

## INTRODUCTION

### The Legendary Roots of Community Construction

Three brothers build a citadel  
Mrljavčevići brothers three.  
...  
Three years on River Bojana  
Three hundred men build Skadar's  
walls,  
The workmen labor three long years.  
In vain they try to raise the walls,  
In vain they try to build the fort:  
What workmen raise throughout the  
day,  
The vila razes in the night.  
...  
From mountains high the vila calls:  
"Vukašin, listen, you must hear,  
your torment end, no treasure waste.  
You cannot lay foundations, King,  
Or ever raise Fort Skadar's walls.  
There are three royal brothers here,  
And each one has a faithful wife:  
Tomorrow whosoever comes  
To bring the men their daily meal,  
Immure her in the tower walls:  
At once the groundwork will be strong,  
At once the citadel can grow."

—*The Building of Skadar*, a Serbian epic

Forty-five builders and sixty apprentices  
Were building the foundations to a  
bridge on the river at Arta.  
They built all day, and every night their  
work crumbled away.  
The builders and the apprentices began  
to weep and mourn their wasted work.  
"Worthless is all our work and toil, a  
doom is on our labor:  
We build all day, and every night our  
work crumbles away."  
A little bird flew by, it settled on the  
farther bank,  
It did not sing like any bird, it sang not  
like a swallow,  
It sang and spoke with a little human  
voice:  
"Unless you make a human a ghost,  
your bridge will never stand:  
But do not destroy an orphan, a  
stranger or a traveler:  
Destroy instead the lovely wife of your  
own masterbuilder,  
Who comes each morning late and late  
again each evening comes."

—*The Bridge of Arta*, a Greek ballad

THE IMMUREMENT OF a female body into the foundations of an edifice, usually a bridge, city walls, or a monastery, is a common trope known to exist in numerous variations in all literary traditions of the Balkan region. The Serbian epic poem *The Building of Skadar* and the Greek ballad *The Bridge*

of *Arta* share a common narrative model: Builders gather around the task of constructing an edifice of unique beauty and importance. They work hard during the day, but each night their structure is razed by a supernatural power that demands a human sacrifice to support the foundations. The bridge of Arta is the enterprise of an unknown sponsor, while the character responsible for both the construction and the sacrifice is the chief engineer, Master Builder Manole. He invests the bridge with his ambition and his skills, he negotiates the terms under which the bridge will be allowed to stand, and he suffers the loss of his wife. Betraying his wife's loyalty and love, Manole deceives her into entering the foundations of the bridge, where she gets buried alive under concrete and stone. The city of Skadar is sponsored by three royal brothers, the Serbian medieval king Vukašin and his two siblings. When the *vila* requests one of their wives in exchange for the city, the two elder brothers agree to cheat the youngest one by warning their wives not to visit the construction site the next morning. The honest brother lets the oath he gave to his brothers prevail over his love and as a consequence sees his beloved wife immured alive into the foundations.

Although the "lovely wife" becomes the sacrificial offering in these two and in most other variants of the Balkan sacrificial legend, the original request voiced by the supernatural power is of a different kind. Thus in *The Building of Skadar* the *vila* originally demands the sacrifice of baby twins, Stojan and Stoja—their names derived from the verb *stajati*, "to stand." However, when the search for such baby twins proves futile, the spirit alters its demand. The bird in *The Bridge of Arta* apparently requests the wife's sacrifice from the start, although some other versions of the ballad tell a different story. These contain bargaining scenes between the master builder and the bird-messenger, in which the builder shamelessly offers his dearest family members, including his children, to be sacrificed for the sake of his ambitious enterprise. When none gets accepted, he offers to immure his wife, to which the bird agrees. The wife is offered last, not as the most precious gift, but as the least deserving one, since the master builder states that another woman can easily substitute for his wife. Being neither a total stranger to the husband's family nor a blood relation places the wife in a marginal position and defines her as an appropriate choice for the sacrifice. Again it is the husband who sends his unsuspecting wife to a frightening and premature end.<sup>1</sup>

Substitution of the sacrificial body plays an important role, both in the sacrificial logic of this Balkan legend and in the other narratives I discuss. Rene Girard, for example, insists that sacrifice always entails a substitution of one sacrificial offering for another but also that each act of sacrifice entails a "degree of misunderstanding."<sup>2</sup> In the Greek version the "misunderstanding"

arises in the (deliberate) misinterpretation of the message that the master builder dispatches to his wife. The master builder instructs the bird to tell his wife not to hurry to the construction site, as he is likely hoping for some chance event that would reverse the inevitable and clear him of the responsibility for her death. The bird, however, advises the woman to make haste because her husband summons her and thus accelerates her tragic end. *The Building of Skadar* lacks this dimension of a deliberate misinterpretation but emphasizes disloyalty and deception among kin. The choice of the victim depends on the character of the three royal brothers themselves, as they undergo a triple test of loyalty: to their personal integrity, to their wives and sacred vows, and to the unknown authority that orders the sacrifice. Regardless of their response, the men are bound to default on at least one count. The two elder brothers conspire against the third to kill his bride instead and to keep their own families unharmed. It is the third brother's excessive sense of duty and integrity that does not allow him to fall back on his word, although this means that he must betray his wife. The next morning his young wife rushes to her death by delivering lunch to his workers. All he can do is helplessly watch her being covered in construction material and avert his gaze when she turns to him begging for an explanation. Her unspeakable death nevertheless precludes the murder of innocent children, which would have been even less socially acceptable than the sacrifice of a wife.

