

Reconciliation or Asymmetry? On the Religious Other in Literature and Theory

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Abstract:

Different cultural perceptions dictate different ways of perceiving those who are religiously different. This article argues that the religious 'Other' and the way it is reflected in literary imagination is usually driven by historically constructed ideologies about race, ethnicity, fear of the other, fear of losing cultural purity, cultural imperialism, and nationalist consciousness, among other factors. Drawing on some theoretical and literary insights on the 'Other' and through reading events in their historical and social contexts, this article reads through and exposes various patterns of religious othering in some selected texts and concludes that while some of these factors spring from the historical contexts of the texts and the events shaping them, others are and can be motivated, however implicitly, by the writer's personal experiences and convictions.

Key words: 'Other'; religion; identity; reconciliation; literary imagination,

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1. Introduction :

The human story is a multi-voiced tale of constant encounters, timeless displacements and historical crossings over. Mostly antithetical, as history tells us, these encounters between different human typologies were both strategic and circumstantial. Alexander the Great's strategic desire, for example, to create a new version of civilization that brings East and West into contact was inspired by his ideas on interracial marriages, administrative hybridity and musical embedding. This is similar to the tactic of forced assimilation which, being both timeless and spaceless, strategically tried to mold new types of people for the sake of larger imperial causes. Because historical circumstances intervened to throw the European man to the shores of the Pacific and the Arabs to the shores of Zanzibar morphing into a cultural and ethnic mosaic, questions of cultural convivencia, reconciliation, incompatibility and/or assimilation started occupying long pages of both scholarly and literary works in an attempt to understand how people can possibly link to each other in view of the cultural specificities they exhibit once in contact with other alien elements.

The most recurring of these cultural specificities, nevertheless, are those informed by religion or belief. This is due to the fact that different cultural perceptions dictate different ways of perceiving those who tend to be religiously different. Religious othering then starts to take place as a culturally molded phenomenon which participates immensely in shaping public consciousness about various emerging patterns of religious acceptance and/or intolerance. This leads us to wonder whether the changing patterns of how a society might view itself with time is what makes people perceive of the religiously different as a threatening 'Other' or the credit goes to religion itself and the ideologies investing with it in molding a cultural consciousness

that defines itself on the basis of excluding all that seems to be different. To what extent, we may also ask, can religion play a role in an identity's *raison d'être* in view of fast changing patterns of both individual and collective identification? While early modern and 19th century othering patterns were dictated by factors like imperialism, rising notions of statehood and the upsurge in scientific racism and pseudoscientific theorizations which were in service of the fast growing nationalistic ideals, late 20th and early 21st century saw new ways of perceiving the cultural other; new ways shaped by a post-cold war clash of civilizations rhetoric which, as much as it opened the door for new insights on identity and belonging, laid the ground for fluid identities to emerge. These new identities are rather shaped in the presence of both a self-imagined and socially motivated 'Other' that tends to take more religious or faith-based overtones. Literary works which engaged with such an identity concern are often thought of as a reflection of the human experience but their role in disseminating certain ideologies and impacting public opinion is equally significant.

In the light of some theoretical insights to otherness and othering (two terms used interchangeably in this paper), I wish to take a closer look at the ways the religious 'Other' was/is portrayed in literature reflecting different patterns of exclusion and embrace. My purpose in this paper is not to discuss religion or try to debunk some religious practices while extolling others. My purpose is chiefly to examine aspects of religious otherness and othering as discussed or reflected upon in literature and theory through reading events in their historical and social contexts. With more emphasis placed on the way these practices of religious othering are portrayed in literary imagination, the paper argues that different portrayals of the religious 'Other' are usually driven by historically and socially constructed ideologies

about race, ethnicity, fear of the other, fear of losing cultural purity, cultural imperialism, nationalist consciousness, notions of statehood among other factors. The paper visits both early modern and contemporary texts in the belief that religious othering is a never outmoded phenomenon and one that keeps feeding on fast growing traditions of cultural exclusion and othering. And because every writer is a product of his time and that literary texts are better understood if read against their historical and socio-cultural contexts, this article considers the historical element in discussing literary representations of the religious 'Other'.

This article starts by locating the concepts of the Other and otherness theoretically, then moves to discuss how, in a world so often driven by a self and other paradigm, religion situates itself as an important determinant of identity while the last section, which draws on the portrayal of the Jewish 'Other' in the English, Russian and German literary traditions and the anti-Muslim othering patterns in some South Slavic texts, is an attempt at demonstrating how representations of religious otherness in the literary imagination dwell on certain factors usually etched out by history and experience. While some of these factors spring from the historical contexts of the texts and their writers, others are and can be motivated, however implicitly, by the writer's personal experiences and convictions. Besides all, this article seeks to find its way amidst the literature already generated on the role of history, religion, propaganda and ideology in shaping societal consciousness towards the cultural 'Other'.

