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The Balkans and the "History of Shit"

Psychoanalysis, argues Dusan Bjelic, has a lot to say about the construction of post-communist identities in the Balkans: Bjelic outlines how Julia Kristeva, the renowned French intellectual originally from Bulgaria has developed a peculiar picture of "Balkan identity" that is associated with all things dirty, polluted and uncivilized.

In Michael Ignatieff's book, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (1998), there is an account of the author's interview with a Serb soldier who has been fighting his Croat neighbors for two years. The conversation takes place in eastern Croatia in a village called Mirkovci ("place of peace"). Attempting to engage the soldier in a multicultural debate, Ignatieff asks him what makes him think he is different from a Croat. To Ignatieff's evident satisfaction, the soldier's answer provides strong evidence of the "narcissism of small differences," and corroborates the author's own view that this has been the moving force behind the Balkan fratricide. The soldier lists many irreconcilable differences between the Serbs and the Croats and accuses foreigners of not understanding why Serbs and Croats—who look alike to them—are so different. Then, obviously becoming irritated by the whole silly inquiry and wanting to end it, he suddenly reverses his position, saying "Look, here's how it is. Those Croats, they think they're better than us. They want to be gentlemen. They think they're fancy Europeans. I'll tell you something. We're all just Balkan shit."⁽¹⁾

Ignatieff's anecdote contains the three most important elements of the Balkan "technologies of the self": shit, psychoanalysis, and fratricide. These three elements are related to each other, and are collectively related to the production of Balkan identity as a revolving door. The implications for the Balkans are alarming. Let me just mention two names: Jovan Raskovic and Radovan Karadzic. These two Serb psychiatrists, the founders of the Serbian Democratic Party

in Croatia and Bosnia, have used their clinical knowledge and psychoanalytic discourse on sanity and madness in their nationalistic rhetoric. As a result of the interpolation of this knowledge, the Serb national identity has been constructed as madness caused by the repression of communism in need of liberation. Madness interpolated by psychoanalytic discourse has been externalized in the insane action of fratricide. When Ignatieff encountered the Serb soldier engaged in fighting his neighbor and former friend, the Serb was already a psychiatric puppet, a tragic product of a clinical "knowledge," and his political conduct was, not surprisingly, congruent with a psychoanalytic theory of "narcissism of small differences."

This paper is part of a larger project about psychoanalysis and its effects on the construction of post-communist identity in the Balkans. Certainly Raskovic and Karadzic are two extreme cases of the Balkan psychology, and the ones most notably identified with the Balkan madness. Other Balkan psychoanalysts have completely disowned their Balkan identities. The two most prominent names in this latter group are Julia Kristeva and Slavoj Zizek. In this paper I will focus on the case of Julia Kristeva and on constructing a subversive critical response to her psychoanalytic approach to Balkan identity.

The "Revolving Door" of Balkan Identity

Bulgarian-born Julia Kristeva is perhaps the best-known Eastern European intellectual in the West. Kristeva arrived in France almost 40 years ago, and since then her contributions to the Western discourse on representation, identity, and subversion have been wide-ranging and impressive.⁽²⁾ Even though only 25 when she entered the French intellectual scene dominated by male humanists and structuralists, she acted as a "force of displacement", as her teacher Roland Barthes puts it, always keen "...to destroy the latest preconception, the one we thought we could be comforted by."⁽³⁾ Critics credit her unique and subversive vantage point to her "strangeness." Toril Moi, for example, writes, "It is, then, in her own exiled and marginalized position as an intellectual women in Paris in the late sixties, as well as in her specific intellectual lineage, that we can locate the formative influences on Kristeva's early work"⁽⁴⁾ Kristeva's promoter and translator into English, Leon S. Roudiez, is more blunt, citing her Bulgarian background as a source of her non-conformist "bent of mind." He believes that it "...preserved her from uncritical acceptance"⁽⁵⁾ of any fashionable trend." Her status as stranger," Roudiez continues, "proved to have been an asset in France; it should be an asset in this country [the U.S.] as well."⁽⁶⁾