The legendary edifice is a structure of such importance that large numbers rally to obey an all-pervasive and seemingly absolute authority that dictates every aspect of the edifice construction. The project is shrouded in mystery, and only a few seem to be privy to its purpose. Despite the initial misunderstanding and the offering substitution, the horrific end of the chosen victim is presented as both inevitable and required by the unknown power. This assumed presence of a distinctive and invisible higher authority that allegedly commands the construction makes the edifice's high-profile sponsors and engineers mere executors of that authority's will. By being put to a violent death, the woman supposedly protects the physical existence of the edifice—national, religious, or similar monolithic community; family; or even broadly defined “institutions of patriarchal authority.” The call to duty to a higher ideal, to a greater common good, is of such urgency that murder and even the murder of kin by one's own hand become acceptable. It is this authority that grants the communal project a license (as well as a moral obligation) to exist, while subsequently justifying any measure of violence necessitated for its construction and preservation. No wonder then that the participants, who are simultaneously the executors of this divine testament, perform the sacrificial act for the construction of the edifice/community

with fanatical obedience, regardless of the apparent insanity of the request and the horror at the prospect of murder.<sup>3</sup> The higher authority commands obedience with respect to the wife's social role and an unquestioned subjugation to her husband's will but also prevails over any and all other loyalties to which the men themselves adhere. It is this authority that is being mediated when the vila or bird calls for the sacrifice to be performed and even determines the nature of the blood offering: "But do not destroy an orphan, a stranger or a traveler: / Destroy instead the loving wife of your own master-builder," commands the bird in the Greek ballad.<sup>4</sup> The men most responsible for the edifice's construction not only have to invest significant effort; they have to suffer emotional loss as well. Yet there is also a clearly articulated sense that their loss can be overcome, just as the wife can be substituted. By being immured into the edifice, the woman disappears from the social scene into the house and marriage and subsequently surrenders herself to a kind of "social death." Her body literally validates the social contract, just as an oath between two parties in primitive societies is taken over a wounded, penetrated, opened, killed, or in any other way "sacrificed" offering. Thus the symbolic value of the edifice as an institution greatly surpasses its material significance or, for that matter, the value of the human life built into it.

However, the men's eagerness to commit murder, in the name of the authority whose existence and intentions they never interrogate, is motivated not solely by fear but also by opportunism, as well as by the fact that this collective crime camouflages their mutual rivalries and conflicts. Prior to bartering his wife for his ambitious enterprise, and then deceiving her into entering the foundations, the master builder of *The Bridge of Arta* haggles with the bird over the lives of his entire primary family. Betrayal and rivalry are even more openly denuded in the Serbian epic, where the elder brothers may have priorities other than saving their wives when they decide to deceive their youngest sibling. The reason why the youngest, the most beautiful, and the kindest among the royal wives is condemned to death may lie in the fact that she is the object of desire of all three brothers. Since she is also faithful to her husband, and as such off-limits to the elder brothers, the two erase the evidence of their unlawful desire by confining her to a monument to their power. Although the legend depicts the youngest brother as another victim of his scheming siblings, his responsibility for his wife's death lies in his placing personal integrity and kinship above his familial duty. It is clear that antagonism, conflict, and betrayal among the founding members compromise the model of homogeneity that underlies each communal enterprise, yet the Balkan edifice-building narrative makes evident that these

weaknesses in communal relations must not be exposed. The request for a sacrifice therefore serves to cover up conflict.

Sacrifice conveniently transposes the conflict onto the ideological plane, where any perceptible disagreement with or departure from collective ideology is represented as a threat to the very communal project. Each member of the community finds him- or herself under constant pressure to demonstrate loyalty to the hegemonic and unitary narrative lest she or he should be recognized as that discursively constructed difference who subverts the communal foundations. In the decisive dealing with this discordant principle that carries the potential to usurp the dull but comfortable stability of imaginary collective identity, difference (racial, gendered, sexual, political, class, or otherwise) is produced, destroyed, and buried in the deepest recesses of collective memory. Both the perpetrators and the victims of the communal enterprise eventually come to share a sense of inevitability and imperative collaboration with the incomprehensible demands made by the invisible authority. The edifice builders shed a tear or two at their wives' suffering and random death, but none of them ever questions the choice of victims or attempts to rescue them. The victims themselves are forced to accept their end without asking too many questions. Neither of the wives is offered an explanation for the immurement, even when they plead with their husbands for a clue about their punishment. Faced with a conspiratorial silence, the women must reconcile themselves to at least dying with whatever dignity and courage they are able to muster.

### The Creative Spirit of the Brotherhood of Men

The burial of a live female body—the forceful removal of woman from the social sphere—is not an end in itself. Rather, it acts as the central metaphor of the building enterprise that is initiated, created, executed, and subverted by desire, competition, tensions, and anxiety among the brotherhood of men and for the brotherhood of men.<sup>5</sup> Italo Calvino's story about the City of Desire depicts these social and gender dynamics outside the Balkan context. Calvino's city is an impassable labyrinth of entangled streets recreating a path from the shared dream of all *humanity*. Men from all corners of the world dreamed of pursuing an elusive female, whose face they never saw and whose naked body was hidden by her long hair. Instead of finding her, the men find each other, follow their *mutual* desire, and gather together at the same spot to build the city in which they will finally capture the woman, who is desire itself. But as each of them constructs the city from the blueprint of his own dream, the streets end up convoluted and unnavigable; at

