Displaced Women

Displaced Women: Multilingual Narratives of Migration in Europe

Edited by

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and Mariangela Palladino

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FOREWORD

The phenomenon of multilingualism has come under scrutiny in the last decade and has attracted the attention of academics as well as that of cultural and political institutions.[1] Generally, scholars have approached multilingualism as a sort of aftereffect of postcolonialism and globalisation, while in the ongoing process of European unification and expansion it is framed as the desirable target in a multi-ethnic and multicultural vision of Europe. However, rather than being a point of arrival, involving interaction and conflict between distinct and well-defined national identities, it can be argued that multilingualism is in fact a constitutive element of European identity, an essential though often overlooked feature of European cultural roots. This volume aims precisely to question the assumption that multilingualism and migration narratives should be defined against monolingual 'national' narratives and to challenge the idea of Europe being built on consolidated nation states.

The essays which appear here mostly originate from the international conference organised by the editors which took place at the Glasgow Women's Library in March 2012. Interdisciplinary and international, the conference, like this edited volume, brought together specialists working in a range of fields and provided an opportunity for interaction between historians, sociologists, scientists and literary specialists, as well as between theoreticians and practitioners, academics and non-academics. Language, multilingual narratives and interaction between cultures and languages were key themes of the conference. The spread of topics, approaches and disciplines is extensive: largely theoretical contributions (McCarthy) sit alongside others that combine theory and practice (Smith), whilst the voices of practitioners who work at the grassroots with migrant women (round table discussion) are joined by the reflections of a bilingual writer living between two languages and three cultures (Ricci Lempen). The historical and geographical range is equally broad, from the fifteenth century (Moreau) to twentieth and twenty-first century writers (Latham,

[1] For example Olga Anokhina (ed.). *Multilinguisme et créativité littéraire* (Louvain-la-Neuve: Harmattan/Academia, 2012) and Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese (eds), *Multilingualism: A Critical Perspective* (London: Continuum, 2010).

Song) and from Central Europe (Davies, Grossman, Jovičić, Šolić) to Switzerland (Leu).

In spite of the differences, all the papers presented here transcend the idea of 'national identity' as an epic heritage or destiny, both linguistic and literary, and suggest a much more fluid definition of citizenship. Working from this perspective and within this general framework, both the editors and the contributors of this volume seek to encourage a broader discussion on women's narratives of displacement that compels us to rethink the notions of 'mother tongue' and 'native speaker' and raises philosophical questions about linguistic ownership, in other words, whether a language is owned, appropriated, imposed or rejected.

Recent scholarship has already moved in this direction and many are now highlighting the role of multilingual women as cultural mediators in post-Enlightenment Europe and challenging the notion of a 'Europe of Nations'.[2]. From a gender perspective, the question of linguistic ownership is even more significant, in that it could be argued that women's encounter with language (especially literary language) is always characterised by estrangement and dislocation. Paradoxically, women's experiences of *estranged intimacy* with the language that they appropriate become a metaphor for that portion of European cultural identity that from its very origin is multilingual and multicultural. Thus, women's geographical and linguistic displacement can be seen as a paradigm of a modus operandi of marginalised subjectivities compelled, as it were, to translate, and therefore to constantly negotiate the boundaries of their linguistic, social and cultural experience. Out of this displacement, emerge new conceptions of identity, culture and heritage, which are more in tune with the demands of a twenty-first-century vision of citizenship.

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December 2013

[2] For example Agnese Fidecaro, Henriette Partzsch, Suzan van Dijk, Valérie Cossy (eds), *Femmes écrivains à la croisée des langues, 1700-2000/Women Writers at the Crossroads of Languages, 1700-2000* (Geneva: Metis Presses, 2009).

DIALOGUE AND OTHERNESS

TEXTUALITY OF MAPS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND IMAGES: VISUAL IDENTITY IN SLAVENKA DRAKULIĆ'S *FRIDA'S BED*[1]

MIRNA ŠOLIĆ

In this essay I argue that one of the dominant narrative tendencies in contemporary Croatian women's writing is a visual articulation of female identity. Visuality here is understood as a new intrinsic textual quality resulting from the transposition of visual into textual medium, which 'enhances the text's literariness more thoroughly than more traditional, narrative ways of reading,'[2] and 'shapes the verbal features of the work of art'.[3] Visuality also represents 'a register of visibility' which 'involves some alternative representational practices such as the pictorial, as a means of making good, of "supplementing" the incapacity of language to make its referents visible,'[4] and transforms traditional narratives into 'interfaces' which 'mobilize visual and textual regimes'.[5] The intermedial techniques used in textual construction of visual identity for instance include pictorial language and ekphrasis, and the narration of one's own life as a flow of textual references to visual objects and visual arts, such as photographs, images and maps.

[1] Research undertaken for this article was generously supported by a research grant awarded by The Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland and CZ 1.07/2.3.00/30.0004.

[2] Ernst van Alphen, 'Reading Visually', *Style,* 22, 2 (1998), 219-29 (p. 219).

[3] Jan Mukařovský, 'Dialectic Contradictions in Modern Art', in *Structure, Sign and Function: Selected Essays by Jan Mukařovský,* ed. and trans. by John Burbank and Peter Steiner (New Haven: Yale UP, 1978), pp. 148-49.

[4] Alexander Gelley, *Narrative Crossings: Theory and Pragmatics of Prose Fiction* (New Haven: John Hopkins UP, 1987), p. 5.

[5] Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith, 'Introduction: Mapping Women Self-Representation as Visual/Textual Interfaces', in *Interfaces: Women, Autobiography, Image, Performance*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005, c2002), p. 2.

