Responsiveness to Comparison in Literature

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By

Fatima Festić

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FOREWORD

BY JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Fatima Festić's *Responsiveness to Comparison in Literature* is an important and wide-ranging book that contributes to our understanding of literature, comparative literature, world literature and culture. Violence, conflict, colonialism and postcolonialism are among Festić's central concerns. She is a determined and devoted scholar who has been through war, injustice and displacement—the terrors of life—and has shown courage in her pursuit of truth and justice. Festić is adept at exploring some of the most pressing aspects of theory, literature and culture and having something distinct to say in her readings and interpretations. The structure of her book shows how Festić responds to comparison and how comparison responds to literature and the world.

Festić, who suffered much in the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, thinks it important to reassess comparison, responsiveness, singularity and counter-culture, as expressed by Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Blanchot, Gadamer, and others, and Charles Saunders Peirce's notions in semiotics. Festić is interested in examining the production of thought and art and in the critical and creative in culture. This figuration relates singularity to both responsiveness and comparison and 'their interaction allows for the conversation' in Festić's collection, especially in regards to 'movement, dialogue, contact, interactions and clashes'. All this is important for Festić's life and work in cultural, social, and political structures but also a scholarly aspect or trace of what she calls her 'itinerant autobiography' and her engagement with 'questions of liberty'. Festić views comparison as a key to 'assignments' in life. Psychoanalysis, Freud and Lacan are important in thinking about comparison and hidden comparison, which can also be 'a ubiquitous weapon'. Moreover, she sees intersectionality as a way to trace the sources of negative uses of comparison. Whereas Festić views motion as suggesting openness, knowledge, dignity, respect, creativity and the like, she sees war as a repetitive death drive—quite different from singularity, which affirms life and is a tool in literature and criticism. For Festić, responsiveness relates and is comparative, and such relations have an ethical dimension.

Responsiveness to Comparison in Literature provides a framework for rethinking world literature in nomadic terms, and does so in twelve studies grounded in the forum of semiotics and comparative literature. Specifically, Festić looks at contemporary questions and ideas of literature in regard to approaches and theories as well as to what she considers to be analytical fields, such as postcolonialism, post-socialism, and post-imperialism. Ethics, openness, creativity and affirmation are central concerns for Festić. Another key to collection is Festić's responsiveness to comparison. She draws on Benedict Anderson's view of comparison as a discursive strategy and she does so in relation to the vantages of selected writers, artists theorists and philosophers. Looking at world literature 'shaped by violent ideological, social and political changes', Festić envisions nomadic thought as an alternative, an affirmation or hope in comparison, in comparative literature. She also turns to poetics and affirmative ethics, which helps an understanding of poetry, untranslatables and learning. Further, Festić refers to Waïl Hassan and his view of the pre-Romantic understanding of world literature as being hybrid. Festić stresses the poetic aspects of the history of literatures, an awareness of literariness and poetics, a subsuming of ethics and politics while affirming hybridity.

Among other things, in chapter 1, Festić speaks of her original field of images and narrative and makes the salient point that 'people kill each other for the letter and for inscriptions in organizing their drives'. She discusses hysteria and seduction, poets as killers, the relation between nomadism and trauma, and self-representation. In chapter 2, Festić, who says that she is a nomad and refuses the term 'refugee' for herself but uses it elsewhere, still considers trauma. She asks what theory is and what it stands for, focusses on the nomadic subject and nomadic intellectual and continues her work on horror while also calling on Umberto Eco, who draws on Horace Walpole for the term 'serendipity,' a mistake that has shaped history. Chapter 3 looks at the figure of Antigone in psychoanalysis and political philosophy, asking what connects the classical figure of Antigone to the girl who committed suicide in Palestine and reading the anxiety in some of the interpretations of that figure.

In chapter 4, Festić reads Edward Said's memoir, *Out of Place*, partly in the context of his "Invention, Memory, and Place" and *Freud and the Non-European*. In Said, someone whose seminar I attended at the School of Criticism and Theory in 1988, Festić sees a dialectic between discipline and desire, a part of his life from childhood and an aspect of his search. Said spoke in London and not in Vienna as planned, which marks the

journey Freud himself took as a refugee from the Nazis. How much do we read with or against the work, and how much is conscious and unconscious in the private and public spheres? A Palestinian Christian, Said benefitted from and questioned the Christian West, which is true of many Western intellectuals and writers and is part of the tradition, as Montaigne, Rousseau and others have shown. Criticism or critical distance goes back to the Greeks, and some suffered for that critique as Socrates drank hemlock, Plato went into exile and Aristotle avoided death just. My response to this comparison is that I, and all humans, including these ancient Greeks and Said, are full of ambivalence and contradiction. Fatima Festić prompts us to reflect. She also, in chapter 5, in regard to psychoanalysis, connects Julia Kristeva to Freud and Lacan, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, and links semanalysis to Rosi Braidotti's nomadic thought that is materialist and realist. Kristeva sees semiotics as a critique of semiotics and this view also relates to a response to psychoanalysis and linguistics. Chapter 6 looks at the intersection of gender and trauma in a reading of Bachmann's *Todesarten* (Ways of Dying), an unfinished prose cycle. Festić explores possibilities for change in Bachmann's nomadic and cosmopolitan life and authorial disposition.