While her critics hold that being a Bulgarian and a woman in Paris has helped Kristeva to develop her subversive discourse, she, on the other hand, has rushed to disown both her Bulgarian identity and Balkan nationalism. In three recently-translated collections of essays and interviews on the topics of nationalism and European subjectivity, *Nations Without Nationalism* (1993), *Crisis of the European Subject* (2000), and *Revolt, She Said*(2002), Kristeva, giving her reasons for this rejection of her Bulgarian identity, writes, "... It is beneficial to be a cosmopolitan when one comes from a small country such as Bulgaria...."⁽⁷⁾ , and "I am among those who dread and reject the notion of *Volksgeist*, 'Æspirit of the people,' which stems from a line of thinkers that includes Herder and Hegel."⁽⁸⁾ She worries about the revival of the *Volksgeist* in Eastern Europe: "...the *Volksgeist* causes me to be perplexed by the nationalistic boom among Eastern European peoples today...."⁽⁹⁾

Kristeva's reading of the post-communist situation in Eastern Europe as a whole, and particularly in the Balkans, closely follows Hannah Arendt's theory that, since Napoleon, two types of nationalism have divided Europe. While "civic nationalism," epitomized by France, has

a strong rational and legal basis and a long history of public discourse, "tribal nationalism" is based on strong collective, mystical sentiments that tend to supersede legal authority and to undermine civil and human rights.⁽¹⁰⁾ Living and working in a nation which exemplifies "civic nationalism" (i.e. France), Kristeva proclaims herself a "cosmopolitan" and rejects her connection with her native country, which to her represents—with other Balkan nations— "tribal nationalism" and a new hegemonic threat to civic society. Thus, like Arendt, whose political theory she greatly respects and unconditionally trusts, Kristeva accepts the political and cultural binary of "civic" versus "tribal" in European identity and, like Samuel P. Huntington, draws the civilizational fault line between the East and the West.

In her essay, "Bulgaria, my Suffering," published after the fall of communism and at the beginning of the bloody ethnic conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia, Kristeva describes a rare visit to her homeland after the fall of communism. She finds two particularly disturbing and internally related irritants—dirty streets and a dirty national language. To her, both are symptomatic of social disorder and the lack of a genuine national identity. She laments the post-communist aesthetics of the public sphere, the black markets and "the garbage and flies" in the streets of Sofia. Even more she laments the "lapses of taste" revealed by the sorry condition of the national language. When Bulgarians began translating Shakespeare and Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, Beckett, Nathalie Sarraute, Barthes, Foucault, a bit of Kristeva, "It became clear," Kristeva points out, "that there were not enough words, and so they stuffed into this poor language of sensitive peasants and naïve thinkers a whole arsenal of tasteless and rootless loanwords."⁽¹¹⁾ When "foreign words, barely modified by a suffix," are written in Cyrillic, they "inspire pity" and produce, "migraine in the so-called half-cultivated public."⁽¹²⁾ For Kristeva, vandalism, trashy consumer aesthetics, an illegal economy, political corruption and cultural plagiarism—common features of post-communist societies—are all signs of barbarism and preempt any kind of social grace, politeness, and national taste. She formulates a principle of geo-aesthetics that divides European nations into those, like France, which have an aesthetic of the public sphere and those, like Bulgaria, which do not.

Kristeva's principle of geo-aesthetics, an outgrowth of Arendt's "veritable politics of narration," posits that a nation is a political object of order only to the extent that it achieves an aesthetic unity among its citizens—that it has a national "taste." France, of course, is the aesthetic nation *par excellence* and the leading example of this principle. "French taste," she writes, "is an act of politeness among people who share the same rhetoric—the same accumulation of images and phrases," and although, "each person belongs to his family, a clan of friends, a professional clique, that's anchored in language," people in clans share "the same battery of readings and conversations" which, in her view, is an example of "a stable society."⁽¹³⁾ French clannishness has been "rooted in language, in an art of living and in this harmonization of shared customs called French taste."⁽¹⁴⁾ With respect to the art of living, Kristeva even claims that France should be seen as the aesthetic leader of the world:

I lodge my body in the logical landscape of France, take shelter in the sleek, easy and smiling streets, rub shoulders with this odd people—they are reserved but disabused and possessed of an impenetrable intimacy which is, all things considered, polite. They built Notre-Dame and the Louver, conquered Europe and a large part of the globe, and then went back home again because they prefer a pleasure that goes hand in hand with reality. But because they also prefer the pleasures reality affords, they still believe themselves masters of the world, or at any rate a great power. An irritated, condescending, fascinated world that seems ready to follow them. To follow

us.(15)

