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DECONSTRUCTION OF SEMI-ORIENTALISM AND BALKANISM IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROSE OF ENZO BETTIZA AND GRYTZKO MASCIONI

Abstract

The paper analyses the ways of deconstructing some dominant elements of semi-Orientalist and Balkanist discourse (as defined by Nino Raspudić and Maria Todorova) in the autobiographical prose of Enzo Bettiza and Grytzko Mascioni of the late 20th century. In the context of Bettiza's deconstruction of Balkan myths about the causes and nature of the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s in *Esilio* (Eng. *The Exile*), the paper focuses on his analysis of the role of the negative perception of elements of the Ottoman heritage in the creation of the ideological framework of the Greater Serbian ideology, as well as on the different functions of depicting Dalmatian hill people (*Vlaji*) in *Esilio* compared to those that motivated the depictions of Morlachs in the Italian semi-Orientalist tradition of the late 20th century. In the novel *Puck* by Grytzko Mascioni, the distancing from the Adriatic semi-Orientalist discourse is manifested in the refusal to attribute the cultural achievements of Dalmatia exclusively to Venetian and Italian influence, and in the privileged position of Dubrovnik in the representation of Croatian and Dalmatian

identity. The detachment from semi-Orientalism in *Puck* takes the form of a strong intertextual dialogue with the birthplace of this discourse – Alberto Fortis's *Travels into Dalmatia*.

Keywords: Enzo Bettiza, *Esilio*, Grytzko Mascioni, *Puck*, deconstruction, semi-Orientalism, Balkanism

1. Methodology Based on Raspudić's "Adriatic (semi-Orientalism)" and Parallels with Maria Todorova's "Balkanism"

The paper analyses the ways in which certain hetero-images of Dalmatia and Croatia were deconstructed within the framework of the Italian semi-Orientalist and Balkanist discourse in the autobiographical works of Enzo Bettiza¹ and Grytzko Mascioni² of the late 20th century. These two authors were chosen because they analyze different aspects of Dalmatian identity from two different perspectives in their works. Enzo Bettiza's writes from an insider's position since he was born and raised in Dalmatia and knows the language, while Mascioni writes as an outsider since he happened to be in Croatia in the middle of the war. The methodology is based on postcolonial critique and imagology. Nino Raspudić deals in detail with the emergence and development of the semi-Orientalist discourse in Italian literature and journalism and its theoretical foundation on postcolonial criticism. In his book *Jadranski (polu)orijentalizam* (*Adriatic [semi-]Orientalism*), he analyses the dominant tradition of perceiving Croats (and the eastern coast of the Adriatic as a whole) as Others within Italian literature and non-fiction compared to their own "European" and "superior" civilization. This type of tradition is conceptually defined as "Adriatic semi-Orientalism" as it is a discourse close to, but not entirely equivalent to, Western Ori-

¹ Enzo Bettiza (1927–2017) was an Italian journalist, novelist and writer born in Split and a perennial correspondent of various Italian news outlets from the USSR, as well as an excellent connoisseur of the political circumstances of Eastern Europe. He was also politically active and from 1976 he was a member of the Italian Senate and the European Parliament. In two autobiographical books, *Esilio* (1996) and *Il libro perduto* (*The Lost Book*, 2005), he reflects on various aspects of Split and Dalmatian identity, which are analyzed in more detail in Raspudić, *Jadranski (polu)orijentalizam*; Dalmatin, *Le metafore dell'identità dalmata e spalatina in Esilio di Enzo Bettiza*; Dalmatin, *Il ruolo dei personaggi femminili nella costruzione dell'Altro croato nelle opere di E. Bettiza e G. Mascioni*.

² Grytzko Mascioni (1936–2003) was a Swiss-Italian writer, journalist, director and producer on Swiss television. He is the author of several collections of poems, novels, short prose and essay books about Ancient Greece. He is also the winner of several prestigious literary awards, including the Grand Prix Schiller in 2000 in Switzerland. For more information on Mascioni's biography and bibliography, see: Dalmatin, Katarina. *Autobiografski diskurs u književnoj teoriji dvadesetog stoljeća i prozi Grytzka Mascionija*.