2- The Other, Otherness and Othering

"Between the system of exclusion and the exclusionary tendencies of the self, are we doomed to despair?" so asks Miroslav Volf in his book on exclusion and embrace (1996: 66). To give a possible answer to this question,

or at least to create a clearer idea, through insightful examples, of how the world is constructed around antipodal entities, Miroslav points out various narratives of exclusion; exclusion by elimination, assimilation, domination and abandonment. Drawing on his experience as a Croat in the 1992 war-torn and ethnically divided Croatia, Miroslav argues that fear of the surrounding culture pushes people to construct different versions of the 'Other'. Miroslav differentiates between the tendency of maintaining boundaries for the sake of differentiation and the exclusionary practices which "prevent a creative encounter with the other" generated mostly by "either expulsion or indifference". (*Ibid.* p. 45). Miroslav's insight is in part inspired by Jesus Christ's teachings on how to regulate social life through his inclusive approach of bringing the excluded and excluding parties into a meeting point. Through strategies like *re-naming* what people falsely assign as marginal or inappropriate in society and *re-making* (or creating) alternative versions of what is disagreeably agreed upon as irrelevant such those people who are deliberately thrown onto the ash heap of society and the real world, Jesus, according to Miroslav, attempted to tear down social boundaries that separate people especially those driven out by faith and belief. (*Ibid.* p.50)

The cases of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Rwanda represent exclusion as elimination while exclusion by assimilation, i.e. becoming part of the new culture which requires assuming its ethnic, linguistic and religious criteria, represents, according to Miroslav, a more genial way of cultural exclusion. This exclusionary practice usually undermines one's identity as it pushes people to give up who they are to secure survival within their new surroundings. This view echoes Levi Strauss's theorizations about the 'anthropoemic' and 'anthropophagic' strategies of cultural assimilation.

According to Strauss in his *Tristes Tropiques* (1955), human societies embraced different ways in dealing with heterogeneity and otherness dividing them into 'anthropophagic' societies, in their more primitive sense, which associate the other with danger and "deal with strangers and deviants by swallowing them up, by making them their own and by gaining strength from them", and, in a more contrasting modern sense, 'anthropoemic' or bulimic ones which "vomit out the deviant, keeping them outside of society or enclosing them in special institutions within their perimeters." (Strauss: 417).

Miroslav's views on othering are in line with Jean-Paul Sartre's postulations about the self's fear of self-annihilation at the detriment of a mysterious other as being part of modern culture's parochial tendencies towards difference. In his *Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1956), echoing Hegel's thoughts in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which he maintains that the self recognizes its existence and anatomy when aware of other, usually different, human beings and whose annihilation risks that self losing its sense of recognition, Sartre theorizes about a form of otherness which fulfills its existence through being conscious of something outside or different from the self. Sartre maintains that perceiving the 'Other' within one's boundaries, with all its distinctive cultural specificities, remains a psychological state that shapes no threat to one's existence while in some ways impacts one's self-image or capacity for judgment amid the overlapping interplay of being for oneself and being for the other. This interplay of self and other yields in a series of axiological and epistemological encounters in the form of evaluations, comparisons, judgments and conceptual modeling much determined by the extent to which the self is able to give space to the other.

This is in a way maintained by what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, with his musings on modern and post-modern perspectives to morality and ethics, thinks of as 'cognitive spacing' which takes place because "each of us 'builds' his own variety of 'others' from the sedimented, selected memory and processed past encounters, communications, exchanges, joint work or battles"(Bauman, 2005: 260)¹. In his postmodern ethics, Bauman criticizes modernist reveries on social condition and human relations thinking that modernity, influenced by early modern and enlightenment philosophies, concentrated on creating order out of disorder and driving the self to accept its ambivalence with little room left to personal considerations on morality or ethics. Bauman thinks that the enlightenment metanarratives and set of 'isms' on ethics and morality called for a universal ethical code which eliminates individual voice, one which every social being is expected to emulate and abide by and in a way, according to Bauman, was used as means of social domination. Instead, he argues for a postmodern ethic which destabilizes this predetermined universal ethical code and gives priority to a social order in which being for the other is more ethically favored than being *with* or *above* the other. In this social order, ethically speaking, being for the other feeds on such ethics as reciprocity and altruism where the self is freely allowed to act according to its moral impulse in the face of socially dictated norms or moral standards.

Exclusion as domination, for Miroslav, manifests itself in some societies' desire to manipulate the others' sense of being. This desire for manipulation is partly dictated by the revulsive tendencies of certain cultures to assign inferior criteria to those who identify differently from them. This was the plight of Black Africans in the New World, Native American populations, and world Jewish communities among many other cases. A

good example to mention in this regard is the *kaffireatnik* Jewry of South Africa which brings race, ethnicity and religion into a meeting point. Being and perceiving oneself as both a "white superior" and a "white inferior" was the plight of many Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrants who came to South Africa from Eastern European countries mainly Lithuanians and Litvaks between 1880 and 1940. Prompted by the Tsarist persecution, Cholera and famine, these East European Jewish immigrants found refuge in South Africa. Nicknamed as 'kaffireatniks', particular to those working in the 'kaffir eating-houses' that provided basic services and food for native Blacks, and 'low-class Russians' by the White ruling class, their social positionality and identity were determined by their Jewish poor whiteness. A Jewish poor whiteness which is negotiated in an in-between context; above the native Blacks already regarded as racially inferior and a 'mainstream whiteness' empowered by the prejudices historically determined in favor of the ruling class.