Like Arendt, Kristeva theorizes the polis and its subject citizens as invigorated by the act of speech and the construction of a narrative. Through narrative, through the network of speech, true interest in political action is engendered and the polis self-regulated. For both Arendt and Kristeva, these conditions are indispensable to the preservation of civic societies and European democracy. The "garbage and flies" in the streets of Sofia and the polluted Bulgarian language signify a lack of *inter-esse* (to use Heidegger's term) among citizens to act in behalf of the common good. The narrative not only generates interest in political action, but also, in and through the telling of stories, enables the asking and answering of the question, "Who am I?" The absence of a narrative is dangerous because it makes the formation of a civic subjectivity impossible. In the absence of civic identity, *Volkgeist* is likely to move in and violent nationalism with a barbaric lack of differentiation and subjectivation, to take over. And, Kristeva believes "... these lapses in taste would be only the final sign of the abject surrender of people (and of so many others) to the new world order..."(16)

Kristeva, similarly to Arendt, envisions the polis and the agency of a citizen or subject within it as being animated by the act of narration. However, unlike Arendt, Kristeva believes that in the absence of the narrative, in the absence of national "taste," life is not worth living because it is reduced to a simple "zoon." Thus, for her, the absence of an aesthetics of the public sphere in contemporary Bulgaria precludes any possibility of the formation of civic identity, and thus is the cause of her "suffering."

No doubt Kristeva, like Arendt, looks to the ancient Greek polis and to Greek philosophy for the model of the modern nation-state where the aesthetics of the self and the politics of the public space merge into the art of living. However, let us remember that Athena in *Oresteia*, masterminding the first democracy, persuades the citizens of Athens to re-direct their tribal vengeance from each other to "the stranger" who lives on the periphery of the city in order to establish the rule of law and make himself or herself beautiful and desirable to the rest of the world. "Democracy" has always tethered the aesthetics of the public sphere to organized violence at its periphery. As a conservative cultural analysts and Krsiteva's model, Samuel P. Huntington observes, "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence." Kristeva regards Bulgarians as political excreta, an abject of the polis' superego, without accounting for the "organized violence" which decides who is literate and beautiful and who is not. Her geo-aesthetics and the politics of national "taste" rest on the unrecognized excretional logic that engenders the organized violence of the "democratic" nation-state—and on the dualism of taste and disgust.

The taste and disgust binary, however, has not always followed the fault line between civilization and barbarism. In Rome, women smeared their faces with human excrement in order to preserve their young skin; in Egypt, female hysteria was treated by inhaling the fumes of charred crocodile dung, and the excrement of the lizard was in Egypt both a beauty product and mediating element in the divine association of scribes and shit. To say it differently and to raise my critical point about Kristeva's geo-aesthetics, underneath her civilizational line between the "French taste" and the Balkan "garbage and flies," runs a stream of repressed inverse signification.

To unearth this commerce of signification I shall turn to another, less known, French aesthete, Dominique Laporte(17), and to his short study *History of Shit*. Unlike Kristeva, Laporte

approaches the question of French taste historically, critically, and—to utilize David Wills on this point—from the rear. He claims that the birth of modern power is rooted in the aesthetics of the public sphere and in its subject citizens, both of which, according to Laporte, are effects of the management of human waste. Kristeva approaches the question of national aesthetics frontally, through the history of consciousness from Aristotle to Arendt, and in a discourse, which has already turned the management of the human body (as Michel Foucault claims) into the pleasure of pure discourse about the body. Laporte resists the frontal approach by reintroducing human waste as an aesthetic signifier from the rear. His main point is that just as the shit has been cleansed from the streets of Paris in order to beautify public space, so the French language has been cleansed in order to beautify public narrative. In 1539 King Francois issued an edict that the Paris streets should be cleansed of shit. His edict coincided with the effort of the Royal Academy to beautify the French language through systematically cleansing it of redolent Latin words. "Latin was stale," writes Laporte, "It smelled of stagnate scholasticism and musty classrooms, of esoteric and ambiguous knowledge."(18) Further cleansing measures, both of public places and of the language, were undertaken during the republic. The language was washed and policed so that no one who spoke it need, as one French legislator put it, "fear polluting his mouth."(19)

Paul Eluard summarizes poetically the hygienic origin of power: "Language speaks and asks: 'why am I beautiful?' Because my master bathes me." Laporte argues, as does Kristeva, that the formation of a national aesthetics has been crucial to the birth of France's political power first as an absolute monarchy then as a republic: "Without a master, one cannot be cleaned. Purification, whether by fire or by the word, by baptism or by death, requires submission to the law."(20) When Kristeva admonishes Bulgarian writers and translators, "Dare to invent words, but not without the ideas that you lack; cut the long sentences with foreign syntax for which you don't have the thought; change the rhythm; don't drone through the old elementary stuff, but also don't ape the tricks of those who, unlike you, come from a boudoir and a baroque of which you have no idea."(21) she attempts to "bathe" the Bulgarian language and constitute herself its master much as the Royal Academy purged the French language.