the spot where each man lost the dream woman from sight, they create a confinement from which she could never again escape. As the city evolves and begins to function like a place of daily life and work, more people following their own desire pour in, and the place loses its appeal. Newcomers keep constructing alleys of their own dreams' pursuit, until the whole city becomes an ugly trap in which both escape and imagination are rendered impossible. Incessant alterations and modifications of the city only further alienate the edifice from those who claim credit for the construction of the original structure. We never learn whether Calvino's builders stand up to those *others* in defense of their own community, changed beyond recognition by newcomers' strange dreams, alien customs, and prohibitive desires. But we do learn that the shared dream-desire of male builders is the desire for the meeting and visionary union of men with similar power-driven creative goals. Woman is a metaphor for desire, not for her body or for the woman herself, but for liberty, togetherness, a community (of men), all of which is eventually compromised. The dream itself, the reason why the edifice is built and the efforts wasted, is forgotten as if it had never existed.

The sacrifice of a living thing generally takes place at times and in situations when the social pact lacks a referential object.<sup>6</sup> If a body is violated for a nascent community on the threshold of being established, then this sacrificial act falls under the definition of a "founding act of violence." Sacrifice is not performed for an extant entity or for an achieved idea, but only for a concept that is still a distant promise or that has as of yet no referent in objective reality.<sup>7</sup> Such unsubstantiated constructs belong to a distinctly social and cultural symbolic and are therefore invested with a metaphysical meaning whose significance only increases with the fact that they cannot be related to the material world. A body, a corpus, dies for an incorporate construct. There is no material bridge, even less a city. The bridge, the church, the monastery, or the city walls are all fictitious yet more real than the very material and bleeding bodies that are incessantly surrendered to them, dedicated to the sustenance and perpetuation of this imaginary edifice. However, to their devoted members, such constructs are more "real" than reality itself, and the act of sacrifice presupposes the suspension of the individual's cognitive and critical faculties for the sake of the tribal unitary spirit.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, sacrifice is also an act of corporeal destruction whose meaning is appropriated by the existing community for the purpose of (re)establishing the social contract that has been revoked or suspended due to a crisis. Sacrifice is employed as a means of repressing others—of eliminating difference, which at the point of birth, crisis, or transformation of one social construct into another is seen as in some way undermining the narrative recognized by a community's

adherents as their unitary law. Sacrificial economy that thoroughly dominates the ideological communal project is activated for the purpose of the confirmation of the social pact, as a remedy for social crises, or as a solution for the reestablishment of suspended social order.

Most of the material I discuss in this book relates to precisely such unstable communities undergoing an acute identity crisis: a foreign threat, a civil war, a repressive government, or even sweeping economic and political changes. Of course, a crisis is the point at which the lack of strength and coherence in an organized structure is most evident. Crisis is also the time when community, seeking to regain the unity whose absence it acutely feels, intensifies aggressive requests for its members' loyalty and subsequently demonstrates even less tolerance for dissent than usual.<sup>9</sup> This under no circumstances means that a community does not call for sacrifices when not undergoing an acute crisis; on the contrary, it constantly seeks them in confirmations of allegiance, consent, and its members' sense of belonging. In fact, the only way for a community to sustain itself and to justify its existence is to keep the crisis going and demand more sacrifices, austerity, self-control, and self-repression from its constitutive bodies.<sup>10</sup> Community's eternally incipient and undefined state therefore exposes the crisis inherent in every idea that in reality lacks a solid "origin" (foundation) and therefore seeks to construct one. The very notion that an architectural metaphor can serve as a reinforcement of an otherwise unsubstantiated concept is what Kojin Karatani defines as the "will to architecture," which he recognizes as inherent in Western thought and its philosophy from Plato onward. Karatani makes the point that the "will to architecture" is "reiterated and renewed at times of crisis."<sup>11</sup> Every edifice without sound grounds, philosophical or otherwise, ultimately reveals itself as impossible to maintain and in a constant urge for redefinition, reinvention, and modification of its starting premises. Thus the "will to construct a solid edifice," as Karatani states, "ultimately does not achieve a foundation, but reveals instead the very absence of its own foundation."<sup>12</sup> However, while Karatani's metaphysical edifices, just like material ones, always and necessarily depend on communication, "dialogue," and "relationship with the other," the space for the sacrifice of the other opens precisely in the vacuum caused by the absence of a tolerant and productive relationship among the entity that "wills" the construct, the community that builds it, and the sacrificial victim. The Balkan legend of sacrifice thus becomes metaphorical for the construction of an entity or an idea, while the sponsor of the edifice, or the master builder, is revealed to be as much a visionary as an ideologue.