Chapter 7 examines Lermontov's *The Dream* and Chekhov's *Dreams*. In an interesting fashion, Festić refers to Jean Laplanche's view that in the connection between writer and reader in culture, transference is the 'translation of the enigma or puzzle of the other', a 'transposition and renewal of the traumatic relation of primal seduction'. Festić's range of reference and her intellectual and existential engagement are suggestive and I use this example to show just one of the horizons she opens up to the reader. For instance, in the early 1990s, Laplanche's 'Le temps et l'autre' discusses the etymology of 'psychoanalysis', from the Greek root *analuein*, 'to undo'. Psychoanalysis, for Laplanche, is an unbinding, an analysis that involves Homer's Penelope at her loom, mourning, weaving and unweaving. Festić discusses instances of dream writing in Russian literature, a lyric poem and a short story, and how they represent transference and irony as literary figuration.

In chapter 8, Festić refers to Dominick LaCapra, who discusses objectivity and subjectivity in relation to trauma in history and to his notion of in-betweenness. In a critical consideration of trauma, Festić uses a strategy in which empathy unsettles and represents a need to respond to trauma in others. Festić argues that giving those who suffer trauma the way to define their loses could produce more positive in-betweenness as Bakhtin and

LaCapra discuss. For Festić, the 'creation of a public space in which the experience of the victims of horrors can be expressed and received with analysis and empathy is necessary for a functioning society'. In chapter 9, Festić examines the national, post-national, imperial and post-imperial, nation-making and nation-unmaking. She refers to Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt* and suggests the possibility of sovereignty of literature that might get or invite us to 'search in its imaginative space for self-othering' or a comparatism that is responsible and shows us our internal foreignness allowing for an 'awareness of the aporias of our being in a nation'.

Chapter 10 elaborates on Festić's own position in relation to literary studies in Central Europe, Central European postcolonialism, and memorability, performativity and dispersion as a social phenomenon. She explores the word 'postcolonial' in connection to the post-imperial and re-national and in the context of culture as it relates to mediation, testimony, witnessing, and authenticity. In chapter 11, Festić avers that literary writing is a singular act and asks the suggestive question about 'how can we talk about the intimate without also speaking the truth from another place in the world'. Chapter 12 refers to Patrick Imbert's examination of discursive changes in the postmodern condition in the context of postcolonialism. Festić discusses world literature while integrating the practices of poetics, politics and ethics. One of the key relations that arises in this chapter and in Festić's book is that among subjectivity, intersubjectivity and objectivity, a vital connection in art, literature, the humanities, social sciences and science. The questioning of this relation is open, changing and ongoing.

The book ends with a discussion of the innovation and experiment, ethics and politics of modernist, postmodernist, and post-postmodernist poetics. Festić talks about 'a literary domain of hope' in talented writers worldwide, a 'domain that does not reduce the primacy of poetics while also telling its story of ethics and politics,' but more marvelously and artistically. In *Responsiveness to Comparison in Literature,* Fatima Festić responds to works theoretical and literary, viewing the poetic as being related to the ethical and the political in world literature and comparative literature. This book is an intellectual and cultural journey, as well as a personal and existential quest for Fatima Festić, an exploration that she shares with the reader.

Shandong University/ University of Toronto/ Harvard University,
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INTRODUCTION

Responsiveness to comparison is a timely expression that integrates the acmes of my empirical voyage through literary and cultural scholarship in various academic and political environments worldwide from the 1990s onward. Introducing a distinct theoretical topic, this phrase came to my mind as a proposal for the 22nd Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, "Literature of the World and the Future of Comparative Literature," held in Macau, China, in the summer of 2019.[1] However, much earlier, the concept of *comparison* had caught my attention as a concept necessitating a deeper theoretical reflection, before my studies of world and comparative literature, philosophy, and the arts, and before my various instances of cultural, social, and political activism in the ethnically composite socialist state of the former Yugoslavia, which disintegrated in violence for some of its constituents, and alongside my earliest possible awareness of gender issues. I had noticed that the ethical dimension of comparison, the contexts and frames of comparison, both in writing and in ordinary communicative situations, often remained unclear or disregarded. Hence, it was important to probe the processes of comparison pertaining to the agents, participants, and referents in the comparing operations, the effects produced on them, and their reactions, all of this resonating in wider questions or ambiguities of value and truth.

Similarly, the concept of *responsiveness* crystallized itself, requiring a deeper contemplation, and also one in line with recent philosophical developments.[2] I came to think of responsiveness as a dynamic conceptual summary of my curiosity about the term *singularity*—first, pertaining to the Peircean semiotic category of thisness,[3] then to the production of

[1] Throughout the collection, I specify when each chapter was first written.

[2] These developments include feminist nomadic materialist philosophy, ethico-onto-epistemology, and various contributions to the journal *Rhizomes*, alongside the work of a major nomadic thinker, Rosi Braidotti, to whom I refer throughout the book; and also the work of Elisabeth Grosz and Alexis Shotwell.

[3] Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) specified the categories of *firstness* (being; sensation), *secondness* (relation; existence; experience), *thirdness* (mediator; means; mould). Firstness is an instance of that kind of consciousness which involves no analysis, no comparison or any process whatsoever; it has its own

thought and art, and to the mode of critical-creative cultural figuration.[4] Such defined multiple functions of singularity relate to both responsiveness and comparison; it is the interaction of these three terms that has allowed the integrative conversation of the chapters presented in this collection. Relative to the conditions and frameworks that favor, facilitate, advance, fear, or refuse comparisons, responsiveness emerges as a critically prolific analytic and theoretical lens for discussing the intricacies of contemporary movement, mobility, contacts, interactions, dialogues, or clashes; and all these have also featured in the preceding literary periods.