Kristeva demands the castration of the Bulgarian language through purging of foreign words just as the French language was castrated by being purged of Latin words. Psychoanalytically speaking, she wants to transform the Bulgarian language into a woman, a virgin. But there is something very dirty about this. When Roland Barthe writes, "...when written, shit does not smell," is he not referring to a kind of unavoidable representational Puritanism which causes language to negate what it signifies precisely because it wants to ennoble and purify it? Is there not a hygienic relation between the sign and its referent? Do not syntax and words work as a kind of representational deodorant? On this subject Laporte writes,

For while the elimination of waste may be a condition of beauty, the beautiful does more than simply put itself in excrement's place. Just as the pearl requires the mud that cultivates it, the language of the King—pure language of virginal power—is engendered by the base languages, waste and commerce, to which it is the equivalent."(22)

By this logic of inverse signification, the two hygienic opposites "mud" and "shine" cannot be separated because each engenders the other. In the same way, following Hegel's master-slave logic, the master's freedom is engendered by the slave's concealed labor, and in this chain of signification the slave is master and the master a slave.

Freud invokes this logic of inverse signification in his analysis of South Slavic folk narratives of dreams, where he establishes his notorious symbolic relation between "shit" and "gold".

In dreams in folklore gold is seen in the most unambiguous way to be a symbol of faeces. If the sleeper feels a need to defecate, he dreams of gold, of treasure. The disguise in the dream, which is designed to mislead him into satisfying his need in bed, usually makes the pile of faeces serve as a sign to mark the place where the treasure is to be found; that is to say, the dream—as though by means of endoscopic perception—states outright, even if in a reversed form, that gold is a sign or a symbol for faeces.(23)

For Freud the repression and sublimation of anal eroticism is necessary to the civilizational process, and this sublimation surfaces in dreams when the inverse signifier, gold, symbolically represents shit (or anal eroticism). This same logic may be applied to Kristeva's hygienic—and civilizational—binaries, revealing that each in fact is engendered by its opposite thus making a virgin language a slut and vice versa.

Freud's theory on sublimation and anal eroticism has, in fact, considerable significance in the development of Balkan scatological identity. He maintains that the Balkan people have a proclivity for anal eroticism that impedes sublimation and the civilizational process.(24) He did not have direct analytical contact with the Balkans. His source of information is ethnographic collections of the folk narrative of dreams, mostly from the journal *Anthropophyteia* edited by F. S. Krauss. In other words, Freud's contact with the Balkans was mediated by layers of representation, to which he added his own psychoanalytic layer. But there was one important addition to his representational intervention. That is, he found folkloric anecdotes about dreams to be more fertile ground for analysis of dream—symbols than dreams themselves, which conceal their meaning and only yield with great difficulty to interpretation. In his analyses of these dream narratives, he interpreted their symbolism psychoanalytically, that is as wish fulfillment and the satisfaction of repressed needs. The serious tone of his analysis was somewhat incongruous with the narratives, which were originally told as comic anecdotes.

Consider this dream, taken from Freud's collection of South Slav Folk Traditions:

Two gentlemen arrived at a hotel, ate their evening meal and drank and at last wanted to go to bed. They asked the host if he would show them to a room. As the rooms were all occupied the host gave up his own bed to them, which they were both to sleep in, and he would soon find a place for him to sleep somewhere else. The two men lay down in the same bed. A spirit appeared to one of them in a dream, lit a candle and led him to the churchyard. The lichgate opened and the spirit with the candle in its hand and the man behind walked up to the grave of a maiden. When they had reached the grave, the candle suddenly went out. 'What shall I do now? How shall I tell which is the maiden's grave to-morrow, when it is day?' he asked in the dream. Then an idea came to his rescue, he pulled down his drawers and shat on the grave. When he had finished shitting, his comrade, who was sleeping beside him, struck him first on one cheek and then on the other: 'What! You'd shit right in my face?'(25)