I argue that the reason for using visual techniques in construction of female identity is the power of visual self-recognition in encounters with oneself and others. The use of visual techniques in the narrative text challenges the idea, intrinsic to Western aesthetics, of the surveyed female who 'turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision – a sight,'[6] by offering narratives whereby the female characters become surveyors exploring themselves by looking for their self-identification in their own art, as well as the visual representations and art of others. As we see in Irena Vrkljan's novel *Marina, ili o biografiji* (1986) [*Marina, or About Biography,* 1991], visual recognition is stronger and more 'truthful' than factography, because it is 'raw' and unspoiled by facts and stories. Facts are something we learn from the stories of others, and we use them to fill in our own gaps, but images are the mirrors of self-identification: 'Marininu fotografiju kada je još bila dijete sad gledam kao svoju. Klica za bilo kakav opis leži više u toj odluci nego u poznavanju činjenica'[7] ['I now look at the photograph of Marina [Tsvetaeva] as a child as though it were my own. The germ of any kind of description lies more in that decision than in knowledge of facts'].[8] While in Vrkljan's narrative the female narrator reconstructs her life as a stream of intertextual and intermedial references to Marina Tsvetaeva, especially the Russian poet's letters and photographs, she becomes aware that her narrative body consists of fragments of others' narrative bodies. The parallel journey between the narrator's own and Tsvetaeva's life expands, to include elements of artistic articulation of many other visual auto/biographies. These range from German-Jewish artist Charlotte Solomon's portrait of young girls, to Salvador Dali's Surrealist depictions of time and Paul Klee's 'Carpet of Memory'.

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[6] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (British Broadcasting Corporation: Penguin Books, 2008, c1972), p. 41. The idea of the surveyed female has been discussed across genres and art. See for instance *Images of Women in Fiction. Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Susan Koppelman Cornillon (Bowling Green: Bowling Green Popular University Press, 1972); Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema', in *Screen,* 3 (1975), 6-18; Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985); *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, ed. by Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1988).

[7] Irena Vrkljan, *Marina, ili o biografiji* (Zagreb: Grafički zavod Hrvatske, 1986).

[8] Irena Vrkljan, *Marina, or About Biography,* trans. by Celia Hawkesworth (Zagreb: Durieux: The Bridge, c1991), p. 167.

An inclusion of visual artefacts, such as photographs and images, results in a subversive approach to history and geography, and especially one's own past. With the fictional possibilities originating in employment of visual means, contemporary Croatian women's prose has introduced a crucial new approach in comparison with the representation of gender and exile in the late nineteenth- and the twentieth-century Croatian literary canon. It has subverted its deeply ingrained tradition of masculine-oriented discourse of exile-borne nostalgia for the homeland as the place of one's own, even if the exiled individual considered himself an outcast from his own society. As Renata Jambrešić-Kirin argues, the most important feature of women's writing of the 1980s onwards is its being 'protupriča tradicionalne muške 'egzilantske hagiografije' koja je isticala dvostruku stigma 'odmetnutog' intelektualca u tuđini – njegovu (po)ratnu trauma političkog gubitnika i njegovu napornu borbu za održavanje 'kulturne vidljivosti' u stranom svijetu' ['the anti-story of traditional masculine "exilic hagiography," which emphasised a double stigma of an outcast intellectual abroad – his (post)war trauma of a political loser and his difficult fight for preservation of "cultural visibility" in a foreign world'].[9] Women's writing discourse has shifted construction and interpretation of identity towards 'preispitivanja osobnih i kolektivnih odrednica vlastitog identiteta, odnosno intelektualnog angažmana i umjetničkog stvaranja' ['examination of personal and collective traits of one's own identity, intellectual engagement and artistic production'].[10] Visual artefacts become mirrors in which one's memory is a reflection of others' memory, and one's own personal geography a representation of otherness. They link the re-construction of individual memory to the re-construction of one's own space as a prerequisite of artistic creation and existence, and act as a strategy of creating 'unhomed geographies', 'a possibility of redefining issues of location away from concrete coercions of belonging'.[11]

The female identities established in this way represent themselves as fluid and hybrid structures, in a dialogue with themselves and others, in a gap between the past, loosely and unreliably mediated through the prism of memory, and the present moment. They become such mainly through exploration of links with visuality and the visual arts. What visuality offers to these narratives of displacement that the use of the written word cannot deliver is an essential role of visual experience in construction, articulation

[9] Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, 'Za književnicu je pisanje dom: o suvremenoj hrvatskoj ženskoj književnosti u i o egzilu', *Novi izraz*, 8 (2000), 3-20 (p. 4).
[10] Jambrešić-Kirin, 'Za književnicu je pisanje dom', 4.
[11] Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 4.

and production of memory, as the visual discourse represents 'osnovna strategija pamćenja-sprečavanja zaborava i sjećanja dozivanja iz zaborava' ['the essential strategy of remembering – prevention of oblivion and recovering the memory from oblivion'].[12] The visual artefacts are used as a response to a traumatic experience, so that the visualising act offers hope that the broken world, especially the link between the past and the present, may be healed and re-created. The fictionalising, and thus semantically liberating powers of the visual (especially use of artistic material) reinforce memory and remembering as a confirmation and a challenge of the condition of displacement. It also re-constitutes one's space in the world, as 'the finding of absent images heals what has been destroyed: the art of *memoria* restores a shape to the mutilated victims and makes them recognizable by establishing their place or seat in life'.[13] Additionally, the inclusion of the visual into the textual explores a simultaneous existence of the past in the present moment which is crucial for coherence of identity and understanding of trauma, as 'the continuing spiritual power of an image lives in the interplay between what it reminds us of – what it brings to mind – and our own continuing actions in the present'.[14] Finally, the use of the visual defamiliarises and subverts the visual genre itself as well as the viewer's (or in this case reader's) expectation of the verisimilitude of the facts it represents: 'it works with and recontextualizes well-known imagery in order to destabilize the viewer's ordinary perception'.[15] In this way, the use of these artefacts opens up a new perspective on contemporary Croatian women's prose, which could be generally characterised as a literature of displacement. During the last three decades, by shifting the focus on individual suffering, this literature has challenged and subverted the official interpretations of recent history, in particular the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina at the beginning of the 1990s, and has demonstrated how the employment of visual means, as an artistic subversion of official media representations and manipulations of images of the wars and suffering, has played an essential role in the construction of fragmented, exiled and estranged identities.

