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Dream in a Suitcase: An Immigrant's Transformative Journeys to Imperfect Homes

Domnica Radulescu

The writer is a foreign country.

—Marguerite Duras¹

In a foreign country my family is like shattered glass.

—Aglaja Veterany²

Notes on This Essay's Format

The present essay is personal, hybridic, fractured, and nonacademic even though significant traditional scholarly research has gone into it together with field, ethnographic, and experiential research. I am interested in creating a different genre, in which critical inquiry is interwoven with creative writing and memorialistic discourse. To illustrate the rechanneling of the brokenness caused by exile and displacement into a different kind of celebratory wholeness in this chapter I offer: (1) brief musings on the experience of the exile, immigrant, nomad; (2) short incursions into some of my explorations of immigrant art, trauma theater, and arts of intervention by theater artists I have connected with intellectually, artistically, and personally; (3) selected examples of my own fiction and theater works that reveal modalities of reinvention, and of creating spaces of belonging through the crafts of storytelling and performance. Other than the linguistic, spatial, and cultural imperfection that marks both the works of the artists I explore and my own art, there are several other layers of trauma that I explore—namely political

¹ Marguerite Duras, *Practicalities* (New York: Grove Press, 1993), 66.

² Aglaja Veteranyi, *Why the Child Is Cooking in the Polenta*, trans. Vincent Kling (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2012), 124.

violence, genocidal wars, and social inequity, specifically poverty. Finally, while I explore positive transformations of imperfect realities through innovative artistic creations, I also warn against the risks and dangers of idealizing imperfection at the levels of social ills, injustice, and poverty, particularly with regard to cultural appropriations from marginalized communities, such as the Roma people, also erroneously known as “Gypsies.”

In light of Virgil Nemoianu’s theories of literature as “a preservation of defeat”—and, paradoxically, as “a force of renewal”—I pursue the transformation of the experience of exile and displacement largely through its manifestations in literary creations, in particular theater. In this exploration, I am interested in the ways in which the imperfection of exile meets the “relaxed imperfection and smiling defeat” that, according to Nemoianu, is literature, thus creating a glorious form of “imperfection,” that is, “envisioning possibilities, and nursing dreams.”³ While exile is a loss and a profound one at that, it is also a form of rebirth—and in the cases of political exile, an extreme measure of finding freedom from oppression, war, genocide. Equally, while literature is considered secondary to history and social science with regard to factual truths and historical facts, it is also, in Nemoianu’s words, “a force of renewal,” precisely because it “partakes of irrationality, randomness and surprise, rejection and dispersion,”⁴ namely of what is most authentically representative of the organized chaos that is our human journey on earth. Well before Nemoianu’s theorizing on literature’s fertile imperfections, Joseph Brodsky claimed loudly the power of literature with the self-assurance of an exile writer from the former Soviet Union—one whose strongest grasp on reality and strategy of survival had indeed been the moving sands of literary universes in a world of oppressive certitudes and terrifying utopias. In his lecture on the condition of the exile writer, Brodsky asserts the regenerative and transformative powers of literature as the only salvation in our messy violence-ridden world:

Should the masters of this world be better read, the mismanagement and grief that make millions take to the road could be somewhat reduced. Since there is not much on which to rest our hopes for a better world, since everything else seems to fail one way or another, we must somehow maintain that literature is the only form of moral insurance a society has; ... that it provides the best argument against any sort of bulldozertype

³ Virgil Nemoianu, *Imperfection and Defeat: The Role of Imagination in Human Society* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 20–1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

mass solution— if only because human diversity is literature's lock and stock, as well as its *raison d'être*.⁵

Before Brodsky, another exile Nobel Prize winner, the French Algerian writer Albert Camus, stated in his 1957 acceptance speech in Sweden that "by definition [the artist] cannot put himself today in the service of those who make history; he is at the service of those who suffer it," while at the same time the artist cannot possibly "in good conscience dare set himself as a preacher of virtue" for "truth is mysterious, elusive, always to be conquered. Liberty is dangerous, as hard to live with as it is elating."⁶ And even earlier than Camus's speech, Pablo Picasso, yet another exile artist of the past century, pointed to the paradoxical nature of art in relation to any form of absolute truth or perfect certainties:

Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. ... The "lie" is the construct that transforms all those decisions into an experience for the art's audience. The "truth" is the point of the exercise, or what the artist hopes to share through artifice and artistry.⁷

To illustrate some fertile encounters between the bittersweet imperfection of exile and the "relaxed imperfection" of the truthful "lies" of literature, I have chosen several works by immigrant writers who have put themselves indeed in the service of those "who suffer" history and not of those who make it, authors of hybridic art who navigate between poetic memorialistic prose, experimental dramatic texts, and theatrical performances. They are: Aglaja Veteranyi's dramatic poem *Why the Child Is Boiling in the Polenta*, the work of the Belgrade based DAH Theater group, and a handful of my own prose and dramatic texts.

Reflections on Spaces of Exile and Creativity

It has always been about the suitcase: what to take and what to leave behind, what to hold on to and what to let go of. In the summer of 1983, I packed up a modest collection of belongings, clothes for all weather, a handful of family

⁵ Joseph Brodsky, "The Condition We Call Exile," *New York Review of Books*, January 21, 1988.

⁶ Camus, Acceptance Speech on the Occasion of Receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, December 1957. Retrieved February 19, 2020, from <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1957/camus/speech/>.

⁷ Pablo Picasso, "Statement to Marius de Zayas," in *"Picasso Speaks": The Arts*, 315–26. New York, May 1923, 315–26. Reprinted in Alfred Barr, *Picasso* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1946), 270–1.

photographs, a volume of poetry, a collection of short stories I had written in my native Romanian, and I said goodbye to my family, my country, and the twenty-two years young woman that I was and boarded a one-way flight to Rome for the revolution of my life, with the intention of never returning as long as the dictatorship lasted. With the passing of years and acquisition of renewed understanding, the brokenness produced by that initial trauma of displacement has been channeled and transformed into new real and imaginary homes, into mosaics of experience and spaces of reinvention.