Freud offers the following interpretation: The sleeper knows that the bed is not the place to defecate, hence in the dream he causes himself to be led away by a person—spirit who shows

him another place where he is permitted to satisfy his need. The spirit leads the person through the night with a candle as a servant would lead a guest to the restroom. The sudden change of the situation, however, puzzles Freud; why does the spirit lead the sleeper to a churchyard to desecrate a grave? "After all," Freud continues, "these elements seem to have nothing to do with the urge to defecate and the symbolization of faeces by gold."(26) Freud's analysis stops here, but he adds, for possible future analysis, that we should bear in mind the fact that in the dream, "...two men are sleeping together," and that "...the uncanny element of the ghostly guide is associated with a woman."(27)

Here I will provide my own analysis of this dream and in doing so I will treat this southern Slav dream narrative not as an extension of the theory of the subconscious but— as it was to those who originally produced it—a comic narrative intended to give pleasure both to the storyteller and his listener. Freud himself argues that jokes about shit make us laugh because they allow us for a brief moment to enjoy our shit again just as we used to do as children. Since we are discussing "Balkan shit" I shall try to provide an analysis consistent with this common sense psychology. The dream is about two Slavs who end up spending a night together in the same bed. They may have been a Serb and a Croat or, two Bugars. I use "Bugars," the Slavic word, rather than "Bulgarian," the English word, because in fact the English word "bugger" (a sodomite) is derived from "Bugar." This is an important etymological detail because it does strengthen Freud's allusion to homoerotic desires (according to Branka Arsic at the psychic core of Balkan nationalism) between the two sleeping men. To continue the etymological thread, the word "slovenly," which means "lazy and dirty" according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is in fact derived from "Slovene." It seems that the Oxford English Dictionary has conspired in the creation of a linguistic hegemony, which has contributed to the self-essentialization of Balkan shit-identity. The dreamer needs to defecate but is lazy and reluctant to get up and leave the warm hug of forbidden homoerotic pleasures to go out into the cold, dark night. The narrator/dreamer's perception of himself as lazy corresponds to Kristeva's characterization of her fellow Bulgarians when she tells them, "you want everything as long as you can doze through it, or laze about, or hedge, maneuver, cheat..."(28) She takes at face value the lack of hygienic discipline and of an aesthetic will, as if they are natural conditions rather than representational conditions.

There is another element relevant to our interpretation of the dream narrative that speaks to Kristeva's prescribed therapy for the Balkans, and also to the predicament of the Balkan Enlightenment. Hovering over the Balkans through the darkness of their culture, Kristeva, much as the spirit with a candle showing the path of Enlightenment, wants to lead the Balkans to the place of virginity, of gold—to France. There, at this final and redeeming destination, the Balkan sleeper marks the place with his shit in order to find it when he awakes. But his full predicament is revealed at the end of the dream. As he wakes from the pleasurable dream, the moment of redemption leads to shitting inadvertently on the face of his fellow Balkan, the true meaning of the Balkan Enlightenment.

"Balkan shit"

"Hold your shit," declares the French monarch. "Dispose of it only in the dark night. Remove your pigs from sight beyond the city's walls, or I will seize your person and your goods, engulf your home in my capacious purse, and lock your body in my jail"(29) Though a civilizational discontent, the criminalization of shit and its removal from the public sphere has made France into an aesthetic empire. In line with Laporte's project of reintroducing "shit" into cultural discourse, we may ask (paraphrasing Bob Dylan), "Where has all the shit gone?" Where

indeed? The surplus of shit everywhere evident in the Balkans' public restrooms may provide us with our answer to that question. The Balkans may lack a tradition of liberalism and a public sphere, but they are the most liberal-minded and the most publicly-oriented of all the European nations when it comes to the production of shit. If French liberalism, following Freud's theory of civilization, stems from the sacrifice of anal pleasures for a beautiful and orderly society and the subjectivity of cleanliness and odorlessness, then it follows that Balkan liberalism must stem from the lack of such sacrifice. The failure to repress and sublimate, as Kristeva observes with her psychoanalytic eye, make the streets of the Balkans dirty and the people who walk on them graceless.