This collection also demonstrates the stages of my understanding of the diversely working codifications of my own encounters with the many cultural, social, and political structures I have inhabited, or through which I have travelled, to this day; a kind of a scholarly, itinerant autobiography, or theory as autobiography, on the one hand. On the other hand, this is a display of my incessant, lifelong engagement with the questions of liberty. By liberty, I mean a possibility of emotion and the embodiment of human freedom, integrity of life, creative impulse and right to expression, desire for movement, determination for independent thought, the value of (intellectual) work, diversification of society, the chance for alterations, and worldliness. Whichever theoretical position we use to ponder this, using various educational prompts from classical, continental, Eastern, or American philosophy, it is the framework of thinking that decides on the outcome. Likewise, in thinking any relation, what semiotics is primarily about, it is the framework that matters most. Similarly, when there is a relation of at least two items in any sense, form, figuration, or performance, there is a comparison, a search for either similarities or differences. Handling comparisons is probably one of the most serious assignments one takes upon oneself in the course of growing up, education, socialization, sexualization, and further life endeavors.

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quality which consists of nothing else; it is predominant in the ideas of freshness, life, and freedom. Secondness is a derivative interpretation, actuality, *singularity* of thisness. Thirdness pertains to thought, language, representation, the process of semiosis; it makes social communication possible; it corresponds to intellectual experience. See Charles S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writing of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover, 1955).

[4] Some recent works on singularity in literature and philosophy include David Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) and Timothy Clark, *The Poetics of Singularity: The Counter-Culturalist Turn in Heidegger, Derrida, Blanchot and the Later Gadamer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005).

Freudian psychoanalysis[5] has provided us with useful templates for studying familial, group, ethnic, national, and other variably canonical strivings, anxieties, neuroses, turbulences, and disasters that reveal the willing or unwilling alternations in ethical domains and in the sustenance of human existences, psychologies, economies, societies, and states. Comparison can also often arise as a ubiquitous, albeit disguised, weapon, a negatively structured platform in one's movement outward, that the social side of the human animal[6] tracks and pursues, not much better or more sophisticatedly than other animal species does. A subsequent stage in the evolution of psychoanalytic theory brought about Jacques Lacan's notion[7] of the permanence of the mirror stage in the human development and life, that significantly points to the evolution of negative or positive narcissisms in various societal stratifications. At the same time, Lacan's insights enabled the recognition of mediality, performativity, and gender, including artistic creative integrities interpreted as singularities, as key domains in human interactions; and all that proceeded in feminist, gender, and other societal applications and developments.

The more recent theoretical-analytical framework of intersectionality, which the humanities and social sciences have offered as a response to the awakening of politically mainstreamed planetary connections, and to the complexity of comprehending discourses of human rights and of civil rights, also traces the sources of such negative uses of comparison. At the same time, this domain aptly elucidates the risks that everyone takes when initiated into the competitive figural or performative combat of making a comparison; no matter how life-threatening or socially obvious one's inequality or a concrete material injustice is or could be, each act of comparison can always be conducted in a more considerate way. As comparison always involves acts of dismantling, disassembling, taking apart, or breaking down a component, and moving from a (self-)image toward a presumed interactive or dynamic position, it requires closely

[5] See, for example, Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1919-1920) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey, Anna Freud, et al. (London: The Hoggarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1978).

[6] See Dominick LaCapra, *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2009), for his contemporary perspective on the classic philosophical bond of human-animal.

[7] Jacques Lacan's *Seminars* (I-XX) were crucial for my earlier thought, as were the works of his interpreters, such as Julia Kristeva, Shoshana Felman, and Slavoj Žižek.

observed criteria for its conduction. Such criteria imply an understanding of the internal work of different codifications of what is being compared, the referents and the agent(s) of comparison, alongside the investment of positive energy, feeling, and thinking into a comparison act. It is not cunning that keeps humankind moving: that life-asset of being in motion belongs, rather, to the openness of the human mind, and to knowledge, respect, dignity, imaginativeness, creativity, talent, cognition, production, understanding, empathy, affection, and change. War is what always comes to the same: the return of a symptom, the endorsement of the repetitive (death) drive.[8] Life, however, is what always differs, for anyone. That is why singularity,[9] with its own repetitiveness nevertheless implying a change with each new interaction, is such an apt literary and critical tool.

The word *responsive* means giving or constituting response, being quick to respond, react appropriately, or sympathetically sensitive; response is an answer, verbal or written, and also a reaction to something expressed through media other than language, as the human body is. Responsiveness is the quality of having a reaction to something or someone, especially a quick or positive reaction, as well as the ability to be approved or cured. As such, responsiveness is easily related to comparison, which itself speaks of a relation or relationality, the terms that are currently focused upon in world comparative literature discourses/discussions, particularly pertaining to the challenges of the increasingly 'relational world.'[10] However, the perspective of responding to something is not the same as clinging to a comparison or imposing an inconsiderate comparison, as comparison is not simply a technical medium for an easy transaction. In contemporary discourses other than literature, singularity is mostly understood in computing-technological and hypothetical terms, as is also

[8] Teresa de Lauretis, a pioneer in 1980s gender studies, offers an extensive study of Freud's concept of the death drive in *Freud's Drive: Psychoanalysis, Literature, and Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

[9] See Gilles Deleuze, *Repetition and Difference* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995 [1968]); also see Samuel Weber, *Singularity: Politics and Poetics* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2021), which rethinks the implications of singularity on politics, psychoanalysis, economics, theology, and literature. Weber discusses the works of Hölderlin, Nietzsche, and Kafka as exemplary practices that put singularity into play, as friction, exposing the self-evidence of established conventions as responses to challenges and/or problems that they often prefer to obscure or ignore.