Since my arrival as a political refugee in the American city of Chicago in the 1980s, during one of the coldest winters of the century, different variants of the question “Where are you from?” have been asked of me hundreds of time. In the words of the writer and theoretician Sara Ahmed, this question “becomes something you reside in” and “to be questionable can feel like a residence.”⁸ Both through my writing and my life choices I have become the “architect” of my own residence of foreignness. Like many other exiled writers across literary history, from Ovid, to Dante, to Vladimir Nabokov, to Joseph Brodsky, Salman Rushdie, Marjorie Agosin, or Edwidge Danticat, to name just a few, I have tried to build “imaginary homelands” and to be my own suitcase. In his book of poems *Tristia*, written in exile from his beloved Rome, the poet Ovid says: “Behold me, deprived of native land, of you and my home, bereft of all that could be taken from me; my mind is nevertheless my comrade and my joy; over this Caesar could have no right.”⁹ This fierce sense of freedom that the exiled artist experiences once left with nothing but their own mind and creativity is a bold and painful stretch across frontiers, an impulsive embracing of the unknown in a reckless but necessary desire to make the whole world one’s own. As an artist of the written and spoken word who has chosen her adoptive country and the language of her art with deliberation, I function and exist across communities of thought and imagination rather than within national and ethnic lines, which I have always found imprisoning and from which I escaped thirty-seven years ago.

Memory is a deceitful and unreliable vehicle of experience in general, and the memory of a person displaced from their native locations is significantly more deceitful and unreliable. The new environment where we have resettled, taken refuge, and that we have immigrated to no longer holds in its landscapes, sensorial and cultural realities and language, the recognizable traces of our experiences and development in the native country, and it is only our faulty memory that holds those traces of our existence and of who

⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 116.

⁹ Ovid, *Tristia*, Book VIII, trans. A. L. Wheeler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924).

we once were. It is mostly this layered and often labyrinthic transformation of experience into memory from the angle of the drama of uprooting and resettlement that I try to explore in my writing, the present essay included.

Having to contend with a conscience split between lost spaces and unfamiliar spaces, the mirror of the exiled writer is forever broken: reality, the self, memory, the perception and representation of space and time will always have irreparable cracks, yet it is the cracks that account for the troubling beauty of their art. Joseph Brodsky noted that “exile is after all a kind of success.”¹⁰ As he elaborates on the fate of the exile writer in comparison to regular refugees, Brodsky equalizes the two categories of exiles in saying that “what our exile writer has in common with a Gastarbeiter or a political refugee is that in either case a man is running away from the worse toward the better.”¹¹ In speaking about his experience of trying to retrieve the image of India from his memory as he is writing as an exile in London, Salman Rushdie said that the immigrant writer “is obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost. But there is a paradox here. The broken mirror may actually be as valuable as the one which is supposedly unflawed.”¹² Again the imperfection of the broken mirror of memory becomes an asset for the creative artist who is attempting to recreate spaces that she or he has lost contact with through the act of displacement but which acquire an added level of poignancy in the creative imagination and its artistic products.

The art emerging from the experience of exile is one such example of “a kind of success” achieved at the expense of a profound sacrifice and loss of the self as well as from a simultaneous reinventing of the self and of repiecing together the broken mirror of memory. In Platonic philosophy, our very life on earth is an exile from and an imperfect copy of the perfect world of ideas, or “Forms” as he called them in his *Symposium*, and in the dialogue of *Phaedrus* in particular.¹³ However, it is precisely the “imperfect” particulars of our world and its sensorial richness that account for much of its texture, color, and complexity. To bring this thread back to the discussion of exile, the immigrant poet Adam Zagajewski hints at the sublimity of the imperfection of our world in his poem “Try to Praise the Mutilated World” (2002):

¹⁰ Brodsky, “The Condition We Call Exile.”

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 11.

¹³ Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato, Volume II: The Symposium*, trans. R. E. Allen. See also Nehamas, “Plato on the Imperfection of the Sensible World,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1975): 105–17.

Try to praise the mutilated world. Remember June's long days, and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine. The nettles that methodically overgrow the abandoned homesteads of exiles.¹⁴

Edward Said, on the other hand, elaborates on the irreversible trauma of exile in memorable words, which warn us of the danger of fetishizing it as we consider its sociopolitical consequences on the larger scale of our world and this historical moment:

Exile is the unhealable rift between being and a native place, between the self and its true home. Its sadness can never be surmounted. ... [E]xile is tremendously secular and unbearably historical; ... it is produced by human beings for other human beings, and ... like death, but without death's ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from traditions, family and geography.¹⁵

I am such a person myself, torn by "the unhealable rift" of exile yet also enriched by its multiplicity of perspectives and bold explorations of uncharted territories, frontiers, margins. An immigrant/exile from a former Communist country, I am interested in the ways in which the ontological uprooting of exile influences the aesthetic shapes of works that have emerged from this experience, and in the ways in which it determines not just what we write about but also how we write about it. Given the ontological nature of the experience of displacement from one's native country, the creative imagination that emerges from this experience will bear the marks of rupture, fragmentation, existential alienation. It is, however, precisely these scars that endow the writings of countless exiled writers, with their unique beauty and power.

On the upside of his considerations on exile, Said also noted boldly that "modern Western Culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees," and the critic George Steiner asserted that a certain genre of twentieth-century Western literature is written by exiles about exiles "wanderers across language. Eccentric, aloof, nostalgic."¹⁶ The experience of displacement marks not only the content of exilic writings but the very shapes of this art, the construction of characters, and the jagged narrative lines.

¹⁴ Adam Zagajewski, "Try to Praise the Mutilated World," in *Without End: New and Selected Poems* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2002).

¹⁵ Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 173.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 174, and Steiner cited in *ibid.*

Through my work as a literary and theater critic I have explored with particular attention the aesthetics of exile novelists and playwrights whose works bear the marks of brokenness and mutilation, of dystopian, lost or recreated worlds, while as a creative artist I have myself created works in the genres of fiction and play-writing whose topics and characters have imperiously demanded to come to life in fractured forms and broken mirrors. What is lost in wholeness is gained in realness. By “realness” I do not mean realism, but “the real” in the sense that Jean Baudrillard meant in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) as the “original,” the “territory,” the viscera of reality, and not the copy or, in Baudrillard’s words, “the copy of the copy.” The immigrant writing that I am interested in and that I create myself points to the very core of the real, “the territory” and not “the map.”¹⁷ I focus on the spaces between the viscera of experience as it takes place in historical time and its transformation into a work of the creative imagination. And since we are talking of works derived from the trauma of displacement, the truthfulness of such works emerges quite often precisely in their cracks and perceived imperfections. It is in the brokenness and the “mutilation,” in the fractured narratives, the mixing of comic and tragic styles, the quilting of multicolored and often jagged, even incongruous, fragments that the loss and trauma of exile might have the chance of producing meaning and of even bringing about some measure of healing.

