is marketed as a hyper-democratisation of reader choice and a benefit for everyone: readers decide what they want to see published, writers get their work noticed without battling with gatekeepers, publishers enjoy an increasing profit. By tapping into the already-established narrative of the free market where everyone has a chance to succeed (writers) and the right to choose their commodity (readers), the project creates a new mythology of authorship. The writer is perceived as an autonomous social actor, completely unconstrained by editors' and publishers' opinions: all they have to do is win over their readership on the *authonomy* website. The top five writers with most votes secure a publishing deal with Harper Collins, an event the website markets as 'when a writer becomes an author'. Having bypassed the usual *friends-of-friends-agent-publisher* route, the writer thus 'authonomously' becomes a published author. In reality, however, the writer has emerged from the expectations, values, and tastes of their online community as well as from this new publishing mythology. Its narrative

represents the 'autonomous' writer as a resourceful, publishing industry-independent, and community-beloved individual. All the while, though, these social interactions take place in a snazzy virtual space expertly designed, hosted, and supported at HarperCollins's expense.

Despite the challenges the publishing industry has faced throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and afterwards, the Western concept of the author as autonomous and distinctive has remained untouched. Both my ethnography, and my personal experience as a fiction writer highlight authors as social actors and active participants in relations that surround them locally as much as globally. If modern authorship is understood as a social performance, one aim in this research has been to show what goes on backstage, behind the public performance. I experienced the substantiality of the social network in the process of writing my novel. During fieldwork in Croatia, I spent much time with people from the publishing house I have a contract with. These literary professionals are involved in the book production process in a variety of ways, from cultivating and 'improving' the style of writing to publicising books and authors. The idea for my novel was quite vague and I needed to do more thinking before I even began writing it. One of my participants persuaded me to share those ideas and just tell him 'what the book was going to be about'. This, as I explained, was not in tune with my 'superstition' about speaking thoughts while they were still being shaped. That evening, and at many other future meetings, we worked together on 'my' ideas for 'my' novel. Some suggestions I liked, some sounded unreasonable to me, such as 'kill the main female character at the end of the novel to create more drama'. The truth was that, by the time I had the synopsis ready, it became a product of more than one mind. Besides starting as an idea in my own head, it was also a reflection of whatever those people knew about Croatian publishing and local literary tastes, the particular dynamics created among us as team members, and expectations we had from the finished product.

As part of the EWI mentoring scheme (see Chapter 2), I started writing this novel in English and received regular feedback from my UK mentor. This was not only a commentary on my writing style, reflecting imperfect non-native English, but also involved the socio-cultural expectations an average UK reader might have and a culturally-specific dynamics of mentoring. For example, my

mentor was very much against 'killing off the main female character', and in fact suggested I wrote the novel from the first- rather than an impersonal third-person point of view. Certainly, this change of voice would dictate a rather different regime of truthfulness, creating a contract between the author and the reader resembling autobiography; even if the novel was pure fiction. It was fortunate that this forging and fashioning of my text from the 'outside' was taking place during my fieldwork: it gave me a unique perspective on the rest of my ethnography and, not insignificantly, saved me from taking the 'criticism' too personally. I concluded that the product to which one person – the author – makes claims through intellectual property and a socially-constructed notion of creative genius is in fact a work of many intermingled social relations; those that date from the past as much as those that are projected into the future. The book designed and produced in this way also reflects the local and global literary economy, by which I mean both specific literary tastes and the global underlying power structures between various literatures. I realised that in this experiment, I was the only person who 'spoke both languages': I was the cultural broker in the position to communicate across and between linguistic, cultural, and economic codes and thus negotiate the foreign literature market in the UK. And because I had still not been published in the UK but was carving my way towards it, it was easier to notice that the translated literature market on which this research has focused is not a naturally-occurring phenomenon but a socially-constructed and mediated field that comes into being through the actions and strategies of those who take part in it.