Because whiteness in South Africa determined what jobs are destined to what type of people and to what type of whiteness, Eastern European 'Whiteness' raised the immigrant Jews above the jobs destined to native South African Blacks but did not raise them enough to get entitled to the privileges of the other prevailing white typologies mainly the English, and to a lesser extent the Afrikaners. Primarily driven by a religious othering and distancing rhetoric, this 'eatnik' whiteness was not only a factor in determining social position or occupation but participated immensely into the question of Jewish immigrant identity which was shaped by a racial stigmatization that was both socially despising and elevating. A South African society, already divided along ethnic and racial lines with a White majority from Britain ruling class, which has viewed the newly coming waves

of East European immigrants, even though similarly white, as equal to the Blacks they served in a black whiteness fashion.

Accordingly, in a contemporary world where many are led astray by a mania for cultural purity and distinctness, the 'Other' remains the lynchpin that drives most theorizations about identity, belonging and cultural embrace. Defining oneself, then, along dimensions of sameness and difference is carried out through a symbolic interactionism, to use George Mead's concept, which explains how the self evolves through creating its own symbolic world which in turn yields in certain individual behaviors that keep creating and recreating meaning whenever communications are established with other individuals in a certain social context. This recurrent creation of meaning motivates the individual to maintain proper frames of reference enabling him to reflect on and sometimes expect the ways he is perceived by others and, in contrast, helping him generate, through social intercourse, a social selfhood by means of which he can appropriately link to those different from him. The 'Other', in this case, is no longer referring to the remote and esoteric usually encountered in books or popular stories but became part and parcel of the neighboring entourage and among street crowds. The 'Other' changed from being a mere outsider to an insider whose features of cultural difference keep distancing him from the realm of those surrounding him. Identity then takes and keeps taking shape through confrontation, difference and the evasive tendencies towards all that is asymmetrical. Not necessarily dismissed as intolerant, people do usually embrace such prereflexively held and exclusivist attitudes towards what is different because they perceive of the other as

the gathering point for the risks and fears which accompany cognitive spacing. They epitomize the chaos which all social spacing aims staunchly

yet vainly to replace with order, and the unreliability of the rules in which the hopes of replacement have been invested. (Bauman, in Miroslav, 1996: 54)

Conceptualizing otherness in the literature on interculturality foregrounds such an understanding that collective identities and group consciousness are often maintained along lines of stereotypical fixed and preconceived images of the 'Other'.

3- Identity's 'raison d' être': the Other through the Prism of Religion

Since its inception in 1993, Samuel Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" evoked an ongoing dialogue on how far religion can play a role in generating future clashing and single-mindedly uncompromising societies. The essay's thesis, which makes one think that the postwar world would cluster in a *bellum sacrum*, had echoes in political and academic circles and among popular readerships. According to clash theorists like Bernard Lewis, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington, the post-cold war global politics are drifting from a power oriented kind of conflict to a culturally and religiously oriented form of civilizational clash. A clash of civilizations, one which Edward Said, in his philippic against Huntington's invidious analysis, thinks of as a 'clash of definitions' and a 'civilizational self-justification' due to the reductive, irrational and tendentious conclusions Huntington and the proponents of his analogy had about Oriental Islamic and Confucian civilizations thinking of them as 'challenger civilizations', which raised questions about how far "what we are" is or can be defined "by what we are against" (Qureshi and Sells, 2003: 26). Clash theorists think that religious or cultural differences tend to be more resistant to inconstancy compared to political or economic ones and might therefore widen the gap of disparity between regions and lessen the chances of coming to a sense of communion with the cultural 'Other'.

Huntington, in his clash pontifications, however, sidesteps the fact that the world's most popular religions and the cultures upholding them enjoyed a symbiotic presence, for centuries, in regions like the Middle East, the Balkans, North and Sub-Saharan Africa and to some extent South East Asia. While he thinks that he could draw an accurate image of the zeitgeist of the post-cold war world, his comparative analysis repudiates a long tradition of flowing interdependency and historical intersections, however incompatible, that brought different people who believe in different things side by side. Furthermore, this clash rhetoric is a good reminder of past ideologies and movements which assumed a culturally eliminating tone and insisted on the continuous need for more superior forces to maintain the world's original order from falling apart. Movements like *Kulturkampf* in Germany (translates as 'fight for a civilized or ideal society'), though anti-clerical in essence and known for its anti-Polish sentiments, associated religion with identity and nationalism. Added to this are theories like the 'theory of oriental despotism', which relates western progress to democracy and Oriental decline or stagnation to democratic failure and despotism, the 'Peter Pan theory' which romanticized with the image of an exotic deprived passive eastern 'Other' who is expected to seek help and guidance from a more socially elevated western 'Other'. These ideas, backed up by religious ideals in most cases, supported imperial, enlightenment and post-cold war philosophies which tend to define societies and even individuals in center and periphery terms, in well-placed dichotomies all meant to give meaning to a world where friction and chaos seem inevitable to eke out order and harmony.