entalism (17). The use of postcolonial criticism is methodologically justified by the fact that Croatian-Italian relations have been defined throughout history as relations between a “superior” and a “subordinate” culture, and in some historical periods as military and economic domination over parts of today’s Croatian territory.³ Alberto Fortis’ travelogue *Travels into Dalmatia* from 1774 is taken as the birthplace of the semi-Orientalist discourse on the eastern coast of the Adriatic, not only in Italian culture but also in the wider European context.⁴ The main similarities between the semi-Orientalist discourse and Orientalism are the uncritical projection of several mythical patterns that aim to simplify and interpret complex reality, intertextual interweaving⁵ as well as frequent factual errors resulting from the uncritical reproduction of previous semi-Orientalist sources (Raspudić 408–09). In his book, Raspudić applies the results of the analysis of Balkanism,⁶ the discourse that the Bulgarian historian and theorist Maria Todorova analyzed in her book *Imagining the Balkans*, and to the segment of Italian semi-Orientalism of the 20th century, in which the eastern coast of the Adriatic is viewed within the wider construction of the Balkans. However, considering that there is an important difference between Raspudić’s understanding of Balkanism and that of Todorova, it is necessary to elaborate in more detail. Raspudić associates the theory of postcolonialism with “Balkanism” only

³ In his book *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment*, Larry Wolff points out that during the Enlightenment, Dalmatia became the focal point of the Venetian fantasy of imperial revival, and he analyses how it produced a vastly elaborated empire ideology on such small territorial basis (5). Wolff borrowed the term “semi-colonial,” which is used to describe the Venetian rule in Dalmatia in the 18th century, from the Italian historian Marino Berengo (469–510). Berengo is also referred to by younger historians, such as Paladini (41), who deal with the Venetian rule on the eastern coast of the Adriatic.

⁴ Fortis’s image of a Morlach as a good savage, a man close to the natural state and not yet corrupted by civilization, supported by the later trend of “Morlachism,” dominated until the mid-nineteenth century, alongside its antithesis, the model of the “evil savage,” which is found in the works ranging from Carlo Gozzi, G. D’Annunzio and Curzio Malaparte to the irredentist discourse of the emigrated Italian Istrians in A. Petacco and others. Raspudić’s research has produced several basic models of constructing the image of Croats as members of the subordinate culture: “good savage,” “evil savage,” “good soldier,” “evil soldier,” “model of paternalistic sentimentalism,” “ungrateful child,” and “model of Balkan cruelty” (2011).

⁵ According to E. Said, a set of “knowledge” and texts about the Orient eventually develops a life of its own, and the “Orient” gradually separates from its signified meaning and, as an independent signifier, becomes the basis for the creation of further Orientalist texts or influences their formation. A similar situation is found in the tradition of Adriatic (semi-)Orientalism.

⁶ According to Todorova, “The term *Balkanism* refers to all those interpretations that place the Balkan-related phenomena within the framework of discourse or a stable system of stereotypes that place the Balkans in cognitive patterns” (193).

in the sense of specific Western discourse about the Balkans as a metaphor for something aggressive, semi-evolved, barbaric, and semi-Oriental. On the other hand, Todorova allows the possibility of associating the theory of postcolonialism with the Balkans as a metaphor, but she is fundamentally opposed to the application of postcolonialism to the Balkans (264–69) and insists that there are key differences between Orientalism and Balkanism.⁷ She seeks to establish the “ontology” of the Balkans within the Balkanist discourse through the notion of the historical Ottoman legacy⁸ (198–99),⁹ which she perceives from two points of view, its continuity and perception.¹⁰ In such a context, the negative Western perception of various elements of that legacy represents the “real basis” that served as a foundation for the emergence of the Balkan discourse at the beginning of the 20th century, which has been periodically reproduced until today. In view of the above, considering the genre diversity of Bettiza’s *Esilio*¹¹ which allows the work to be interpreted outside of its narrower literary context as an essay on various political and cultural phenomena that characterized the

⁷ The main similarity between Balkanism and Orientalism lies in the fact that both are discursive creations and can be used as powerful metaphors. According to Todorova, the main differences between these two discourses lies in the fact that there is no problem with the colonial legacy in the Balkans and in the fact that the Balkans are geographically and historically concrete, while the Orient is mostly metaphorical and symbolic in nature (266). Despite the fact that Orientalism is presented by a literary theorist (Said) and Balkanism by a historian, Todorova believes that their approaches are not necessarily incompatible, considering that both deal with discourse analysis (194). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Reflecting on the ontological status of ideas about any foreign entity, which are the subject of imagological research, Hugo Dyserich points out that the task of comparative imagological analysis is not to replace “wrong” ideas with “correct” ones, but to consider such ideas as facts and to analyze their structure as well as the effect they have on all possible areas of human spiritual life (36).