If Kristeva is right when she claims in the *Powers of Horror* that in pre-discursive societies shitting is a way of "writing of the real," then we may have to revise our reading of Balkan shit. Anyone who has been privileged to enter a Balkan public restroom would readily confirm that it is an aesthetic horror. Should we not blame Balkan kings who, unlike the French king, failed to arrest the subjects for not taking care of their shit? A Serbian king, whose people were known for distilling brandy out of shit, once found himself, a revenge of history and of the king's failed hygienic responsibility, literally deep in shit after the supporting boards under his outhouse had been sabotaged by his enemies. He was bathed like French language. The condition of the public toilets in the Balkans today is horrendous.⁽³⁰⁾ They often lack toilet paper and have uncontrolled water leaks, but the most serious problem is that shit is often liberally disposed around the toilet hole. (The toilets are the type upon which one squats and aims with a blind rear toward a central hole). This is not only a practical problem but also a philosophical puzzle. Why not shit in the hole? Is it lack of hygiene and proper training, the lack of a narrative (as Kristeva would no doubt say) or something more serious and sinister?" Could it be some higher logic of culture at work here to keep public toilets as places of aesthetic terror?

A Serbian poet Alexander Ristic, may give us a poetic answer to this question in his poem "Monastic Outhouse":

In the back of the nunnery
 there's small outhouse
 with a half-open door and evening visitors.
 While one is inside,
 another waits her turn
 with her nose in the book.
 And while the first one exits,
 straightening her robes,
 her face almost radiant,
 the other one—steps in,
 peeks into the spotless hole,
 trembling with terror
 that what lies at the bottom
 may leap into her face
 and leave a mark on her flushed cheek
 in the shape of a devil's cross.

A story has been related to me about a young American professor of English who, coming for a job interview to the American University in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, broke into tears when she needed to use a restroom but was terrified to enter it. Much as one fears the dark space under the bed in Ristic's poem the outhouse becomes a place of metaphysical imagination projected

onto the dark hole. Thus, what appears as a lack of hygiene may be a case of Heideggerian metaphysics in situ, with the public restroom serving the function of an oracle before which pre-literate subjects tremble, fearing the dark hole as an abyss of being, an open crack into the real. Between the dark hole and the nun's face, between demonic shit and virgin purity, lies the terror of the cesspool's abyss. If the history of the West, as Heidegger claims, is the history of abandoned being, that is the history of clean toilets, then shitting shit next to the toilet hole rather than in it, is a Heideggerian resistance to modernity. An re-opening to the Being, a harkening to the anal logos. Or perhaps a pre-narrative abandoning of the Western abandonment of being.

Kristeva may not acknowledge this point, given her preference for frontal analysis. But, thanks to Laporte, and to a comic Freud, we are able to conjure up a strategic discourse on an inversion of Balkan identity in relation to the French taste and to relate them symbolically in the way that Freud relates shit and gold. Balkan shit on the floor of the restroom is symbolically analogous to French stinky cheese on the neatly decorated table; the former is inedible cheese, the latter edible shit. To the extent that Kristeva relies on Freud's theory of the civilizational process of repression, sublimation and sacrifice to represent the Balkans as less civilized, she reproduces the psychoanalytic shit/gold symbolic binary with the Balkans lapses of taste as shit and France taste as gold, and thus exposes her position to subversive inversion. This same logic may also be employed in another way to destabilize Kristeva's position. That is, the implied seriousness of the consequences of normality and cultural superiority may be turned against itself—into a comedy. For this strategy I am indebted to Nietzsche's call to laughter at power as a way to remove its mask and to Karl Kraus treatment of psychoanalysis as a comedy of subjectivity rather than as a science. Both, along with my Balkan proclivity for shit, should invite you to enjoy a moment of anal counter-hegemony to Kristeva's frontal geo-aesthetics.

To return to the anecdote with which I began this paper, the Serbian soldier's remark, "We are all Balkan shit," at first appears to be a perfect example of Kristeva's Balkan barbarism, of a pre-narrative culture steeped in vulgarity. However, it is noteworthy that the Serb voluntarily places himself at the bottom of her prescribed cultural hierarchy. In fact the Serb soldier quite accurately articulates his place in the hierarchy. Precisely by confirming his "shit"—identity, he uncannily activates hierarchical and hygienic conditions of Balkan representation already in place. This scatological self-identification corroborates that the Serb soldier has internalized Kristeva's hygienic fault as a frontline identity. Ironically, this fact contradicts Kristeva's own claim about Serb fascism. Unlike fascists who define their superior identity in clear, hygienic terms, the Serb's affirmation of his scatological identity confirms his understanding that he represents what Goethe has called at the end of the second part of *Faust*, "remnant of earth" or, *Erdenrest*.