[10] See, for example, Shu-mei Shih, "Theory in a Relational World," *Comparative Literature Studies*, special issue *The Indiscipline of Comparison*, 53, no. 4 (2016): 722-746.

the case in reference to philosophy of mind.[11] Hence, it is crucial to realize that responsiveness should also fall back on understanding the singularity of a creative individual in literary, artistic, and philosophical terms, as this helps profiling the relation involved in a comparison with the mindfully observed criteria for each specific application. Current literary theoretical discussions are more prone to rely on the critical term of negation (in building universality) rather than on self-negation, or incomparables, or the question of the agency of comparison, which is always induced with negativity or positivity, with opposition or affirmation, and from various locations. Ethical sensitivism can help reconceptualize comparativism as a *non-proprietary* mode of thinking in more than one paradigm, or idiom, language, mindset, or culture from each of the involved sides. This implies an ethics of relation, which attends to concrete specificities, symmetries, asymmetries, openness, and closures, untranslatability and untranslatables, and pertaining materialities.[12]

On these grounds, *Responsiveness to Comparison in Literature* proposes a framework for rethinking world literature in nomadic terms,[13] within its wider sociocultural dynamic reflected in rhizomatic, comparative theoretical domains. This collection responds to the pressing need to rethink comparison, to join similar scholarly efforts worldwide, and to understand comparison as both a *cognitive* effort and a way of *living* the world. The chapters outline the trajectory of my dispersive cognitive movement, initiated by war and violence in my physical lands of origin in the 1990s, and influenced by the whole palette of the ethico-political dynamics I have encountered. The collection integrates twelve studies

[11] Technological singularity is a hypothetical point in time at which technological growth becomes uncontrollable and irreversible, resulting in unforeseeable changes to human civilization. In general, the term *singularity* was first used in 1873 by James Clerk Maxwell as an explanation of unstable systems. A singularity refers to a context in which a small change can cause a large effect; Maxwell's initial use of the term does not differentiate between dynamical systems and social systems. The existence of singularities is primarily an argument against determinism or absolute-causality. In the 1960s and 1970s, Michel Foucault discussed *singular points* through which power travels, related to institutions.

[12] This term was introduced by Emily Apter in response to David Damrosch's thesis on translatability. See David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature*? (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003), and David Damrosch, ed., *Teaching World Literature* (New York: MLA, 2009); Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso, 2011).

[13] See the works of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Rosi Braidotti, as well as their followers in nomadism.

presented at various international semiotic and literary comparatist congresses and conferences from 1997 to the present. It offers a composite reading of select literary texts, from classics to postmodernist works, and it points to the increasing contemporary consciousness of the relational world and the interaction of text and reality.

Looking into contemporary questions and conceptions of literature, the collection demonstrates synergies of different approaches and theoretical stands (semiotics, psychoanalysis, feminism, gender, narrativity, mediality, performativity, inter-art, memorability, nomadism), and of the analytical fields of postcolonialism, post-socialism, and post-imperialism. Applicable to literary, theoretical, and everyday sociocultural practices, with its suite of subtopics, *Responsiveness to Comparison in Literature* resonates with vital concerns of ethics, creativity, openness, affirmation, hybridity, and poeticism. Specifically, it points to how a critical reassessment of comparison, relative to the affirmative capacity of its use, informs the responsiveness to developing comparative mechanisms and frameworks of comparative literature in studying literatures of the world.

The Present: Against or Alongside the Past and Future?

The chapters are grouped into two sections. The first section, "Documenting Violence: Variations on the Theme," consists of six texts written just before or after the turn of the millennium. That is, these chapters are in line with the 1990s ethico-political turn in American theory that followed the heights of the philosophy of deconstruction, Lacanian, feminist and gender psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, and the simultaneous initiation of the studies of trauma, witnessing, testimony, and memory. My attempts to converse with the practices and proponents of these approaches started with my simultaneous attempts to pull myself out of the discursive and physical traps of the mass violence arising from the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I looked for the grounds for speaking my own mind, the facts of what I had seen, my own thoughts, and my own words. From the start, I was driven by the massive trauma resulting from my involved witnessing of war crimes and other manifestations of the conflict, both in my immediate work environment and in society as a whole. The crimes committed against the most vulnerable segments of the population, particularly the organized sexual-abuse program on an ethnic basis that was utterly predictable from previous dominant discursive currents and from previous systematic ravages of these territories, were especially

notorious.[14] My reflective self responded efficiently to the ordeal of my early years, while still retaining the ruptures that I have perpetually narrated in the decades that followed, and transforming the deadly energies of aggression and war into meaningful textual performances.

