

## 57-*Dictionary of the Khazars as a postmodern narrative veiling an ultra-nationalistic rhetoric*<sup>1</sup>

Ümit HASANUSTA<sup>2</sup>

**APA:** Hasanusta, Ü. (2020). *Dictionary of the Khazars as a postmodern narrative veiling an ultra-nationalistic rhetoric*. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (Ö8), 732-751. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.821947.

### Abstract

Milorad Pavić's lexicon novel *Dictionary of the Khazars* is an example of historiographic metafiction which attempts to question the line between the historical and literary narratives. The book narrates the historical/fictional event "Conversion of the Khazars" via various references none of which acknowledges the others' representation of history. Also, the self-reflexive text strongly emphasizes the role of the reader. Many fictional authors break the domination of the authoritative narrator and make the novel a crucial example of postmodern literature. On the other hand, we argue that each society experiences the postmodern differently and this must be considered in interpreting a literary work. Thus, in this study, Pavić's novel is interpreted as an example of postmodern literature from Yugoslavia in the 1980s. For us, the formal aspects of the text make it a distinguished postmodern work influenced by post-structuralist theories of language and literature, but the novel is also strongly tied with the national question and it problematizes the basis of Yugoslav existence. The story of the Khazars has many parallels with the Serbian people and their historical experience especially in Titoist Yugoslavia. Thus, the playful, fantastic language of the book also covers an ultra-nationalistic rhetoric of Serbian victimization and suppression. This rhetoric is clearly seen in satirical parodies of Tito's multiethnic state. In addition, the novel problematizes the Yugoslav context via impressive images showing that assembled structures like Yugoslavia are not natural and they are doomed to be demolished. It must also be pointed out that the main reference to the failure of the Yugoslav metanarrative is the form of the novel which overtly denies the combination of diverse narratives and indicates the impossibility to reach a harmonious totality.

**Keywords:** Postmodern literature, Milorad Pavić, nationalism.

## Aşırı milliyetçi bir söylemi gizleyen postmodern bir anlatı olarak "*Hazar Sözlüğü*"

### Öz

Milorad Pavić'in sözlük romanı *Hazar Sözlüğü*, tarihi ve edebi anlatıların arasındaki sınırı sorgulama çabasında olan bir tarihi üst kurmaca örneğidir. Eser, tarihi/kurgusal bir olay olan "Hazarların Din Değiştirmesi"ni, birbirinin tarih temsilini kabul etmeyen farklı referanslar aracılığıyla anlatmaktadır. Ayrıca, özdeşimsel bir metin olan roman, güçlü bir biçimde yazarın rolünü vurgulamaktadır. Birçok kurgusal yazar, otoriter anlatıcının baskınlığını ortadan

<sup>1</sup> This article was produced from the PhD thesis entitled "Ethno-Religious Nationalism in Serbian Literature in the Break of the Yugoslav National Ideal" written by Ümit Hasanusta in 2019 in İstanbul University, Comparative Literature Department.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Biruni Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümü (İstanbul, Türkiye) uhasanusta@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0002-8131-7661 [Makale kayıt tarihi: 08.09.2020-kabul tarihi: 20.11.2020; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.821947]

kaldırmakta ve eseri, postmodern edebiyatın seçkin bir örneği haline getirmektedir. Diğer taraftan, biz, her bir toplumun postmodern durumu farklı şekilde tecrübe ettiğini iddia ediyor ve edebi bir eserin anlaşılması için bunun hesaba katılması gerektiğini düşünüyoruz. Bu yüzden, bu çalışmada Pavić'in romanı 1980'lerin Yugoslavya'sından bir postmodern edebiyat örneği olarak okunmaktadır. Bize göre, metin, biçimsel özellikleriyle yapısalılık sonrası dil ve edebiyat teorilerinin etkisini taşıyan seçkin bir postmodern edebiyat eseridir; fakat aynı zamanda, roman milliyet sorunuyla sıkı bir biçimde bağlıdır ve Yugoslav varlığının temellerini sorgulamaktadır. Hazarların hikayesi, Sırp lar ve onların tarihi deneyimleriyle, özellikle Tito dönemi Yugoslavya'sındaki varlıklarıyla birçok paralellik içermektedir. Böylelikle, kitabın eğlenceli ve fantastik dili, ayrıca Sırp milletinin mağduriyetini ve baskı altına alınmasına dair aşırı milliyetçi bir söylemi de gizlemektedir. Bu söylem, romanda Tito'nun çok-etnili devletinin satirik parodilerinde açıkça görülmektedir. Ayrıca roman, farklı öğelerin bir araya getirilmesiyle oluşturulmuş Yugoslavya gibi yapıların doğal olmadığı ve yok olmaya mahkum olduklarını gösteren imgelerle Yugoslav varlığını sorgulamaktadır. Yugoslav üst anlatısının başarısızlığıyla ilgili romandaki temel referans ise metnin biçimidir, çünkü bu yapı farklı anlatıların bir araya gelmesini açıkça reddetmekte ve uyumlu bir bütünlüğe ulaşmanın imkansızlığını ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Postmodern edebiyat, Milorad Pavić, milliyetçilik.

## Introduction

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon points out that the separation between the historical and literary is challenged in postmodern theory and art, and the critical readings of both history and fiction deal with what they have in common rather than how they differentiate. One of the most significant aspects the two forms share is that both of them are intertextual and “deploy the texts of the past within their complex textuality” (Hutcheon, 2004, 105). Historiographic metafiction, a genre depending on the problematizing of historical and literary narratives, has a pivotal space in postmodern literary tradition with its “intense self-consciousness” to “blur the lines between fiction and history” (Hutcheon, 2004, 113). Milorad Pavić's lexicon novel *Dictionary of the Khazars* can be read as a “historiographic metafiction” considering its primary attempt to question the line between the historical and literary narratives by referring to different text types and problematizing the “activity of reference”. In order to emphasize the discursive nature of the references, the historical/fictional event “Conversion of the Khazars” is narrated via various references none of which acknowledges the others' representation of history. Also, the self-reflexive character of the text emphasizes the role of the reader while the employment of many fictional authors both break the domination of the authoritative narrator and makes the novel a crucial example of postmodern literature.

On the other hand, this study is close to the idea that the way each society experiences the postmodern varies significantly, and this experience must be considered in interpreting a work of literature as well. Thus, in this study, Pavić's novel *Dictionary of the Khazars* will be read as an example of postmodern literature from Eastern Europe, specifically from Yugoslavia. According to our reading of *Dictionary of the Khazars*, the formal aspects of the novel make it a distinguished example of postmodern fiction influenced by post-structuralist theories of language and literature. On the contrary, it is not possible to ignore the reality that the novel is strongly tied with the national question in Yugoslavia, and it problematizes the basis of Yugoslav existence throughout the entire work. So, instead of interpreting the novel as an apolitical and ahistorical postmodern work, this study suggests that the novel can be

read as a national allegory since the story of the Khazars has many parallels with the Serbian people and their historical experience. Thus, the playful, fantastic language of the book also veils an ultra-nationalistic rhetoric of Serbian victimization and suppression. Sometimes it springs out abruptly, especially in the parts that can be interpreted as satirical parodies of Tito's multiethnic state organization. In addition to this rhetoric, the second way the novel problematizes the Yugoslav context is that it creates potent images that show that assembled structures like Yugoslavia are not natural and are doomed to be demolished. Nevertheless, the main reference to the failure of the Yugoslav metanarrative is the form of the Dictionary which overtly denies the combination of diverse narratives and clearly demonstrates that it is impossible to reach a harmonious totality.