Storytelling as a Place of Belonging—Examples of Exilic and Trauma Writing

The examples that I offer in this essay are meant to illustrate the channeling of trauma, loss, and displacement into spaces of belonging. These spaces are created through the quilting of fractured, imperfect, tragicomic aesthetics, narrative, and dramatic shapes that replace lost wholeness into regained realness. These are forms that “praise the mutilated world” not despite but precisely because it is mutilated, and they do so by being themselves fractured and discontinuous, in particular when compared to classical aesthetics of linear narratives and realistic representations.

Simultaneously, I need to stress that—while in this alchemy of transforming loss into gain, brokenness into realness, exilic experiences and discourses into spaces and languages of belonging, and of creatively turning the painful and negative dimensions of trauma into positive forms of reinvention—it is

¹⁷ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Gaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 161–3.

important to avoid leaping into utopian images of loss of country, language, nomadism, immigration, and all other forms of displacement or social inequality. As the critic Yuriko Saito points out, “it is critically important to maintain the negative assessment of imperfection, as it may indicate a need for corrective actions.”¹⁸ While “the aesthetics of imperfectionism offers one strategy for developing a capacity to appreciate what is otherwise considered a deficiency and inadequacy,” as in the case of wild gardens, overgrown lawns, tattered clothes, or, in our case, the experience of displacement, it is equally important to recognize the social ills and inequities that come with this aesthetics. Such injustices are often the immediate effects of the trauma and drama of exile, immigration and refuge-seeking from war and violence-ridden environments.¹⁹

Said’s words regarding the reality of immigration are even more relevant now as we face the objectionable realities of today’s formidable flow of asylum seekers and refugees, most recently the separation of families and the placing of young children in cages at the US-Mexican border.²⁰ He talks about “immense aggregates of humanity” who “loiter as refugees and displaced persons,” “undocumented people, suddenly lost, without a tellable history.”²¹ The immigrant or exiled artist must balance the artistic channeling of these imperfect realities of displacement, migration, and poverty with the acute lucidity of the need for change and social justice and with a healthy skepticism toward any literature emerging from these experiences, including their own. For, in Said’s words, “to think of the exile informing this literature as beneficially humanistic is to banalize its mutilations” (2002, 174). Similarly, Brodsky noted, in discussing the plight of undocumented immigrants worldwide:

¹⁸ Saito, “The Role of Imperfection in Everyday Aesthetics,” *Contemporary Aesthetics* 15, no. 1 (2017). Retrieved February 15, 2019. <https://contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=797>.

¹⁹ The full quote from Saito (*ibid.*):

These examples of imperfection often indicate social ills and injustice, and the negative aesthetics associated with them is the best means of signaling that something is amiss and change or improvement is in order. These aesthetic manifestations communicate social problems more powerfully and effectively than things like statistics regarding the poverty rate. Our sensibility assaulted by these negative aesthetic experiences affects us immediately and viscerally, and I believe that it is important that they affect us this way.

²⁰ For more information on the separation of families ordered by the Trump administration, see: <https://www.npr.org/2019/06/20/734496862/how-the-trump-administrations-zero-tolerance-policy-changed-the-immigration-deba>.

²¹ Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 176.

Nobody ever counted these people and nobody, including the UN relief organizations, ever will: coming in the millions, they elude computation and constitute what is called, for want of a better term or a higher degree of compassion: migration. Whatever the proper name for these people, whatever their motives, origins, and destinations, whatever their impact on the societies which they abandon and to which they come may amount to—one thing is absolutely clear: they make it very difficult to talk about the plight of the writer in exile with a straight face.²²

The exiled artists whose works most contribute to the creation of spaces of belonging from experiences of displacement are also those who simultaneously point with lucidity toward the ills of the world with a call toward addressing and repairing them. There is no sublimity of any kind in the image of toddlers snatched from their mothers' breasts and put in cages or in that of countless homeless people who fill the streets of modern urban areas around the world from the most to the least developed countries in the world.

In this chapter, it is not my intention to idealize in any way displacement, wars, loss of home, or abject poverty. Rather, I wish to point to the ways in which some creative artists may draw inspiration from the very inside chambers of such realities as a means of revolt and resistance, as a measure of healing and launching an urgent call toward social justice. While the work of such artists shines with the particular beauty of brokenness and mutilation discussed here, it also draws attention to its own imperfection and insufficiency when faced with the crude realities outside its spheres of representation.

Aglaja Veteranyi—Home Is in the Journey

Why Is the Child Cooking in the Polenta? (2012) is a cross-genre novel/epic poem/monologue that tells the wrenching story of a young girl traveling with her family of circus actors across the world, after having escaped their native Romania. The story emerges from the author's own life as a child in a family of circus people who escaped Ceausescu's Romania, taking with them circus paraphernalia. The author, Aglaja Veteranyi, was herself that circus girl, whose ethnicity in the story is ambiguous and possibly alludes to that of Roma people, the eternal nomads, marginalized and oppressed for centuries. The image of the itinerant circus performers overlapping with that

²² Brodsky, "The Condition We Call Exile."

of the Roma becomes like an aggregate symbol of all “loitering” refugees. Her dramatic poem is written from the perspective of a young girl terrified of the possibility of the death of her mother, whose circus act is to hang by her hair in the trapeze. I consider Veteranyi the emblematic exile writer to the point of flagrant literality, where she documents in a puzzled and fractured voice a nomadic and terror-filled existence, telling, living, and recreating a story of displacement and homelessness. The fractured and dreamy narrative is held together by the crystal-clear and perky voice of the young girl. It is in this crystalline voice that the trauma of a perpetually itinerant childhood and youth, the brokenness of the “shattered glass” that her family becomes in a “foreign country” are rearranged and forged into a redeeming world of dreams, ironies, and haunting poetic discourse.

The voice of Veteranyi’s child protagonist cuts through the core of this life in translation and from the honesty of the voice comes a certain sad irony, a melancholy humor almost like the cliché face of clowns, half-laughing half-crying. This strident and terrified child’s voice telling a biography in syncopated rhythms and cinematic imagery is the running thread through a world of broken images and experiences away from home in a dizzying and often cruel carnival. Here I share some examples:

“This house is a home, my sister says. Here you have to put on a lot of weight, or else you’ll be crushed by the mountains. And you need lots of skin to get warm.” “And then I let my skin fall to the ground.” “IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY MY FAMILY IS LIKE SHATTERED GLASS.” “WE MUST NEVER GROW FOND OF ANYTHING” “HOW MANY PLACES ARE FOREIGN COUNTRIES?”²³

Veteranyi’s discourse has no reverence for logical syntax, chronology, or continuity of space, as it is the product of a life on the road and a consciousness in translation. Languages, relations to spaces, relations to self—all are “like shattered glass” and are made even more haunting as the story is told in the voice and from the perspective of a child. The chaotic journey of the circus performers is stunning in both its literality and symbolism as the reader/spectator sees the world reflected in pieces that are often all mangled up, upside down and inside out as if seen through the shattered glass of a mirror.