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[12] Aleksandar Mijatović, 'Diskurz fotografije u romanu Dubravke Ugrešić *Muzej bezuvjetne predaje*', *Fluminensia* 15, 2 (2003), 52.

[13] Renate Lachmann, *Memory and Literature: Intertextuality in Russian Modernism,* trans. by Roy Sellars and Anthony Wall (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, c1997), p. 6.

[14] Adrienne Rich, 'Notes toward a Politics of Location', in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1986), p. 227.

[15] Lutz Peter Koepnick, 'Photographs and Memories', *South Central Review,* 21, 1 (2004), 94-129 (p. 95).

I will analyse the tendency towards the visual creation of identity in contemporary Croatian women's prose through the example of Slavenka Drakulić's recent novel *Frida, ili o bol* (2007)[16] [*Frida's Bed*, 2008].[17] Drakulić's[18] fictionalised biography of Frida Kahlo is based on interpretation of the painter's selected self-portraits and should not be taken as yet another work inspired by a renewed popularity of the painter, who experienced a rapid and powerful transformation from oblivion to a cultural icon. Instead, it should be discussed within the writer's

[16] Slavenka Drakulić, *Frida, ili o boli* (Zagreb: Profil, 2008). Further references will be given in the text in brackets as FB HR (HR meaning 'Croatian' followed by page number, e.g. FB HR 43).

[17] Slavenka Drakulić, *Frida's Bed,* trans. by Christina P. Zorić (New York: Penguin Books, 2008). Further references will be given in the text in brackets as FB EN (EN meaning 'English' followed by page number, e.g. FB EN 43).

[18] Slavenka Drakulić is a prominent Croatian writer of both fiction and non-fiction and one of the most extensively translated. She also works as a journalist and currently lives in Sweden. Her novels include *Holograms straha* (1987) [*Holograms of Fear*, 1992], *Mramorna koža* (1989) [*Marble Skin*, 1993], *Božanska glad* (1995) [*The Taste of a Man*, 1997], *Kao da me nema* (1999) [*As If I Am Not There*, 2000], *Frida, ili o boli* (2007) [*Frida's Bed*, 2008], *Optužena* (2012) ['Accused'] and focus in particular on the themes of the female body, matrimonial relationships and violence. Her non-fiction opus is mainly concerned with the recent social history and wars in former Yugoslavia, especially nationalism and violence against women. They include *Smrtni grijesi feminizma* (1984) [The Deadly Sins of Feminism], *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (1992) [*Kako smo preživjeli komunizam i čak se smijali*, 1997], *The Balkan Express: Fragments from the Other Side of the War* (1993) [*The Balkan Express*, 2012], *Cafe Europa: Life After Communism* (1996), '*Oni ne bi ni mrava zgazili:' ratni zločinci na sudu u Hagu* (2003) [*They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in the Hague*, 2004], *A Guided Tour Through the Museum of Communism* (2011). She regularly contributes to different newspapers and magazines such as *The Nation, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *The Guardian.* She left Croatia for Sweden after receiving threats following the media campaign in 1992 against her and four other prominent female writers and intellectuals (known as 'The Witches') for their political and intellectual stands towards violence against women in the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. For an analysis of her work in the context of contemporary Croatian literature see for instance Andrea Zlatar, 'Oblici autobiografskoga pripovijedanja u suvremenoj hrvatskoj književnosti' in *Autobiografija u Hrvatskoj* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1999), pp. 99-122; and Andrea Zlatar, 'Tijelo: Modus komunikacije' in *Tekst, tijelo, trauma: ogledi o suvremenoj ženskoj književnosti* (Zagreb: Naklada Ljevak, 2004), pp. 100-18. The extensive list of translations of Slavenka Drakulić's work as well as scholarly and non-academic publications and texts about her work are listed on her personal website http://slavenkadrakulic.com/.

understanding of displacement as an internal condition, which stems from her experience of exile, violence, disability, isolation and pain, and as such it should stimulate enquiry about the reasons for establishing a narrative relationship with the culturally and geographically remote painter and her artistic expression. While the 'otherness' in many contemporary women writers' narratives refers to the construction of one's own memory as a simultaneous presence of memory of others, and defines exile as a condition of an obvious physical, geographical and cultural displacement,[19] in *Frida's Bed*, the space of exile becomes the space of the internal displacement as one's artistic self at the same time poses as 'the other':

[19]For instance, in Dubravka Ugrešić's *Muzej bezuvjetne predaje* (1998) [*The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, 1998], the reconstruction of one's own story is projected towards the creation of an alternative topography of Berlin, consisting of hidden and parallel micro-histories. While trying to make sense of her exilic experience, the female narrator questions her own memory against the memory of others, scattered in forgotten artefacts of everyday life and their representation in visual arts. These range from shabby family photographs shared by immigrants on fleamarkets, as 'depersonalized signifiers of a distant place and a bygone era' in the shadow of the Wall (Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frame: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge Mass; London: Harvard University Press 1997), p. xi), to exhibition catalogues and visual performances, such as the work of Shimon Attie and Richard Wentworth. The narrative also includes a significant presence of metadiscourse on photography in creation of memory and identity (Mijatović, 'Diskurz fotografije'). The journey through visual representations results in a return to the narrator's own family album, which, as she realises, is a result of censorship, imposed by selective and authorial principles of nostalgia. Daša Drndić's description of a relationship between the female narrators and urban spaces, individual and collective histories, is also accomplished through photographs and photographic lenses, constructing different spatial-temporal relationships in the native town of Rijeka and exilic spaces of Central European cities in *Leica Format* (2005) and *Doppelgänger* (2002), as well as Canadian Toronto in *Marija Czestochowska još uvijek roni suze ili Umiranje u Torontu* (1997) [The Black Madonna]. Both writers treat urban spaces as fictionalised creations of exiles and newcomers who infuse them with their trauma of displacement and their previous topographies, inhabit them as 'prostori-hibridi napuštenog i ponovno pronađenog svijeta' ['spaces-hybrids of an abandoned and newly-found world'] (Jasmina Lukić, 'Imaginarne geografije egzila: Berlin i Rijeka kao fikcionalni toponimi u prozi Dubravke Ugrešić i Daše Drndić', in *Čovjek, prostor, vrijeme: književnoantropološke studije iz hrvatske književnosti,* ed. by Živa Benčić and Dunja Fališevac (Zagreb: Disput 2006), p. 464) and employ their own intimate archives, visual memory and invisible gaze in revision of their histories and urban identities.

this time it is one's own art that becomes a mirror of self-reflection, and the relationship with one's own body the ground of artistic exploration.