The important revelation for me was my ability to generate and employ my creative bodily capacities in ways that prevented me from succumbing to forceful sexuation within political, ethnic, or war-related models. Such were the practices of my subversive 'prophesying', rebellious artistic 'clairvoyance', variously mediated and theorized testimonies, cognitive dispersiveness, exuberant communicability, transcontinental scholarly networking, and leadership. An early prompt for me was my effort to test the empirical ungroundedness of the otherwise sovereign theoretical (pre)cursors of deconstruction and their philosophic treatment of witnessing. I probed the intellectual peaks of deconstruction theory with immediate examples of its physical equivalents, such as de(con)structing human lives, bodies, groups, peoples, and states, pointing out that their real-life referents survive within philosophical discourses. From the perspective of the involved witnessing, the meanings of those occurrences or 'events'[15] had to be documented according to what exactly happened in the physical reality in order to open the paths toward societal and juridical dealing with these wrongdoings. As philosophy and literature are also meant as responsive and responsible media and means for the documentation of these crimes, they cannot afford the abstraction and free-game of interpretation, because that is what often simply and blatantly equalizes the sides of the victims and perpetrators. In fact, the documentary paths of philosophy, literature, art, theory, the concept of the everyday, and law[16] can meet and become textually engaged in scaling the responsiveness to harsh realities. However, even then, affect often remains untheorized and unexplained; hence, its interpretation requires additional knowledge from studies of trauma, psychoanalysis, gender, ethics, memory, and nomadism.

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[14] In Chapters Eight, Nine, and Ten, I offer a detailed critical analysis of the circumstances that led to the armed conflict, wars, and mass crimes in these territories.

[15] See Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Limited Inc*. (Chicago: Northwestern UP, 1988).

[16] Since the writing of the first few chapters of this collection, many major American and British universities have established combined studies of Law and Humanities, and of Medical Humanities.

Luckily, I escaped the worst examples of the Yugoslav military and interethnic violence and destruction, and pursued my responsibility to speak out amid my search for a spiritual calmness and a dispersive cognitive-productive motion. These were also the preconditions for the thematic and discursive comparisons presented in this book. At the same time, the first several chapters demonstrate how my entrance into Western academic circles had been marked in advance as on the brink between the major European theoretical discourses developed from Judeo-Christianity into contemporary continental philosophy, and their presumed inner differential of the 'other' and its 'origin' in Muslim culture. In the case of my European origin, however, 'otherness' was, rather, a projection of a differential from the side of the cohering Western-minded streams toward my not less Western, yet culturally constructed, being and womanhood. European or not European, Slav or not Slav, Muslim or not Muslim, American or not American: these were the binary platforms projected onto me, as if demanding that I deconstruct them. My sensitivity to processes of comparisons was intensified further in my in reality proven reflection on how one's proneness to comparison or non-comparison is conditional to situationally gendered human openness or closures. It depends as well on the proximity or experience of violence; or, in extreme cases, on the possibilities for indictment, prosecution, or retribution.

The first chapter demonstrates my enduring commitment to veracity in documenting the horrors that happened in Southeastern Europe in the 1990s. This chapter, "Who's Afraid of Hysteria? They Shoot Desires, Don't They?", [17] was originally presented at the 1997 International Semiotic Congress, "Semiotics Bridging Nature and Culture," in Guadalajara, Mexico. The second chapter was prompted by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the USA and was written for the South African Literary Theory Association 2001 Conference. In the circumstances of a different kind of mass violence, I also examined some of my stances from the preceding chapter. The third chapter was written for the University of South Carolina's 2003 Comparative Literature Conference, "The Desire of

[17] This title associatively merges the theatrical and filmic peaks of American art production in the 1960s as my own après-coup experience of my early perceptions of America: Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* staged in 1962, and Sidney Pollack's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* produced in 1969. As I wrote this text at UCLA, I also included other references to American literature, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), both of which were important in the early development of my sensibility and education.

the Analyst: Psychoanalysis and Cultural Criticism in the Twenty-First Century," featuring my efforts to ponder the emergence of women suicide bombers in Palestine, and the unequal sides of the ongoing bloody armed conflict there. This text was also presented/published at the Australian Women's Studies Association 2003 Conference, "Other Feminisms." Produced within six years, as I was crossing the planet in several directions in the course of my research and work,[18] these texts were engaged in deciphering deep biological and emotional currents, or their blockages, in people trapped in, and responding to, existential, social, or catastrophic hardships. From the start, my authorial perspective was that of a woman in the position of a victim or a spectator who became involved in a response. My question to both theory and reality was to think how it is possible to come to a non-violent yet effective response in such endangered circumstances. That is what critical cross-cultural studies should primarily engage, as such a line of inquiry is widely lacking. Globalism makes sense only if the particularities of cultures and their gendered and material aspects are considered and learned. My accounts of the forms of the brutal physical and scholarly collisions between Western and Eastern Europe, and between America and the Near East, also reflects my exposure to their various traces imprinted over the course of my education, career, and habitus in all their forms and locations.

As in any comparison, the problem begins with the negativization of the content being compared and the flagrant manner of the comparison. The basic philosophical question of human negativity is aptly read in the idiom 'tarrying with negative,'[19] used by Slavoj Žižek, a major 1990s Lacanian philosopher from the South Slavic territories. This concept rapidly assumes more complex dimensions of the contemporary need to think of the future of the world and of the human, and other, species. For me, movement has always involved my thought and my drive, my libidinal organization, and, thus, my escape from an aggressive environment, from the frantic shelling and ultimate ravaging of the country, as well as from the regressive forms of masculinity and narrow ethnic matrices. Then, subsequently, my writing was based on my own cognition, life choices, and trajectories. However, for others, moving through the world has

[18] I wrote my PhD dissertation in Los Angeles, and worked as a postdoctoral fellow first in New York City and then in Pretoria, South Africa.