## 9.2 Tales of Trust

The stories of how ex-Yugoslav books come to be translated into English and become part of the world literature project are largely tales of trust. This dissertation's three main concepts – translation, authority and authenticity – have served as a magnifying glass as well as a common thread linking together my ethnography. Through these concepts, I have explored how trust is perceived, negotiated, and socially embedded. In the opening vignette, *The Arvon Magic*, I illustrated how the assembling of multifarious entities sets the foundations for the project of world literature. For example, neoliberal narratives of aid and development set in motion the funding scheme of UK

public institutions that look for the 'right' beneficiaries. These people are normally grouped into categories to allow the ethical demand for extending pity and help with limited resources to be answered more easily. The vignette showed that the category and position of exile can mobilise such public support for writers, while providing a sense of achievement for helpers as well as securing them membership of a discernible social group. The coming together of diverging ideas, practices, and people, however, occurred under the helpers' conditions, which exiled writers in Devon dubbed 'the English way'. Many of them explained that 'the English way' was a particular process of smoothing over and flattening out any awkwardness, whether linguistic or socio-cultural: in other words, domestication. Becoming part of the cohesive community thus offered protection and a platform to speak from, but it also dictated the terms: cultural difference was embraced and celebrated thematically, but it had to be expressed in structurally limited ways. This left most of my colleagues in Devon feeling disappointed and unappreciated: they became aware that performing their socio-political position was more important than their literature.

The background chapter, *Publishing Yugoslavia*, provided a socio-historical context for both UK and ex-Yugoslav literary production. Certain beliefs about literature are encountered both in the UK and the region, that: capitalist literary production is free from any but commercial considerations; (post)socialist literature is bound to state ideology; and translation into English is a purely aesthetic enterprise. An extensive overview of UK publishing industry illustrated that the market for translated literature is heavily influenced not only by commercial but also political, ideological, and institutional factors. Namely, state subsidies, additionally guided by global political currents, play a major part in the choice of foreign books translated in the UK. A certain historical moment in ex-Yugoslavia produced Socialist Aestheticism, a literary movement during which literature was thought to be unhindered by state ideology; in practice, the removal of literary practice from everyday reality was itself an ideological act. After challenging the widespread public opinion that post-socialist literature needs to acquire the free-market model, I provided a view of literary geopolitics that reveals unequal economic, political, and power relations. This global field of literary production resembles a literary 'conquest' of the world and hides the underlying imperialist and

colonialist assumptions about the West and the Rest of the World. Such extra-linguistic considerations for the domination of English are an integral part of the translation process from small and dominated languages: they should not only serve as an accompaniment to aesthetic regard but form the basis of academic scrutiny of this field and its processes.

The Two Silences chapter spoke through the ongoing anthropological debate about individual human rights against cultural relativism and offered an ethnography about free-speech protection. Vladimir Arsenijević's case study, because it featured both his 'rise and fall', exemplified a successful assemblage and simultaneously a dis-assemblage of ideas and practices of free speech on the free market of books. I argued that the concept of a dissident writer, a symbol of the fight for free speech, is socio-historically constructed. Whereas during the Cold War the narrative supporting it produced many successful projects of protecting dissenting writers from East and Central Europe, nowadays it is less likely to gel with existing stories in the Balkans able to sustain these representations. Because most Balkan dissenting heroes looking to exercise their *right to write* no longer work towards the coherence of Western neoliberal concepts of free speech and free market, their stories and books struggle to cross into English translation. Moreover, Western free-speech campaigners commonly perceive that no open censorship in the Balkans equates to a meaningful practising of free speech. This chapter's ethnography instead illustrated a model prevalent in Serbia that Arsenijević dubbed 'the atmosphere of noise': where everyone can say whatever they want without being censored but equally without being heard. This paradoxical situation pointed to the nature of speech itself, i.e. what speech *does* in addition to what it *means*. Because free speech is a dialogical form of address – including both speaking out and being heard – writers who were censored under socialism were able to yield more effect with their free speech or its curtailment than they can in the post-socialist Balkans.