Even though inimical in spirit and lacking a scholarly thread (Said: 585), the clash of civilizations rhetoric laid the ground for new definitions

about identity, race, ethnicity and culture in general with more emphasis placed on how different cultures are and can be in the future. This understanding argues for a cultural identity which insinuates itself with faith distinctness or religious difference where axiological and conceptual borders keep intensifying and therefore dividing the world into warring, and less harmonious, camps. Read in this context, identity's *raison d'être* is shifting to be perceived along a religious line where differences do not have "a fixed status in and of themselves" but ones which are motivated by and "rooted in power or a move in a rhetorical game." (Wolfe: 310).

While cultures are viewed as "zones of conflict" by the clash theorists, reconciliation or dialogue theorists lean towards locating them in 'zones of proximate development' (to use Lev Vygotsky's term) where mutual influence, recognition and collaboration on both sides of the divide are ineluctably important in maintaining intercultural understanding. Considering civilization itself, as both concept and a category reflecting certain cultural practices and their boundaries, as a fluid, crossbred phenomenon and one subject to change, what is usually regarded as peripheral starts to assume an impactful role. As an alternative to Huntington's reductionist reading of the post-cold war international scene which treats world civilizations, Said thinks, as "monolithic and homogenous", as self-constitutive entities, many commentators, partly enraged by the belligerent nature of the clash discourse, went into suggesting a different reading based on dialogue and interreligious or intercultural reconciliation. So, instead of an approach that excludes open possibilities to come to terms with the different 'Other', these critics pushed for an inclusive view of culture and religion.

"Tako, vec nikako": the Religious Other in Literary Imagination

Oh, thee beautiful Slavic land,
What sin didst thou commit to Heaven above,
That such fate has befallen thee,
And mortifies thee with eternal sorrow?
Thy oppressed sons,
Once powerful in their lordship,
Are now bastards, or slaves,
Eager to graze together with sheep.
Ah, let that one be accursed
Who, due to faith, hates his brother:
For thy misfortune has its cause
From this slimy mud only. (Zdenko: 23) (emphasis added)

The texts revisited in this paper constitute a meeting of history and literature but instead of going deep in exposing the layers of the narratives chosen for reference, I do rather engage in a commentary that aims at exposing the historical and social motifs behind religious othering and the facts that drove many theorizations about it. As stated above, the paper grapples with both personal and socio-historical considerations which made the texts under examination possible. The texts or regions chosen as cases of reference on the religious ‘Other’ do not exclude the presence of other texts which examine religious othering but their choice springs from the author’s familiarity with the historical contexts of the texts selected and the writing philosophy of their writers. The texts selected are likely to yield much analytical payoff due to their racy artistry and adeptly set plotlines.

In the English literary imagination, the image of the Jew as a “Christ-killer” prefigured in different writings from Chaucer to the first half of the twentieth century’s upsurge in the literary representations of Jewishness.

Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, for example, are criticized for the anti-Semitic pronouncements both writers express through the mouths of their characters. Jews are equalized with villainy, murder, mutilation echoing an English reductionist consciousness towards the non-Christian prevailing at the time (Cohen and Heller: 5-6). While Chaucer's *Prioress* detaches the Jews of innocence, Shakespeare's Shylock presents the reader with two contested religious ontologies, Judeo-Christian, where Christianity wins both ethically and ideologically. More flexible treatments of the figure of the Jew, however, started to manifest in later writings like Charles Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* or George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* where we notice a transition from portraying the Jew as a "Christ killer" to the "good Jew" who exhibits virtues such as human integrity and artistic genius. (*Ibid.* p.07). Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend* depicts the Jewish figure in contrasting tones which shapes a move in Dickens' attitudes towards the religious other. While his character Fagin of *Oliver Twist* reflects the Medieval and renaissance English perception of the non-Christian and mainly the Jewish other as a 'compendium' of negative stereotypes and source of evil, his Mr. Riah in *Our Mutual Friend*, in contrast to Fagin, attracts the reader's attention to a different and more favorable aspect of the Jew, one who "acts as a friend and protector of innocent children". (*Ibid.* p. 06). Such a transition in approaching the non-Christian in the English literary tradition, and the Jewish identity more precisely, stems from, first, the growing sense of empire during the 19th and early twentieth centuries that pushed the English to reconsider their position towards the cultural other and, second, due to the anti-Jewish mass massacres leading to the 1939-1945 débâcle which created a victimized Jewish

archetype who is now cast as a “displaced, rootless, refugee and migrant figure”.