In this space of literal or figurative elimination, the victim occupies a

liminal position vis-à-vis the community that requires her sacrifice. The victim's liminality is crucial to the social economy my book analyzes, as this project does not attend to politically symbolic sacrifices or signifying bodies, regardless of their clout or political significance. I also do not take into consideration the important category of the voluntary sacrifice as a political act.<sup>13</sup> Quite the opposite, this volume is circumscribed by the act of sacrifice of the politically marginal, frequently invisible subject. Meanings assigned to the victimized bodies explored in this book differ from those of historical personages whose oversignifying corpses have been and continue to be used as symbols marking the limits of the national territory or that in multiple other ways "stabilize the landscape and temporarily freeze particular values in it."<sup>14</sup> In recent history we have been witness to several cases of political burials, reburials, and even thefts of corpses of political and religious leaders in the Balkans, instances that were clearly staged as spectacles with an important underlying statement, yet these are not of interest for my discussion.<sup>15</sup> This book also distances itself from the "political lives of corpses" exhumed from mass graves and reburied with ceremony, as poignant reminders of the (usually preceding) regimes' repressive practices.<sup>16</sup> These latter victims have significance for my discussion only inasmuch as the people sacrificed, while living, were designated as "pathogens" and were consequently sacrificed to the alleged "purity" of a nationalist, religious, or political community-building cause, precisely on account of the perceived difference or threat they allegedly represented. The sacrificed body presented for the purpose of steadying a community's foundations is remarkable because it is discerned as failing to fully incorporate itself within the community's clearly outlined interpellatory limits or, alternatively, consciously rejects the social contract, and the obligations and rights that accompany it, and consequently becomes a victim of ostracism. Its exceptionality lies precisely in the fact of its perceptible (or imaginary) otherness, its nonbelonging, or in the subversive difference it may represent to the overall existence of the structure. The sacrificial act itself assumes the form of the body's forced integration into that structure—as either a corpse or the living dead.<sup>17</sup>

A question that logically imposes itself is whether an entity can sacrifice something that is not part of it, its own, and therefore whether a body that has never been part of a community proper can be considered as an appropriate sacrifice for the establishment, reinforcement, and solidification of its imaginary totality. While the logic of sacrifice operates on the premise of homogeneity, demanding that undesirable components be dealt with in a radical manner, the parallel logic is that the other is never inassimilably



alien but is instead always and necessarily part of ourselves as well.<sup>18</sup> Each individual is required to sacrifice in her- or himself the part that is *other* and inassimilable because only then will she or he be able to partake of privileged insider status. However, this site of victimization is also characterized by impermanence, and the position of marginality can likewise be occupied by those who only recently enjoyed the relative safety of the prevalent and integrated majority. The texts I discuss point to the fact that every community member is likewise potentially a sacrificial offering for the collective. Frequently shifting sociopolitical paradigms create conditions under which any community member can also be called to sacrifice her- or himself for the benefit of the edifice. The body is thus subject to repression and forceful inscription of meaning both in rituals of daily life and in what is commonly defined as “history.” The sacrificial economy underlies the incessantly shifting and only seemingly radically changing political-historical landscape, as well as the limited space within this confinement left for individual assertion and the potential subversion of repressive communal laws. Part of my analysis also deals with these invisible mechanisms of coercion by which a community keeps its members compliant within its complicated structure and by which it deters dissent.

#### Community, Communalism, Capitalism

In the plurality of Balkan tradition(s) the legend of sacrificial immurement occupies a very prominent place, even though the legend is not indigenous to the region and even though its metaphorical meaning is not unknown at other, sometimes very distant locales.<sup>19</sup> A great deal of the philological and literary attention dedicated to the legend has dealt with its dispersion and origin and even more with the semantics of the bridge, the edifice that is prevalent in most Balkan versions of the legend. It has been the subject of many regional scholarly studies, and not infrequently it has received the treatment of a metanarrative whose origins are tied to an existing architectural edifice and utilized as an explanation of concrete historical events or personages. In its popular Serbian and Greek versions, the legend was recorded by folklorists and anthropologists: Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864), the reformer of the Serbian alphabet and the man credited with the adoption of the vernacular as the language of literature and culture, and George Megas (1893–1976), a Greek ethnologist.<sup>20</sup> More recently, Mircea Eliade famously worked on Romania’s widespread version, *Master Manole*.<sup>21</sup> The legend is known throughout the Balkans and exists in different forms even in Hungary and Cyprus. Some more recent research links the origin of the narrative

to ancient Indian legends in which the woman dies not in an architectural edifice, but in a water spring. The purpose of her sacrifice is the sustenance of a community threatened by extinction due to natural causes.<sup>22</sup>

No Balkan variant of the legend implies such a natural threat, yet there is an obvious sense of urgency in the demand for a human sacrifice needed to patch up an “edifice” that is on the point of implosion. The Balkans are still a region in which people by necessity organize their lives around communities, having been historically thrown into various imperial state projects characterized by disregard for minorities’ political autonomy or cultural affiliations. A point that hardly needs mentioning is that this fertile cultural heterogeneity has frequently been manipulated into a human and political tragedy in which collective ethnic or religious interests allegedly demand declarations of loyalty and literal sacrifices. Small wonder then that the people(s) of the Balkans have traditionally developed stronger communal bonds or an almost proverbial distrust of centralized state authority.<sup>23</sup> It is logical to assume that this is one of the reasons why the myth of the building of an important, endlessly postponed structure, paid for in blood, would acquire such a broad dispersion in the region. The legend’s existence in so many different versions and locales can be attributed to the specificity of the history of the region, to the beautiful but explosive mix of its populations and cultures, and to the existence of communities of differing makeups that have long lived alongside each other although rarely *with* each other.