Exile, on the other hand, offered a post-socialist writer a new lease of relevancy. Exile should be understood as a multi-layered processual stance, consisting of the story of suffering, using exile as a literary trope and a general performance at live events and media representations. Dubravka Ugrešić's negotiation of her exilic experience, unlike Arsenijević's, fed into an overall

Western project of neoliberal democracy and free-speech protection. Central to the ethnographic data was the 'Witches from Rio' article, used in Croatia to publicly defame her and doubt her suffering while the testimony to suffering was appreciated in the West for its truthfulness. This highlighted the socio-historical constructedness of trauma as a particular regime of truth, which has evolved from doubting to believing the same victim's experience of suffering. Ugrešić's story of suffering was trusted in the West specifically because it was undermined in her home country, constructing roles of both victim and witness for her to occupy. Much of the chapter focused on poetic rules of testimony – a preferred genre for recounting traumatic suffering – which makes ethical as well as epistemological demands on the reader. Because testimony conflates the roles of victim and witness, their experience is self-evidently recognised as truthful. The narrator of the testimony is then at once an insider of the story – the one experiencing it – and the outsider to it – the one who recounts it from a distance. In this way it resembles the strategic position of exile, which ex-Yugoslav writers occupy in terms of world literature. This position is both paradoxical and real: they at once write against their country (by critiquing their home country's regime and mentality in their books) and for their country (by representing their 'culture' and national literature abroad). Ethically, stories conveyed through the genre of testimony ask the reader to witness the suffering and, because they believe it to be true, offer their help. This type of narrative – the politics of pity – dovetails neatly with the project of aid and development, in which individual human rights are invoked to protect writers' right to free speech by saving them from the autocratic state they come from. In both the negotiation of community ties and the issue of human rights, it is more important to observe which narratives are being mobilised as cultural resources to achieve desired outcomes rather than assume *a priori* categorisations. In the context of ex-Yugoslav exilic writing, this meant that the organic image of home was continually invoked as a literary theme and the writers were classified against their country of origin. Simultaneously, rights to individualism, freedom of expression, and home of personal choosing were tapped into to support the narratives and realities of Western projects, such as free-speech protection and world literature as 'autobiography of civilisation'.

Foreign books travel certain routes on their way to consecration by literary translation into English, an exchange underpinned by certain social devices. A micro-analysis of social and linguistic transactions, focusing on their quality rather than quantity, helps to explain the infamous number of 3% of literary translations (of overall book production) that UK literary professionals commonly lament. Trust is a position and a resource most often mobilised in order to mitigate publishers' risk and secure book deals. Although people involved in publishing appeared to have inherent qualities of trustworthiness, I suggested a different approach: to concentrate on the processual nature of trust, revealed through switching and negotiating positions between belonging and non-belonging to either the UK publishing industry or the foreign book's country of origin. A 'no-personal-interest' stance perceived as an objective judgement was able to produce and support a large number of transactions. However, depending on the context, it could be negotiated by being both an insider and outsider. Because close personal ties could often produce 'objectivity' and yield book deals, I again questioned the free-market narrative and the naturalness of its representations of social actors as self-interested and autonomous individuals. Trust should thus be perceived neither as exclusively a reflection of professional objectivity (unconstrained free market) or 'amoral familism' (its imperfection), but rather as including elements of both categories. Just as people negotiate between belonging and non-belonging, texts travel on the same principles. Strong UK editorial control, embedded in historically-prevalent, fluent translation strategies, tends to domesticate the foreign text. This process functions both on the poetic level and more broadly in terms of global sets of representations that cross-cut literary translations. My ethnography illustrated that only certain types of foreignness were desirable and translatable: interesting and exotic content was welcome, but foreign-sounding styles of writing were deemed a hindrance. Because UK editors cannot change the foreign text to the extent they may with domestic authors, they choose only those books that already fit the dominant poetic code and socio-cultural expectations of UK readers. However, because they have very limited access to short sample translations, the whole exchange of books relies on intermediaries whom I called cultural brokers.