⁹ According to Todorova, legacy is a “neutral abstract signifier” (198), and in the context of rethinking the methodology of its analysis, the author distinguishes two aspects: continuity and perception. Legacy from the standpoint of continuity implies the survival and gradual disappearance of certain characteristics of an entity before it disintegrates, while legacy from the perspective of perception refers to articulation and re-articulation of the image which different individuals and groups have of that entity in different periods. In the context of reflecting on the dominant political legacy that has significantly determined the Balkans, Todorova highlights the millennium of Byzantine rule and half a millennium of Ottoman rule (199).

¹⁰ According to Todorova, the continuity of the Ottoman legacy proved to be the most resilient in the economic and social sphere, and today it is present only in the perceptual domain within the field of demography and popular culture. The perception of the Ottoman legacy in the domain of demography represents an integral part of all nationalist discourses in the Balkans. The urge to alienate from the Ottoman legacy and the desire for Europeanisation is reflected in the disappearance of the last traces of Ottoman legacy, ethnic diversity and coexistence, which have been replaced by ethnically homogeneous institutionalized entities (199).

226 ¹¹ Enzo Bettiza’s *Esilio* is a combination of autobiographic and political and cultural essays.

Dalmatian history of the 20th century, this paper aims to analyze his attempts to deconstruct Balkanism, as defined by Todorova, using methodological foundations of imagology.¹² In the context of the novel *Puck* by Grytzko Mascioni, the elements of his deconstruction of the Italian semi-Orientalist discourse on Dalmatia, as defined by Raspudić, will be analyzed.

2. The Reproduction of Semi-Orientalist and Balkanist Stereotypes in 1990s Italian Non-Fiction and Their Deconstruction in Enzo Bettiza's *Esilio*¹³

Certain pre-national imagotypical perceptions presented in Alberto Fortis's travelogue *Put po Dalmaciji* (*Travels into Dalmatia*) from 1774 had a far-reaching impact on the perception of the Dalmatian population in Italy. The two main identity myths, which were uncritically associated only with Dalmatian Italians, and often used for political purposes in the later discursive tradition of Italian "semi-Orientalism,"¹⁴ refer to the myth of the sovereignty of the coastal population compared to Morlachs who inhabited the Dalmatian hinterland and its civilizational continuity since the Roman period (Fortis 50–53). As a trans-Adriatic racist alternative to the formation of Croatian national imagologies and ideologies in Dalmatia, they primarily served to legitimize the domination of Dalmatian Italians over the majority Croatian population. In his book *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment*, Larry Wolff indicated that the Morlachs primarily embodied the civilizing mission imposing Venetian ideology and that the invocation of the Morlach nation was useful to Venice because this label was imbued with the notions of ferociousness and barbarism and the implicit justification of the Venetian civilizing mission in Dalmatia (329).¹⁵ In his paper "Morlaci (Vlasi) gledani s mletačke strane" (*Morlachs [Vlachs] Viewed from the Venetian Standpoint*), Grga Novak, a Croatian historian who systematically tackled the issue of Morlachs in Croatia, analyzed

¹² Methodologically, Todorova refers to the texts of the imagologists of the Aachen School, Hugo Dyserinck, Karl Ulrich Syndram and others (193).

¹³ Maciej Czerwinski has so far published two research papers on Bettiza in English. The research in his paper entitled "Spatiality in *Esilio* by Enzo Bettiza, The Ambiguity of the Multicultural and Multilingual Heritage of Dalmatia," was taken into account when writing this paper.

¹⁴ Raspudić analyzed the myth of the Italian historical and cultural role on the eastern Adriatic coast in the texts of several historians, including G. Praga, but also some Slavists such as A. Cronia (273–95).

¹⁵ The notion that a Morlach is a typical discursive figure of the colonized Other, without a voice of his own, is supported by the fact that the term Morlach is originally an Italian term since it did not appear in either Shtokavian or Chakavian dialect until the second half of the twentieth century, and in spoken language not even then (Bešker 17).