I read the sacrificial economy underlying the building enterprise as the creation or confirmation of the social contract, while the architectural structure in which the woman is buried alive signifies a communal organization whose permanence is enabled and guaranteed by her blood. *Community* is broadly understood as a type of organization that lies beyond precise sociological definitions that circumscribe entities of human organization but is instead founded on inevitability (family) or on people’s own perceptions and affiliations (diaspora community, nation, closely knit religious group, etc.)—namely, on the ties and relationships that members of a community imagine, create, and perpetuate among themselves. Its form, organization, and rules are elusive and difficult to define, yet its effects are visible and even visceral. In most definitions, *community* stands for a type of organization built on the basis of perceptions of shared commonalities (kinship, culture, territory), resting on solidarity among its members. Not infrequently and much less benevolently, it is also perceived as a crowd, a herd, a mob. *Community* lacks the dimension of individual self-interest that is considered to be the basis of legally administered societies and is by some critics of nationalism seen as an archaic and rigid predecessor of modern nation-states and nationalist

ideologies.<sup>24</sup> It is precisely due to the existence of collective rather than personal interest that community can and does demand sacrifices from any and all of its participants.<sup>25</sup> As such, community surpasses the legal framework of civil society, that other and predominantly voluntary form of human association, whose repressive mechanisms mitigate external manifestations of dissent yet leave some space for personal preference and relative individual freedom.<sup>26</sup> In contrast to civil society, whose visible form is the organized state apparatus, community commands allegiance and imposes itself as the ultimate referent of its members' duty and affection. Its appeal is emotional and visceral, although administratively it is mainly unregulated. However, communal interference or competition with the administrative apparatus is more a rule than an exception, and in many cases community exists as a parallel institution to the legally sanctioned bodies of a civil society, whose laws are not infrequently overridden by much more ancient and rooted communal traditions. Thus the most obvious distinction between a society and a community is the absence that community demonstrates of the administrative and legal apparatus, backbone and guarantor of the stability of every society. This is not to say, however, that community must be volatile, as it is likewise regulated by its own norms. It also does not mean that any well-organized society is free from communalist tensions or that a state cannot and does not function like a restrictive community, as will become clearer from my discussion.<sup>27</sup>

Although sacrifice—the physical destruction of bodies—is the most extreme form of “purification” against unwanted elements, most social entities regularly exercise cleansing by bureaucratic means. Administrative exclusion, increasingly and with ever more hostility applied against undocumented workers, refugees, immigrants, or otherwise disenfranchised individuals, is the pivotal point at which the most developed of societies expose their mode of functioning to be little else than primitive communalist protectionism shrouded in legal jargon. Regardless of their “bloodlessness,” such insidious administrative (legal) forms of discrimination and cleansing are barely less inhumane, and their ultimate effects not infrequently lead to the same deadly outcome.<sup>28</sup> Even though this ever-growing and ever-more-repressive stance taken against undesirable social elements in contemporary societies is explained by the current moment of economic and demographic crisis, the rationale that supposedly justifies discrimination by the application of law or force (or both) is neither new nor caused by any unprecedented global crisis. The global demographic crisis that we are witnessing is merely evidence of the metamorphosing of the modern state's principles of *bio-* into *necropolitics*.<sup>29</sup> Modern sovereign states only further modernized and made

more efficient the procedures of dealing with foreign and undesirable bodies, while both the ultimate goal of their elimination and the underlying racist ideology remained unaltered. What I define as the example of repressive communalism is a more evident and parallel development of the necropolitics practiced by the increasingly bureaucratized state apparatus.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the fact that the designation “the Balkans” appears frequently here as a carrier of meaning and a signifier for a plurality of related traditions and cultures, the literary and film material I choose to discuss originates primarily, though not exclusively, in Greece and the countries of the former Yugoslavia. This is due to my personal judgment that the histories of these (for most of the twentieth century) *two* countries provide the best illustrations for my argument. While it is commonplace to a banal extreme to state that the history of this region is “turbulent” or “tragic,” Yugoslavia and Greece, especially in their post-World War II political development, provide paradigms of a greater social dynamic than other Balkan countries that spent most of the period in question under some form of either pro-Soviet or locally grown totalitarian regime and emerged out of these predicaments relatively peacefully, at least compared to the bloodbath that marked the death of Yugoslavia. Greece, on the other hand, politically part of the West ever since its philhellenic rediscovery over two centuries ago, has shown everything but the stability that makes the West a proverbial model of statehood and governance. Instead, in this historically brief time, Greece has literally dashed through the whole spectrum of political developments—from a procommunist uprising, to foreign interventionism, civil war, military dictatorship, and terrorism, to the violent forms of civil unrest and xenophobia that have shocked the society most recently and are growing increasingly serious even as I write this. These facts testify to deep divisions and instability at the foundations of Greek political society that are of extraordinary interest for the subject of this volume. On a broader scale, the legend of sacrifice and other narratives that build on its original theme have gained fresh relevance with the most recent demographic and political consequences of immigration, growing unemployment, looming or already effective budgetary crisis, social stratification, and widespread dissatisfaction and protests. These developments have in their own way refueled communalist tendencies and protectionism over territorial, economic, or cultural claims, a phenomenon that is also emphatically global, rather than in any way being confined to the Balkans. For this reason it is legitimate to see the legend of immurement as an archetype of cross-cultural value that represents the foundation myths of *human communities* as such, while all evidence suggests that it is naïve to expect the bankruptcy of communalist ideologies.