The storytelling itself is a nomadic experience about nomadic lives and mixed ethnicities told in absurd contradictions. “OUR STORY,” Veteranyi writes,

²³ Veteranyi. *Why the Child Is Boiling in the Polenta*, 80, 81, 124, 15, 87; capitalizations original—DR.

SOUNDS DIFFERENT EVERY TIME MY MOTHER TELLS IT. We're Orthodox, We're Jewish, we're international! / My grandfather owned a circus arena, he was a salesman, a captain, travelled from country to country, never left his own village and was a locomotive engineer. He was a Greek, a Romanian, a farmer, a Turk, an aristocrat, a Gypsy, an Orthodox believer.²⁴

The Balkan fragmentation and exilic disorientation soar to unmatched heights of ironic poetry in Veteranyi's discourse, mixing categories and superimposing contradictory realities onto one another to a startling multiplication of identity. And it is in this disjointed storytelling technique, held together by the unbreakable thread of the girl's relentless and irreverent voice, that the egregious reality of homelessness is turned into a space of belonging, maybe even something resembling a home. This wrenching yet unsentimental ballad to life on the road, to the sadness of circus life, and the cynical laugh of rootlessness that is Veteranyi's poetic and dramatic work, is also a beautiful illustration of an aesthetic that is equally flesh, blood, politics, and nourishment: in the brittle voice, in the shards of glass, in the spikes of irony lies also the survival of the heroine.

"At the end the grandmother stands at the door and waves," tells Veteranyi's narrator. This is the description of the end of the movie that one of the characters has made, and not the ending of the story in the first degree. We never know how that story ends, but the image of the grandmother waving evokes endings, departures, separations, as well as new beginnings, a sense of nostalgia and yearning, all in a layering of fictional universes. As if conscious of the power of storytelling, the girl protagonist/narrator confidently projects herself into immortality: "Then when I die the light will go out and I'll be alive again. I'm never going to die completely."²⁵ Aglaja Veteranyi committed suicide at the height of her writing career, having herself been that circus girl living on the road who only became literate as an adult. From wherever she may be rambling in her other-worldly exile from our wretched world, hopefully Aglaja Veteranyi rejoices in her dream come true, for indeed she is never going "to die completely."²⁶ For those of us left here amid the many

²⁴ Ibid., 53; capitalization original—DR.

²⁵ Ibid., 65.

²⁶ In an interview in *Cinema Without Borders* (November 17, 2013), the director gives a beautiful description of how she created the movie trying to follow the spirit of Veteranyi's book. She notes that the girl who played the young Aglaja could not read, so she had to teach her the lines. The actresses who played the little girl and the teenage Aglaja often practiced by looking at each other in a mirror—a setting that bears an uncanny resemblance to Veteranyi's own early illiteracy and the mirror imagery in the novel.

imperfections of our “mutilated world,” Aglaja’s journey is an example of overcoming the desperation of exile, the difficulties of nomadism, and the humiliation of poverty through a bold and luminous creative voice that builds spaces of refuge and imagination along the way. It should also sensitize us to the social ills outside the realms of the imagination in the reality in front of our eyes, and hopefully incite us to action.

DAH Theater—Turning Horror into Beauty

The following example is one of extraordinary courage in the face of the destruction of war, and a model of turning a sinister reality into an art of healing and beauty while never losing awareness of the need for peace and social action. In 1991 a group of courageous Serbian female performers and directors gathered under the name of DAH Theater and created in Belgrade—just as their country was preparing to hold Sarajevo under siege and to wage war with age-old neighbors—both a theatrical space and a theatrical project. The project was launched to bear witness to the raging war, but mostly to create a peaceful world of belonging. This was meant to be a site of real ceasefire, where the body and the soul could rest and engage in the creation of art instead of war.²⁷ The DAH Theater has functioned, grown, and developed ever since, bearing witness to the violence of war, keeping and artistically channeling memories of victims and survivors, creating spaces and artistic structures of resistance and remembrance, and promoting the celebration of diversity.

During the last three decades, the DAH theater group, in collaboration with the Serbian feminist activist group Women in Black,²⁸ gathered stories of Bosnian and Serbian female victims and survivors of the war and the mass genocidal rapes waged against them by Serbian soldiers, and published them in a book titled *Women in Black. The Women’s Side of War* (2007).²⁹ The

²⁷ See the DAH Theater website for the full information of the theater’s history, modes of production, and their repertoire over its almost thirty years of existence: <https://www.dahteatarcentar.com/aboutus.html>.

²⁸ Women in Black are a group of Serbian women opposing the war. They would gather in public spaces dressed in black and stand in silence as a sign of protest, remembrance of the victims of war, and resistance to its absurdity and horror. The group has grown over the years confronting many dangers, often suffering violence by regular citizens and supporters of the war, and it still engages in silent antiwar performances in Belgrade, protected by a cordon of police.

²⁹ The book consists of a large collection of first-hand narratives by actual survivors of the Bosnian War and of the rape camps, told in the first person and largely unedited. It circulates almost anonymously for fear of reprisal and is hard to obtain. I personally was able to obtain the book with the help of Dijana Milosevic, the artistic director of DAH who put me in touch with one of the members of Women in Black in Belgrade. Jankovic,

DAH Theater production titled *Crossing the Line* (2009) emerged precisely from these stories. The show stages many of the accounts of women who have survived the unimaginable and yet still had the strength to tell their stories. The performance is built from an interweaving of parts of stories performed by the three main actresses of the DAH Theater in a stunning exhibit of passionate storytelling, stage movement, singing, and dancing. Movie images of Bosnian women and of the war are at times superimposed on the live performance, which evokes the Brechtian techniques of collage and the postmodernist aesthetic of mixed media. At other times, depending on whether the group is traveling or performing in their own theater space in Belgrade, the actresses coordinate their stage actions with a filmed version of the same show, creating a dizzying and overpowering effect of mirroring images reverberating into infinity and offering a larger-than-life experience.