In the novel, this particular difference stems from the condition of permanent physical pain. As has already been argued,[20] the history of Kahlo's visual arts could be read alongside her medical history and disability caused by inherited spina bifida, polio contracted in childhood, and injuries resulting from a traffic accident. In the narrative, Kahlo's paintings represent a visual attempt to mend a broken relationship between words and a wounded, estranged body. In other words, they articulate, mediate but also authenticate internal displacement caused by illness, which originates in the inability of words to depict and make sense of pain. They also explore the extent to which it is possible to come to terms with alienation from the body caused by its inability to perform and its grotesque appearance. The body in the narrative exists as an estranged object and an instrument of different invasive medical but also artistic interventions: 'nikada, osim u najranijem djetinjstvu, odnos prema tijelu za nju nije bio jednostavan. Njeno je tijelo bilo bolni teret i objekt medicinskih intervencija. Zatim objekt njenog slikarstva. Instrument taštine. Instrument užitka, također, ali ponajprije *objekt* i *instrument*' (FB HR 44) ['Except for her earliest childhood, her relationship with her body had never been simple. Her body was a painful burden, an object of medication. And later an object of art. An instrument of vanity. And of pleasure, as well – but above all, it was an *object* and an instrument'] (FB EN 43-44). As a medical object, the body is encased, or rather 'framed'[21] in order to improve, and consequently visually conceal, the painter's physical condition. Different medical corsets become the real physical confinements which keep her alive and in a physical unity: 'samo u posljednje tri godine isprobala je dvadeset i osam različitih korzeta od gipsa, plastike, željeza i kože. Korzet je bio kavez – što nikako nije metafora – stvarni kavez napravljen posebno za njezino tijelo. Bez njega bi se raspala, meso bi se opustilo, a kosti razišle, ne bi mogla sjediti, kamoli stajati' (FB HR 91) ['in the last three years alone she had tried twenty-

[20] Sarah M. Lowe, 'Essay', in *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005); Mimi Yang, 'Pain and Painting: Frida Kahlo's Autobiography', *Autobiographic Studies,* 12, 1 (1998), 121-33; Clara Orban, 'Bruised Words, Wounded Images in Frida Kahlo', in *Text and Visuality: Word & Image Interactions,* 3, ed. by Martin Heusser et al. (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999); Carlos Fuentes, 'Introduction', in *The Diary of Frida Kahlo*, pp. 7-29.

[21] I use the notion of frame intentionally in order to stress the connection between the theme of the body in the novel and its visual representations.

eight different kinds of corsets: plaster, plastic, iron, leather. The corset was a cage, and this was no metaphor, a cage constructed especially for her body. Without it her body would collapse, the flesh would sag and the bones scatter, she would not be able to sit, let alone stand'] (FB EN 95-96). Orthopaedic support overcomes its function of physical support and becomes a way of life, a rigid self-control one needs in order to function and survive: 'stroga pravila, ograničenja koja je sama sebi nametnuo, poput korzeta, pomislila je. Inače bi mu se život urušio poput napuklog kamenog stupa' (FB HR 91) ['strict rules, restrictions she imposed on herself – like a corset, she thought. Otherwise, her life would have collapsed like a broken column'] (FB EN 96). At the same time canvasses become metaphorical and artistic prostheses of her wounded body, as they are small, and adaptable to her needs: 'Njene su slike bile malih dimezija kako bi stale na štafelaj na krevetu. Ili na onaj, nešto veći, u studiju'. (FB HR 98) ['Her canvasses were small so that they could fit on her lap-easel or on the slightly bigger easel in the studio'] (FB EN 104).

However, the visual depiction of the body in pain and internal displacement in *Frida's Bed* also represents a continuation of Drakulić's narrative poetics organised around the figures of visual artists and visual arts. She explores visuality in representation of the female body, either in self-reflection or in relation to other bodies. For instance, in *Mramorna koža* (1989) [*Marble Skin*, 1993],[22] the female sculptor, who is at the same time the first-person narrator, is trying to recover a broken relationship with her mother by carving the memory of the maternal body into marble, a porous material whose surface, as the narrator observes, changes with time. In *Frida's Bed,* the relationship between the verbal and the visual is obvious but far more complex if the intermedial nature of Kahlo's art, as well as the narrator's approach to it, is taken into consideration. Many of Kahlo's canvasses are accompanied by short verbal supplements, drawing from the confessional tradition of votive images, typical of their small format and inserted inscriptions. They enter into a dynamic semantic relationship with paintings, so that the combination of visual and verbal in her work serves to 'represent and to bridge the gap in her broken body; to make whole what is divided'.[23] A similar structure could also be found in Kahlo's diaries, whereby sketches and written entries overlap and merge into powerful visual-textual structures.[24] Away from the public gaze and

[22] Slavenka Drakulić, *Marble Skin*, trans. by Greg Mosse (London: Hutchinson, 1993).
[23] Orban, 'Bruised Words: Wounded Images in Frida Kahlo', p. 163.
[24] The diary of Frida Kahlo was published as *The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2005).

scrutiny to which exhibited canvasses are exposed, the intimate diary entries represent a revelation from 'an uncanny restraint evident in Kahlo's self-portraits,' and offer 'the immediacy of first-hand sensations transcribed and recorded, a disclosure lacking in her paintings'.[25]