My choice of the “Balkans” as a designation for the trope of communal sacrifice is guided by the geographical and cultural space that the Balkans represent. The Balkans I concentrate on are not the seat of some exotic specificity or, alternatively, of despicable political practices that exist in glaring disproportion with the “civilized world.” It has often been repeated that in the Balkans, unlike in the West, mythologies are still recognized as an integral part of the life they inform. This has been explained as a consequence of Balkan nations’ not having had the luxury to allow their history of suffering and sacrifice to sink into oblivion and turn into a pragmatic pursuit of political alliances and interests. Nowadays the Balkans are commonly associated with a propensity to chauvinist separatism. So too are the frequently conflated concepts of community and communalism. Seismic shifts that occurred as a consequence of the fall of communism, the failure of Yugoslav multicultural community, and the pains and trials of the multiplicity of Balkan nation-states in the process of EU integration have once again tested the fragile balance of national borders, weak economies, and precarious cultural tolerance, which seemed frozen in a time capsule during the Cold War. As a result, there appeared a new imperative for community restructuring and redefinition, which left the gate wide open to the resurrection of the most repressive and deadly forms of communalism. Yugoslav dissolution wars and atrocities committed in the name of ethnoreligious definition have become eponymous of such negative communalist tendencies. As much as these processes have acquired a “Balkan” identification—whether through specific historical events or even through crudely exaggerated abstractions and stereotypes of great associative power—the sacrificial economy that keeps reappearing in the Balkan narratives I analyze here in fact points very much to European and global historical developments.<sup>31</sup> One such recent example is media interest in the rise of Greek right-wing sentiment, embodied in the Golden Dawn party. Although more or less marginal right-wing phenomena have always been part of the European political landscape, the Golden Dawn is broadly publicized as yet another instance of un-European Balkan intolerance, which goes hand-in-hand with the nation’s proverbial lack of discipline and credit unworthiness. Proclamations and violent actions against immigrants by Golden Dawn thus receive broad media consideration, while the fact that, for example, the states of Germany, Belgium, and Switzerland return planeloads of Roma and other “false asylum seekers” to Serbia passes virtually unmentioned anywhere, save among the Serbian public (likewise generally inclined toward these minorities’ silent disappearance). I am thus more apt to read the unabated relevance of the subject of sacrifice in the philosophical, anthropological, and sociological field in general as a consequence

of exponentially growing insecurities the individual subjectivity faces in the always precarious and potentially explosive political moment on the global scale.

The very definition of a national/ethnic community faces multiple challenges from globalization processes in the complex interchange of the political and economic ideologies of nationalism and capitalism. A gradual and inevitable obliteration of the nation-state and its replacement by some form of capitalist monetary union has long been hailed as a solution for particularist ideologies of all hues. What we are witnessing nowadays, however, is that these ideological premises are returning into official administrative practices, part and parcel of both Western and non-Western politics, with the stigma of racial or cultural supremacism carefully sanitized by neoliberal jargon. It is not just in the Balkans but worldwide that a new paranoid and increasingly chauvinistic politics has again been utilizing the banner of the “protection of national interests” (economic, political, or cultural) to reinforce ideological positions.<sup>32</sup> No longer the prerogative of Western nations (and nation-states), which have utilized racism-by-other-names in the protection of “European [Christian, democratic] heritage” or the “American way of life,” chauvinism now proudly features in the struggle for the “purity of Islamic laws” and in any and every similar particularist position. It has become a method of effectively dealing with undesired social phenomena and of imposing ever more rigid safeguards against internal dissent, as well as external challenges. Any given community today presents its condition as one of perpetual crisis. This phenomenon is becoming more evident in the state of global capitalism and in fact denudes the elitist interests behind communal projects.

It is in capitalist modernity that sacrifice assumes its undeniably deadliest and most absurd form in the massive destruction of designated social “pathogens” and also, paradoxically, of the community’s *own*, who sacrifice themselves (or are collectively sacrificed) for their motherland/fatherland, their religious or political beliefs, or even a “way of life”—according to George W. Bush’s (in)famous formula in the “war on terror.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, the very design of this ultimate incarnation of the sacrificial act demonstrates a clear anatomy of capitalist production/expulsion cycles in which every redundancy is un sentimentally discarded without remainder. Meanwhile, the ideology triggering various forms of communalist chauvinism is revealed as little else than crude manipulation that barely hides the concentration of power within elite groups, aggressive eradication of political transparency, and rampant encroachment upon human rights and civil liberties. As an anticommunal force, neoliberal capitalism has invaded and apparently undermined the texture of traditional communal life, which forces community to keep

reinventing and redefining itself in increasingly protective, rigid, and crude forms—a phenomenon that only further deepens its state of crisis. This is only a false paradox, however, as many have noticed, because neoliberal capitalism and ethnoreligious nationalism are not each other's extreme opposites and in fact have more in common than meets the eye.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the application of the capitalist logic of expulsion in attempted counternarratives by anticapitalist ideological communities in most recent history testifies to its efficiency in various forms of terror, execution, and extermination, a tendency that becomes even more striking in such failed experiments' ultimate return to the ground zero of capitalist production.