the appearance of Morlachs in the documents from the 13th to the 18th century and indicated that the meaning of the term *Morlach* or *Vlach* has always been flexible throughout history, and therefore its use can never be observed outside the historical and cultural context in which it occurs.¹⁶ In his book, Nino Raspudić analyzed the uncritical reproduction of certain Balkanist stereotypes and the role of Morlachs in the analyses of the causes of war conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s in the works of Italian writers A. Petacco and P. Rumiz. Rumiz's main thesis presented in the book *Maschere per un massacro* (*Masks for a Massacre*) is that for understanding the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, it is more important to anthropologically than ethnically distinguish individual social groups in that area. According to him, the key anthropological dividing line in that respect is the hillside/lowland dichotomy, where the hillside rural population, regardless of their ethnicity, is deemed as belligerent, primitive and cruel, whereas the lowland urban population is deemed as cosmopolitan and peaceful. According to Rumiz, the main culprits for the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina are the mythical Morlachs, which he refers to as non-Slavic hillside people. Raspudić indicated that Rumiz's discourse is mainly based on the uncritical linking of old anthropological patterns taken from the Venetian semi-Orientalist imaginarium of the eastern Adriatic coast with the discursive strategies typical of twenty-century Balkanism (390–91). Unlike Rumiz, Enzo Bettiza, in his book *Esilio* from 1996, completely rejects the Balkan stereotypes that reigned at the time in the Western media about the cruel and genocidal nature of the Balkan peoples and seeks the reasons for the war in the domain of politics and ideology.

His deconstruction of the dominant discourse of the Western media about the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in *Esilio*, which he ironically refers to as “the music of deaf musicians for a deaf audience” (25), derives from a historical, psychological and ideological analysis of the “Serbian phenomenon” that was neglected by the Western media. According to Bettiza, it is a rare and paradigmatic phenomenon composed of equally powerful Mediaeval and modern components, which he describes as “the devastating spillover of the

¹⁶ Throughout history, the term Vlach/Morlach denoted: 1. urban population of Dubrovnik (in documents of Serbian and Bosnian rulers from the 13th century); 2. Romance non-Slavic population of inland Dalmatia in Venetian documents from the 14th century; 3. Slavic rural population in the Dalmatian hinterland in Venetian documents from the 15th century to the 18th century; 4. The Christian population in areas that had once been, or were still at the time of the document composition, under Ottoman rule (Novak 594).

myth of a single race into an ideologically empty communist funnel” (26).¹⁷ In understanding this phenomenon, a crucial role is played by the revival of Serbian victimhood myths in the late 1980s related to the ancient Battle of Kosovo of 1389. Considering that Bettiza was well-acquainted with the power and suggestiveness of these myths as a child living in Split raised by a Serbian nanny from the Dalmatian hinterland, *Esilio* resulted from his desire to introduce the European public to the psychological patterns that enabled the revival of the Serbian victimhood myths on which the Greater Serbian ideology of the late 20th century was based. The genre and topical diversity of *Esilio* is a consequence of Bettiza’s abandonment of the initial intention to write an essayistic study on the then-current political events and the subsequent decision to provide an autobiographical view of the identity of Dalmatia that transcends narrow national boundaries (7). Bearing in mind such intentions, Bettiza found the justification for writing *Esilio*, in view of J. Derrida’s understanding,¹⁸ in a dual representation—the exceptionality of his multiple identities and his belief that he is well-acquainted with the political, economic and historical circumstances of Eastern Europe as a whole.¹⁹ The Balkanist discourse about the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, which dominated the European media in the 1990s, and sought to portray these conflicts as an incomprehensible civil war among the Balkan genocidal peoples, has been deconstructed in *Esilio* in several ways. On the one hand, Bettiza indicates the key role of the negative perception of Ottoman legacy within the domain of demography in the creation of the Greater Serbian discourse, which encouraged the practice of ethnic cleansing:

¹⁷ In newspaper articles published in *La Stampa* at the end of 1991, Bettiza emphasized the need to observe and analyze the disintegration of Yugoslavia in parallel with the disintegration of other communist multinational states, such as Czechoslovakia and the USSR, instead of placing it in the isolated Balkan context.

¹⁸ According to Jacques Derrida, autobiographical text is a perpetual return to oneself (Derrida 56–57). It is the starting point from which we begin to narrate our life, simultaneously recording it in the metahistory and affirming it; it cannot be entirely found in the work nor the life of the author, but it should be sought in the instances where we need to find justifications for the beginning (59).

¹⁹ Enzo Bettiza was a good connoisseur of Croatian, Italian, Serbian and Russian. He spent a number of years as a correspondent from Moscow, and in 1966 he published the book *L'altra Europa* (*The Other Europe*), which was a result of his extensive research conducted for *Corriere della sera* in the then communist countries of Eastern Europe. In the foreword to that book, he indicated that he had stayed in Yugoslavia four times that year alone, which is why the chapters dedicated to that country resulted in the most systematic analyses. The book deals mainly with economic issues, but an important place is occupied by reflections on the growing nationalisms and cultural life in individual Yugoslav republics.