A similar portrayal of Jewishness can be also noted in the Russian literary scene which fed on a long historical tradition of exclusion, elimination and/or attempts at assimilation. The Jewish question in Eastern Europe, which to be later referred to not just as a religious category but a way of maintaining cultural difference in the western part of Europe, remained clouded in the mists of state-sponsored anti-Semitism and church orthodoxy for centuries. From Tsarina Elizabeth Petrovna's most recorded 1740 pronouncement that she does not “want any profits from the enemies of Christ” (Haumann: 80) and the series of anti-Jewish expulsions which followed, and Catherine II's 1791 “Pale of Settlement” which confined Jewish presence to dispersed territories outside Russia and along the Black Sea culminating in the *polozhenie dlya evreev* (“State on the Jews”) decree of 1804 which defined the proper ways through which Russian Jews can be successfully assimilated before being finally emancipated, to the most notorious 1880s anti-Jewish pogroms. Considered, more openly, as religiously dangerous, ignorant, conspirators, an obstacle to the aspired to progressive Russian state, and more importantly, as Tsar Alexander II's killers; a fact which was baselessly attributed to the Jews, large Jewish families across imperial Russia were the target of genocidal killings and mass waves of displacements towards the US, the UK, Germany and Asia Minor.

The way this was reflected in literature was rather subject to conflicting inclinations. The literary portrayal of Jewishness, among the circles of both Judeophobes and Judeophiles, was motivated by changing notions about national identity, Russian citizenship, changing patterns of assimilation and acculturation, statehood and the liberal ideals of

universalism towards the end of the 19th century. Seen in this light, writers and philosophers exhibited fluctuating convictions between the enlightenment ideal of the perfectly assimilated or Russified Jew who exhibits a readiness for change and a reformability of character and a romantic vision which prioritizes the original, the essential and the authentic over the misleading anxiety or temptation of the universal. In a similar vein and through relying on biblical stories and images, Russian writers created a dichotomy between the true and sincere Jewish convert modeling him after Paul of Tarsus, and the false or hypocrite Jewish convert modeling him after Judas Iscariot, Jesus' disciple who betrayed him in exchange of pieces of silver, one converting for financial gain and not out of desire of being Christianized or assimilated (Safran, 2000: 12-14). In tandem with this categorization of the true and false Jewish converts to Russian orthodoxy, there emerged a type of fictional characters which questioned the reliability, political allegiance and honesty of the new baptized Jew and how he might possibly fit into the Russian Christian way of life.

Writers like Nikolai Leskov, writing with a more inclusive impulse, puts a more positive spin on things through invoking various archetypes of the assimilated Jew, one who exhibited willingness to compromise his traditional attachment to his Jewishness in favor of a more tolerant socialization. Critical of the forced Jewish conversion which yielded in the production of false and hypocrite groups within the Orthodox Church, the Russian reformist writer Nikolai Leskov created stories that questioned the inefficacy of both these new converts and the laws which forced them into it meaning both the state and the church in the name of assimilation. In his famous *Episcopal Justice* (1877), Leskov, influenced by the cantonist tradition of imperial Russia, tells the story of Jewish conversion to

Christianity across the Russian empire through his major character Father Kiriak; an "Orthodox missionary to the Far East" who "teaches the native peoples about Christianity but refuses to participate in a campaign to baptize masses of them as quickly as possible". (*Ibid*.119-120). Through Father Kiriak's refusal to baptize who do not want to, Leskov espouses his thoughts about the importance of voluntary conversion to create healthier and more tolerant communities and showing that "voluntary baptism, inspired by the association of Christianity with mercy and virtue, is better than forced, bribed, or bought conversion. Only voluntary converts, like Paul, can become "real" Christians". (*Ibid*). Leskov's account of the convert Jew drifts considerably from earlier depictions which insisted on the false Jew's immorality, hypocrisy and his negative impacts on Russian society.

This image of the Jew as a dangerous Christ killer and an untrusted religious other came to my personal encounter as an undergraduate student working on a university project for a class on issues in culture. I was recommended to work on education and socialization as a general thematic. In an attempt to narrow down the topic, I chose to work on child literature and its role in socializing children with society's norms and manners. One of my case studies, which attracted my attention at the time, was Julius Streicher's 1938 children's novel *Der Giftpilz* in its English version as *The Poisonous Mushroom*. Casting the German Jew as a poisonous mushroom, metaphorically opposed to the good edible mushroom or the German Gentile, who constitutes a threat to German ideals and stability. Further reading on the issue led me to more profound accounts on how the religious 'Other', who in many occasions tended to be synonymous to race, was and is still finding its ways in the world literary imagination; albeit subject to cultural and regional differences. Notwithstanding, some representatives of

the German literary imagination did not limit their insights on the religious 'Other' to the anti-Semitic propaganda of children's books but depicted the Jewish religious other in an 'old and new' fashion of Jewry. The *Ostjuden*, referring to the old East European Jewishness which fled to Germany after the outbreak of the Russian pogroms of 1881, has always acted as a figure of the other in the German cultural and literary imagination. Distinctions were often made between a German Jewry type; one that could successfully assimilate to and be enlightened by the German refined Bildung, and an old, despised, Yiddish speaking and an unrefined ghetto East European type of Jewishness (Klier: 136-137). To be viewed similar or equal, the ghetto Jews had to seek sophistication and acceptance through German Kultur. Speaking in a, as Heinrich Grätz describes it in his *History of the Jews*, a "half-bestial language", the ghetto Jews figured constantly in poetry, drama and fiction produced in the pre-war period. Commenting on the plight of Jewish communities in German society over time, Marion A. Kaplan, in his book *Jewish Daily Life in Germany, 1618-1945*, elucidates that