Examining the socio-historical background of the construction of modern authorship extended the discussion about cultural brokers by showing how the notion of authorship,<sup>98</sup> which appears natural to us today, was invented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in order to deal with the emerging literary marketplace. The idea of the individual creative genius which eventually supported the claim for intellectual property was mobilised as a way of distinguishing writers amid increasing competition. Not only was this a reflection of the free-market narrative and its projection of an unconstrained individual, but here lie the foundations of what in the 20<sup>th</sup> century became known as marketing. The emotional appeal on which products' symbolic value rests nowadays was already implicit in the aura of creative genius that has since imbued modern authors. A multi-sited ethnography supports my claim that cultural difference as represented in literary translations has become a desirable commodity due to two major paradigm shifts: from belonging to 'culture' to consuming 'culture', and from consuming commodities to constructing lifestyles. An increased globalisation of fragmentation has included more localities and 'cultures' in translated literature as commodity but means they are expressed in a limited number of themes and narratives. Foreign literature has been objectified in more than one way, stripped of its political and transformational potential by being flattened out and shot through with domestic cultural representations, and 'used' by consumers to construct their (self-)images and lifestyles. The social groups that mainly aspired to translated literature as a commodity were those that supported neoliberal ideas of democracy, in itself a loaded commodity sign resting on the evolutionist narrative.

The case studies of two author brands, Ugrešić and Hemon, illustrated the function and position of cultural brokers in the context of book exchange. Recuperating the forgotten meaning of the word 'brand(ing)' focused on restriction and limitation rather than attraction. Perceived as a dialectical process, brand(ing) offers authors a platform to speak from and connect with

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<sup>98</sup> The modern notion of authorship, i.e. the single author with no genealogy, was understood quite differently in the Middle Ages. Chaucer, for example, speaks of authorship, but also of authority to tell a tale, which came from placing yourself in a literary lineage and stating the story's provenance, i.e. denying that you made it up (Catherine Alexander, personal communication, 26 Nov 2010).

their UK audience, while simultaneously restricting their available range of themes, styles, and social positions. The question thus results: how free is free speech in terms of the limited number of stories and ideas that the market can accommodate? In other words, the brand itself often acts as a powerful self-censorship tool. This is especially noticeable in the set of reading and writing practices I call 'anthropological exotic', usually the only way by which a foreign writer might reach the UK readership.

Literature has travelled in partnership with nation ever since Goethe's project of *Weltliteratur*. Even today, when spatially-grounded 'cultures' and coherent images of nation are questioned, the public appropriation of projects such as world literature still rely on these categorical identifications. World literature today should be understood as a specific set of knowledges about the world and cultural difference, supported and represented through the contract of the anthropological exotic as well as a commodity with global exchange value. In this sense, the world was literarily 'conquered' through translated fiction from an increasing number of foreign localities whose cultural difference was celebrated and marketed as a commodity. However, this celebration and inclusion rested on the long-established colonial narrative of progress that conflates difference with distance and thus objectifies it. Foreign writers as cultural brokers were considered as representative voices of their 'culture as a whole' even when, and these were the majority of cases, they were exiled from or opposed to their official state. Unlike their white English-speaking colleagues, foreign writers were expected to offer a 'window into their world' by providing rich, often reified images of their countries. To be a representative voice, or to have any chance of belonging to world literature, they must remain present in their country, at least in terms of their literary repertoire. Borrowing an expression from one of my participants, I called this 'small nations' sociology' as opposed to 'big nations' literature'. Foreign writers thus find themselves in a paradoxical position: their cosmopolitanism rests on their firm embedding into, and conceptually never leaving, their country because they are always expected to represent it no matter how far into exile they have gone and for how long.

I have examined the translation of foreign literature into English with these broad questions in mind: what type of foreign literature gets translated

into English, under what conditions and what are the politics and practices of representation that such foreign fiction serves? Questions of literary 'quality' were thus perceived as geopolitical as much as aesthetic, while social processes enabling the travel of books highlighted personal and partial as much as institutional, 'objective', and universal motivations. On the most abstract level, literary translation into English, culminating in the project of world literature, was presented as a dialogic speech act. In order to be felicitous/effective, foreign writers had to secure the right kind of relation through negotiating with home/away or foreign/same positions. In this process of self-imagining and imagining their audience, certain kinds of information was always foregrounded and other kinds suppressed.