Communalism and its accompanying phenomena—resentment, virulent chauvinism, violence—therefore emerge as symptoms of capitalism, which utilizes them as weapons of control and manipulation of the masses. Former Eastern European societies, especially Yugoslav heir states, are almost eponymous of this development brought about by the neoliberal eradication of the social state and the aggressive (and NATO-assisted) introduction of predatory capitalism. However, the unwillingness of some religious communities to reject capitalist practices, despite their proclamations to the contrary, is even more symptomatic. Namely, both neoliberal capitalism and ethnoreligious nationalism share a common interest in attenuating the disturbance caused by class conflict, the former for the purpose of its own perpetuation, the latter seemingly achieving this goal by eliminating the individual differences of those who partake in the collective.<sup>35</sup> Neither goes about this task by abolishing classes themselves but instead by offering an escape from class reality into a world of their characteristic remedies: capitalism through the overproduction of goods and the desire for them, which, as Marcuse wrote long ago, leaves the real problems of social stratification blissfully undisturbed, simultaneously creating ever-new spaces for expansion, either by coercion or by military interventionism.<sup>36</sup> Ethnoreligious nationalism, on the other hand, offers its own version of retreat from extreme materialism into a falsely spiritual and egalitarian pursuit of communal identity, which in extreme forms demands self-sacrifice from its followers in the spreading of belief by acts of the mass sacrifices of those who do not share it. These two social models, which currently present the only options of escape from each other's excesses and obvious shortcomings, are in fact not extreme opposites, as they are frequently portrayed, and neither represents an answer to the other's problems. With the political left unable or unwilling to envision an option outside of this political dichotomy, humanity is at present split between the two right-wing alternatives that have long overstayed their arguable historical utility.

## Contemporary Narratives of Sacrifice

The sacrificial metaphor is without doubt among the most productive metaphors in use in official and popular national narratives, regardless of cultural or historical differences. However, in this volume I present the sacrificial metaphor as a counternarrative to the national(ist) one by focusing on the actual victim of the crime. Instead of concentrating on heroic sacrifices for the motherland, honor, or the people, this work brings to the surface the anonymous victim, excluded from the rhetoric of heroism, and frequently from the communal narrative as well. More often than not this victim has either an ironic stance toward the historic event for which she or he is about to die or downplays its significance despite being aware of the human cost involved in grand abstract ideas. The narratives I have chosen are contemporary and situated in historically turbulent times (which in the case of the Balkans is pretty much any time) and amid political changes that seek unambiguous declarations of loyalty as much as unprecedented sacrifices of the participating subject. Despite the fact that they do not always pay homage to the immurement legend itself, these narratives prove the timeless persistence of the sacrificial economy in history and as part of the mostly unchanging human condition. When making a selection of what material to include, I was faced with a vast amount of texts and films, which deal with various episodes in the past century's history of the region. Most of them involve some kind of sacrifice, and many speak from the position of the defeated victim and by those facts alone could have been analyzed here. Those texts that did find their way into this volume possess a dimension of corporeality, of vivid destruction, violation, or brutalization of bodies, especially those that make a determined attempt to inscribe themselves into the communal or historical narrative against prohibitions. Such a sacrificial offering, often an agent of her or his own sacrifice, subverts the notion of the legendary immured victim who is cheated or forced to die yet who purportedly consents with her or his victimization in two ways; either these are victims who are brutally murdered and whose consent for sacrifice is never even nominally requested, or else they determine their own sacrifice by a willing inscription into the communal narrative. The efforts of these latter victims to incorporate their difference in the imaginary communal homogeneity creates a countertext to the erasure of the victim's body (immurement of a live woman) from the communal narrative (the city or the bridge). In the end the victim remains disillusioned and defeated, or frequently physically destroyed, yet always fully aware of the inevitability of this defeat.

The main focus of this book is the sacrificial economy as concentrated



around the body's social function and within the boundaries of gender determinism and sexual repression. Feminist criticism holds the female body to be the procreative body of a community/nation that is necessarily abandoned on the threshold of the subject's entrance into the symbolic order of the male nation. The female body is thus seen as the first and ultimate victim of a patriarchal social structure, whose true identity is always masked by other sacrificed bodies. Yet the female body is also symbolic of the community or nation to the extent that its "boundaries" are considered permeable to contamination by external groups—as was evident in the campaign of mass rapes and forced impregnation of women in the most recent interethnic wars in the Balkans. The repressive sexual economy specifically controls the procreative female body in order to prevent the "contamination" of communal "purity" by other groups, the fear of which increases with the degree of the crisis in which the community finds itself.

While acknowledging the validity of feminist critique, however, I challenge the notion of the female victim as a privileged symbol by analyzing multiple other bodies who find themselves at the site of the "sacrificial victim." Although not necessarily female, they may be defined as *feminine*, which becomes a marker of social marginality, incorporating bodies that at one point or another find themselves in opposition vis-à-vis the defining hegemonic masculinity monopolizing the social contract.<sup>37</sup> Male homosexual bodies come to the forefront as the ultimate threat to the heteronormative model by which a community (re)produces its identity. Minorities, refugees, immigrants, socially subjugated classes, and even the disabled are likewise subject to various degrees of violation of their integrity, administrative removal, or even physical annihilation.

The immurement legend in my discussion becomes a powerful and omnipresent metaphor for such bureaucratic or physical violation and discrimination against undesired bodies, while the bodies themselves are a visible reminder of the fragility of communal ideologies based on restrictive and exclusive identities. Such bodies, on the contrary, by necessity offer a glimpse at the possibility of a different community, constructed on heterogeneity and mutual respect of differences. The Balkans, with their rich cultural mix, are an ideal locale for precisely such a community yet also a place where heterogeneity has historically been undermined by communalist ideologies. Literary "bridge texts" by Ivo Andrić (who won the Nobel Prize in 1961), Ismail Kadare (awarded the Booker in 2006), and the always controversial Nikos Kazantzakis famously rewrite the immurement legend in order to explore the historical problem of national identity in the Balkans. In their versions of the immurement legend, the bridge emerges not only as the symbol to which