[19] See Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993). Žižek has opened the way for a new understanding of social conflict, also related to the outbursts of nationalism and ethnic fighting of that era.

involved simple reproductions of their own experiences previously imposed on them by the 'heart of darkness,'[20] only the other way around. Such understanding of affect, as pertaining to wider societal and political interactions, also urges for further probing of *responsiveness* to comparisons.

Comparison is supposed to enfold as an exchange within compatibly exchangeable spaces and means, with certain advancement, both respecting and also modulating the existing norms, not simply with an abjection from any side, because, for anyone in any relation, thought, feeling, desire, text, or narrative, some terrorizing instance is looming, some competition forced with unequal positions, and, hence, unequal outcomes. There is always some insufficiently elaborated relational economy, a problematic grasp or deciphering of the given symbolic order, or also a forced sexualization, or sexuation,[21] with no liberating ground and no positive prospects. That is what goes wrong in comparisons: if they lack in subtlety in understanding of the frameworks, canons, or matters of what is involved in a comparison, or are forced into a comparing interaction with no possibility of retaining each side's specific differential, critical, or vital grounds, such as intensity, thought, traces of history, or culture. Hence, response to inconsiderate 'merging' also means recognizing the damaging aspects of the comparing processes and of the annulment of the multiply mediated layers of the cultural resources of human beings; while such a response could also indicate some alternative interactive routes.

Responsiveness is primarily an ethical term. The ethos of responsiveness is suggestively read in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the late 1960s through the late 1980s,[22] and in its further elaboration by his successors in nomadic thought and by feminist authors of the past decades.[23] All of them

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[20] See Joseph Conrad's 1899 novella *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin Classics, 1989).

[21] See Jacques Lacan, *Book XX: Feminine Sexuality, the Limits on Love and Knowledge* (New York: Norton, 1998). *Sexuation* is distinct from biological sexuality, because the term designates how the subject is inscribed in the difference between the sexes, specifically in terms of the dictated unconscious/ 'castration' as 'inhabiting language.'

[22] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1975) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 1980).

[23] See, for example, the philosophical work of Erinn Gilson in "Responsive Becoming: Ethics between Deleuze and Feminism" in *Deleuze and Ethics*, eds. Jun Nathan and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011) and *The Ethics of*

examine the stratification of a multiplied desire, spirit, relationality, environment, movement, rhizomes, positivity, production of affect, negotiation, and future. The first three chapters of this collection came from such a way of thinking and, on such grounds, demonstrate a connection between different types of factual oppressions and variously generated or scaled forms of activism that respond in either positive or negatively transgressive ways, or even in catastrophic ways.

The three subsequent chapters are written from a somewhat less immediately affected, autobiographical documentary perspective, as my own traumas of the war and displacement gradually began to decrease. I thematized the sensitivity to traumas in the works of the authors who significantly influenced the paths of my reading and writing. Continuing the same critical thread from previous chapters, I offer close comparative analyses of several literary and theoretical works. Chapter Four was written for the workshop "Fluid Cartographies, New Modernities" held at the World Congress of Comparative Literature in Rio de Janeiro in 2007. In it I probe the link between the literary/theoretical thought and political commitment of Edward Said's late writings (his memoir and two critical studies), and in dialogue with Sigmund Freud's late work. The fifth chapter was written for the World Semiotic Congress held in Sofia, Bulgaria in 2015; it discusses some key semiotic concepts of Bulgarian-French feminist psychoanalytical theorist and practitioner Julia Kristeva. On the one hand, I examine Kristeva's link to the teaching of her psychoanalytical influences, Freud and Lacan; on the other, I examine her link to the productions of her feminist poststructuralist contemporaries. The results point to the dynamic platform of these women's academic philosophical engagement that, from the 1970s onward, enabled the vast domain of gender-modulated thought as well as various advanced artistic, social, and political practices. Chapter Six further investigates the intricate core of major societal, historical, and gender traumas in contemporary cultures, as I closely read and analyze the tetralogy of the foremost post-WWII Austrian woman writer, Ingeborg Bachmann. This essay is a longer version of my presentation written for the American Comparative Literature Association Congress held in New Orleans in 2009.

Vulnerability: A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

Literatures against or about 'Equalities'?[24]

The second section of this anthology, "Rewriting the 'Posts', Empire, Post-Empire: Individual, Memory, Language", also consists of six chapters. Chapter Seven was written for the Workshop "Writing the Dream" at the World Congress of Comparative Literature held at the Sorbonne, Paris in 2013. It discusses two short works, a lyric poem and a story, by two major nineteenth-century Russian writers, romanticist Mikhail Lermontov and early modernist Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. The chapter offers a view of poetic dreams as a resisting alternate substance and dynamics of individual desire, faith, and mind, respectively, within the rigid societal structures of Imperial Russia. This is also a literary prologue to the discussions in the following chapters of various post-imperial effects in the region from which I originated, the chapters that also proceed as my critical-theoretical après-coup reintegration with my geographic and scholarly departure-points from the early 1990s.