Drakulić intertextually responds to the visual-textual nature of Kahlo's art by creating a complex narrative structure, constructed as a predominantly third-person narration with inclusions of the first-person narrator. The third-person narrator here acts as a teller of a biographical narrative, who unfolds and comments on the facts of the painter's life – her childhood, illness, marriage and death, all from the fictionalising angle given by the fact that instead of biographical chronology the events are narrated from the final moments of Frida's life. However, not only the reversed chronology but also the inclusion of the first-person narration additionally fictionalises and subverts the biographical genre, as it upholds and authenticates the third-person narrator as a witness of the painter's own trauma and pain, which occurs as she speaks directly from inside her wounded body. Here the third-person narrator becomes a mediator between the experience of the painter's pain, somebody who takes narrative responsibility for that pain, and the audience, in this case readers, and, as we are talking about visuality, viewers. Hence the third-person narrator could be seen in this narrative as 'an appointed witness,' who verbally transmits somebody else's trauma, whose 'appointment to bear witness is, paradoxically enough, an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak *for* other and *to* others [...]'.[26] Additionally, the narration of pain helps recognition of the condition of the internal displacement as 'witnessing to pain helps to reframe its character by providing it with a different structure of interlocution within which it

[25] Lowe, 'Essay', p. 26.

[26] Shoshana Felman, 'Education and Crisis: Or the Vicissitudes of Teaching' in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York; London: Routledge, 1992), p. 3. See also Alison Lewis' article on similar strategies used in articulation of intersubjectivity in the context of East German women's writing since the late 1960s, discussing the 'life-saving and sustaining alliance' in this type of narrative strategy. While accessing another female artist through narrative interpretation of her work, the author effectively 'authorizes another female subject to speak, act, travel, or simply suffer on her behalf' (Alison Lewis, 'Foiling the Censor: Reading and Transference as Feminist Strategies in the Works of Christa Wolf, Irmtraud Morgner, and Christa Moog', *The German Quarterly,* 66, 3 (1993), 372-86 (p. 372).

might be expressed *and* acknowledged'.[27] As such the third- and the first-person narration are interlocked and inseparable from one another, the third-person narrator lends her voice to the painter and transmits hers as an authentication of witnessing. However, the failure of the appointment to bear witness, perhaps resulting from an overwhelming solitude of the end-of-life experience, happens at the very end of the narrative. The last moments of Frida's life preceding her suicide are narrated in the first person, and they represent lyrical meditations about love, life and death, as well as addressing people Frida wished to see before death, especially her sister, with whom she often had a troubled relationship, but who was nevertheless her main caregiver and vital support. In addition to intimate recollections of the past and facing oneself through addressing other people, the first-person narration is also used for meditation on the future that the main character clearly sees happening in front of her: 'Gdje si sada, Kity? Za sat-dva ući ćeš u sobu i naći na krevetu moje tijelo koje se hladi. Znam da ćeš najprije u nevjerici dodirnuti moje lice jer smrt je, začudo, uvijek neočekivana, čak i kad je to samo pitanje dana ili sati' (FB HR 146). ['Where are you now, Kity? Soon, you will walk into the room and find my body in bed, turning cold. The first thing you will do, I know, is touch my face in disbelief, because, strangely enough, death always comes unexpectedly, even when it is a matter of mere days or hours'] (FB EN 158). In this way the first-person narrator, whose voice was verbally mediated by the third-person, now not only takes over the possibility for witnessing, but also gains control over the last life encounters and her own death.

However, the narrative mediation of the disabled painter's voice should also be contextualised within the social and aesthetic context of the writer's work, as the 'appointment to witnessing' carries strong political connotations. Ato Quayson refers to the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa in order to argue that 'the shift from a non-sufferer of pain to that of a witness of pain is fundamentally one of empathetic repositioning. Empathy is to be seen not only in interpersonal relations; it is also evidenced in entire public apparatuses of witnessing'.[28] Similarly, the exchange between the third- and the first-person narrator in *Frida's Bed* recalls not only the strategies used in Drakulić's fiction concerning artists and visual arts, but also the narrative strategies in her writings about war-related violence against women as yet another form of displacement. The use of the same narrative strategies in

[27] Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness. Disability and the Crisis of Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 81. Italics are in the text.
[28] Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness,* p. 80.

two very different narratives of suffering points to the writer's inherent interest in writing and arts as ways of coming to terms with trauma and understanding the complex origins of desire to inflict pain. This is done through exploration of the importance of the gaze, the visual nature of memory as 'an act of the "vision" of the past […] situated in the memory's present',[29] and also an ability to see as an active pursuit of knowledge about oneself and the world. Similar to *Frida's Bed,* in *Kao da me nema* (1999) [*As If I Am Not There*, 2000], a fictionalised testimony of a survivor of a Bosnian concentration camp, the narrative exchange is graphically and visually foregrounded with the use of italics:

> Po Hrvatskoj se već pucalo, a oni su plivali i pekli ribu i nisu svemu tome vjerovali. Mislili su da je to daleko od njih i da ih se ne tiče. Odjednom, baš toga ljeta, to što se događalo u Hrvatkoj prestalo ih se ticati. *Kao da smo namjerno bili slijepi, mislili smo da ćemo se obraniti od užasa tako da ga ne vidimo. Da ne gledamo*.[30]

> [The shooting has already started in Croatia, but the two of them swam, grilled fish over a fire and did not believe any of it. *As if we were deliberately blind, we thought we could defend ourselves against the horror by not seeing it. By not looking*'].[31]

Hence the failure to predict the war is the problem of the failure of the visual recognition which, in contrast to an ordinary act of seeing, triggers the production of meanings. As we read from the introduction of '*Oni ne bi ni mrava zgazili': ratni zločinci na sudu u Hagu* (2003) [*They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in the Hague*, 2004], essays inspired by the writer's observation of the proceedings in the International Crime Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), 'we didn't see the war coming'[32] because of ideological images used in construction of the past and everyday life. Visual blindness and ignorance, resulting from the failure to decode images, consequently leads to 'the absence of facts,'[33] a natural excuse for violence. There is no visual relief in the narratives about

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[29] Mieke Bal, *Looking in: The Art of Viewing* (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, c2001), chapter 'Dispersing the Gaze: Focalizing', pp. 41-64 (p. 43).
[30] Slavenka Drakulić, *Kao da me nema* (Split: Feral Tribune, 2001, 2nd edition), p. 25. Drakulić's italics.
[31] Slavenka Drakulić, *As If I Am Not There,* trans. by Marko Ivić (London: Abacus, 1999), p. 21.
[32] Slavenka Drakulić, *They Would Never Hurt a Fly: War Criminals on Trial in The Hague* (London: Abacus, 2004), p. 7.
[33] Drakulić, *They Would Never Hurt a Fly*, p. 13.

violence – the artistic act of production of self-portraits as an attempt at visual (self)-recognition, which is the core of *Frida's Bed,* is absent here.