Both the processes by which the DAH Theater creates its performances and the end result of their final theatrical products are a beautiful illustration of the aesthetics of trauma. Reflective to a degree of the postmodernist merging of the levels of the real and the imagined, of actual footage of war and personal stories, of superimposing genres and aesthetic categories, boldly taking the harshest truths and realities of their time and incorporating them in the shows, the director and performers of the group operate according to very high standards of theatrical professionalism as they stylize and transform raw stories into performance art that uses the space of the stage in startling ways and produces startling visual effects and stage actions.³⁰ The techniques used in the creation of their shows are largely those of devising, as they mostly perform their own work created in collaboration and through the merging of texts, ideas, stories, and images that come from different sources. Because of the collaborative creation the performances bear the marks of diverse artistic points of view, yet they form a cohesive theatrical entity. This is the reason for the freshness, rawness, and also unexpected quality of their performances: they emerge organically out of experience yet are creatively transformed into art through bold imaginative processes and with the performance strategies borrowed from European theater innovators such as Jerzy Grotowski and Eugenio Barba (see also Figures 12.1 and 12.2).³¹

Mirka, and Stanislava Lazarevic. *Women in Black: Women's Side of War*, trans. Dubravka Radanov, 2007.

³⁰ As is evident from the illustrations included here.

³¹ Jerzy Grotowski, like Eugenio Barba, developed a theater practice that made the actor and the actor's body the very center of the theater experience, often subjecting actors to strenuous physical work and use of the body on stage. See Eugenio Barba, *On Directing and Dramaturgy: Burning the House* (New York: Routledge, 2010); and Eugenio Barba and Nicola Savarese, *A Dictionary of Theater Anthropology. The Secret Art of the Performer* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Figure 12.1 *The Presence of Absence*, DAH Theater, Belgrade, directed by Dijana Milojevic; DAH Theater Ensemble. Photography: Dijana Milojevic, 2013. Maja Vukovic.

One of the DAH Theater's most recent productions, *The Presence of Absence* (2015), is inspired by the aftermath of wars and genocidal events and focuses on the disappearance of people as a result of abductions. As stated in the production catalog, "during the civil wars in ex-Yugoslavia over 40,000 people have gone missing. That number is drawn from: the conflicts in Croatia during two separate periods in 1992–93 and 1995. Around 5,500 persons disappeared, of which 3,380 were identified, while about 2,120 persons are still classified as missing."³² *The Presence of Absence* was devised from numerous testimonies of family members of missing people. This is how artistic director Dijana Milosevic frames and describes the performance and its role in the understanding and healing processes necessary when those who were once loved and present in our lives have disappeared:

³² Catalog design by renowned Serbian artist Nesa Paripovic. To be noted that the DAH production catalogs such as this one are not just production programs but extensive production documents that offer invaluable details on the production, the actors' work, and the overall scope and relevance of the production. 2011–12. *Crossing the Line*. Performance program. 2013. *The Presence of Absence*. Performance program, designed by Nesa Paripovic.

Figure 12.2 *The Presence of Absence*, DAH Theater, Belgrade, directed by Dijana Milojevic; DAH Theater Ensemble. Photography: Dijana Milojevic, 2013. Left to right, clockwise: Maja Vukovic, Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, Nemanja Ajdačić (with violin).

History tells us that the only way of healing a society after atrocities have taken place is to go through the painful process of truth telling. This is still on-going within our region. Our performance is a contribution to that effort. People cannot just disappear, they can die of illness, or they can be killed in wars or be murdered, but they cannot just disappear. Roses were carried by mothers from Plaza del Mayo in Argentina, in their ongoing circling, searching for the truth about their missing. ... Hundreds of roses were carried by families of the disappeared from Đulići, Bosnia, who left them on the sites of the concentration camps where their dearest had been taken and all trace of them had disappeared.³³

Holding the memory of historical violence and human suffering in the exquisite receptacle of a work of art that honors it is a necessary political gesture. Such a gesture renders all of us more human and more lucid in an inhumane world whose violence defies reason. If indeed, as the playwright Erik Ehn has noted, genocides are an attempt “to forbid history—to forbid

³³ Interview with the DAH theater cofounder and artistic director Dijana Milojevic, 2014.

the making of meaning by barring our real and imaginative abilities to gather history,”³⁴ DAH Theater has responded to such attempts by creating safe spaces of questioning and remembrance, of community and meaning making, of salvaging histories and of turning horror into safe spaces where even the sublime can be encountered through the artistic gestures of the actors/witnesses/survivors.

My Personal Testimony: Creating in Exile and Turning Displacement into Spaces of Belonging

In between my nomadic lives several picaresque heroines came to life in my novels and plays as I find myself in perpetual revolutions between critical inquiries, dramatic embodiments, and imagined lives, in a never-ending pull between different countries and cultures, between belonging and rootlessness. As bell hooks, I keep trying to find in the “margins, a space of radical openness.”³⁵ My heroines create utopian spaces of courage and inventiveness, color and passion out of broken hearts, losses, and displacements. They attempt to create alternative Americas, alternative ways of being in the world, and they question the very shapes in which we have gotten used to tell stories of violence, oppression, and suffering. These alternative ways of being are what the protagonist of my recent novel, a survivor of atrocious acts of violence at the hands of Serbian soldiers during the Bosnian War of the 1990s, expresses in the following episode:

You know what people say, that you have to remember the past so you don't repeat the same mistakes in the future? Look ... it's not true that people remember and then they don't commit atrocities anymore because they remember the past and don't want to repeat it. On the contrary, they have the model of past carnages and they keep perfecting that model ... they do! What happens actually is that people become even more desensitized, they experience aesthetic pleasure, they cry, they feel good about themselves because they emote in front of a film about the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide. That's not the kind of make believe that we need, because it *is* real, it doesn't need to be made up, those horrors actually do happen to real people. Marija paused and

³⁴ Erik Ehn, *Soulographie: Our Genocides* (New York: 53rd State Press, 2013), 248.