### **9.3 Recovering Collectivity, Embracing Risk**

#### **9.3.1 Contribution**

The social embeddedness of literature has been theorised in various ways (Laurenson and Swingewood 1972; Routh and Wolff 1977; Hall 1979; Lowenthal and Weeks 1987). Traditional Marxist literary criticism viewed literature as part of society, able to offer social content that will serve as information about society. It was preoccupied with questions about the social genesis of literature and the material conditions affecting its production. John Hall (1979) argued that such approach can be insensitive to literary texts, perceiving them as merely reflections of social context and ridding the author of any agency. Conversely, proponents of the English School, such as the critics Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, valued literature for its imaginative powers: they asserted that the writer was a creator who could actually construct and influence reality with the constitutive power of literature. Taken too far, this approach often disconnected literature from its social context. Neither extreme offered the right description of the tension between art and society.

Later Marxist theorists, such as Althusser and Eagleton (1977; 1991), approached literature as both social product and social force. They described the relation between literature and society through the concept of ideology and institutional constraints, emphasised empirical work and redirected the study of literature away from reading masterpieces towards considering average and

popular works of literature (Hall 1979). Theme-wise, sociology of literature focused on readers' construction of meaning (Iser 1993) and networks within literary systems. The former was explained as reception aesthetics: a local construction of meaning and value that readers collectively construct and that is influenced by their gender, class, occupational status, nationality and life experience. The latter included studies of gatekeepers who prevent certain types of writing being published, and (far fewer) studies of marketing agencies who actively participate in establishing literary trends and fashions. Gatekeepers were found not only within the publishing industry, but equally in literary organisations, government-run institutions, and overall ideological codes.

Literature was also used as a kind of sociology: thus, in the 1980s, a new interdisciplinary area of literary anthropology started considering narrative texts in various national literatures as the object of study. Looking at the specific writings of specific people was believed to offer an insight into the society they emerged from and thus add new dimensions to the study of community, nations, and nationalism. Literary anthropology considered both canonised and 'forgotten' books, claiming that they constitute the richest source of signs and data for both synchronic and diachronic analyses of culture (Poyatos 1988). Literary texts were not used as a substitute to traditional fieldwork. However, the context in which the literary work emerged, the intention behind it, the expected response, and the institutional relation between writer, text, and reader were believed to constitute the anthropological perspective in the study of literature.

My contribution to anthropological and sociological approaches to literature is evident both empirically and theoretically. In her review article of new directions in the sociology of literature, Griswold (1993) called for precisely the type of new research my dissertation has carried out. She highlighted the lack of consideration for the connection between literature and national identity in a context where more writers are producing literature in exile or emigration and when the nation's cohesion is continually being deconstructed. Literary anthropology quite unproblematically asked for the examination of 'national literature'. My research, however, questions and situates the very concept of national literature – what becomes a representative body of literature and what is actually being represented? – and problematises the position and identity of

the national and international writer. In the politics of representation that offers a writer international status, 'internationalism' means something quite different for a white English writer than for a Third World *voice*. Griswold further calls for the rediscovering of the author as an agent who (just like a reader) interacts with both the text and social context to encode meanings. My research shows that, against the grain of poststructuralist thinking, the author is socially constructed, historically situated but certainly alive. Ex-Yugoslav writers' socio-cultural embeddedness is made visible by pointing to extra-linguistic forces at work in the process of translation (economic, political, institutional constraints) but also by examining the everyday reality of social interactions necessary for books to travel across languages. Uncovering the social ties that highlight the collective character of modern authorship reveals and proves that there is much space for negotiating and manoeuvring one's position, within and across the immediate environment. This deconstructs the 'divine' quality of modern authorship but attests to different aspects of authorial agency.