The visual dimension in story-telling is provided in exchange and agreement between different narrative voices, mainly the third- and the first-person narrator, and the visual strategies they use, particularly focalisation. The third-person narrator becomes a viewer, 'the seeing narrator,' 'the focaliser,' whose choices of visual perspectives clearly establish a division between 'the vision through which the elements are presented and the identity of the voice that is verbalizing the vision'.[34] The notion of vision is crucial here because everything in the painter's life, all her recollections and memories are related to images, either mental or painted ones. The third-person narrator tells the story of the painter's life through a selection of her self-portraits, which loosely follow the chronology of the narration, and transpose the readers into viewers as they are given the impression that the narrative gaze is directly projected at the images, as if they are taken on a guided and intimate walk through the exhibition. The third-person narrator appropriates the painter's story and her articulation of pain as her own. Telling the story through a selection of the painter's self-portraits[35] thus has a twofold result: on one hand it enables the third-person narrator to create and *verbalise* her own intimate catalogue of images, to control and manage the way the things are seen. In this way she constructs a fictional, selective biographical narrative, a fictional biography of internal displacement, which could be a shared story, a story of oneself in the other – of a shared pain – regardless of the neutrality of the third-person narration. On the other hand, narrating the story through the selection of the painter's self-portraits allows the painter to use her own voice, and thus helps to constitute the visual auto/biography on the basis of subjective and artistic visual recognition. In this way the self-portraits act as an artistic tool, 'in which the artist is both

[34] Bal, *Looking in: The Art of Viewing*, p. 43.

[35] References to canvasses in the narration are present in a loose chronological order, and they seem to follow the third-person narrator's strategies to authenticate the narrative of pain. The canvasses discussed are (in the order referred to and discussed in the narrative): *The Dream* (1940), *Portrait with Maestro* (1931), *My Dress Hangs There* (1933), *Henry Ford Hospital* (1932), *Me and My Doll* (1937), *A Few Small Nips* (1935), *Self-Portrait With Cropped Hair* (1940), *Love Embrace of the Universe* (1949), *The Broken Column* (1944), *Self-Portrait Dedicated to Leon Trotsky* (1937), *The Tree of Hope* (1946), *Roots* (1943), *Girl With Death Mask* (1938), *Frame* (1938), *Self-Portrait With Dr Farrill* (1951).

subject and object and conceives of how she looks in the sense of how she sees rather than how she appears'.[36]

Finally, commentaries on canvasses, graphically (by the use of cursives) emphasised within the text, represent a prominent part of the third-person narration. They are subjective commentaries, but also meditations on the process of painting, origins and creation of the work of art. They strongly reiterate the physical pain the painter felt while creating images, and in this way emphasise a connection between pain and artistic production. They also explain the process of creation of the work of art, especially the inextricable link between the corporeal and artistic, as the former blends into the latter through the long process of artistic performance. The link is physiological and anatomical – it starts internally from within the body, where the picture is created. Thus the artistic work originates within the rupture of the physical wound, and is nurtured within this rupture, moving into the outside world once the contact between the body and the artistic material is established. In this way the painting becomes a fictional/artistic extension of the corporeal and a representation of the feeling of displacement:

> *Nakon svega, trebalo je vremena da se iz njenog tijela iskristalizira slika. Boje su sićušni kristali koji se dugo talože u organizmu. Zatim putuju krvotokom do vrhova prstiju. Ruka uzima kist i dodiruje boju. Kist dodiruje platno. Započinje process u kojem se kristali sele na platno i tada se dogodi slika'* (FB HR 75)

> [*She needed time for a picture to crystallize. The colours were tiny crystals of pain deposited in her organism over time. They had to course through her bloodstream to the tips of her fingers. The hand would pick up a brush and dab at the paints. The brush would touch the canvas. So began the chemical process of moving the crystals to the canvas, resulting in the painting*] (FB EN 78).

In commentaries on the canvasses the third-person narrator subverts the performed narrative detachment and becomes subjectively engaged in the narrated story, as she starts identifying herself as a viewer rather than a story-teller:

> *Gledatelj zadrhti dok zamišlja ono što mu slika tako snažno sugerira. Ali čak ni dva krvava reza, koja prva privlače pažnju, ne izazivaju toliko iznenađenje kao činjenica da druga Frida, koja sjedi uz onu prvu, još uvijek u narkozi, u ruci drži korzet'* (FB HR 116)

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[36] Masha Meskimmon, *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Scarlett Press, 1996), p. xv.

> [*The painting is so suggestive it makes you shudder. But even the two eye-catching, bloody incisions are not as surprising as the corset that the other Frida, who is sitting next to the still-unconscious one, is holding in her hand*] (FB EN 124). [37]

Finally, there are occasional inclusions of the first-person narration in these commentaries, which are, similar to the main narrative, again interlocked with the dominant voice and not visually differentiated from it: '*Ne mogu više, govori Frida na toj slici*' (FB HR 98) [*'I can't bear it any more, Frida is saying in this painting'*] (FB EN 101). Identification with the viewers, as well as the inclusion of the first-person narration subverts the distance of the biographical story-telling and once again suggests that the act of witnessing is a mediation of one's pain through the act of writing.