Germany's Jews lurched between progress and setbacks, between fortune and terrible misfortune. German society shunned Jews in the eighteenth century, opened unevenly to them in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and turned murderous in the Nazi era.... Even in the heady years of progress, awareness of a basic insecurity accompanied Jews, confirmed and intensified by each new menace, and stored in the memories of successive generations. (p. 04)

Compared to the Wilhelmine state which noticed an outburst in Jewish mobility and integration within the German empire and series of conversions to the German Bildung, the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich saw an increasing and unprecedented wave of unlikely representations

of Jewishness partly shaped by restrictions imposed on Jewish schooling, their presence in public, job opportunities and housing where “everyday life was replaced by a permanent state of emergency”. (Kaplan, *Ibid.* p.271). Moreover, these restrictions were conjoined by scientific racism and pseudoscientific appeals in eugenics, phrenology and physiognomy which, motivated by a national desire for cultural and racial purity, played a major role in intensifying anti-Semitic thought and the othering of Jewish people in the German literary tradition. Ideas like the racially driven myth of the Aryan blood and its role in preserving the Nordic race from being contaminated motivated popular opinion for decades and reinforced the notion that physical attributes do count in determining those who are fit and are destined to claim existence and survival.

This does not, however, gainsay the fact that German popular opinion towards the Jewish Other lived through fluctuating moments of denial and acceptance which in turn determined the content of much of the literature produced from the second half of the 19th century to the post-holocaust period. Therefore, due to this in-betweenness and the fact that “Germans interacted with varying degrees of openness toward and distance from Jews” (Kaplan. p.05), earlier writings with Jewish characters as their embodiments exhibited a certain tone of indeterminacy and ambivalence between sympathy and prejudice towards the Jewish ‘Other’. Novels and poems mixed with intermittent sentiments of acceptance and refusal, approval and disgust, respect and despise mobilized the general opinion towards the Other while the Jews’ oscillating attitudes between their Germanness and their Jewishness deprived them of a sense of belonging and drove them to the edge of despair. And writers themselves who attempted to reflect upon the Jewish presence in their stories and novels experienced a shift in attitude and a

difficulty to decide upon what they do actually want to address in their writings. One of the most relevant representatives of such an ambivalent temper is the German novelist Thomas Mann.

In his 1905 notorious novel *Wälsungenblut* (*The Blood of the Walsungs*), Mann, himself married to a daughter of an assimilated Jewish family, portrays some aspects in the life of a Jewish family which falls within the earlier mentioned Ostjuden category and seems to relate ‘race’ or ‘blood’ to ‘Jewishness’ or ‘religion’. Many read this novella, whose “potential to cause offence” Mann acknowledges (Hannah, 252), as a portrayal of racial identity and the question of Jewish assimilation within a mainstream German Christian culture where Mann makes it explicit that that the Jews’ biological make up and racial features render such an assimilation a difficult if not an impossible venture (Kontje, 110). Mann, ambushed by doubt, thinks that “below the polished exteriors” of his Jewish characters and their milieu there lies a “less civilised aspect” of life (Hannah, 258). Because they think of themselves inferior in the eyes of a society to which they incessantly try to assimilate, the rich background of the Jewish family or the Aarenholds of the novella try to cover for such a socially created self-hatred through financial advancement and their “Knowledge of the social disadvantage of being Jewish acts as a spur to success, which becomes an act of retaliation against the majority” (*Ibid.*, 257). In an acrimonious tone, Mann forwards his scrutiny through his approach to the incest committed by the twin characters as a way to maintain cultural exclusivity towards alien descent, the family’s manners and accent, his detailed description of the characters’ physical features and the children’s wordplay, and the family’s bad taste despite of wealth. Mann’s ambivalence in this novella and others published thereafter, according to some critics, lies in him trying to voice out his

attitude towards the need for Jews to assimilate while his insistence on spotlighting their exclusivist traits and background makes the reader feel the difficulty and obstacles in the face of such a desired assimilation. The more setbacks in his Jewish characters are exposed, the less promising their integration turns to be.