³⁵ bell Hooks, *Yearning. Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 148.

breathed deeply. I took her hand and held it tightly. It was incredibly warm, like a bird that had just landed exhausted in my palm.³⁶

By having my own protagonist Marija question both the relevance and ethical value of creating art inspired by genocides and atrocities, I am to a degree subverting my own work of narrative fiction by asking the reader—in an almost Brechtian manner—to connect both with the fictional character and with the actual reality she is referring to without concession to any form of sensationalist retelling of tragic stories. Here, I am channeling my own doubts with regard to the redemptive value of art, yet also paradoxically reconfirming its powers of healing. “Tell the truth without telling the story,” suggests Marija, after which she manages to take her truth to the next level, that of holistic survival: Marija [was] “shrouding us in a cooling silence of forgetful dis-remembering. It wasn’t really like forgetting,” remembers her life-long friend Lara and the narrator protagonist, “you remembered it but it didn’t touch you and you said farewell to it.”³⁷

As someone who has lived at crossroads and comes from a country of crossroads, who has opted to throw herself into the larger unknown crossroads of the world, I have created heroines who choose to live at crossroads precisely as spaces of belonging and freedom. This is what my heroine says toward the end of my novel *Train to Trieste*, in a chapter titled “Indiana, crossroads of America”:

I have chosen to live in the flattest, most boring landscape of the American Midwest. I love the flat, flat, wide endless cornfields, where the sun rises and sets with a vengeance every day, having no mountains, no valleys, no undulating earth to hide behind. This space soothes my heart. I have the illusion, in its straight immensity that my native land is just over the horizon. Just beyond the stretch of cornfield is the backyard of my aunt and uncle’s house in the Carpathians.³⁸

As a writer, scholar, artist, teacher who lives in, creates in, and teaches in languages other than her own native language, one must be, in the words of Hélène Cixous, “a thief of language” or, in the French innuendo, “une voleuse de langue,”³⁹ which means both to fly with language and to steal language. Cixous urges female artists to be “thieves of language” and thus make up

³⁶ Domnica Radulescu, *Country of Red Azaleas* (New York: Twelve, Hachette, 2016), 229.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

³⁸ Domnica Radulescu, *Train to Trieste* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 261.

³⁹ Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in *New French Feminisms*, ed. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, 254–64 (Brighton: Harvester, 1981).

for the fact that they have been excluded from language and relegated to the realm of silence. As a female exiled artist, I am doubly a thief of language, of several languages, as I tell my stories, as my heroines tell their stories in languages other than their native one. In *Train to Trieste* (2008), the heroine Mona confesses that “sometimes I want to steal everybody else’s country and miss it.”⁴⁰ Having to give up, forsake, relinquish our own first familiar, native cities, landscapes, and stories forever, we have to appropriate and make our own the adoptive or adopted cities and landscapes. My heroine is doing her damndest to spill her past, her memories, her language onto her American-Chicago environment. She brings it all together—her past, and her present, her memories and her living moment, her languages, cultures, spaces—into a carefully sewn colorful quilt:

Slowly, in the Chicago cold, I learn how to live within freedom. I make a little place for myself within its wild vastness. And there is me, the little piece of me in the mosaic of America. Do you see me there? I’m the one with the maroon down coat from a secondhand store and grey boots that are too tight for my frostbitten feet. I’m right there, standing on State Street between the Russian woman selling apples and bananas and the Mexican man with the hot-dog stand. Do you see me now?⁴¹

In my search for the real and desire to hold on to the real I turn to live theater and performance as the ultimate forms of expression that offer us sanctuary from the banality of evil, as I have attempted to show in the section about the DAH Theater’s work. Unlike narrative, theater offers the delicious opportunity of embodying concepts and using the actor’s body on stage to incarnate otherwise abstract notions, revolutionary ideas, and ineffable realities. It also offers the possibility for those of us whose identities are splintered across countries and languages to reembody and play with our diverse selves and bring them all together in a cathartic manner on stage. The barrage of images, subliminal advertising, the myriad forms of technological modes of communication that exclude the physical presence of the individual, the body, voice, live presence of people, have created new strategies of estrangement and oppression of the individual.⁴² This is why I passionately cling to the experience of the live body of the actor that creates

⁴⁰ Radulescu, *Train to Trieste*, 207.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁴² This aspect is aptly criticized by Jean Baudrillard in his seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation*.

meaning on stage and to the sacred relation established between the actor's body and the presence of a live audience.

Often my heroines take me to the darkest places of history and illustrate extraordinary capacities of survival and resistance in a violent world—one that too often is hostile to women and their power, as is the case with Lina and Mina, the heroines of my recent play *Exile Is My Home: A Sci-Fi Immigrant Fairy Tale* (2014), which was inspired by the realities of immigration and the genocidal wars that cause it (see Figures 12.3–12.5). The play traces the eerie journey of two female lovers who cross the galaxies and travel from planet to planet in search of home, peace, memory, a place to belong, after having survived wars and unimaginable acts of violence. Mina and Lina visit planets devastated by wars that had started from inane reasons, terrifying snow-covered lands where bodies and souls are brutally separated and hearts frozen in the moment of yearning for lost homes and families. They recover a lost son, land on a planet where the inhabitants soothe their yearnings for home through role-playing and gorging on edible landscapes, and finally return to planet America, a dystopian landscape haunted by fascist immigration officers and cannibalistic “haters.” The heroines, tied to each other for life by a fierce bond of love and friendship, save the day and recover their lost memory as they save the life of their lost son, and rid planet America of its grotesque racists and “haters.” My heroines are survivors who find meaning after trauma and reinvent a comforting version of home while reinventing themselves on the move. They are travelers whose journeys are as heroic as they are obstacle-ridden and they initiate new trajectories for the creation of a world based on love, imagination, collaboration, and humor.

MINA: I was born in exile. Where were you born? LINA: I was born on the way to the market.

MINA: Oh, that makes sense then, that's why we get along. Why we sort of get along. In any case, it's better than with the others who were born somewhere precise. Good for us that we were born in the air.

LINA: Nowhere. MINA: Out there. LINA: In the air.

MINA: If it wasn't so damn inconvenient to spend one's life on the road, I would say living in constant exile is the best home there is.⁴³

The eerie and fantastical style of the play is an attempt at evoking the inconsolable sadness of exile and homelessness, all the while confirming its

⁴³ Domnica Radulescu, *Dos Obras Dramaticas de Domnica Radulescu*, Spanish transl. Catalina Iliescu Gheorghiu (Valencia: University of Castellon Press, 2017), 32.

Figure 12.3 *Exile Is My Home: A Sci-Fi Immigrant Fairy Tale*, Domnica Radulescu. Theater for New City, New York, directed by Andreas Robertsz. Photography: OneHeart Productions, 2016. From left to right: Nikaury Rodriguez, Mirandy Rodriguez, Noemi De la Puente.