### 1-The form and content/context of Pavić's work

#### The structure and the experimental style of the novel

Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars* is written in the form of a dictionary. Actually, it is a compilation of three different dictionaries entitled "The Red Book" including the Christian sources of the Khazar question, "The Green Book" which has the Islamic sources, and "The Yellow Book" which includes the Hebrew sources on the same question. The Red Book, The Green Book, and The Yellow Book contain 14, 15, and 16 entries respectively. Because of the dictionary form of the novel, the order of the entries changes when the book is translated into a different language. It must be pointed out that all the entries of the dictionary are related to an ancient tribe called the Khazars. The entries are not only about people who lived in the period of the Khazar Empire. They also include entries about archaeologists and scholars studying this ancient tribe. However, it must be pointed out that they are all connected to the event known as the conversion of Khazars into one of the monotheistic religions. Remarkably, as a result of this event, they lose their identity. The entries are mostly different in each book of the dictionary, but the ones which are common in all three dictionaries are the Khazar Princess "Ateh", "Kaghan", "Khazars", and "The Khazar Polemic". In addition to the main text constituted by the three dictionaries, there are Preliminary Notes and two Appendix parts. The first appendix is about the character Father Theoctist Nikolsky and the second one includes "Excerpt from the Court Minutes in the Dr Abu Kabir Muawia Murder Case". The text does not end even after these two appendixes since we have to read the "Closing Note on the Usefulness of the Dictionary" and "The List of Entries".

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the novel is that the main text is supplied with a high number of paratexts. First, the subtitle of the novel defines it as a "lexicon novel consisting of 100.000 words". The first page of the book is much more striking as male readers are instructed to read the male version of the text, and female readers are instructed to read the female one. The difference between male and female versions of the text is only one paragraph which, according to Pavić, completely changes its meaning. These introductory words are followed by a photograph of the cover page of Lexicon Cosri, calling it a "reconstructed" version of the "original, destroyed edition of *Dictionary of the Khazars* published in 1691. The next page, dedicated to the reader "who will never read this book," announces that he/she "is forever dead". The book follows with "Preliminary Notes to the Second Reconstructed Edition" that gives information about the history of the dictionary, its structure, and the methods for its usage. These preliminary notes end with "Rescued Excerpts from the Destroyed 1691 Edition". All these linguistic aspects are parts of Pavić's play with the novel genre. First, the conventions of the novel are broken as it is hybridized with the dictionary, a completely distinct genre. A dictionary provides definitions in its entries, whereas in Pavić's work, three dictionaries narrate stories related to the events and characters that are somehow connected to the mythical/historical

Khazars. Also, the novel's claim that it was written as the reconstruction of a lost text is the way Pavic questions his own authority, including many fictional authors.

Thus, it is very clear from the very first linguistic elements that Pavic's work will extremely deal with questions of authorship and the role of the reader as well as the conventions of the novel as a genre. There are numerous scenes and characters that problematize these issues. Theoctist Nikolsky is one of the most important characters who is presented as somebody who has a significant contribution to the creation of the original version of the dictionary. In fact, in Appendix One, he is portrayed as the compiler of the lexicon. Like many other characters, he is one of the authors in the novel with whom Pavic voluntarily shares his authority. His journey of being an author clearly illustrates that the writing process is one of the main themes of the novel. Theoctist Nikolsky is born in 1641 in a village of St. John Monastery with a very strong memory which does not allow him to forget anything. He learns Turkish from Constantinople coins, Hebrew from the merchants of Dubrovnik, and reading from icons. Strangely, one day he suddenly loses his memory. When he is eighteen, his father sends him to St. John Monastery and there he is given the job to transcribe books. In this way, his journey to becoming an author starts. First, he transcribes some books without making any changes or adding anything to them. (Indeed, Pavic never portrays Nikolsky as a reliable scribe or author. Even while he is transcribing these very first books, he first memorizes the manuscripts and then writes them down) Then, he starts to add appendixes to books and invents new saints and miracles. However, probably the most notable story in this part of *Dictionary of the Khazars* is that he transcribes "Life of St. Peter of Corishia" upon the request of a young monk and while writing the chapters about the days of the fast, he writes 50 days instead of 5. He then gives the book to the young monk who starts a fifty-day fast after reading Nikolsky's copy. On the fifty-first day, Nikolsky hears the news about the funeral of the young monk.

The section of the novel about Theoctist Nikolsky is a good illustration of how the novel, like many examples of the postmodern conventions of representation, thematizes writing and authorship by narcissistically revealing the process of creation and turns the novel into a carnival where a lot of voices, many unreliable authors, fragments from lost texts, poisoned books killing the reader, translations, transformations and reincarnations of people and texts form a playful narrative. In such a text, the relationship between history and fiction transforms into an endless game. On the other hand, Pavic proposes that, as it is clearly demonstrated with the death of the young monk in Nikolsky's narrative, writing has the power to affect and change life. Accordingly, the dictum *Verbum caro factum est* meaning "The word became flesh", which is repeated many times throughout the text, signifies the close relationship between life and writing.

As stated by David Damrosch, Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars* has been widely celebrated as a tour de force of metafictional play (2013, 260). While experimenting with the novel genre through writing a novel in the form of a lexicon and playing with genre conventions, the author also creates a kinship for his novel with works such as "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", "The Library of Babylon", and "Death of the Compass" by Borges. Concerning the mythical/historical people called Khazars and their conversion to one of the monotheistic religions, there are three different lexicons on Christian, Muslim and Hebrew sources on the Khazar question. The event discussed in these three different lexicons takes place in the 8th or 9th century and is referred to as the "Khazar polemic". Conveying the stories related to this mythical event, the main elements of Pavic's narrative are constituted as the "denying of chronology, dreaming-like discontinuity of time, and the interchangeability of time and space" (Karesek, 2018, 43).

According to the historical information included in the preliminary notes, the Khazars are an autonomous tribe that lived around the 7th and 10th centuries between the Caspian and the Black Sea. They wage war against the Arabs and Byzantium and manage to establish a mighty empire. However, their culture and state vanish from history as a result of the event discussed in the Dictionary (Pavic, 1989, 2). The ruler of the state, Kaghan, gets up one day after a dream in which an angel tells him that God finds his intentions pleasing but not his deeds. So, he demands representatives from different religions to interpret the dream and promises to convert to the religion of the representative who can provide the most convincing interpretation. St. Cyril, Farabi İbn Kora, and Isaac Sangari are the representatives of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism respectively. Each separate dictionary claims that the Khazars converted to their religion. Thus, these three absolute narratives of three religions never manage to reach an agreement. Also, this conversion is significant for the Khazars since after the event, the Khazar state is demolished, and very few things remain from their culture. Incredibly, a new interest for the Khazar culture arises in the 17th century, and all the materials found about them are collected in a dictionary published under the title "Lexicon Cosri" by the Polish printer Joannes Daubmannus. One of the five hundred copies published is a poisoned copy with a golden lock, and there is also another one with a silver lock. After the Inquisition destroys the copies of the dictionary in 1692, only those two copies with golden and silver locks remain. However, they also disappear somehow even though the 20th-century archaeologist and Arabist Dr Isialo Suk claims that he possesses the poisoned copy of the dictionary. As he indicates, he reads only the first nine pages of the book repeatedly in order not to die. Thus, as the author claims, the reader is attempting to read a reconstruction of the 17th century Daubmannus version. Nevertheless, in 1982 the endeavour to combine the fragmented parts of the dictionary in a conference in Istanbul fails after Dr Isialo Suk and Dr Abu Kabir Muawia are murdered by incarnated demons disguised as members of a Belgian family. So, this reconstruction is also controversial and not completed.

Milorad Pavic's interviews and his writing on literature and the novel clarify his purposes in writing a novel in the form of a dictionary. Interestingly, he likens his Dictionary to a huge house with many entrances and exits. Also, he is a writer fully aware of the responsibility of the reader, and he is deliberately attempting to increase this responsibility while creating his text. He describes his attempt as:

I tried to change the way of the reading increasing the role and responsibility of the reader in the process of creating a novel (let us not forget that in the world there are much more talented readers than talented authors and literary critics). I have left to them, to the readers, the decision about the choice of the plots and the development of the situations in the novel: where the reading will begin, and where it will end, even the decision about the destiny of the main characters. But in order to change the way of reading, I had to change the way of writing. Therefore these lines should not be understood exclusively as a talk about the form of the novel. This is at the same time both a talk of its content. (Pavic, 1998, 145)

In *The Beginning and End of Reading-The Beginning and End of the Novel* and *As a Writer I was Born Two Hundred Years Ago*, he points out that arts are reversible or irreversible. Architecture, painting and sculpture are included in the group of the reversible arts since the viewer can approach works produced in these fields from different sides. Literature is an irreversible art because it has a linear character from start to finish (Pavic, 1998, 146). He indicates that in order to turn literature into a reversible art, he has tried his best to get rid of the beginning and end of the novel (Lallas, 1998, 129). So, the form of *Dictionary of the Khazars*, which allows the reader to start and finish the text wherever (s)he wants, clearly illustrates this attempt of the author.