Certain demands for the territorial expansion of Serbia, the dream of Greater Serbia, a single united people in a single territory, are not based only on ideological and propagandistic deception. They are also based on the fragility of the boundaries between myth and history, between legend and reality ... which is particularly reflected in periodically recurring Serbian cycles, which are egotistical and belligerent (14).

According to the Serbian myth, a Muslim, in his Bosnian and Albanian version, is much more than a Croat, an ideal 'other,' a rival too similar and too close; an Islamized Balkan man is a historical traitor, Ottoman convert since forever, a sacrilegious and perfect infidel. He is an antonomastic alien, the embodiment of the enemy's deed in his own house (16).

Bettiza, like Todorova, believes that the desire to deviate from the Ottoman legacy of ethnic diversity and coexistence and the creation of ethnically homogeneous nations and states should not be seen as an exclusively Balkan historical phenomenon, since the practices of ethnic cleansing and forced migrations have also marked the recent history of other European nations during and after World War II (17).

The deconstruction of Balkanist stereotypes about the nature of the war in Croatia in 1991 is also carried out through his choice to depict the war in Croatia from the perspective of Dubrovnik. On the example of brutal Serbian and Montenegrin aggression against Dubrovnik and its surroundings, which were inhabited almost exclusively by a Croatian population with a small Serb minority in 1991, Bettiza points to the falsity of the Balkanist notion about the civil war and asks that the causes of aggression against Croatia and the practice of ethnic cleansing be sought within the framework of the Greater Serbian ideology. The Serbian-Montenegrin aggression on Dubrovnik served as a basis for Bettiza's interesting view of the historical conditions of the emergence and breakdown of one of the key Croatian identity metaphors—the metaphor of the bridge among the South Slavic peoples. In *Esilio*, Bettiza portrays the destruction of Dubrovnik in 1991 as a "culturecidal holocaust" of Orthodox Sparta over the Croatian Athens, thus reformulating the 19th-century stereotype of Ljudevit Gaj, the leader of the Croatian Revival movement, who perceived Dubrovnik as the Illyrian Athens and Montenegro as Illyrian Sparta:

The Serbian attempt to disfigure and not just conquer Dubrovnik, to disrupt its architectural beauty, its Renaissance and Mediterranean

uniqueness, is the most obvious example of this project of destroying the cultural symbols of a hated Slavic civilization, which is cosmopolitan, maritime, distant from the Orthodox domes, from Byzantine icons and sacred scripts written in Cyrillic. From a military point of view, nothing can justify the Mediaeval plunder that still threatens Croatian Dubrovnik, which does not represent an interesting strategic position or possess a port of exceptional importance. Nothing but the devastating urge to obliterate the art and architecture of the South Slavic Athens once and for all. In the Athenian Dubrovnik, the Orthodox Sparta recognized a perfect victim of this new culturecidal holocaust currently raging across the Balkans. (8–9)

Omitting the common Illyrian signifier creates an interesting shift in the semantic field of both civilizational stereotypes. In Bettiza's version, Athens becomes Croatian, and Sparta not only remains Montenegrin, but it becomes Orthodox in a broader sense. Such a semantic extension in *Esilio* has two fundamental functions. It primarily points to the final breakdown of the Croatian South Slavic ideology, which yielded the stereotype of Dubrovnik as the "South Slavic Athens" within which the Croatian identity was portrayed by the metaphor of the bridge among the Southern Slavic peoples.²⁰ By alluding to the mixed national identity of the aggressors on Dubrovnik, Serbian and Montenegrin, and by emphasizing the Orthodox component in their national identities (icons, Cyrillic), he deconstructs an essential element of the Greater Serbian discursive practice that sought to Serbianize Dubrovnik's literary heritage at the end of the 20th century. On the other hand, by emphasizing Dubrovnik's civilizational superiority over the rest of Dalmatia, Bettiza in a way deviates from the Italian semi-Orientalist tradition, which exclusively attributed these high cultural achievements of Dalmatia to the Venetian influence. This detachment is also visible in the completely different functions of thematizing the Dalmatian "Vlaji"²¹ from the functions performed by the Morlachs in Rumiz's *Maschere per*

²⁰ For more information on Croatian cultural stereotypes and the phenomenon of dissemination of the Croatian nation, see: Dubravka Oraić-Tolić, "Hrvatski kulturni stereotipi, Diseminacija nacije," *Kulturni stereotipi*.