A similar tale about ascribing the non-Christian and religiously different as a Christ-killer was very well on the move within a different historical context but one which changed from charging the Judas as Christ killers to the Slavic Muslims who came to be known as Christ-Prince Lazar killers. It is a tale which equates faith with race and belonging with blood. The poetic piece mentioned earlier in this section is taken from Croatian poet Ivan Mažuranić's epic poem "The Death of Smail-aga Ćengić" (1845) which reflects upon a long history of brotherly discord and fratricidal feuds motivated by the historical knitting together of south Slavdom and its cultural counterpart; Ottomandom. Taken from a long epic poem of 1134 verses; this poetic piece recites a story of brethren crisis between brothers who submitted to the whims of hatred and faith-driven antagonism; an antagonism which required not just a church or state-sponsored proselytizing as earlier demonstrated, but one in which baptism by blood replaced baptism by water. Like many other founding epics and mythologies of world nations, Islamic-Christian relations in the history of the south Slavic countries especially Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia, and the way this was portrayed in literature and historical chronicles, drew largely on a national mythology that "portrays Slavic Muslims as Christ killers and race traitors." (Sells: 27). When it comes to the Bosnian religious context, certain arguments, backed up by both history and mythology, were raised to explain

the 1992-1995 genocidal ideology which brought out the worst of human intolerance. Among the arguments usually presented when tackling the issue of religious othering in Bosnia surrounds a pan-Slavic blood brotherhood which fell apart due to the failure of the constituent parts of the Slavic race to maintain their unity in the face of non-Slavic alien elements with the Ottoman Turks as the most referred to stranger and for which the great Old Bridge at Mostar in nowadays Bosnia stands as an architectural testimony.

Mažuranić's epic poem both chronicles South Slavs' history and reminds them that faith-driven animosity brings misery to people. The poet blames both foreigners, mainly Turks and Germans, for investing with the region's cultural and religious diversity in the name of expansion and control as he accuses the locals of complicity with the foreign element and bringing their lands to a fraternal hatred. It is a hatred which afflicted the lives of Muslims and Christians (both Catholics and Orthodox) in Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries up to the 1992 genocidal massacres.

This story of fraternal hatred caused by interreligious antagonism amounted into a national mythology which invested with the past and transformed it into a historical tale of ethno religious purification; one which is often referred to as the 'Njego mythology'. This mythology inspired many Serbian works of literature and history. It draws on what is usually recorded as the Kosovo Curse (battle) of 1389 and the martyrdom of Prince Lazar in the battle with the Ottoman Turks. This battle saw the martyrdom of both Prince Lazar of the Serbs and Sultan Murat of the Turks. For the Serbs, this battle and Lazar's death marked the beginning of a new age of Ottoman supremacy in the region. What is specific about the event, however, was the way it was retrieved and used by Serb nationalist writers of the 19th century

likening Prince Lazar to Christ in a ‘last supper’ fashion and with a betrayal incident taking place². Driven by such a ‘stab in the back’ belief that those South Slavs who accepted Islam were converts who betrayed the Slavic blood and cause, many nationalist writers advocated for a new religious ideology or ‘Christoslavism’, which is the belief that “Slavs are Christian by nature and that any conversion from Christianity is a betrayal of the Slavic race” (Sells: 36).

While historical records attest to the fact that Slavic Muslim and Serbian Orthodox conflicts escalated after the Ottoman conquests of the region, some nationalist writers and policy makers, especially during the late 20th century genocidal atrocities, manipulated this ancient tale of animosity to justify anti-Muslim atrocities (*Ibid*,). Ancient regional sensitivity between border regions in the Balkans, especially those emerging due to the encounter with the Muslim Turks, were part of larger patterns of historical transformation and adaptability. These natural enmities, however, were given a different, more churlish twist by Njego in his poetic drama *The Mountain Wreath*.

Written by the Montenegrin poet Petar II Petrović-Njegoš, a contemporary of Mažuranić, in 1846 in a dialogic monologic fashion, *The Mountain Wreath* is a verse historical drama which chronicles four centuries of South Slavic or Yugoslavian history and brings in dialogue the story of three different worlds; the classical Slavic, the Ottoman Muslim and the West Venetian. This poetic drama turns around an 18th century Christmas event during which an extermination of Slavic Muslims took place guided by the slogan “exterminate the Turkifiers” through cleansing and purification. In the mouth of its protagonist Bishop Danilo, Njego resurrecting the 1389

Kosovo tragedy, reminds his follow men of the fact that these Slavs who embraced Islam or agreed to be ‘Turkified’ didn’t just betray Prince Lazar in the Kosovo incident by embracing the religion of the enemies, but betrayed the Slavic race itself and for which they deserved a purification by either extermination or baptism; a treason that deprived the Muslim Slavs of their Slavic race (Sells: 42-44).

While the actual event itself turned around a blood feud between people sharing geography, language and race, it was, however, dramatized into interreligious, us and them, good vs. evil tale of othering where faith and race meant one thing. In a metaphorical laconic language, Njego’s drama with its final aura of forgiveness and purification through extermination and massacre cast as a divine act, impacted popular opinion at the time uniting both Serbs and other Slavs through delegitimizing those who chose to be religiously different. In this context, religious othering implied a ‘race betrayal’ which in turn kept distancing all those who chose a different path yet wanting to be part of the land and heritage that defined them for centuries. Read and received as a tale of national awakening, though inflicted by a contested historiography regarding some of its aspects, this historically inspired drama kept molding a Slavic national consciousness based on exclusion and elimination of the ‘Other’ for decades to come.