Empirically-grounded research into translated literature focuses on aspects that translation studies often leaves unexplored. Venuti (2004) has asserted that most innovative contributions to this discipline have come from ethnographies of translation. Although emphasis on the translation process as contextually contingent has prevailed in recent years, a micro-analysis of its social interactions has not been widely explored. My dissertation thus offers a much-needed perspective on the extra-linguistic realities of the life of authors, translators, and books. Similarly, studies of literature that have focused on the material conditions of its production, such as the new historicism, cultural materialism, and cultural studies often focus solely on written sources of data or other types of audio-visual media. My research offers an ethnography of the everyday existence of that world of books that remains hidden during and after their production. The insight into minute details of the connections between people, places, ideas, and objects offers a study of how they come alive and how they are constructed, mobilised, and transformed in a variety of contexts. As an ethnography of movement and flow, it also contributes to studies of post-socialism and development because these focus on cross-cultural exchange of knowledge and other cultural and material resources. Specifically, my exploration of the use of free-speech and free-market narratives can enhance the

post-socialist scholarship which have already tackled how ideas of free market as the 'transitional' goal enter the language and practices of people in post-socialist countries. Free speech, however, has featured in an extremely limited way. As an aspect of Western individualist discourse and a potent symbol used and circulated in practices of globalisation, this research on free speech can enrich anthropological studies of post-socialism, globalisation, development, and human rights.

The anthropology of art, which has provided me with helpful theoretical guidance, focuses largely on issues of how the West 'discovers' and appropriates 'primitive' art. Though these studies have been extremely useful, particularly in terms of thinking about the construction of authenticity and representation of nations and regions, I believe my research offers new perspectives on the production of literature in a cross-cultural and global context, the connection between art and nation, and the negotiation of cultural difference.

Lastly, my dissertation valuably augments studies of the Balkans and ex-Yugoslavia. It would probably be next to impossible to study the region in the last 20 years and *not* consider the 1990s wars. However, as much as my research is influenced with and in many ways thematises the war, my aim was to offer a different perspective. As such, I show how narratives of witnessing and suffering from the war have become part of the Western humanitarian project and as such offer a necessary step in many writers' literary career. Fassin (2009) pointed out that the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s were a major step in the social history of trauma through which it went from being a discourse of shame and doubt to becoming a regime of truth. During that time, humanitarian workers were called on to witness and verify the suffering of those they encountered in the field. Their practices, among other things, contributed to the construction of the modern genre of testimony in which victim and witness, united in the role of narrator, are always trusted as authentically true. Narratives of the Balkans, as much as they reflect the original ideas of Orientalism, have their own socio-historical specificity. My research aims to integrate them into the broader study of literary translations and world literature.

### 9.3.2 New avenues

Two possible avenues for continuing this research suggest themselves: firstly ways to recover the collectivity of the author, and secondly new perspectives on how risk in publishing influences the skills, beliefs, and values a new type of author seeks to acquire.

Jay Bolter (2000) has explored the collaborative character of writing in the context of digital writing, which allows the reader to become a contributor in an unending process of reading and writing. This, Bolter argues, reverses the trajectory of print and invokes the collaborative writing milieu of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Internet writing can be compared to a medieval manuscript whose margins were used for conducting a dialogue with the text. Recovering collectivity digitally is a useful avenue to explore in the emerging context of social marketing. This touches on the topic of risk, namely because most authors today are encouraged to have a strong online presence. One way in which publishers try to mitigate risk is by directing the author towards self-marketing, cutting their own top-down publicity costs. But what kind of skills, beliefs, and values does the new type of author need to possess in order to succeed on the literary market? Jane Guyer (2009) argued that price incorporates risk and risk-mitigating instruments. The question in the context of the publishing industry is what type of mitigating strategies and instruments are employed: are they provided by people from within the industry, by outsider agencies, or by authors themselves? This avenue would particularly benefit from a further exploration and contextualisation of collective authorship, in turn raising more questions about the nature of (inter)national literature.