²¹ "Vlaj" is the name still used by the inhabitants of Croatian coastal areas to refer to the inhabitants of the continental hinterland (regardless of their religious affiliation). Although it comes from the word Vlach, it differs from it semantically. The term Vlach, like the term Morlach, has a migrating meaning, meaning that it denotes various foreign peoples in different peoples. In *Rječnik stranih riječi* (*Dictionary of Foreign Words*), Bogoljub Klaić states the following: "The Germans initially used Walhos to refer to the Celts, and later the Romans; the Slavs used various derivations of this name

un massacro. The otherness of Bettiza's "Vlaji" is never reflected in the racial or national sphere, but exclusively in the class-related and regional sphere. In that respect, Bettiza is never seen confusing the national and the anthropological level, which is typical of Rumiz. Some elements of Fortis's model of the "good savage"²² are noticed in the depictions of Vlachs, but the greatest attention is paid to the analysis of the social conditions of their marginalization in the Split society between the two world wars, and they are never directly associated with the causes of the war in Croatia in the early 1990s.²³ In addition, the depictions of Vlachs in *Esilio* lack a priori belligerent or negative attributions, which is why it can be justifiably concluded that they predominantly assume Fortis's model of "the good savage."

3. The Deconstruction of semi-Orientalism in Grytzko Mascioni's *Puck*

Grytzko Mascioni, an Italian-Swiss writer and public cultural worker, was appointed to Croatia at the beginning of 1992, at the peak of the war, as the head of the Italian Cultural Centre in Zagreb, which provided him with the opportunity to directly witness the war events and create an independent opinion about the war. Disappointed by the passivity and indifference with which most of the European public followed these events and the chronic ignorance of historical, political and cultural circumstances in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, he published numerous papers and essays in Italian and Swiss daily newspapers where he reflected on numerous topics related to the war in Croatia and the Croatian historical and cultural identity. The experience of war also initiated a kind of catharsis on a personal level that gained its literary expression in his masterpiece, the autobiographical novel *Puck* in 1996. This complex novel represents the culmination of his prose endeavor²⁴ and the *summa* of Mascioni's

to originally refer the Italians, while the Ottomans referred to all Christians as Vlachs (which is why the Croats sometimes use it to refer to the Serbs" (1429).

²² These elements are analyzed in detail in Raspudić, "Enzo Bettiza — od morlačke dadilje do splitske rezignacije," *Jadranski (polu)orijentalizam*.

²³ The only exception is *Prolog* (Eng. *Prologue*), in which the reflections on the psychological aspects of Serbian victimhood myths, on which the entire imaginarium of the Greater Serbian ideology is based, are introduced in the context of the story about the narrator's Vlachian wet nurse and her role in his upbringing. In this context, it should be noted that Bettiza never describes this cultural influence as Vlachian, but as Serbian. In this way, the only elements of the Ottoman legacy in Dalmatian society of the first half of the twentieth century are discovered in the territory of the Serbian cultural circle, in a living belligerent epic tradition (5–46).

232 ²⁴ Until the publication of the novel, he had been predominantly perceived in Italy and Switzerland as

literary and ethical preoccupations. The subject of the war in Croatia is introduced in the novel in the context of the narration of Puck's²⁵ sentimental history and his brief fling with a young Dubrovnik student Zlatka whom he met in the lobby of a Roman hotel. Mistaking her for an Eastern European prostitute with a wealthy clientele, he was surprised by her passionate indulgence and even more by a generous gift she gave him—her golden necklace after a night they spent together. Such an ironic “initial misunderstanding” at the very introduction of the Croatian theme in the novel indicates the existence of strong collective prejudices and stereotypes in the background of the Italian perception of the Croatian “Otherness” at the end of the 20th century. The golden necklace, in the broader interpretive context of the novel which describes Puck and Zlatka's relationship, subsequently assumes the function of a reverse metaphor, where the false and condescending attitude of the rich Europe towards a humiliated Croatia reveals the true face of its spiritual poverty. On the narrative front, the strange development of Puck's fling with Zlatka, which initially assumes a comedic tone, continues in a romantic tone and ends in tragedy with Zlatka's death, triggering another of Puck's great adventures—the Croatian one. In the context of the main theme of the novel—Puck's search for identity, it becomes a turning point and leads to the final discovery of a long-lost stronghold. On the structural level of the novel, the experience of war in Croatia sheds new light on some of Mascioni's perpetual topics. This is especially true in terms of tackling the topic of one's own eradication in the broader context of reflection on the role and importance of the homeland in the contemporary postmodern world. On the autobiographical level, questioning one's own cultural and national identity arises from common ideological and geographical stereotypes, with the tendency to establish it in a broader cultural and ethical domain.