### The critical reception of *Dictionary*

Pavic's work managed to gain international success primarily because of the highly experimental style of the novel that was not popular at the time in the region. In the summer of 1998, *the Review of Contemporary Fiction* allocates more than one hundred pages to Pavic's novels, chiefly on *Dictionary of the Khazars*. As Damrosch points out, Pavic was a significant figure in Serbian literature, but he was not known outside Yugoslavia until the publication of *Dictionary*, and the book became a success around the globe (2013, 261). In order to demonstrate this, Damrosch indicates that the French rights of the novel were acquired while the book was still in press, and it was published in Paris at the same time with Belgrade in 1984. And by the late 90s, it was translated into almost twenty-six languages including Japanese and Catalan. He also states that the international audience "welcomed the book as 'An Arabian Nights Romance', 'a wickedly teasing intellectual game', and an opportunity 'to lose themselves in a novel of love and death' as the American edition describes it" (2013, 261). In the critical articles written on the novel, it is clear that nearly all of them are centred on the formal features of the novel, and there are very few of them interpreting the novel within the context it was created, Yugoslavia in the 1980s on the threshold to get demised as a result of nationalistic fragmentation.

Among the articles on the novel, Tomislav Longinovic's "Chaos, Knowledge and Desire: Narrative Strategies in *Dictionary of the Khazars*" can first be cited. Longinovic associates the structure of the novel with chaos theories, and he puts forward that if there is a hidden order of the novel, this is not provided via making any reference to an external reality or the internal coherence of the text. It is found in the process of reading. This emphasizes the reader's responsibility in interpreting the text: "each reader will put together the book for himself, as in a game of dominoes or cards, and, as with the mirror, he will get out of this dictionary as much as he puts into it" (1998, 185-186). Giuliana Perco also stresses the reader's interactive participation Pavic endeavours to create with the structure of his work (1999, 52). Radmila Jovanovic Gorup describes Pavic's fiction as "baroque imagination and playful humour". She reminds that Pavic is linked to authors such as Nabokov, Borges, Eco, and Calvino; but according to her, in *Dictionary of the Khazars*, the reader has something entirely new. As Gorup claims, "The 'Khazar Polemic' theme on which the novel is based allows the author to introduce his magical world of events and characters" (1998, 121). Also, she indicates that postmodern poetics in Pavic's fiction is not found only within the text, it also expands to the physical book (Gorup, 1998, 213) by which she means the paratexts surrounding the main text. Rachel Kilbourn Davis reads the book as a nonaristotelian fiction with "a very solid illusion of a novel that has order and meaning" (1998, 176). Moreover, what he emphasizes in his article is that the reader is caught in the middle of the historical and the fantastic while reading the novel. For him, the novel starts with a high intensity of historical elements, but as it continues, fantastic elements gain more control and the nonmimetic character of the novel is emphasized (1998, 177). Along with these scholars, Jasmina Mihajlovic describes it as an example of hyperfiction and discusses the novel with regards to "the transition of fiction into a new technology" (1998, 215).

### The Yugoslav cultural / historical context and the interpretation of the novel

None of the articles cited above associates the novel with the local context it was created in. They interpret it considering mostly its formal aspects focusing thus on its metafictional qualities, and its self-reflexivity. Also, they emphasize its tendency to textualize history, to play with genres and hybridize them, and to swerve to the realm of the hypertext. As far as its content is concerned their main implication is that the text is closer to fantastic fiction and it has an infinite number of meanings

without any real ethical impact at all (Damrosch, 2013, 275). Actually, David Damrosch in “What is World Literature” discusses Pavić’s novel and its journey both in its own country and abroad as a remarkable example for the debate of world literature. For him,

[t]he book’s international success involved the neglect or outright misreading of its political content. As his country began to disintegrate after Tito’s death, Pavić spoke out bitterly on behalf of the cause of Serbian nationalism, his international reputation giving weight to his words at home. The metaphysical magician turned out to have an angry joker up his sleeve. (Damrosch, 2013, 261)

Admittedly, Yugoslavia in the 1980s, the time Pavić writes and publishes the novel, is the arena of harsh conflicts about cultural and ethnic identities. These conflicts center on the problem of nationality and include debates related to culture, religion, history, language, and globalization. It is not difficult to view numerous satiric implications about those questions in the novel. Indeed, the *Khazars* may be interpreted as the “forerunners of modern Serbs as a majority oppressed in their own country” (Damrosch, 2013, 275). While the book was at times discussed in terms of the national question and battles on cultural identity by the novelist Danilo Kiš or by scholars such as Petar Ramadanović or Andrew Wachtel in Yugoslavia, the foreign readers seem to be prone to overlook this kind of local implications and offer mainly apolitical interpretations.

The reason behind this tendency is probably the fact that *Dictionary of the Khazars* has been read within the tradition of understanding the postmodern in the West. The “postmodern condition” is interpreted generally in Western countries as the loss of traditional values and grand narratives. Likewise, truth claims lose their plausibility. As a result, in the postmodern presentation of history, we witness its subversion and “reduction to a textual residue disconnected with memory, all the way to the total destruction of history as the knowledge of the past, and its ultimate identification with the fictional narrative” (Aleksic, 2008, 275).

The Western tradition of the postmodern was shaped as a result of a cultural history including Feudalism, Renaissance and Reformation movements, nation-states and monarchies, the Enlightenment, and Modernism. On the other hand, people in the Balkans did not experience the same steps until the “postmodern condition”. They arrived in the Balkan region in the 9th century. After battles with small tribes, they established states, but then they were dominated and ruled by Empires such as the Ottomans and Habsburgs for centuries. The existence of a rooted aristocracy was not witnessed in this region, so they did not experience the same struggles between aristocrats and bourgeoisie as Europe. The influence of the Enlightenment thought was undoubtedly felt in the 19th century, but most of the Balkans was attempting to get rid of the hegemony of different empires and establish nation-states. Also, distinctly from Western Europe, the Balkans underwent civil wars, partisan struggles and established communist states. In its mostly accepted definition postmodern meant questioning, subverting, and deconstructing the structures of all grand narratives. Nevertheless, in the postmodern age, the nations constituting Yugoslavia were rediscovering and reinventing their old traditions, beliefs, and narratives related to the nation’s glorious past covered by the communist ideology and the charismatic leadership of Tito. So, the postmodern in the Yugoslav context cannot be discussed only in relation to Lyotard’s definition “disappearance of grand narratives”. Instead, their experience of the postmodern should be considered as the exchange of a grand narrative with another more ancient and solidified one (Aleksic, 2007, 110). Thus, the Western and the Eastern parts of the world did not experience the same historical processes until the postmodern age. This fact reveals two questions: 1-Does postmodernism in literature means the very exact thing for both parts of the world?

2- Whether a work of postmodern fiction from the Balkan region can equally reduce history into textuality separating it from the political.

The Yugoslav novelist Danilo Kis indicates that Yugoslav literature could not free itself from political dictates and national resentments. As Aleksic also points out, one problem related to the postmodern fiction from the region is

[t]he constant reshaping of political ethnoscaples of the Balkans which demanded from literature unwavering loyalty to national interests. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why in the rich postmodern fictional production coming from the Balkans there is a profound involvement with the historical and the national. (Aleksic, 2007, 110)

Thus, writers never manage to abandon the "sacred duty to the nation". However there are writers expected to subvert institutionalized literature, they also participate in its creation. Whereas Western "historiographic metafiction" attempts to question absolutes and their very existence, the same literary form as created in Southeastern Europe does not have a purely deconstructive outlook, and it seems that there still exist strong ties between history, past, memory, and political. Tatjana Aleksic explains this fact indicating that the narratives carry some kind of "remnant of the modernist melancholy for the lost absolute" and "an anxiety about the loss of recognizable and delineated culture-specific identities" (Aleksic, 2007, 4). This feeling of melancholy and anxiety is demonstrated in Dictionary of the Khazars with the image of the lost body of Adam, which is wished to be reconstructed again by the assembling forces in the narrative. As an example of postmodern and post-structuralist literature from Yugoslavia, Pavic's novel is an excellent illustration of stylistic and thematic experimentation, but it also has a solid tie with the national and political debate in Yugoslavia.