## **9.4 Anthropology and Literature: a foreign affair**

Literature has been the subject of this dissertation. On a different level, it has also provided a mirror to anthropology's ethos. Often, what is reflected in this mirror is constructed as the Other: different and distant, but also attractive. Literature and anthropology seemingly have the 'foreign affair' type of relationship. As Nigel Rapport (1994) argues, even as discrete disciplines, both are interpretative, poetic, and imaginative enterprises: 'Both are self-conscious

practices which derive, in [E.M.] Forster's own words, from "connecting prose and passion". Both demand that their individual authors make sense of their experiences, intuit those of others, and so rewrite (and right) social reality' (Rapport 1994: 1). Richard Hoggart insightfully noticed that 'without appreciating good literature, no one will really understand the nature of society' (Hoggart 1966: 38). In line with this thought, I hope my dissertation has in some way answered Rapport's call for re-evaluating the relationship and correspondence between anthropology and literature as 'visions and versions of social reality' (Rapport 1994: 253).

In connecting my research questions and topics with anthropology's reflections about its own project, my aim was to highlight the discipline's literary origin: such investigation seemed to me practically and intrinsically anthropological. The main points of correspondence were found in how exilic narratives and ethnography deal with the authority and authenticity of the writer. The insider witness to reality constructs their authority through the immediate presence in the field - 'I was there,' 'I witnessed' - which is precisely how I, as an author, began this thesis. However, this is only half of the journey into becoming an author: the second half includes distancing; spatial, temporal, and cultural. Again, just as exile gives a writer a vantage point from which to be taken authoritatively, so the anthropologist becomes an author through cutting ties with the field and creating a distance towards their 'object' of writing. I myself did precisely that with writing about *my experience* at the writers' retreat in Devon. I was a knowledgeable insider first, then I became a dispassionate outsider.

There was further reflection on the process of translating and negotiating foreignness and, more generally, translating lived experience into text, examined from both ethical and epistemological perspectives. The ethical perspective reflected on anthropology's colonial legacy, which corresponded with a geopolitically and linguistically unequal trade within the project of world literature. The epistemological perspective focused on poetic production, i.e. the rules of genres, which construct and situate the author as well as determine what is deemed as evidence for truth. Lastly, I commented on similarities between issues of free speech within literature as well as academia. Free speech is almost always contextualised in its practice, which, within anthropological

enterprise, touches upon methodological and ethical concerns. It guides the anthropologist in their choice of methods and in how they define their field, but most of all it raises questions of how the ethnographer can preserve their critical stand towards social reality without compromising their own or their participants' integrity.

In my concluding thought I wish to return to the passion of both literature and anthropology. Strathern (1991) contributed to the debate about the crisis of representation within anthropology through engaging with Tyler's (1987) idea of ethnography as evocation. It is true, she argues, that 'the person who "went into" the field and then returned to translate her or his observations into an authentic representation of the "culture" or "society" no longer convinces' (Strathern 1991: 8). However, instead of trying to make representation better by focusing on the meanings ethnography provides, both Strathern and Tyler suggest looking towards what ethnography *does*. Ethnography, they conclude, provides the reader with a connection to what the researcher has experienced. It is an evocation of their experience. And, in this evocation, both prose and passion have their rightful place.

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## Appendix

### Extracts from documents, books and articles

*From Chapter 4*

Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, Article 38:

'Everyone has the right to free speech and free expression of opinions. Freedom of expression involves in particular free media and other means of information traffic, free speech and public activities and setting up institutions and organizations for dissemination of information. Any form of censorship is against the law. Journalists have the right to free reporting and free access of information.'

<http://www.usud.hr>

Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 46:

'Everyone has the right to free speech, free expression by way of speaking, writing, visual and any other form of expression and to receive and disseminate ideas and information.'

[www.parlament.sr.gov.yu](http://www.parlament.sr.gov.yu)

Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia (1963), Article 39:

'Everyone has the right to free speech and to form opinions freely.'

*From Chapter 8*

Extracts from Dubravka Ugrešić's work:

1. From *Ministry of Pain* (2005: 251-4).

May you be cursed in this world and the next.

May you not live to see the sun rise.