A century later, the author Ivo Andrić, in his historically set novel *The Bridge on the Drina* which won him the Nobel prize of literature in 1998, incarnates Njego’s mythic tale relating it to the history of the two parts of his town Visegard, which are divided by the bridge, giving it a more accessible and explicit breath. A richly-textured story which draws heavily on memory, epic, legend and old gnosis and with a bridge symbolism which, for

Andrić, represents both division and unity, the novel spans a three centuries history of Visegard; that ethno religiously diverse gathering of shared histories but one shattered by colonialism and motivated hatred. In a Gogolian rhythm that brings mockery and romantic pathos to a perfect harmony, Andrić weaves together the lives of Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Serbs and Turks weighing their desires, conflicts and inner concerns in a way that exposes a “conglomeration of episodes bound together by the single motif of the bridge, a symbol of permanence in a world of change” (Mustapha: 88). How people, as described in the novel, view the religiously different echoes Njego’s approach to Christian-Muslim relations which excluded those who embraced Islam as race traitors. Andrić deals with this issue through evoking the Turkish tradition or system of ‘devshirmeh’ or ‘blood tribute’ (Andric: p. 23) according to which boys from occupied territories were taken to Istanbul to serve in courts, harems or the army. This practice which gives the bridge significance especially for the people surrounding it, according to Andrić and other nationalist writers, created a rupture in those regions’ collective memory and for which later interreligious animosities were to be justified. Andrić’s literary recollection of those past memories and his sympathetic views towards Njego’s race betrayal tale reek of precisely that subjective attitude when he clearly states that “Njegos, who can always be counted on for the truest expression of the people’s mode of thinking and apprehending... [described] the process of conversion thus: ‘The lions [those who remained Christians] turned into tillers of the soil, the cowardly and covetous turned into Turks’”(Sells: 45). Standing with Andrić’s views means excluding the historical fact that the Ottoman presence in the region, however lugubrious for the locals, maintained a dialogue and to some

extent a harmony among the region's Christians, both Catholics and Orthodox, Muslim converts and Jews equally. In contrast to Njego, however, Andrić treats the bridge and the tales surrounding it with a romantic impulse, as an inter-civilizational mediator which keeps reminding its two sides of their shared histories. Seen as such, both Njego's and Andrić's treatments of the religious 'Other' can be said to be informed by national mythologies which insisted on equating race with faith and coexistence with elimination.

In an unlike fashion with both Andrić and Njego and the writers who shared their views, post-genocidal (post 1995) treatments of the religious other mainly in Bosnian literature, even in its German counterpart, dwell on post memory and feature a slight move towards reconciliation with self and other. Many of the new post-genocidal writings were expressive of certain desires for self-articulation hanging still in purgatory.

2. Conclusion :

"Tako, vec nikako" (Serbian) of the last section's title which translates as "This way; there is no other" is taken from one of the characters' pronouncements in Njego's *Mountain Wreath*. This pronouncement implies the difficulty or impossibility, in the character's words and perception, to look at the issue from a different less confining view or agree on how to accept or at least deal with those who chose to embrace a different faith. This saying and the shortsighted view it upholds equally reflect some of the religious attitudes exposed in the texts referenced in this paper, the clash theorists' limited view towards civilizational contact, some of the writers' personal takes on the different patterns of religious assimilation and/ or

othering and the role of historical events and ideology in informing different patterns of religious irreconcilability. As the previous texts exemplify, religious othering is molded by history, ideology and cultural perspectives towards the 'Other' but once cocooned and internalized, it plays a major role in the dissemination of stereotypical and exclusive attitudes towards both self and 'Other'.

Given the centrality of religion as a cultural aspect to modern cultural discourse and its continuous relevance to critical theorizations about otherness, othering and interculturality, different writers including the ones under study, regardless of space and time, grappled with the different motifs that shaped their societies' attitudes towards the religious 'Other'. While this article's concern is with the ways the religious 'Other' was/is reflected in literature, revisiting the role of history in leading up to such literary portrayals and how it both shaped and changed attitudes and responses is essential to bring out for faith-based othering is a history old phenomenon but one which reverberates still.

3. Notes:

1. Taken from, and personally translated to English, Bauman's book *Postmodern Ethics* in its Spanish version *Ética Postmoderna* in which he says, "Cada uno de nosotros «construye» su propia variedad de «otros» a partir de la memoria sedimentada, seleccionada y procesada de encuentros pasados, comunicaciones, intercambios, trabajos conjuntos o batallas". (p.162)
2. The myth goes that Prince Lazar's death "represents the death of the Serb nation, which will not be resurrected until Lazar is raised from the dead and the descendants of Lazar's killers are purged from the Serbian people. In this story, the Ottoman Turks play the role of the Christ killers. Vuk Brankovic, the Serb who betrays the battle plans to the Ottoman army, becomes the Christ killer within. In the nationalist myth, Vuk Brankovic represents the Slavs who

converted to Islam under the Ottomans and any Serb who would live with them or tolerate them.” (See Sells, 31)

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