## **2-Dictionary of the Khazars as a "national allegory"**

In *Third-World Literature in the Era of Multicultural Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson endeavours to offer a general theory for the literature produced in certain parts of the world he calls third-world. As he points out, the cultures he defines as "third-world" cannot be considered as independent or autonomous. They are locked in an unending struggle with first-world cultural imperialism (Jameson, 1968, 68). As he argues, the categories such as subjective, public or political and the relationship between them are totally different in third-world culture compared to the first-world. Accordingly, third-world texts, even the ones that are seemingly private, "necessarily project a political dimension" (Jameson, 1968, 69). Jameson indicates that whereas in the capitalist culture there is a clear distinction between the story of the individual and the public, the story of a private self always refers to the story of the entire nation in cultures he defines as third-world. Probably, the most significant argument in the text summarizing his hypothesis is that:

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. (Jameson, 1968, 69)

Obviously, the theory of national allegory corresponds to many literary texts produced in different parts of the world dealing with the national question. Nevertheless, the attempt to create a theory comprising all texts of the so-called third-world literature and generalizing all literary works as the repetition of each other seem quite problematic. That is why the theory has been criticized enormously since it was put forward. One of the most popular of these critiques was introduced by Aijaz Ahmad. In his article, Ahmad questions the concept of "Third World Literature" and puts forward that this



concept is epistemologically impossible (Ahmad, 2000, 98). The separation of the world into the capitalist first world, the socialist bloc of the second world, and the third-world countries which suffered from colonialism and imperialism cannot be coherent. Also, according to Ahmad, the theory creates "an insistence upon difference" and a "relation of Otherness" between the first and the third world. However, most strikingly, Jameson's argument that the experience of the third world is able to be conveyed via a single narrative form is extremely insulting (Ahmad, 2000, 100-105).

Disregarding the reductionist aspects of Jameson's theory, his ideas may prove very helpful too. In this study *Dictionary of the Khazars* is interpreted as an allegory of the Serbian and Yugoslav national experience. Within the scope of this discussion, Jameson's theory of national allegory is taken into consideration and it is attempted to discern the essential features "all Third World texts" contain, as he claims. I argue that Jameson's theory is functional in the interpretation of some individual works like Pavić's *Dictionary*, which problematizes the national question, constantly referring to the contemporary or past experience of a people. On the other hand, the problematic essence of Jameson's generalizations which are exemplified in Aijaz Ahmad's critique is acknowledged.

The first allegorical connection of Pavić's text to the Serbian national experience can be observed in the three different periods the narrative is built on. These historical periods are noteworthy since they all refer to a crucial event in Serbian history. In fact, the narrative can be separated into three distinct periods when the stories mainly take place: 1-The 8th and 9th centuries, 2- The 17th century, and 3- 1980s. First, the narrative starts with the 8th and 9th centuries when the Khazars are seen as an independent tribe. In this time period, the Kagan decides to convert into Christianity, Islam or Judaism depending on the dream interpretation of their representatives. However, after their conversion, the Khazars lose their identity including their language and poems. This is the period in history when Slavic tribes including Serbs settle in the Balkan lands and the first Serbian state is established.

The 1690s is also a crucial period in the novel when the first edition of the Khazar dictionary is compiled and published by Daubmannus. This is the time when characters such as Avram Brankovic, Samuel Kohen and Yusuf Masudi (forces trying to join various parts of the dictionary together), the demonic figures Nikon Sevast, Yabir Ibn Akshany, and Ephrosinia Lukarevich (who come from the three hells and try to inhibit this assembly) enter the narrative. Also, it is the time when all sides searching for the lost parts of the dictionary come together and fade away in an Ottoman War with Austria. Interestingly, the 1690s corresponds to the Great Migration when Serbs left Ottoman lands to settle in the Habsburg area.

The third and last period of the novel records events that take place when the Serbian nation is again in a historical turning point. Here, the same characters from previous centuries reincarnate and enter the text in different personalities. In 1982, academics and archaeologists working on the Khazars participate in a symposium in Istanbul where they all stay in the Kingston Hotel. By giving some clues, the author helps the reader to see that the characters in the hotel come from previous centuries in the narrative time of the novel: Avram Brankovic transforms to Dr Isialo Suk, Ephrosinia is seen as the little child of the Belgian family, Dr Dorothea Schultz from Poland is the reincarnated self of Samuel Cohen, and Nikon Sevast with one hole in his nose now emerges in the text as the woman in the Belgian family. Also, the waitress at the Kingston Hotel is the Khazar Princess Ateh. Here, whereas Isialo Suk, Dorothea Schultz, and Abu Kabir Al Muawia from Egypt represent the combining forces, they cannot prevent the murder of Suk and Muawia by the Belgian family, which also causes Schultz's

imprisonment. This is a time in national history when the Serbs are in cultural wars with the other nations constituting Yugoslavia. Also, this is a period when the destiny of the nation depends on a global network. This confusing image of identity is best conveyed at the end of the novel, in the part entitled "Excerpt from the Court Minutes", when Princess Ateh reveals the Turkish prosecutor her Khazar identity and Jewish passport. This also creates a strong analogy with the Jewish myth of an archetypal oppressed people:

Prosecutor: (...) What are you by nationality, Miss-or is it Mrs.? – Ateh?

Witness: That's hard to explain.

Prosecutor: Try, please.

Witness: I am Khazar.

Prosecutor: What did you say? I've never heard of a nation like that. What passport do you carry? Khazar?

Witness: No, Israeli.

Prosecutor: So, that's it. That's what I wanted to hear. How can you be a Khazar and have an Israeli passport? Do you betray your people?

Witness (laughing): No, one might say just the opposite. The Khazars assimilated with the Jews and, along with everybody else, I accepted Judaism and an Israeli passport. What's the point of being alone in the world? (Pavic, 1989, 331)

Indeed, the end of the novel does not provide a clear answer to the question "Which religion did the Khazars convert to?" The sources of each monotheistic religion claim that the Khazars chose their religion. Nevertheless, the dialogue above where the Khazar Princess Ateh is demonstrated in a court in Istanbul indicating that she has an Israeli passport is noteworthy, because in this way Pavic creates a link between the Khazars and Judaism in terms of victimization. As also indicated by Marko Zivkovic in *Serbian Dreambook*, there has been a tendency among Serbian intellectuals in the 1980s to link the "Serbian narratives of martyrdom and suffering, of exile and return, and of death and resurrection (...) both metonymically and metaphorically, to their Jewish equivalents" (2011, 198). Thus, it becomes meaningful in this respect when Pavic gives a Jewish passport to the Khazar Princess since it creates a strong sense of victimization and suffering.

Pavic assuredly problematizes the national question in other ways as well. First, it is quite possible to find parallelism with the popular nationalistic rhetoric which advanced enormously during the cultural wars in Yugoslavia and Pavic's identification of himself as a member of the victimized Serbian nation. This language, extensively used by Pavic in his speeches and interviews, is repeated in *Dictionary of the Khazars* where Titoist Yugoslavia is portrayed through the lenses of satirical allegory. Indeed, there is no overt reference to Serbs or Yugoslavia in the novel, but the depiction of the Khazars as a people squeezed in-between great powers makes it possible to equate the Khazars with Serbs.

Pavic problematizes nationality not only in his novel but also in his interviews and autobiography. In all these forms, he identifies himself as a member of a victimized people. Popular nationalistic discourse, likewise, portrays the author of *Dictionary of the Khazars* as "in one way or another a political intellectual" (Jameson, 1968, 74).