Another important observation about the ontology of the Balkan identity is in place here. The national identity of France emerged from its struggle with Germany in the midst of war. The Balkan identity on the other hand, emerges, to use Gramsci's term, as a "spontaneous submission" to the established European hegemony of representation: "We are all Balkan shit." In this respect Balkan identities are not phenomenally "real" but always mediated by the discursive non-experience, and thus always queer. That should explain why, only recently, after the appearance of Maria Todorova's masterpiece, *Imagining the Balkans*, the Balkans are becoming aware of the queerness of their "technologies of the self." Her book does not call for a pan-Balkan identity, it calls for the self-de-essentialization of Balkan identity and the acceptance of this identity always conditionally, critically and in relation to the history of its discursive origin.

One must remain bewildered by how a theorist of abjection and of language such as Julia Kristeva has fallen prey to ignorance of the history of her native language and allowed herself to embrace the darkest of cultural theories. On the one hand, she places narrative and representation at the center of the polis, on the other hand, she is completely ignorant of theories of language and the intricacies of cultural representation. In reality, she deals neither with aesthetic polarities nor with civilizational fault lines, but only with the unity of her adoptive language. The French language, so beloved of Kristeva, like a young girl described by Marx who sells her body in exchange for the dowry that ensures virginity on her wedding night, may produce virgin "taste" only by being a slut. Thus, what has been described as an external object, shit, is in fact the internal symbolic character of Kristeva's civilizational and linguistic purity.

And, in conclusion, I will address the question of why I am writing this scatological study. Hannah Arendt, discussing her Jewishness, or as she calls it "an identity under attack," gives some advice that may be adopted as a universal method for representational counter-hegemony in the post-colonial world. She said: "If one is attacked as Jew, one must fight back as a Jew!" Or, to translate it for the Balkan identity under attack, "If one is attacked as a shit, one must fight back as a shit!" However, this fight need not always be somber, disgusting, and without pleasure. On the contrary, it may even be pleasure of a kind. The comic Freud has the last word on this subject. Through his studies of Balkan folk narratives and his appreciation of the Balkan people's "crude love of truth.," he was able to arrive at the conclusion that for men and women who can no longer copulate "there still remains the pleasure of shitting."⁽³¹⁾

1) Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), p. 36.

2) "In 1966," Toril Moi comments, "Paris witnessed not only the publication of Jacques Lacan's *Ecrits* and Michel Foucault's *Les Mots at les choses (The Order of Things)*, but also the arrival of a young linguist from Bulgaria." Toril Moi, "Introduction," *The Kristeva Reader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 1.

3) Roland Barthes quoted in *Ibid.*

4) *Ibid.*, p. 3.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 3.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 11.

7) Julia Kristeva, *Nations Without Nationalism* (translated by Leon S. Roudiez) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 15.

8) Kristeva, *Nations*, p. 53

9) *Ibid.*, p. 53–4.

10) See Kristeva's uncritical acceptance of Arendt's theory of nationalisms in Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 130–31.

11) Julia Kristeva, *Crisis of the European Subject*, 171.

12) Kristeva, *Crisis*, 172.

13) Kristeva, *Crisis*, 167.

14) Kristeva, *Revolt She Said*, p. 49.

15) Kristeva, *Revolt*, p. 65.

16) Kristeva, *Crisis*, 175

17) Dominique Laporte was a Lacanian scholar who died young. he was also working on a multi-volume cultural dictionary of the French language, the influence of which (his interest in words and their meaning and connotations) are evident in the *History of Shit*, originally published as "Histoire de la merde" in French in 1978.

- 18) Laporte, *History of Shit*, 8.
- 19) Laporte, *History of Shit*, 8.
- 20) Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*, translated by Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 2.
- 21) Kristeva, *Crisis*, 175
- 22) Laporte, *History of Shit*, 17–18.
- 23) Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. XII, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), 187.
- 24) Freud, *The Standard Edition*, X, 214.
- 25) Freud, *The Standard Edition*, XII, 189–90; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 145–46.
- 26) Freud, *The Standard*, XII, 190.
- 27) Ibid.
- 28) Kristeva, *Crisis*, 170.
- 29) Laporte, *History of Shit*, 11.
- 30) One of the signs of the change of regime in Belgrade and its democratic pro-European orientation, has been an opening of a spectacular, high-tech public restroom in the Belgrade bus station.
- 31) Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. XII, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1968), 200.

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