Before Zlatka's appearance in the novel, Puck was staying in Venice listening to the news from war-torn Croatia. The choice of the city from which Puck travels eastbound is not accidental. From the Venetian perspective, because of its strong historical ties with Dalmatia, Puck gets a different view of the identity

an excellent poet and essayist (author of a rich essayistic endeavor on Ancient Greece). He has won numerous literary awards, including the Grand Prix Schiller.

²⁵ In the novel, the main character does not have a first and last name, but exclusively the nickname Puck, which substantially alludes to the interpretation within the rich intertextual context of Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in terms of both the main character and the text as a whole. For more information on the subject, see: Dalmatin, Katarina, *Autobiografski diskurs u književnoj teoriji dvadesetog stoljeća i prozi Grytzka Mascionija*.

of the eastern Adriatic coast from the one prevailing in most Western media. This deliberate choice of the initial perspective reveals the narrator's desire to remove the historical and cultural identity of war-torn Croatian areas from the Yugoslav and Balkan context and inscribe it in a common Western European context. The otherness of the Croatian coast from the Venetian perspective is therefore interpreted more in the geographical than cultural sense since it refers to "the East that still remains European, where people have always written in the Latin script"²⁶ (Mascioni 293). It should be noted that the adjective *European* in *Puck* never transforms into Italian or Venetian, which clearly distances the narrator from any symbolic "appropriation" of the eastern Adriatic coast. Within the framework of Italian literature, *Puck* thus represents a radical departure from the dominant discursive tendency of coding Croats and the entire eastern coast as a subordinate civilization compared to the Western one, which results in the abandonment of all traditional models of their presentation emerging from such practice. Mascioni's deviation from the trans-Adriatic semi-Orientalist discourse, as defined by N. Raspudić, is manifested primarily in his refusal to attribute the cultural achievements of Dalmatia exclusively to Venetian or Italian influence. This is most evident in the example of baroque, which is equally admired by Puck and Zlatka in its Dubrovnik and Roman variants, whose mutual relationship is not approached in the typical semi-Orientalist manner of mutual influences and fortune, but in a postmodern and refreshing way as one of the many foundations for establishing a proper dialogue. The very erotic and ludic context in which the metaphor of baroque outlines the nature of their excessive and "superfluous" relationship pre-emptively prevents the establishment of any universal interpretation model. The ironic gesture of "reading" Borromini from a 100 Swiss franc banknote reflects the position of a decentralized postmodern subject, which no longer perceives culture as the property of a certain national entity, but as a common source of symbolic patterns and models.

The fact that of all Croatian and Dalmatian cities Puck is fascinated most by Dubrovnik, whose high civilizational achievements cannot be attributed to the direct Venetian influence, speaks in favor of Mascioni's rejection of the semi-Orientalist discourse on Dalmatia. The lack of mention of Dubrovnik is evident in the Italian semi-Orientalist tradition to such an extent that it can be said that Dubrovnik represents a kind of taboo topic. In most cases, this could

²⁶ Original text: "un Oriente che resta ancora europeo e dove l'alfabeto è sempre quello latino" (Mascioni 293).

be explained by the political and ideological sphere, but also by the uncritical reproduction of certain anthropological patterns on which the depiction of Dalmatia was based in Fortis's *Travels into Dalmatia*. An additional reason lies in the fact that most Italian semi-Orientalists were not familiar with (or ignored) Fortis's later texts in which, after visiting Dubrovnik, he completely revised his earlier position on the exclusive position of Venetian rule in the civilizing mission on the eastern Adriatic coast.²⁷ In Fortis's depictions of the population of the Dubrovnik Republic,²⁸ there are no straightforward dichotomies between the inhabitants of the coastal area and the inland or the urban and rural population that marked its depictions of Venetian Dalmatia. He concluded that Dubrovnik surpasses the Venetian Dalmatia not only in economic and fiscal matters but even more in political and cultural achievements (Fortis 26). Unfortunately, due to the turbulent political circumstances after the French Revolution, Fortis failed to publish his second revised edition of *Travels in Dalmatia* prior to his death, therefore the dominant stereotypes about Dalmatia and its identity continued to be reproduced in European literature and imagology for a long time on the basis of the images from the first edition of his book. The thematization of Dalmatia and Dubrovnik in *Puck* reveals numerous similarities with Fortis's insights from his later phase, but also with some details from his intimate biography. This refers primarily to the selection of Venice as the starting point of discovering Dalmatia and the crucial role of the two Dubrovnik women in the process of discovering and experiencing the Croatian Other.²⁹ The intertextual template thematizing Puck's lost manuscript in the novel could be found in Fortis's lost book on Dalmatia, although this interpretation should be taken with reservation. In any case, Mascioni was certainly familiar with Muljačić's research on Fortis's travels in Dalmatia before the publication of *Puck* in 1996. This is evidenced by the letter of Žarko Muljačić from October 1995 in which he proposed to Mascioni a lecture on the Dalmatian travels of A. Fortis at the Italian Institute in Zagreb.³⁰