### **The denial of Yugoslav unity: An ultra-nationalistic rhetoric and an imagery negating supranational entities**

One of the most noteworthy aspects of Serbian nationalism is that they identify themselves with a powerful feeling of victimization. In both cultural history and literary works, this identification is

overt. In the rhetoric of Serbian nationalism, Serbs have been defined throughout history as a people who sacrificed themselves for others, who faced the betrayal of the Slavic race, who struggled with great powers and resisted against the occupation of their lands. One of the most remarkable examples of this rhetoric of victimization in Serbian history is Milosevic's address in Gazimestan on the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo Battle. In this speech, he calls the Serbian people for unity so that they can protect themselves from future defeats and failures. The speech describes Serbian people as "oppressed by pain and filled with hope". The Serbs for Milosevic "have never in the whole of their history conquered and exploited others." Also, "they liberated themselves, and when they could, they also helped others" (Milosevic, 1989). Milosevic claims furthermore that Serbs are also the defenders of European civilization because the Kosovo War in 1389 was also a battle where Serbs sacrificed themselves for the welfare of Europe:

Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself in the field of Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended the European culture, religion, and European society in general. Therefore today it appears not only unjust but even unhistorical and completely absurd to talk about Serbia's belonging to Europe. Serbia has been a part of Europe incessantly, now just as much as it was in the past, of course, in its way, but in a way that in the historical sense never deprived it of dignity. In this spirit, we now endeavour to build a society, rich and democratic, and thus to contribute to the prosperity of this beautiful country, this unjustly suffering country, but also to contribute to the efforts of all the progressive people of our age that they make for a better and happier world. (Milosevic, 1989)

It is striking that Milorad Pavic's autobiography on his official website "khazars.com" and his interviews define Serbian people in a very similar way. Both Milosevic and Pavic replicate the same language of victimization. Pavic states that when the first time bombs rained down on him, he was twelve years old. The second time he was fifteen. In between those times, he fell in love, and he had to learn German under the German occupation. He also learned English secretly from a gentleman who smoked pipe tobacco. At the same time, he forgot French, and later he forgot it twice more. Finally, in a kennel where he had sought shelter from the Anglo-American bombing, a Russian imperial officer started teaching him Russian from books. And today he thinks learning languages is "a kind of transformation into bewitching animals" (Pavic, n.d). The experience of an individual about learning languages and forgetting them, as portrayed by Pavic, is in fact the experience of the entire nation suppressed and victimized in-between many great powers and their languages.

The very same experience is exhibited in the novel with the Serbian character Avram Brankovic whose family moves to the Danube region from the South after the Serbian Empire falls to Ottoman rule and ever since this migration, the family counts in Tzintzar, lies in Walachian, is silent in Greek, sings hymns in Russian, is cleverest in Turkish, and speaks its mother tongue Serbian when they have the intention to kill (Pavic, 1989, 25). In this way, the language problem that goes along with the question of nationality is demonstrated. Another character with whom language is problematized is the Khazar princess Ateh. She is compelled to forget her Khazar language and all her poems by a demon in exchange for immortality. In this way, she even forgets her lover's name. Fortunately, Ateh senses this before, and her parrots memorize her poems in the Khazar language. After the Khazar faith is abandoned and their language begins to disappear suddenly, Ateh releases the parrots. Hundreds of years later, the Serbian Avram Brankovich finds a parrot by the shore of the Black Sea, and he starts to learn the Khazar language from it. In this way, the author creates an affinity between the Khazars and Serbs (Pavic, 1989, 207).

Indeed, the language problem remains on the agenda throughout the history of Yugoslavia. Before the establishment of the Yugoslav state, each distinct people uses its national language. However, as the Yugoslav metanarrative is constructed by the attempts of politicians and the intelligentsia from various nations, they also accept a common language called Serbo-Croatian. Nevertheless, especially after the death of Tito in the 1980s, the ethnic-religious polarization starts, and it also brings along debates about the Serbo-Croatian language. Dividing Yugoslavia politically into national units would also mean to negate the theory that all these people had a common culture and language. Thus, their common language, Serbo-Croatian, used by people in the region for many years, is also split into Serbian and Croatian. As stated by Petar Ramadanovic, Croats, Serbs and Muslims spoke a common language before. Now they speak Croat, Serbian and Bosnian. The vanquished language Serbo-Croat has no people, no folk anymore (2013, 268). In this context, Pavic's standpoint is significant. Disclosing his position on the rising nationalism in Yugoslavia, Damrosch points out that when Slobodan Milosevic comes to power, Pavic expresses forceful support for the new government's goals to restore the greatness of Serbia in articles and interviews for Belgrade newspapers, giving nationalist messages on the ancestral greatness of Serbian people. One of the most popular statements of Pavic indicating his nationalistic attitude is when he states that in the thirteenth century Serbian people were eating with golden forks, but the Western Europeans were eating raw flesh with their fingers. Pavic's declaration about the Serbian language demonstrates his deeply nationalistic stance too. Instead of supporting the common Serbo-Croatian language, his statement centres on the distinction of Serbian:

The Serbs come from the mid-point of the world, from the navel of the Indo-European peoples, and the Serbian language is an ancient language, the ancestor of all the Indo-European languages. Thus, everyone hates us out of envy; they sense that we are the most ancient of all the peoples between the Himalayas and the Pyrenees. (Damrosch, 2013, 268)

This type of declarations are not rare in Pavic's life, and they define his position as a Serbian intellectual. For instance, his autobiography includes passages where he defines himself and the Serbian people resorting overtly to the language of victimization. Particularly, it seems crucial when he talks about himself as a Serbian author. According to him, he has not killed anyone, but they have killed him long before his death. If their author was a Turk or German, it would be better for his books. Strikingly, he puts forward that as a Serb he was the best-known writer of the most hated nation in the world. For him, 21st century began before the date 1999 when Belgrade and Serbia were bombed by NATO air forces, after which the Danube River was not navigable. Finally, he finishes this part of the autobiography stating that God graced him with the favour with the joy of writing but punished him equally at the same time (Pavic, n.d.). Thus, while describing himself as an author and a member of the Serbian nation, he creates a great connection with the nationalist discourse.

### **Terrifying images of assembled structures and lost essential parts**

In *Dictionary of the Khazars*, the parallelism with the nationalistic discourse is created mainly in two ways: 1- The author develops a powerful imagery and metaphors implying that formations constructed from disparate elements are artificial and have an unpleasant look. In these parts of the narrative, the reference to Yugoslavia as a multinational structure is conspicuous. 2- The text includes stories indicating that losing essential parts of a structure ends up with transformation into a frightful image, which also signifies the nostalgia for a lost national essence.

The double of the Kaghan who transforms into a giant constitutes one of the most memorable images in the novel. This also exemplifies how Pavic creates an anti-Yugoslav imagery in the narrative. In the

Kaghan entry of the red book, it is stated that they try to create a copy of the Kaghan. At that time, the Khazars face danger because the Kaghan does not have an heir to the throne. One day Greek merchants visit the country, and the kaghan hosts them. Interestingly, all of these Greek merchants are very short and hairy. So, the kaghan sits amid them like a giant. After the travellers leave, the kaghan looks at the leftovers of their food and views that the Greeks' are like the ones of giants. On the other hand, the leftovers of the kaghan are like the ones of a child. After seeing these leftovers, the kaghan calls people in the palace and wants them to remind him of the talks of Greek merchants. However, nobody remembers anything. Then a Jew from the palace retinue appears, and he claims that he can resolve the kaghan's problem. He brings a slave and orders him to open his arm because it is absolutely identical to the kaghan's right arm. Upon seeing this resemblance, the kaghan wants the Jew to retain the slave. On the proceeding days, heralds are sent to different parts of the kingdom, and they find people whose feet, knees, ears, shoulders are precisely the same as the kaghan's. In order to create a double of the kaghan's body, a group of young Jews, Greeks, Khazars, and Arabs are gathered in the palace and all the parts taken from their bodies are assembled together. However, they come across a problem at the end: they cannot find a head for this new body. So, the kaghan asks the Jew to find a head or he would lose his. What the Jew brings before the kaghan is remarkable since it is the head of a young girl. The head is so identical to the kaghan's that if a person looks at it in a mirror, the image would be confused with the kaghan. Then, the Jew is ordered to create the other body of the kaghan assembling all the collected pieces. When the body is created, he is sent to the bedchamber of Princess Ateh to be tested. The reaction of the princess and the transformation of the assembled body into a terrifying, uncontrollable giant are noteworthy:

'The man sent to my bed last night is circumcised, and you are not. Therefore, either he is someone else and not the kaghan, or the kaghan turned himself over to the Jews and was circumcised, becoming someone else. It is for you to decide what happened.'