May the vultures get you.

May you vanish from this Earth.

May you walk on thorn field barefoot.

May God make you thinner than a thread and blacker than a pot.

May you reap wormwood where you sow basil.

May the Devil torment you.

May the Devil lap your soup.  
May the Devil season your soup.  
May ravens caw at you.  
May blood cause you agony.  
May you writhe in agony.  
May thunder and lightning strike you.  
May lightning strike you and split you down the middle.  
May you wander blind over the Earth.  
May a serpent bite you in the heart.  
May you suffer like a worm under bark.  
May turbid water sweep you away.  
May your heart quarter and burst.  
May an arrow pierce your heart.  
May you never more see the light of day.  
May all abandon you.  
May you lose all but your name.  
May your seed be obliterated.  
May you be struck dumb.  
May your life be bleak and barren.  
May a serpent wind around your waist.  
May a serpent swallow you whole.  
May the sun burn you alive.  
May your sugar be bitter.  
May your mouth and neck change places.  
May you choke on bread and salt.  
May the Devil plague you.  
May God do unto you what you have done unto me.  
May the sea cast up your bones.  
May grass sprout through your bones.  
May you see black and your eyes turn white.  
May you turn to dust and ashes.  
May God burn out your eyes and leave two holes.  
May your mouth utter never a word.  
May you be damned.

May you piss blood and tar.  
May a live wound devour you.  
May you be consumed by fire.  
May the waters close up over you.  
May you burn to death.  
May you lie in a grave immobile for a hundred years.  
May you neither marry nor receive extreme unction.  
May your name be forgotten.  
May you never see the sun.  
May you rust over.  
May you be hit by thunder and lightning.  
May you be murdered every day of the year.  
May your face turn to pitch.  
May your roots dry up.  
May you burst.  
May you lick ashes.  
May you turn to stone.  
May you die in darkness.  
May your soul fall out.  
May you vanish in an eclipse.  
May you never eat your fill.  
May you fall dead by the wayside.  
May your joys lament.  
May you drift without end.  
May you go deaf. May you go dumb.  
May you have no possessions.  
May you wither from the roots.  
May you cry for your mother's milk.  
May the Earth push up your bones.  
May you be devoured by worms.  
May you lose your soul and nails.  
May you never have a live guest.  
May you never again see your house.  
May you lack bread when you have salt.

May you turn to wood and stone.  
May a stone fall on your heart.  
May my good wishes kill you.  
May you never be heard of again.  
May a frog piss on you.  
May you fail to awake from your next sleep.  
May my tears kill you.  
May your star go out.  
May you take to the road.  
May your days be black.  
May your tongue go mute.  
May misery smile upon you.  
May you leave your bones behind.

2. From *Culture of Lies* (1998a: 116).

'If we show our imagined foreigner some fifty films from the (former) Yugoslav cinema, he will be amazed by many things, but out of the whole accumulation of shots he will pick out the rigid and unchanging "image" of a woman. For fifty years Yugoslav films were made almost exclusively by male directors and together over the years they hammered home one single female character. Seen from that perspective Yugoslav films reveal the profound and discouraging truth about the way Yugo-man sees women. In these films women are violently raped (there is one favourite shot, used hundreds of times, of a woman's torn clothes and a woman's breast with a hairy male hand covering it), slapped (another favourite shot: a man's hand against a woman's cheek), beaten, ill-treated in various ways. The old-fashioned pair of opposites - *virgin and whore* - will often be replaced by an even more old-fashioned one: *mother and whore*. Over the years, with insignificant deviations and sub-variants, the system of male stereotypes has become fixed between the "old mother" and the "young whore".'

3. From the glossary of *Culture of Lies* (1998a: 270).

'Patriotism:

In my language there is a word for "love of one's homeland": *domoljublje*. I don't feel that love. All the more since "homeland" is on the whole synonymous with "state". All the more so since people take them, homelands, from me and give them to me if it occurs to them, and still ask me to love them unconditionally. Any forced love, including that of one's homeland, strikes me as perverse.'