Chapter Eight was written as the plenary lecture for the conference "The Ghosts of the Past: Twenty Years after the Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe," organized at the University of East London in 2009. Pursuing the thematic thread of the consequences of war horrors and of traumatic residua in the postwar everyday, the chapter discusses the possibilities of building a framework for conceptualizing and understanding of the effects of the atrocities committed in the collapse of 'ex-Yugoslavia'. It includes empirical cross-references from the social, educational, cultural, and political contexts, while revealing the ambivalent meanings of the 'ghosts of the past' and of their 'return'. In rethinking the notions of the signifier, representation, the abject, and the excluded from the social and the symbolic, I argue for the centrality of memory work based on victims' experiences and their articulation in public spaces in postwar societies. Envisioning the move forward, and safer interethnic relations on these territories, I emphasize individual responsibility in the (re)formation and (re)construction of complex personal, collective, and national identities, lived memory and institutions, and in the attempts to inter- and intra-communicate these particularized units.

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[24] The term 'equality' is often used in imprecise or confusing ways; initially related to the French Revolution/Enlightenment formula, *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, it was later compromised in various rigid systems. In ordinary communication, education, social, and administrative structures, this word often distracts attention from locating and articulating real problems and envisioning remedies, by reducing the understanding of the scope of human values, diversity, rights, and privacy.

Written for the conference "Multilingualism in Empires" organized at the University of Zagreb in 2018, Chapter Nine deepens the scope of the discussion to embrace the framework of the preceding imperial(ist) times. It takes a comparative approach to the question of language and the post-imperial identity constructions in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, in the light of three empires: the Habsburg, the Ottoman, and Socialist Yugoslavia. Pointing to both national and shared language memory, variably exacted by political, state, and religious frameworks and cultural potencies, and to the present, history-based, ethnic language institutionalizations in these two formatively different states, the chapter aims to expose the dynamics of the processes of identification that are far from simple, or even finite. These processes are observed as reflecting on the Habsburg relationship of multilingualism and social dominance, which has firmly sheltered the Croatian canon, and on the mutual mirroring between the Ottoman nation-religion model and the subsequent Yugoslav exclusionary (re)grouping of languages. I show how in receiving major impulses also from the Imperial cause(s), these national languages are each grounded in an aporetic image of a lingual community whose underlying currents have fluctuated from traumatic to phantasmatic, from precarious to redundant. Thus, they exemplify how the post-imperial condition has been protracted to more recent times, entailing the confusion of the auto- and hetero-projections of the various selves onto the nations, thus assisting the conflicts of a 'minor-multilingualism' in these territories.

Written on the same track, Chapter Ten was originally presented at the University of Vienna 2019 Comparative Literature Conference, "The Current State of Literary Studies in Central Europe." It further discusses the Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian cultural circles comparatively, against the background of the remaining interactive traces of the three empires that permeated these cultures in the past. It also discusses more recent intellectual and artistic dispersions from these two national cultures across the Central European territorial and cultural domains. I reconsider the concept of postcolonial as relative to the concepts of both post-imperial and re-national, and as embedded in my major analytic frameworks of gender and cultural performativity. On that ground, I attend to the question of domination and continuity as the shifting patterns and political variables that affect the processes of identification in personal, group, and ethnic figurations. The analysis evolves around two points: the postcolonial, manifested in the mnemonic work of cultural production in dispersive moving, and the transforming performativity of a creative singular acting that reinscribes these mnemonic traces with the newly produced quality in rhizomatic cultural interactions. The chapter demonstrates

how domination and continuity pulsate in the rewritten challenges posed to previous or existing structures, and how they provide the mnemonic with dialogical traits in the processes of thawing the compulsory group memorabilities.

Chapter Eleven, the foundational essay of this collection, "Responsiveness to Comparison," addresses the ways of thinking a comparison: the concept, act, and terms of comparison that determine responsiveness to comparison as such. It points to a necessity to complement the operation of comparison with the capacity for affirmativeness in rethinking the discipline of comparative literature and its affective-ethical horizons in relation to variously loaded aesthetic, political, and economic fluxes of the world's societies. Within the framework of the singularity of a literary act and the plurality of its social relevance, and in light of Benedict Anderson's definition of comparison as a discursive strategy,[25] I tackle views of various writers, philosophers, theorists, and artists. Since all of them speak of the negativity or positivity invested in comparison, I discuss different legacies of the understanding of (such) desire. On the one hand, I point out the concept of desire as lack, inherited from Hegelian dialectics, transferred by Freud to his twentieth-century successors, and still present in today's post-structuralist linguistic-based turn filled with negativity, its subject saturated by lack, loss, or melancholia opposes negotiation. On the other hand, I examine the Spinozian positive definition of desire as an ontological force of becoming, reflected in twentieth-/twenty-first-century materialist nomadic philosophy and, in my view, corresponding with Edward Said's concept of beginnings and with recent interdisciplinary elaborations of the concept of similarity. Such envisioned nomadic thought offers an alternative: an understanding of thinking and writing, and hence of literariness and theorizing, as a force of affirmation. I highlight the future of the discipline of comparative literature in terms of an affective dispersion that attunes literary comparisons to the patterns of hope.