The kaghan asked the Jew what this difference ought to signify. The latter inquired:

'Will not the difference vanish as soon as you yourself are circumcised?'

The kaghan was in a quandary and this time asked the Princess Ateh for advice. She led him to the cellar of his place and showed him the kaghan's double. She had placed him in chains and behind bars, but he had already broken all the chains and was shaking the bars with tremendous force. In one night, he had grown so large that the real uncircumcised kaghan looked like a child in comparison. (Pavic, 1989, 71)

The terrifying image of the assembled body can be interpreted as a metaphor for the assembled structure of the Yugoslav state. Through this metaphor, the assembled structures are illustrated as entities which are actually unnatural, ugly, and horrific. When Princess Ateh asks the kaghan if he wants to let his double loose, the kaghan orders his death. So, Ateh spits at the assembled kaghan body that has turned into a giant and he dies and falls down (Pavic, 1989, 72).

The novel can be interpreted as a text manifesting the impossibility of reaching a complete structure or truth combining fragmented pieces. The novel constantly portrays the struggle between two opposing forces of gathering and fragmenting on three different historical layers. However, the attempts of gathering and assembling always end up destructively. For instance, in the 17th century on the Austrian-Ottoman war battlefield, when the three dream hunters Avram Brankovic, Samuel Kohen and Yusuf Masudi are about to find each other and get together to assemble the three parts of the dictionary, they are murdered. Thus, the possibility of unification is totally destroyed. Likewise, in the very end of the novel three Khazar scholars Dr Isialo Suk, Dr Abu Kadir Muawia, and Dr Dorothea Schultz are on the verge of combining the fragmented resources on the Khazars and the Khazar

polemic. Nevertheless, two of them are murdered by the Belgian family, and the last one is imprisoned. As Andrew Wachtel also draws attention, the impossibility of unification is clearly emphasized in the text. When they attempt to unify the separate pieces of the Khazar question together, the characters always search for the others via scholarly actions and dreams. On the other hand, what happens consequently is that

[t]he three individual representatives of their religions succeed in coming together, but when they do, instead of discovering the truth they seek, all are destroyed. The desire for synthesis, therefore, is seen as a utopian and foolhardy quest; for when it is achieved, synthesis leads not to perfect knowledge, but rather to immediate death and destruction. (Wachtel, 1997, 636)

Along with images illustrating the impossibility of assembled structures, another imagery the author uses in the text signifies losing essential parts of a structure and being transformed into a frightful image. This type of imagery, in fact, stands as the opposite of the Adam figure representing a nostalgic totality. When this opposition is considered within the Yugoslav context, it demonstrates the nostalgia for the greater past times of the Serbian nation as opposed to the times of the Yugoslav constitution. The dream of Avram Brankovic where his sister transforms into a double-thumbed demon is a good illustration of the loss of the essential form of an entity. According to our interpretation of the text, which is strongly tied with the Yugoslav cultural context, this can be interpreted as a renunciation of the Serbian national essence:

Brankovich dreamed of his late sister the most, but each time she would lose some part of her familiar appearance and would acquire parts of a new, unfamiliar, different body belonging to somebody else. First, she exchanged her voice with the unknown person into whom she was being transformed, then the colour of her tail and her teeth, until only her arms still embrace Brankovich, with increasing passion-the rest was no longer her. (Pavic, 1989, 43)

Another metaphor that can be linked to the supranational structure of the Yugoslav state is achieved with the three diverse hells presented in Nikon Sevast's speech, a representative of the Satan on earth. First, it must be pointed out that there is always "a tension between the unifying forces underlying the text and those trying to dismember the narrative" (Aleksic, 2009, 91). The deeds and statements of the representatives of the devil are essential in the plot structure of the novel because they are the ones who try to fragment the text and destroy the attempts to reconstruct the dictionary. This is most probably one way to problematize the political grievances in former Yugoslavia. However, it must not be neglected that the dream hunters attempt to recreate the body of Adam Cadmon or Adam Ruhani via a dictionary since Adam represents the absolute totality. On the other hand, demons, who are the representatives of Satan, endeavour to inhibit these unifying forces. However, in fact it is Satan himself who creates the Adam Cadmon figure. So, it can be inferred that a recreation of the body of Adam Cadmon or Adam Ruhani through a dictionary is something unreal, like a simulacrum. The original totality is lost, and the thing to be reconstructed would only be an unsatisfactory imitation. Thus, the acts and speeches of the demons in the novel are crucial. However their deeds seem as attempts for destructive dismemberment, they can be interpreted as a nostalgic loyalty to a past absolute totality.

The statement of Nikon Sevast about the three diverse hells is also allegorical in terms of the Yugoslav context. In this part of the narrative, Nikon Sevast and Yusuf Masudi, two representatives of opposing forces, start a violent argument during the Austrian-Ottoman battle. The scene starts with a dialogue between Masudi and Brankovich. Here Masudi indicates that the man Brankovich sees in his dream is Samuel Cohen. Sevast severely objects to this claim and states that Masudi is deceiving them. He then grabs Masudi's bag where he carries the pages of the dictionary and throws it into the fire. Thereafter, Masudi turns to Brankovich and, pointing to Sevast, puts forward that Nikon is a devil; he has one

nostril in his nose and has a tail. Nikon accepts the accusation and states that he belongs to the underworld of the Christian universe and sky, to the evil spirits of the Greek lands, and the Hades of the Eastern Orthodox faith. He also indicates that the sky above is also divided between Jehovah, Allah, and God the Father. Likewise, the underworld is divided between Asmodeus, Iblis, and Satan. He has been caught on the soil of the Turkish Empire, but this does not mean that the Muslim representatives like Masudi can judge him. Then, he turns to his master Brankovic and indicates that he knows that Brankovic has been working on a dictionary for a long time and wants to add something to this dictionary. For him, this is something that the others are unaware of. According to him, the three rivers of the ancient world of the dead, named the Acheron, the Phlegethon, and the Cocytus, belong to the underworlds of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity and they divide the Gehenna, Hades, and the icy hell of the Muslims. There, at the junction of these three borders, the three worlds of the dead are confronted. These three underworlds do not interfere with each other because their borders are drawn by an iron plow that allows nobody to cross.

After this description of three separate hells belonging to three religious faiths, he continues his speech with sentences he calls an ultimate warning:

Take this as a powerful and ultimate warning, my lord, as the greatest words of wisdom! Have nothing to do with things that involve the three worlds of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism here on earth, so that we may have nothing to do with their underworlds. For those who hate one another are not the problem in this world. They always resemble one another. Enemies are always the same, or become so with time, for they could not be enemies otherwise. It is those who actually differ among themselves who pose the greatest danger. They long to meet one another, because their differences do not bother them. And they are the worst. We and our enemies will combine forces to fight those who allow us to differ from them and do not let this difference disturb their sleep; we will destroy them in one fell swoop from three sides... (Pavic, 1989, 52-53)

Thus, as Aleksic also puts forward, the novel with the devil's advocate proposes that coming together in synthesis is more dangerous than fragmenting ethnic narratives and with an "inviolability of culture, language and territorial sovereignty, the only space where a nation can only feel secure is the boundaries of a fully defined nation-state (Aleksic, 2009, 93).

The form of the Dictionary is probably one of the most noteworthy aspects regarding the denial of the possibility of synthesis, agreement or mutual understanding among narratives pertaining to diverse sides. So, this feature makes Pavic's novel an anti-Yugoslav narrative. The three parts of the text - "The Red Book", "The Green Book", and "The Yellow Book"- include respectively Christian, Islamic, and Hebrew sources on the Khazar question. What is significant about these three dictionaries is that each of them offers its own story and the belief of its absolute accuracy. This reveals the idea of the impossibility of reaching a consensus on the debated issue. The novel combines three narrative times and the representatives of the seventeenth and the twentieth-century endeavour to assemble the diverse parts of the dictionary. They do succeed to come together sometimes (on the Ottoman-Austrian battlefield or in the Kingston Hotel in İstanbul), yet they end up with destruction. This leads to the idea that for Pavic "the desire for synthesis is seen as a utopian and foolhardy quest" (Wachtel, 1998, 214). In the process of reading the reader sometimes feels impending possibility for the combination of the diverse parts of the dictionary, yet at the end (s)he is left with a knot of unresolved tensions. This can easily be read as a denial of the basis of Yugoslavia as a metanarrative and a resistance against the belief that it offers an ideal combination of diverse entities.