Figure 12.4 *Exile Is My Home: A Sci-Fi Immigrant Fairy Tale*, Domnica Radulescu. Theater for New City, New York, directed by Andreas Robertsz. Photography: OneHeart Productions, 2016. Vivienne Jurado, A. B. Lugo, Nikaury Rodriguez, David van Leesten, Mirandy Rodriguez, Noemi de la Puente, Mario Golden.

Figure 12.5 *Exile Is My Home: A Sci-Fi Immigrant Fairy Tale*, Domnica Radulescu. Theater for New City, New York, directed by Andreas Robertsz. Photography: OneHeart Productions, 2016. A. B. Lugo, Nikaury Rodriguez, Vivienne Jurado.

enormous potential for adventure, cultural and geographic richness, and ultimate freedom. The heroines' interplanetary travels coincide with their storytelling and, similarly to Veteranyi's character, their stories change with their travels. Inversely their journey also functions as an exploration of their traumatized memory, which, in turn, produces and retells their story in different styles and from different perspectives, until the ending, which brings it all together both as a form of healing and of home-finding:

GUATEMALAN MASSAGE THERAPIST: Yea, good job everybody. We are the new Scheherazades, story tellers and massage therapists in one. We put disointed bodies

back in shape and twisted hearts back in rhythm. We buy time, we save our lives, one day at a time, one story at a time, one heart at a time. We'll never be unemployed.

TAXI DRIVER FROM UZBEKISTAN:

That should get us work permits and legal status if anything ever will.

MINA: You are right about home LINA. I've missed it too, I was just trying to get us through our journeys and keep us from remembering too much.

LINA: I know. I would have died without you. I was just trying to keep us from forgetting too much and becoming too empty like two hollow balloons floating aimlessly around the world.⁴⁴

At the crossroads between fluid memories and forgetting, the heroines find their home and their strategies of survival, like Scheherazade, night after sweltering night, in the imperfect and fertile rotundity of the story.

Cultural Appropriations as the Downside of Idealizing Imperfection

Inspired by my own travels to the Spanish region of Andalusia, my play *The Virgins of Seville* (2017) engages the immigrant experience of Romanians and other eastern Europeans to western Europe, particularly Spain. It also uses the dramatic style of the tragicomic, leaps into the carnivalesque, and the use of theater within theater as a game of mirrors and reflections of reflections, a *mise en abyme* which parallels the concentric identities, cultural reverberations, and hyphenated existences of migrants and displaced people. Here, too, I primarily take the point of view of female refugees and immigrants, desperate mothers looking for lost sons, migrant workers and sex workers in the margins of society, women of all walks of life searching for home, questioning and reinventing the notion of home as in the following scene:

VIRGIN OF THE CAVES: Where is home?

VIRGIN OF AFRICA: Good question, where is home? My home is in a willow tree by the Danube River. I'm not from Africa, I just say so because it sounds cool and people turn their heads. I'm just a Polish Gypsy Romanian homeless prostitute.

VIRGIN OF ANTIGUA: I miss my mother, I miss my daughter, I miss my dog, I miss my apple tree, I miss my stove in Romania. I became the Virgin of Antigua because it sounded cool and exotic. Everybody wants exotic here, exotic sells. If you're not exotic enough, you die.

RAMONA: Home is in a little log cabin in the Appalachian Mountains. Home is in a cave at the bottom of the ocean. Home is in a stone house at the foot of the Carpathians. I go back and forth, back

⁴⁴ Radulescu, *Dos Obras Dramaticas de Domnica Radulescu*, 116.

and forth, I'm always on the run, always crossing the Atlantic one way or another.⁴⁵

During my journey to Seville, I visited the neighborhood of Triana, known as the district of the "Gypsies"/Roma people for centuries. Flamenco songs were written on colorful mosaics in the street, in piazzas, and on walls. They spoke of passionate and tragic loves, of living in the margins of society, of deep yearnings and of the travails of life in exile, of crossroads, and water crossings: "ventanas de la muralla/ventanas que dan al mar/por donde yo veo venir/los barcos de la caballa."⁴⁶ Such traumatic crossings of frontiers and escapes from oppression are not unlike the crossings of thousands of today's refugees washed ashore, sailing or swimming across perilous seas, reaching the shores of Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey, pushed from country to country, from refugee camp to refugee camp, from one hellish state of homelessness to another.

During my visit and research of Flamenco art and its origins in that glorious Spanish city, I was struck to discover the flagrant cultural appropriations that came with the popularization of this art and of Roma culture in general. I found myself at the intersections between the authentic Flamenco art in its desired preservation as a multilayered performative art performed by Spanish Roma artists and its many sanitized or utterly exoticized forms for tourists who want a taste of that Spanish soul, an exotic experience without any real desire of understanding the history of the genre. The Flamenco art is organically connected to the history of the Roma people in Spain and is equally a history of surviving poverty, oppression, violence. Flamenco locales, bars, restaurants, or dance venues that feature Flamenco music and dance abound and allure tourists eager for an "authentic" experience of Southern Spain. Very few of them, however, recognize the Roma people as the main creators, performers, and protagonists of Flamenco songs and art, and the "cante gitano," "cante jondo," or "deep song" in particular as its main source. This art form can be traced back to as early as the fifteenth century, with the first arrivals of "Gypsies" from India to Andalusia. The "cante jondo" is the oldest form of the flamenco song and unlike idealized Western notions, it is a song of grief, desperation, and death wishes and not of joy and love of life. Originally, this form of expression was not even created as a form of entertainment but rather as a manner of venting the suffering of the Roma

⁴⁵ Radulescu, *Dos Obras Dramaticas de Domnica Radulescu*, 162.

⁴⁶ "Windows in the wall, windows that overlook the sea where I see the fishing ships," translation mine. Lines from the Roma songs inscribed on mosaics in the neighborhood of Triana, in Sevilla Spain.

people and the hardships of their daily lives.⁴⁷ It later provided inspiration for many of García Lorca's poems, who, although not of Roma origins, was Andalusian and raised this poetry of suffering to the wider dimension of humanity. The "deep song" is an art form that "reaches out beyond its limited boundaries and shows the world how to cry."⁴⁸

This lesson of channeling suffering into song—and art as strategy of survival and not of entertainment—is largely lost and disregarded in the huge Spanish entertainment industry that uses the art of the Flamenco as a central point of touristic attraction. The magnificent Fiesta de Abril held in Seville after the Semana Santa (Holy Week) is now a multi-million Euro holiday held in the historic Remedios district. The Sevillana dresses and the men's costumes which are modeled from the Gypsy horse fairs of several centuries ago are worn by middle- and high-class Spaniards and cost anything from 200 Euros at best into the thousands. Simultaneously, the actual Roma people in town, either local or migrant like the Romanian Roma, walk around the grounds of the glittery fiestas begging for euros, selling roses, or offering palm readings.⁴⁹ In reality, Roma people have been treated as pariahs, oppressed, enslaved, and egregiously marginalized to the lowest, most impoverished layers of society, their art, customs, and dress have been flagrantly appropriated by settled societies and communities across the globe, without any credit given. As the authors of a recent article denouncing such appropriations rightfully stated, "morally bankrupt appropriators who use Romani culture as a form of escapism, erase us; they make us disappear. Cultural appropriators steal the spaces that should be rightfully given to actual Roma voices, in a world that seldom listens."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ See Timothy Mitchell, *Flamenco Deep Song* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 1–5.