The importance of the textual-visual structure of the narrative is striking when we compare the original title used by Drakulić and its English adaptation. The comparison between the two offers two different expectations and readings of displacement. The original wording *Frida, ili o boli* ['Frida, or About Pain'], clearly associates the name of the painter with the condition of pain, and offers an expectation that the narrative which follows should be read as a patobiography. As such it again confirms the idea of pain as an internal displacement as one of Drakulić's artistic preoccupations,[38] which, in this particular case, stems from disability and disability-related isolation, but should be read in the wider context of the writer's work. This notion is reinforced by two quotations which introduce the narrative: Kahlo's own words 'Mi pintura lleva el mensaje del dolor' ['My painting carries the message of pain'] and a seminal study by Elaine Scarry on the incommunicability of pain, the political connotations of this phenomenon, the narrative strategies, especially narration of witnessing, shared between the courtroom and literature, as well as what Scarry calls 'the nature of human creation'.[39]

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[37] From the narratological point of view, 'you' is not an adequate translation of 'gledatelj', as it changes the visual perspective. Since 'gledatelj' translates as 'a viewer', the entire sentence would sound like 'A viewer shudders while imagining what image so strongly suggests to him'.

[38] Medical themes and pain are present in other works by Drakulić as well. Using similar narrative strategies, the novel *Hologrami straha* (1987) [*Holograms of Fear*, 1992] describes the trauma and emotional and social isolation of a woman who undertakes kidney transplantation surgery in the USA.

[39] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 3. The notion of the incommunicability of pain and its political connotations again draws a link

These words characterise her paintings as an articulation of pain which expands over the limits of corporeal reality (disability), but also 'leave the wound of disability undressed, so to speak'.[40] Hence the painter is forced to look for any type of alleviation of suffering to create an imagined world, which was simultaneously growing as her physical existence was fading. The narrator depicts the search for verbal means which would enable 'smislenu artikulaciju užasa' (FB HR 8) ['a meaningful verbalization of this horror'] (FB EN 2), followed by a pictorial search for a suitable word. Thus the paintings become the medium which returns the power of speech, and map 'an invisible geography that, however portentous, has no reality because it has not yet manifested itself on the visible surface of the earth'.[41] The paintings also mediate between the outside world and the isolation of the wounded body: 'Kasnije sam slikala te ožiljke kako bi i drugi doprli do moje samoće' (FB HR 35) ['Later I painted those scars, to let others reach into my solitude'] (FB EN 34). However, the search for suitable representation of pain fails when its origin can no longer be detected and thus no suitable picture/word can be used for its artistic mediation: 'Već neko vrijeme nije uspijevala odrediti izvor boli koja je već odavno postala dio njenog tijela, gotovo sinonim za tijelo, ali sad je postala sveobuhvatna, razlivena, preplavljujuća. [...] *Dezintegracija* [Drakulić's italics] je jedina precizna riječ koja mi je pala na pamet' (FB HR 119) ['For some time she had been unable to pinpoint the source of the pain that had long since become a part of, almost a synonym for, her body,

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between the novel and *Kao da me nema* [*As If I Am Not There*] because it happens at times when reality in its most extreme forms, such as war, overcomes the power of words to describe it: 'I u tom trenutku ponovo joj upada u oči kako se nisu u stanju izražavati normalnim rečenicama, nego samo jednosložnim riječima, kao da su zaboravili govoriti. *Možda i jesu. Možda se to događa s ljudima u ratu, da riječi odjednom postanu suvišne jer više ne mogu izraziti stvarnost. Stvarnost izmiče poznatim izrazima, a novih riječi u koje bi se utrpalo to novo iskustvo naprosto nema'.* (Drakulić, *Kao da me nema,* p. 63) ['At that same instant she is again struck by their inability to express themselves in normal sentences; they only use monosyllabic words, as if they have forgotten how to speak. *And perhaps they have. Perhaps that happens to people in wartime, words suddenly become superfluous because they can no longer express reality. Reality escapes the words we know, and we simply lack new words to encapsulate this new experience*'] (Drakulić, *As If I Am Not There,* pp. 65-66].

[40] David T. Mitchell and Sharon S. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis, Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse,* p. *7.*

[41] Scarry, *The Body in Pain,* p. 3.

but now it had become all-invasive. [...] *Disintegration* [Drakulić's italics] is the only word that comes to [my][42] mind'] (FB EN 127).

The choice of title in the English translation – *Frida's Bed* – foregrounds a spatial metaphor and emphasises the visual dimension of the narration and the space of suffering as the space of displacement. The name Frida, the subject in the original title, recedes into the background and becomes reduced to a possessive adjective, which relates to the specific and confined space of the bed.[43] Similar to Kahlo's images, the bed becomes the isolated and real subject of narration: bed as a visual and spatial metaphor, bed as a confinement, bed as a place of rest, reflection and calm, bed as a connection between the real and imagined world, bed as the place of internal displacement. Bed also becomes 'a memory museum to a specific time and place,'[44] a spatial framework and a point of departure for the narration, constructed as an exchange between the third- and first-person narrator, as an articulation of the gap between the past as wholeness, though constantly alive through the permanent presence of pain, and the present as fragmentation, characteristic of the feeling of emptiness and loss: 'Provukla je prste kroz kosu – lice, kosa, ruke, bili su to još samo dijelovi bivše cjeline. Pokušala je ustati, zatim je odustala. Nije imala snage. Nije imala mira' (FB HR 7) ['[She] ran her fingers through her hair – her face, her hair, her hands, they were all parts of what had once been a whole. She tried to get out of bed, but then gave up. She had no strength left. Her mind was troubled'] (FB EN 1). Along with the third- and the first-person narrator, there are also occasional interpolations of other voices, especially second-person narration, which provide an additional visual perspective on the events and create visual images within the text. As an act of witnessing, the inclusion of the second-person narration is directed towards the personality and the body confined to the bed, turning that body into a visual object, a visual representation, and a

[42] I have added a possessive pronoun 'my', omitted by the English translation, to emphasise the change of the narrative perspective and transposition from the third- into the first-person narration.