### **3-Dictionary of the Khazars as a satire of titoist Yugoslavia**

Dictionary of the Khazars creates a powerful imagery proposing that supranational grand narratives are not natural structures and are doomed to destruction. This is one of the main methods Pavic uses to problematize the Yugoslav political context and to create his overt nationalistic rhetoric. At times, an extremely ultra-nationalistic language erupts abruptly within the playful, self-reflexive narrative of the novel, as if coming from the subconscious of the text. This language is defined by Tatjana Aleksic as "slippages into the recognizable vocabulary that has become a trademark of the Serbian nationalist rhetoric of Milosevic's era" (2009, 91).

This kind of language mostly emerges in the text when the state organization of the Khazars is portrayed. The residents of the Khazar country are exhibited as an oppressed majority in their own homeland. So, the organization of the Khazar state can be interpreted as a sharp satire of the Titoist multiethnic and multicultural Yugoslavia and its idealistic notion of "brotherhood and unity". This satirical and ironic language is "a translation of Serbian national hostility toward Tito's efforts to create a unified Yugoslavia" (Damrosch, 2013, 272). It is really noteworthy that the nationalistic rhetoric in these parts of the novel echoes the main ideas of the 1986 Memorandum written by Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Memorandum had great influence in the rise of nationalism in the ethnically polarized atmosphere of former Yugoslavia since it expresses the Serbian perspective about the actual Yugoslav political divisions.

The First Yugoslav state was formed after the First World War, and its core element was Serbia, the victorious state of the war. The other components were Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Vojvodina, areas with different ethnic and religious differences. Despite these differences, the state functioned merely as an extended Serbia (Crampton, 2002, 11). Nevertheless, the communist power of Titoist Yugoslavia established after the partisan struggles in the Second World War was called the Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, and it was built on the basis of cooperation between all ethnic groups. The communists "were anxious to encourage all groups to move in to create a new ethnic mosaic which would encourage the development of a Yugoslav national consciousness" (Crampton, 2002, 18). In this regard, a centralized rule, self-management, non-alignment, and the brotherhood and unity of the people were some of the most emphasized concepts of the communist state. So, with the authority of Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia seemed a remarkable success story, and the national problem behind his authority stayed suppressed (Glenny, 2001, 574). On the other hand, after the early 1960s when the communist leaders abandoned the strict centralizing policy and supranational goals, the empowerment of separate republics and the polarization of ethnic identities started to become the most significant problem. It went along with unrests related to economy, religion, language etc. These problems grew uncontrollably and emerged with outbreaks of violence (Crampton, 2002, 133). As Misha Glenny states, Tito had pushed nationalisms underground, and when they woke up from their hibernation in the 1980s, they also had lost their modernizing and liberal features (2001, 593). The 1986 Memorandum is a pivotal document in Yugoslav history because it clearly demonstrates the perspective of Serbian nationalism. The content and impact of the Memorandum are depicted by Glenny in the following terms:

On 24 September 1986, a Belgrade newspaper published a document written by an anonymous team from the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SANU). The Memorandum, as it became known, was an inflammatory manifesto of Serbian nationalism. Its central claim was that the Serbs of Kosovo faces extermination at the hands of aggressive Albanians. But it also insisted that 'except during the period of the Independent State of Croatia, Serbs in Croatia have never been as endangered as they are today. The resolution of their national status must be a top priority. The



communist authorities condemned the Memorandum in uncompromising terms. Ivan Stambolic, the head of the Serbian Party, called it ‘Yugoslavia’s obituary’, warning the academicians that they were not just provoking other nationalities in Yugoslavia, but acting against the interests of Serbs, ‘for Yugoslavia is the only solution to the Serbian question. Without Yugoslavia, the Serb nation is condemned to dismemberment. (2001, 625-626)

The most significant feature of this document is that it shows the pivotal role of the intellectuals in the politics of the country. When the Memorandum was released in 1986, the leaders of the Serbian communist party including Milosevic could distance themselves from the immoderate nationalism of this text. So, this is meaningful for understanding the influence of the intellectuals in the rise of nationalism. The text is crucial for us because the depiction of the Khazar state organization in *Dictionary of the Khazars* has many parallels with the critique of the Yugoslav Federation in 1986 Memorandum.

The very first paragraphs of the text propose that the undefined and difficult position of the Serbian nation should not be neglected within the Yugoslav reality of the time. The weaknesses of the system, which had existed since the beginning of the state, became more and visible. For example, all nations in the Yugoslav Federation are not equal. The Serbian nation did not have the right to own its own state. Also, large numbers of Serbian people who live in other republics do not have the right to use their own language and alphabet, to develop their national culture. This is unlike the position of national minorities. There is also an unstoppable persecution for Serbs in Kosovo because the principles of the state protect the autonomy of minorities. According to the Memorandum, the 1974 Constitution was one of the most significant reasons of the current crisis since it divided Serbia into parts and made autonomous provinces equal to the republics giving them the power to interfere in the internal affairs of Serbia. Moreover, in a general process of disintegration, the total destruction of the Serbian people and their national unity is aimed (1986 Memorandum, 1986, *passim*).

For the readers of *Dictionary of the Khazars*, this language of Serbian victimization and suppression is not unfamiliar. For instance, in the “Khazars” entry of The Green Book where the organization of the Khazar state is portrayed, this fictional land undoubtedly reminds how Serbian nationalism views the state organization of Socialist Yugoslavia. As exhibited in the entry, the subjects of the state are divided into the ones born under the wind, which are the Khazars, and the others born above the wind, which include Greeks, Jews, Saracens, or Russians. The Khazars are the most numerous people and the others only form small groups, yet the administrative organization of the state does not reflect this. The state is separated into different districts. If one district is populated by Jews, Greeks, or Arabs, it is named according to this population. On the other hand, the larger part of the Khazar state that is inhabited only by the Khazars is separated into different districts, and all of these have different names. (The Serbian Republic in Titoist Yugoslavia has two autonomous regions called Kosovo and Vojvodina). This is presented in the text as a deliberate act. In this way, only one district had the name of the Khazars. Also, in the northern part of the country, a completely new nation was invented and it abandoned the Khazar name and language. As a result, because of the unfavourable position of the Khazars in the state, a lot of them neglect their origin, language, faith, customs, and they pretend to be Greeks or Arabs. Besides, whereas the Khazars have five to one more population than the Greeks and the Jews in the country, the balance of power and population is calculated on the basis of districts rather than the overall number of people. Accordingly, the representatives in the court are determined considering the districts, not the overall population. This assuredly creates an injustice for the Khazars (Pavic, 1989, 146-147). So, it is obvious that the narrative structure of the novel is heavily filled with

nationalistic rhetoric. With the portrayal of the Khazars as a victimized majority, a metaphor of the Serbs from a fictional/mythical people is created.

In this and similar parts of the novel, it is almost impossible to notice that “the rendition of the organization of the Khazar Empire faithfully replicates the structure of the Yugoslav Federation” (Aleksic, 2007, 98). Besides, as in the other texts such as *The Mountain Wreath* or *The Bridge on the Drina*, “the sense of heroism and the duty to sacrifice to the nation” reaches mythological grandeur in this parody of Titoist policies in former Yugoslavia. Just as Serbian nationalism claims for the actual context of Yugoslavia, in the fictional Khazar Empire of the novel, military duties are accomplished by Khazars whereas the other nations only benefit from the ranks. The Khazars are furthermore portrayed as a people who sacrificed themselves in wars, often helping the smaller nations as well. However, they are always repaid incommensurably with their sacrifice:

As the most numerous, the Khazars shoulder most of the military duty, but the commanders come from the other nations, in equal proportion. Soldiers are told that only in combat do men live in balance and harmony and that the rest is not worthy of attention. Thus, the Khazars are responsible for maintaining the state and its unity; they are duty-bound to protect and fight for the Empire, while, of course, the others -- the Jews, Arabs, Greeks, Goths, and Persians living Khazaria -- pull in their direction, toward their parent nations.