the Balkans are historically compared but also as a metaphor interiorized by the population of the region. They likewise record the disappearance of the female body as a productive metaphor of community building, while men and conflicts among men come to the forefront of discussion, as communal crisis increasingly becomes embedded in the language of defense or invasion. All these bridge narratives are situated against the ethnic conflicts, wars, ideologies, nationalist uprisings, populist movements, and dictatorships that marked recent Balkan history. Yet, in place of the romantic idealism inherent in ethnoreligious projects, they mostly offer a critical view of the community's sacrificial imperative. Sacrificial deaths are revealed as little else than cover-ups for elitist profit-making schemes that even bind a paid sacrificial victim with a legal contract. The full power of these texts lies in their social critique of much of the contemporary Balkans as well as the propensity of human communities in general to sabotage the "construction" of peaceful coexistence. These bridges and their respective communities thus fall victim to a combination of economic interests and human pettiness, while their builders either pay the ultimate price themselves or are forced to abandon the very idea of the creation of an inclusive Balkan community.

Yugoslavia is the most recent example of a failure of precisely such a multinational/ethnic/religious identity. We cannot even begin to discuss the (inevitable?) disintegration of the inclusive and heterogeneous Yugoslav community without exposing the failures of the socialist revolution and subsequent post-Yugoslav capitalist developments. The multimedia material presented in my discussion reveals a strikingly unchanging pattern of elitist manipulation of the sentiments of the masses, who are mobilized for the protection of economic interests, clothed in ideological jargon. The texts by two exiled Bosnian authors, Miljenko Jergović and Aleksandar Hemon, are in dialogue with films by the older generation of Black Wave filmmakers, such as Dušan Makavejev and Želimir Žilnik, in their critique of lethal nationalisms. Communalist tensions are perceived as the suppression or destruction of the liberating feminine principle by the hegemonic social pact, deeply unstable in its monolithic identity. It conspires to murder in order to provide consensus for its imaginary community. Dead, mutilated, and tortured bodies graphically delineate the boundaries of Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav space and recall the atrocities that were committed in the name of ethnoreligious communalism. The result of all this fragmentation resembles the Surrealist blind collage technique of the "exquisite corpse" (*cadavre exquis*), in which a story or image is gradually revealed from its many previously invisible aspects. Such a story/image is never fully coherent and constantly verges on the edge of disintegration. This technique of mismatched collage is emblematic not

only of perceptions surrounding the existence of the state of Yugoslavia but also of the literary and film narratives about Yugoslavia that I use in my analysis. Without a solid narrative structure, they are constructed around an immense array of protagonists, images, events, locales, and digressions that disclose more details than necessary for a straightforward story. They perform the composite body they narrate and redeploy the sacrificial metaphor for the purpose of embodying the fragmented Yugoslav space. Yugoslavia ultimately emerges as precisely such a cadaver, a misaligned composite rather than a functional entity, which, moreover, dissolved twice in the course of the twentieth century.

Other texts in this book delve deeper into the structures that facilitate or perpetuate communal(ist) impositions and identify the family as the first and ultimate agent of restrictive identitarian politics. Such, for example, are the novels by Rhea Galanaki, Eugenia Fakinou, and Elias Maglinis, but also the performance art of Marina Abramović. Each in her or his own way, these authors and artists explore identity through the *topos* of the father's testament to the (male) heir, whose monolithic identitarian politics are disturbed by racialized and gendered individuals eager to inscribe themselves within the prohibited space. The only way through which the inassimilable individual effects a visceral inscription of its otherness into the matrix of greater history is by self-sacrifice, which is also a subversion of the hegemonic domination of male testamentary rights. The father and the family are revealed in their dual role, both as the main proponents of identitarian politics and as the victims of that very determination. Much more emphatically than the mother, the father emerges as the main agent willing to sacrifice his offspring to the community's rigid demands for racial and religious "purity." In turn, and before realizing its own defeat in the face of historical horror, the disobedient offspring introduces a different tone of historical narration and opens a space for the contestation and interrogation of dominant nationalist fiction. Contestation and challenge abound in the performance space of the always controversial Marina Abramović, who utilizes her own body as the ultimate record of the individual's sacrifice by and in history. Simultaneously protesting the repressive ideological dictates that leave indelible scars on her (performing) body, Abramović exhibits the defeating truth that the individual's desire for freedom itself has limitations. The physical body is the ultimate signifier of history on which torture, rape, mutilation, and other forms of violation leave permanent inscriptions that become the body's only identity. Historical trauma acts as a somatic hereditary disorder to which no individual is immune or can escape.

In the current political-historical moment the significance of community

seems to be on the rise, while global capitalist tendencies undermine the very concept of community. In this book I treat this as a false paradox, because growing ethnoreligious communalism that poses as a way out of the oppressive neoliberal capitalist model not only employs that very model in its functioning but is proven to be more repressive than its opponent. I perceive the rigid definition of *community* as little else than the sectarian protectionism of minor cultural differences and oppressive internal structure that closes the door on the creation of a genuine community. Rather than suggesting a utopian and highly unlikely solution of a rapid change in people's views and social identifiers, I recognize potential in grassroots efforts at gradual transformation. Genuine change can occur solely on the level of organizations that uphold the interests of local communities, both against neoliberal centralization of capital and governance and against cultural communalism of any kind. The sheer diversity of multimedial material discussed in this book, material that was either created in or refers to likewise diverse historical periods, events, or geographical locales, is intended to demonstrate the extent to which sacrificial economy is not restricted to myths and ritual practices, but is very much part of every individual's experience of history.