[43] The semantic difference between the original title and its English adaptation is strengthened by the respective book cover illustrations, which clearly enter into a 'parapictorial relationship' (Liliane Louvel, *Poetics of the Iconotext,* trans. by Laurence Petit (Farnharm: Ashgate 2011), p. 68) with the main narrative. While on the Croatian original the choice of illustration is Kahlo's picture representing the painter's face gazing directly at the self-portrait, the English translation features the image 'Dream', in the centre of which Frida lies in the bed, a concrete space floating in the unpopulated, blank environment created through the act of artistic imagination.

[44] Watson and Smith, 'Introduction: Mapping Women Self-Representation', p. 1.

framed picture, a work of art: 'Ležala si na zelenoj čohi gola, oblivena krvlju i posuta zlatom. Prolaznici su mislili da si ranjena plesačica iz bara i zato su vikali: Balerina! Bila si tako lijepa – rekao joj je Aleks dok je sjedio pokraj nje drugog dana nakon operacije i držao je za ruku' (FB HR 20) ['You lay there on the green felt, naked, covered in blood and dusted in gold. Passerbys thought you were an injured bar dancer, that's why they called you ballerina. You were so beautiful, Alex told her the day after the operation as he sat by her side, holding her hand'] (FB EN 16).

The space of the bed is not perceived as a 'fixed frame,'[45] but it becomes a point of departure for the creation of other spaces, and a movement from one fictional space to another. Frida re-creates her past during the journey through visual, mental images and recollections. Becoming increasingly bedridden, she wants to leave her own body and bed as her first confinement by imagining parallel, fictional and invisible worlds:

> Kad već nije mogla izaći iz sobe, pronašla je način da izađe iz sebe: zamislila je prijateljicu uz čiju je pomoć prelazila u drugu stvarnost. Njena mala prijateljica nije imala ime. Frida bi došla do nje tako što bi zahuknula staklo na prozoru pokraj kreveta i na zamagljenoj površini brzo, jako brzo, nacrtala vrata. Sasvim mala i nevidljiva. I djevojčica koju bi ugledala, bila je nevidljiva, svima osim njoj (FB HR 9)
>
> [Since she could not leave her room, she created an imaginary little friend who helped transport her to another world. Her little friend did not have a name. Frida would blow on the windowpane by her bed and then quickly, quickly trace a door on the foggy glass with her finger. Only the door was very, very small and invisible. The girl was invisible too, invisible to everybody but her] (FB EN 4).

As she becomes confined due to her disability, her ability to see acts as liberation unveils for her an entirely new world, whereby the relationship with space is changed through one's sharpened vision. During that process textures and surface qualities of surrounding materials are defamiliarised and re-discovered with a strengthened, cautious, and analytical gaze:

> Dugotrajna nepomičnost izoštrila je njene promatračke sposobnosti. Činilo joj se kao da gleda svijet kroz povećalo, da više ništa oko nje nije ni jednostavno ni plošno. Otkrivala je jedva vidljive znakove na naoko glatkim površinama, na predmetima oko sebe, u sobi. Primjećivala je detalje na koje prije nije obraćala pažnju: deblje i tanje niti i način na koji

[45] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto, Ont; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 139.

> se isprepleću i tvore neravnine u tkanju lanene plahte na tepihu. [...] Kao da je ležeći u krevetu opažala više, sve više, te je svijet postupno poprimao drugačije, zanimljivije dimenzije (FB HR 27).
>
> [Such a long period of immobility had heightened her powers of observation. Nothing seemed simple or small anymore; it was like seeing the world through a magnifying glass. She distinguished almost invisible markings on the seemingly smooth surfaces of the objects in her room. She noticed details she had never paid attention to before: the interweaving of thin and thick threads that unevenly coursed the bed linen; [...] As if being bedridden somehow made her notice things more and gradually lent the world new, intriguing dimensions.] (FB EN 27)[46]

The journey enabled by these new optical abilities leads to an estranged self-recognition, a psychological blow caused by a distorted image in the mirror, which represented her differently and clearly revealed the physical consequence of pain. The shock gradually evolved into a long process of reconciliation with her own condition through refocusing on herself, and the discovery of a possibility of longitudinal exploration of identity through the act of painting: 'A kad je otac došao na ideju da učvrsti zrcalo iznad kreveta, kako bi mogla vidjeti svoje lice, počela je slikati najbliži objekt – sebe' (FB HR 25-26) ['And when her father came up with the idea of fixing a mirror above her bed so that she could see her own face, she began to paint what was closest at hand – herself'] (FB EN 22). The painting helped her to overcome the physical restrictions of immobility as it empowered her to mediate her new identity to others: 'Kada je naslikala autoportret za Aleksa, bila je zadovoljna. Poslala ga je Aleksu. Iz očaja, iz ljubavi, iz potrebe da ga približi sebi' (FB HR 28) ['She was pleased with the self-portrait she painted for Alex. She sent it to

[46] The phenomenon of sharpened vision is present in other works by Drakulić, especially in *As if I Am Not There,* where it represents an escape from the body traumatised by rape. While being gang-raped, S. suddenly re-focuses her attention on insignificant details in the room, which carry her away from reality, only to return instantly to the present moment: 'Kad prvi od njih prodire u njeno tijelo S. osjeća trenutačnu bol. [...] Okreće glavu prema zidu. Tamo jedna muha sa zelenim zatkom nervozno šeće gore-dolje. Kao da je nešto izgubila. ...] S. je slijedi pogledom. U tom času vidi svoje noge podignute u zrak i između njih mušku glavu. Muškarac ima zatvorene oči i otvorena usta' (Slavenka Drakulić, *Kao da me nema,* 64) ['When the first of the three men penetrates her, S. feels momentary pain [...] She turns her head to the wall. A greenbottle fly paces up and down the wall nervously, as if it has lost something. [...] S. follows her with her eyes. And at that moment she sees her own legs and a man's head poking out between them'] (Drakulić, *As If I Am Not There,* 66-67).