Understandably, when war looms, these relations change. Then the Khazars are given greater freedom and treated more leniently, and their past victories are glorified, for they are good soldiers. They can thrust a spear or a sword with their feet, slay with two hands at once, and are never just right- or left-handed because both their hands have been trained for war since childhood. As soon as there is war, all the other peoples immediately join up with their parent countries: the Greeks rampage with Byzantine troops and seek enosis, union with the Christian matrix; the Arabs cross over to the side of the caliph and his fleet; the Persians seek the uncircumcised. After each war all this is quickly forgotten; the Khazars acknowledge the ranks earned by foreign peoples in enemy armies, but the Khazars themselves revert to dyed bread. (Pavic, 1989, 149)

The rhetoric of subjugation and the representation of the Khazars as eternal warriors are foregrounded in *The Yellow Book* as well. In the Khazars entry of the *Yellow Book*, they are represented as people who are not called by their Khazar name even in their own state. Likewise, when they are outside, they cannot reveal their origin. They hide the fact that they speak their mother language both from others and their own citizens. Interestingly, people who are not proficient in the Khazar language are regarded more highly in civil and administrative services. Even the ones fluent in the Khazar language speak it incorrectly. Moreover, the translators from the Khazar language into other languages are selected from people who make deliberate mistakes in the Khazar language. This nightmarish representation of the state also includes the economy and judiciary. For example, under the law of the Khazar state, a person is sentenced to one or two years of labor in the Jewish populated part for a specific crime. In the district of the Arab residents, the sentence for the same crime is half a year. In the Greek-inhabited region, there is no punishment for it, and in the Khazar district, the central part of the state, the crime becomes beheading (Pavic, 1989, 255). Hence, “the Khazar state, in presentation, becomes the ultimate dystopia of a totalitarian multiculturalism” (Damrosch, 2013, 273).

## Conclusion

Many books and articles have been written regarding the end of the Yugoslav experience. The underlying reasons including political and economic problems have been discussed in detail. On the other hand, far less attention has been given to cultural factors. This is rather incomprehensible since it was nationalism that took apart the country, and “nationalism at the base is a cultural issue” (Wachtel, 1997, 627). As also maintained by Slavoj Žižek, in the Post-Yugoslav experience, there was a

very strong connection with the violent demise of the country and the "poets' dangerous dreams". Politicians manipulated nationalist passions, but it was poets who provided them with the stuff for this manipulation (Zizek, 2014, *passim*). Also, Zizek indicates that poets and authors in the seventies and eighties began to sow the seeds of aggressive nationalism in Serbia and other republics of Yugoslavia. Throughout these years, the invisible, underground work of "changing the ideological coordinates" continued and it exploded surprisingly in the late eighties. Moreover, as Zizek claims, "(...) other ex-Yugoslav nations (and Serbia itself) had poets and writers recognized as 'great' and 'authentic' who were also fully engaged in nationalist projects" (2014, 563-564).

It is not possible to accuse an author for sentences in a novel, and this study does not aim it. Besides, after the theories of poststructuralism, the claim that there is only one accurate interpretation of a literary text is meaningless. On the other hand, Pavić's powerful textual imagery does not allow the reader to distance himself/herself from the actual nationalist-political Yugoslav context. Moreover, the rhetoric of victimization and suppression which is also found in many texts since the 19th century in the Serbian literary tradition opens the way to interpret the text as a national allegory and parody of Titoist Yugoslavia. So, in this context, the *Khazars* stand as a metaphor for the Serbian people who are always in a struggle and on the threshold to lose their national essence. They search for their lost father signified with the totality of Adam Cadmon or Adam Ruhani figure in the text. It can easily be stated that *Dictionary of the Khazars* is a distinguished example of historiographic metafiction from Eastern Europe which puts the mechanisms of creation at its centre and is fully conscious about the responsibilities of the reader. On the other hand, the narrative persistently refers to the actual Yugoslav context, which shouldn't be overlooked since, as Damrosch states, "understanding the cultural subtext is important, as otherwise we simply miss the point of much of the book" (2003, 276). Thus, it should be noted that the intricate narrative devices and exceptional stylistic features of this profound allegory of Yugoslavia make it an outstanding work of world literature.

### Bibliography

- Aleksic, T. (2007), *Mythistory in a Nationalistic Age: A Comparative Analysis of Serbian and Greek Postmodern Fiction*. PhD Thesis: The State University of New Jersey.
- Aleksic, T. (2009), "Disintegrating Narratives and Nostalgia in Post-Yugoslav Postmodern Fiction" in *Balkan Literatures in the Era of Nationalism*, edited by Belge, Murat, and Parla, Jale, Bilgi Ün. Yay, İstanbul.
- Aleksic, T. (2009), "National Definition through Postmodern Fragmentation: Milorad Pavić's *Dictionary of the Khazars*", *Slavic and East European Journal*. Vol. 53: 86-104.
- Crampton, R. J. (2002), *The Balkans since the Second World War*. Longman, Great Britain.
- Damrosch, D. (2013), *What is World Literature*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Davis, R. K. (1998), "Dictionary of the Khazars as a Khazar Jar", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Summer 1998: 172-182.
- Glenny, M. (2001), *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers: 1804-2012*, Penguin, London.
- Gorup, R. J. (1998), "He Thinks the Way We Dream", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Summer 1998, 119-127.
- Gorup, R. J. (1998), "Pavić's *The Inner Side of the Wind: A Postmodern Novel*", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Summer 1998, 204-213.
- Hutcheon, L. (1980), *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, Wilfrid Laurer University Press, Canada.

- Hutcheon, L. (1989), *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Jameson, Fredric. (1968), "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism", *Social Text*, No.15, Autumn 1968, 65-88. North Carolina: Duke University Press: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466493>, Accessed: 09.04.2018 08:53 UTC
- Karasek, M. (2018), "Balkan Identity Between the Orient and Europe in Milorad Pavić's Dictionary of the Khazars", *World Literature Studies*, Vol.10, 39-49.
- Lallas, T. (2008), "As a writer I was born two Hundred Years Ago", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 128-135.
- Longinovic, T. (1998), "Chaos, Knowledge and Desire: Narrative Strategies in Dictionary of the Khazars", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Summer 1998, 183-190.
- Wachtel, A. (1997), "Postmodernism as Nightmare: Milorad Pavić's Literary Demolition of Yugoslavia", *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol.41, No:4 (Winter 1997), 627-644. Accessed: 01.02.2017. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/309833>.
- Mihajlovic, J. (1998), "Milorad Pavić and Hyperfiction", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 214-220.
- Milosevic, S. (1989), "1989 St. Vitus Day Speech". Gazimestan: [https://cmes.arizona.edu/sites/cmes.arizona.edu/files/SLOBODAN%20MILOSEVIC\\_speech\\_6\\_28\\_89.pdf](https://cmes.arizona.edu/sites/cmes.arizona.edu/files/SLOBODAN%20MILOSEVIC_speech_6_28_89.pdf).
- Pavić, (1989), *Dictionary of the Khazars*, translated by Pribicevic-Zoric, Christina, Alfred A. Knopf Inc, NewYork.
- Pavić, M. (1998), "The Beginning and End of the Novel-The Beginning and End of Reading", *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 142-146.
- Pavić, M. "Autobiography", Accessed: 01.05.2018. <http://khazars.com/en/biografija-milorad-pavic/autobiografija-milorad-pavic>.
- Perco, G. (1999), "If on a Winter's Night, Wandering Through a Landscape Painted with Tea... Milorad Pavić, Italo Calvino, and the Construction of the Reader", *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, Vol. 26, Number 1, March 1999, 51-71.
- Zizek, S. (2014), *The Poetic Torture-House of Language*, Poetry, Vol.203, No:6 (March 2014), Poetry Foundation, Accessed: 24.09.2018 10:33. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43591384>.