⁴⁸ Mary Etta Hobbs, *An Investigation of the Traditional 'Cante Jondo' as the Inspiration for the Song Cycle 'Five Poems of García Lorca' by Elisenda Fabregas*, Doctor Dissertation, University of North Texas, 2004, 1–5.

⁴⁹ On the website of the Canadian-Romani Alliance, Julia Lovell, Romanichal activist, and Amanda Schorr, Romanichal/Sinti activist and scholar, coauthored an excellent blog article titled "Cultural Appropriation and the Gypsy Industry" (2017), in which they rightfully denounce the myriad cases of appropriations of Roma culture, art, jewelry, clothing, festivities, customs in sensationalized and consumeristic ways, whether in Europe, the United States, Canada, or Australia. See also Ricardo Armillei, "Romanies in Italy and Australia: The Concealment of Romani Culture behind false Myths and Romantic Views," in *The European Diaspora on Australia: an Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Bruno Mascitelli, Sonia Mycak, and Gerardo Papalia, 28–51 (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2016); and Lincoln Tan, "Romani Gypsies Accuse Traveling 'Gypsy' Fair of Exploiting Gypsy Culture," *New Zealand Herald*, March 5, 2017. Retrieved February 19, 2020 from https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11812277.

⁵⁰ Julia Lovell and Amanda Schorr, "Cultural Appropriation and the Gypsy Industry." Retrieved May 10, 2019 from <https://gypsyindustry.wordpress.com>. In the beautifully

The cultural appropriations of this important aspect of Roma culture and art by Spanish and many other consumerist societies—my own Romanian culture being itself a big culprit in this area—are a kind of insidious ramification of “poverty tourism.” In such voyeuristic practices, the cultural products that emerged as cries of loss and desperation by oppressed communities living in the very margins of society, working in coal mining or other backbreaking jobs, and suffering abject poverty, have been appropriated by the dominant culture and turned into money-making products of a consumerist society that only they can afford. As case studies of “slumming,” “poverty tourism,” “slum tourism” or “dark tourism” through guided tours in the slums and favelas of India or Brazil demonstrate, tourists pay for such tours the money that would buy a week’s food for the people that are being voyeuristically visited, in order to have a “real-life” experience and to “satisfy their curiosity regarding the precarious living conditions of the urban poor.”⁵¹

While acquiring knowledge and information about poverty with the scope of engaging in socially conscious activities of any kind in order to alleviate it is of course admirable, the mere acquisition of knowledge of first-hand poverty and the selling of its cultural products at prices that the original creators of these products could not afford themselves is definitely less than admirable. What does, however, have ethical value is the telling of the story from the inside of communities in the margins; is creating silence so that the voice of the girl in the “vardo” can soar and be heard, like the voice of Aglaja and her trapeze ballerina mother, living in tents and on the road; is the transmission of and respect for the truth about the origins of such cultural products as the Flamenco; and the refusal of the tourist trappings of copies of copies of such products for entertainment value.

In the absence of stable homes and in the exhausting searches for home, the truth-telling *story* itself is the only reliable form of belonging, perhaps precisely because of its fluid borders and hyphenated identities. Literature, in its stubborn “preservation of defeat” and “relaxed imperfection,” draws from the brokenness caused by exile and political trauma in fractured forms and

crafted and historically accurate documentary *Opre Roma: Gypsies in Canada* (2000), directed by Tony Papa, Julia Lovell, and her father Tom Lovell, together with other Romani and Sinti artists and scholars such as the renowned Ronald Lee, offer powerful testimonials of the history of the Roma people, their persecutions, and the many forms of artistic expression, particularity in the area of dance and song, that they have created over the centuries in parallel with the egregious appropriations of these same forms by non-Roma people and communities. See also the collection “*Gypsies*” in *European Literature and Culture* (2009), prefaced by Ronald Lee and coedited by Valentina Glajar and Domnica Radulescu.

⁵¹ Manfred Rolfes, “Poverty Tourism: Theoretical Reflections and Empirical Findings Regarding an Extraordinary Form of Tourism,” *GeoJournal* 75 (2010): 437.

irreverent ironies that illuminate the human truthfulness of such experiences with much more poignancy than most statistics, history books, or verbose lectures about social inequality. I embrace Jean-François Lyotard's skepticism of meta-narratives and his theorized reliance on small narratives, singular events, local personal stories, "petits récits" that are grounded in specific and diverse human experiences rather than in any unifying discourse.⁵² Maybe exile is the fundamental illustration of the postmodern condition as it jolts one out of all certainty about the stability of truth and breaks any illusion of an immutable spatial, moral, or cultural reality. So, if, in Marguerite Duras's words, "the writer is a foreign country" and a foreign/exile artist carries their country in their story, in their literal or metaphoric suitcase, this double foreignness may just be a home of "radical openness." Ultimately it has been precisely because of the fluidity of such story/homes, the portable nature of dance, song, and the stories encapsulated in them that both the Roma people and their art have survived over the thousand years of their nomadic and too often pain-ridden existence. The flamenco poets and artists knew that, wherever they may land or arrive, one thing nobody could take from them is the story, the song that sings and dances the story. Home is in the story. Survival is in the story. So thought the young woman on the September morning when she left her country with a volume of stories in her suitcase running for her life.

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⁵² See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), and the introduction to this book, as well as his book *The Postmodern Explained to Children* (1992). See also Claire Nouvet, Zrinka Stahuljak, and Kent Still, *Minima Memoria: In the Wake of Jean-François Lyotard* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), which discusses the great impact Lyotard had on modern thinking and his criticism of grand narratives and embracing of personal stories and local events as a way of retelling history.

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