²⁷ Fortis's travels in Dubrovnik in 1779 and 1780 are documented in detail in: Žarko Muljačić, *Putovanja Alberta Fortisa po Hrvatskoj i Sloveniji* (*Travels of Alberto Fortis in Croatia and Slovenia*).

²⁸ These depictions are found in his letters to his friend Vitturi. Letters are published in: Baldazar Bogišić, "Dva neizdana pisma Alberta Fortisa o Dubrovniku" ("Two Unpublished Letters by Alberto Fortis on Dubrovnik").

²⁹ These similarities are analyzed in detail in Dalmatin, *Autobiografski diskurs u književnoj teoriji dvadesetog stoljeća i prozi Grytzka Mascionija* (150–56).

³⁰ The letter is dated October 19, 1995, and the original is kept in the Literary Archives of the National Library in Bern. A photocopy of the letter is attached in the book of Katarina Dalmatin, *Autobio-*

4. Conclusion

Comparing Bettiza's and Mascioni's discourse on Croatia and its identity during the 1990s, it derives that certain elements of the Balkanist and semi-Orientalist discourse are deconstructed in *Esilio* and *Puck*. The deconstruction of Balkanism in *Esilio* is most evident in Bettiza's underscoring of the key role of Serbian victimhood myths in the creation of the Greater Serbian ideology in the late 20th century, as well as the negative perception of Ottoman legacy in the domain of demography within this nationalist discourse. The deviation from the Italian semi-Orientalist tradition in both works is also noted in the emphasis on Dubrovnik's civilizational superiority over the rest of Dalmatia under the former Venetian rule. This detachment is also evident in Bettiza's completely different functions of thematizing the Dalmatian "Vlaji" from the functions achieved by thematizing Morlachs in the texts of P. Rumiz and A. Petacco. In *Puck*, the detachment from semi-Orientalism takes the form of a strong inter-textual dialogue with the birthplace of that discourse—Alberto Fortis's *Travels into Dalmatia*.

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DEKONSTRUKCIJA SEMIORIJENTALIZMA I BALKANIZMA U AUTOBIOGRAFSKOJ PROZI ENZA BETTIZE I GRYTZKA MASCIONIJA

Sažetak

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Rad analizira načine dekonstrukcije nekih dominantnih elemenata semiorijentalističkoga i balkanističkoga diskursa (kako ih definiraju Nino Raspudić i Maria Todorova) u autobiografskoj prozi Enza Bettize i Grytzka Mascionija potkraj 20. stoljeća. U kontekstu Bettizine dekonstrukcije balkanskih mitova o uzrocima i prirodi rata 1990-ih u Hrvatskoj i Bosni i Hercegovini u djelu *Esilio (Progonstvo)*, rad se fokusira na njegovu analizu uloge negativne percepcije elemenata osmanske baštine u stvaranju ideološkoga okvira velikosrpske ideologije, kao i na različite funkcije prikaza dalmatinskoga zaleđa (Vlaja) u djelu *Esilio* u usporedbi s motivacijama za prikaz Morlaka u talijanskoj semiorijentalističkoj tradiciji kasnoga 20. stoljeća. U romanu *Puck* Grytzka Mascionija distanciranje od jadranskoga semiorijentalističkog diskursa očituje se u odbijanju da se kulturna dostignuća Dalmacije pripišu isključivo venecijanskomu i talijanskom utjecaju te u privilegiranju Dubrovnika u predstavljanju hrvatskoga i dalmatinskoga identiteta. Odmak od semiorijentalizma u *Pucku* popraćen je snažnim intertekstualnim dijalogom s ishodištem toga diskursa – djelom Alberta Fortisa *Put po Dalmaciji*.

Ključne riječi: Enzo Bettiza, *Esilio*, Grytzko Mascioni, *Puck*, dekonstrukcija, semiorijentalizam, balkanizam