The final chapter, presented at the 2020 conference "Poetics of the World Literature, Analytical Essays," held in Moscow, probes the concept of world literature within a paradigm I suggested: "*Poetics-Ethics-Politics* to *Politics-Ethics-Poetics*: A Century of Integration." The chapter discusses transmutations of these major streams of world literary studies, shaped by turbulent and violent ideological and sociopolitical changes in the past

[25] See Benedict Anderson, "Frameworks of Comparison," *London Review of Books* 38, no. 2, 21 (2016): 1-11.

hundred years, from the post-Great-War era through the long twentieth century, to the jubilee year of 2020. Curiously enough, this year has emerged as one of the most globalized years in the period under discussion; it has started with a pandemic, making us aware of the fallacy of centrisms and of the relation of nature and culture that pervades literature and literary studies alike. I demonstrate how developments in poetics were intensely merging with various materializations of ethics and politics, so gradually they reached the point when this process has simply been reversed, from an overemphasis on politics, via various aspects of ethics, again to poetics. Moreover, what was called 'world literature,' J. W. von Goethe's *Weltliteratur*,[26] two centuries ago within a privileged Western European categorization, can still be rethought in a dialogue with the contemporary, multiply diversified world literature poetics. That implies all the global, national, ethnic, area, and regional cultural dimensions, with gender and also new materialisms that restructure and retexture each dimension from within. Within the context of responsiveness to comparison in comparative literature, I further discuss the concept of affirmative ethics on the way back toward reassessing poetic approaches in the recent turn to World Literature. I point out how such ethics contributes to the revival of the understanding of poeticism as a central feature of a literary work, particularly in comparative contexts that prevail within the contemporary domain of World Literature. It is not only politics that should include, determine, and describe one's active participation in writing, reading, theorizing, or studying world literature, but also, or primarily, one's dynamic cognitive-productive-poetic quality, which can speak for itself.

Close to completing the preparation of this collection, I attended the 2021 American Comparative Literature Association plenary seminar "Geopolitics of Comparison around the World", consisting of a dozen of talks that emphasized the importance of cultural gaps and untranslatables, and the importance of *learning* how and what to communicate in comparisons. I recognized many of the ideas that came to my mind in writing the chapters of this collection, and I more clearly understood both the communicative aspect of comparison as modulating the often problematic or omniscient agency of comparison and 'untranslatables' as education itself. In relation

[26] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) used the term *Weltliteratur* directly in only a few places. In many other instances, he discusses issues that bear on the concept, or that address it, in other terms. See, for example, John Gearey, ed., *Essays on Art and Literature: Goethe's Collected Works, Vol. 3* (New York: Suhrkamp, 1986).

to my concluding discussion of the heaviness of politics with which world literature studies are charged today, I refer to Waïl Hassan's ACLA presentation, which suggests the possibility that the story of world literature had begun long before Goethe and/or similar cosmopolitan efforts responding to the raise of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe, and in Spain and Italy, whose histories had been entangled with the Arab presence in Europe in the medieval era. According to Hassan, the trajectory of American comparative literature studies would then become less of a "linear, progressive march toward greater 'inclusivity'" than a circling back to pre-Romantic understanding that, notwithstanding its Eurocentric universalism and belief in progress, "stressed the fruitful interaction of world cultures and what we might call, in today's critical parlance, their *irreducible hybridity*." [27] These words could read as paradigmatic for the current need for literary scholars from all over the world to focus more on the poetic aspects of the history of literatures, which subsume ethics and politics, and also on an affirming hybridity, rather than on an infinite political particularization of 'inclusive differences' that still remain unequal or become more problematic. This is one of the hints of the raising of awareness of poetics and literariness that also connects the chapters presented in this collection.

[27] The Vice-Presidential Panel, 2021 ACLA Congress; see Waïl Hassan, "Geopolitics of Comparison: World Literature *Avant la Lettre*," *Comparative Literature Journal*, Duke UP 73, no. 3 (2021): 255-269. Hassan also shows how, before his antinationalist Westward-looking description of *Weltliteratur* in 1827, already in 1819 Goethe had rejected the ontology and epistemology of colonial Orientalism, as also the Eastward-turned, globalist Goethe.

PART I:

DOCUMENTING VIOLENCE: VARIATIONS ON THE THEME

CHAPTER ONE

WHO'S AFRAID OF HYSTERIA? THEY SHOOT DESIRES, DON'T THEY?

My membership in the International Association for Semiotic Studies began six years ago (1991),[1] simultaneously with the wars in Croatia and my native Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since then, violence and horror have become my main preoccupation, instead of my original field of images and narrative in philosophy and fiction. Yet, like everything else in this world, these two fields—like nature and culture, human drives and human production, territory and the environment—are interconnected. This interconnectedness can take various forms, such as religion, the Internet, psychodynamics or the unconscious. What is common to all these perspectives is *écriture*[2] and the close-to-myth self-reflexivity of language that pervades our lives and world as a God-like machine. One can be deceived only if one is made to ask: "And what is behind that?",[3] thinkers

[1] This chapter was originally written in 1997. My lifelong gratitude goes to Jeff Bernard (1943-2010), senior Austrian colleague, Secretary of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, who encouraged my international activities from 1991. Michael Heim, the UCLA Slavic Studies Professor, read this text first, recommending its presentation.

[2] In the last decades of the twentieth century, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan were major European authorities in philosophy and theory, and their work was applied to various disciplines. Derrida lectured regularly in the Spring quarter at the University of California at Irvine at the time.

[3] Jacques Lacan discusses this in *The Eleventh Seminar: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981). To exemplify the structure of a redoubled deception, Lacan provides an anecdote about the competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasios, from ancient Greece, about who will paint a more convincing illusion. Zeuxis produced such a realistic picture of grapes that birds were lured to eat it. Parrhasios won by painting a curtain on the wall of his room, so that when Parrhasios showed him his painting, Zeuxis asked him: "OK, now please *pull aside the veil* and show me what you painted!" The illusion of Zeuxis's painting was so convincing that image was taken for the real thing; the illusion of Parrhasios's painting resided in the very notion that what we see in front of us is just a *veil* covering up the hidden truth. This is also how, for