

***Binary relations in the deconstruction
of ancestral tradition – An analysis of excerpts
from Pajtim Statovci’s novel „My Cat Yugoslavia”***

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the binary relationships found in the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia* by the Finnish Albanian writer Pajtim Statovci. The theoretical background to the discussion is the previous research on deconstruction in literature, particularly Jacques Derrida’s theory of the supplement. I construct a research tool based on the assumptions of Derrida’s theory and the polemical exchange with Derrida of Iranian literature researcher Mahdi Shafieyan. On the basis of studies of traditional Albanian society (including Albanians from Kosovo), I introduce the reader to issues such as the traditional model of the Albanian family, ancestral revenge and the role of women in society. These issues undergird the analysis of excerpts from the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia*, which takes into account the theory of binary relations with regard to elements of the traditions of the ancestors of Albanian immigrants from Kosovo who settled in Finland.

Introduction

Literature created by immigrants, although sometimes approached as a separate branch of a country’s literary history, is not uniform. Perfect examples of this syncretism are the novels written by Finnish citizens of a different ethnic origin than Finnish. In fact, Helsinki literary salons in recent decades,

apart from the country's earlier linguistic diversity, have turned into a mosaic of different cultures. The phenomenon of recent years is Kosovo-born Pajtim Statovci. His debut novel *Kissani Jugoslavia (My Cat Yugoslavia)* was showered with extremely favourable reviews from literary critics and given an enthusiastic reception by Finnish readers. Pajtim Statovci was born in 1990 in Kosovo and is an ethnic Albanian. His family arrived in Finland when he was two years old. The emigration was caused by the war in the Balkans. Statovci is currently one of Finland's most popular writers, and the rights to translate his books have been sold to 15 countries. In his work, Statovci returns to the country of his ancestors, often facing themes of war and alienation. Statovci's protagonists are most often—like himself—refugees and emigrants. Statovci's work abounds in symbolism referring to Albanian folk beliefs, but the author also explicitly describes the customs of Kosovo Albanians as an essential element of the world presented.¹ This yields great insight into the traditions that have been built on the borderline of European culture, which are inundated with influences of Islamic philosophy.

To examine the values that have been smuggled into the novel text in relation to the traditions of his ancestors one can look at the binary relationships presented in the text. Such relationships between opposed elements have been dealt with in philosophy for a long time (e.g., Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, de Saussure), but in modern literary research the concept has developed primarily as a component of the theory of deconstruction developed by Jacques Derrida. Over the years, polemic voices (cf. Wolin 1993: XIII) and adaptations of these theories have emerged. In his study, for example, Mahdi Shafieyan deconstructs selected motifs from the Koran, extracting binary relationships and various other connections between two components where not necessarily one must be dominant. For the purpose of this article, given the influence of Islam on the Albanian tradition system, I will apply references to Derrida's theory to the passages of the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia* and try to build conclusions with regard to the types of binary relationships described by Shafieyan.

1. Binary relations as a research tool

According to Polish literary scholar Ryszard Nycz, deconstructionism can most generally be described as a "literary orientation shaped by American scholars inspired by the philosophical work of Jacques Derrida", but according to Nycz, this is by no means an exhaustive definition. Nycz then distinguishes and describes three periods typical of the history of every the-

¹ <https://pajtimstatovci.org/>

ory (constitution, institutionalisation, and adaptation and critical transformation). (Nycz 1986: 102) From the perspective of this study, the last of these steps will be the most important.

Through the introduction of Derrida's philosophical work into the field of literature theory and subsequent considerations of American literary scholars, deconstruction became one of the main literary orientations of the second half of the 20th century. Nycz (1986: 106) stresses that deconstruction, in the sense of a philosophical position, is different from its application in literature. One can look at the text from different perspectives, pointing out that it is the author who deconstructs thoughts, giving them the form of text, or assume that it is only the researcher² of literature who makes the final deconstruction of the metaphors contained therein (Bloom 1992: 1-7). Deconstruction may mean demolition, which, according to Nycz, is the closest to "the scientific idea of analysis to literary scholars"; he describes it as "rigorous in the assumption of textual analysis" (Nycz 1986: 115). Following this line of thinking, we can consider that deconstruction is carried out by a researcher-literary scholar analysing a given work as well as the authors themselves, who, for example, undertake to deconstruct the culture of the countries of their ancestors, creating from it an element of their literary fictional world.

One of the most important observations of the father of deconstruction is the phenomenon of the supplement, which is a special interpretation of the phenomenon of binary opposition. According to Nycz, "in particularly spectacular cases, the whole deconstructive operation develops as only deconstructive potential contained in the innocent and marginal formulations of key «inconsoluble» terms". The researcher points out here the role of the "supplement" in Rousseau's text (Nycz 1986: 116):

For the concept of the supplement – which here determines that of the representative image – harbors within itself two significations whose cohabitation is as strange as it is necessary. (...) The second signification of the supplement cannot be separated from the first. (...) Each of the two significations is by turns effaced or becomes discreetly vague in the presence of the other. But their common function is shown in this: whether it adds or substitutes itself, the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added,

² Harold Bloom, in his essay "The Breaking of Form" (1992), referring primarily to the example of poetry, draws attention to the similarity of the wording of the words "meaning" and "moaning". He points out that "a poem's meaning is a poem's complaint" (1). In this way, the role of the author and their feelings in the literary text can be described from the perspective of deconstructionists. In the case of the study of literary texts, Bloom continues: "When I observe that there are *no* texts, but only interpretations, I am not yielding to extreme subjectivism, nor am I necessarily expounding any particular theory of textuality" (7).

alien to that which, in order to be replaced by it, must be other than it. Unlike the *complement*, dictionaries tell us, the supplement is an “*exterior addition*” (Robert’s *French Dictionary*). (Derrida 2002: 144-145)

Derrida (2002) refers to Rousseau’s earlier considerations in his work *Of Grammatology*, but points out that in such a combination one element is always dominant and the elements cannot be separated from each other. This issue concerns, as Finnish literature researcher Eva Maria Korsisaari (2003: 300) points out, above all the circle of culture, beliefs and mythology that is characteristic of Western culture. According to her, finding and identifying binary opposition is an important part of deconstructing the ideology of Western metaphysical thought. The researcher emphasises here that, according to Derrida, deconstruction concerns only binary relationships that are not neutral ways of describing the world—one element is always the dominant one, and the other element is defined in relation to the former.

Mahdi Shafieyan of Tehran Imam Sadiq University enters into dialogue with Derrida in his article “Derrida’s Shadow in the Light of Islamic Studies: An Analysis of Binary Relations in the Qur’an”. (2015) Shafieyan’s article reveals problems and inaccuracies in Derrida’s theory, emphasising the thought that a binary relation does not always mean that one of the elements is the dominating one, and then he presents an alternative. He lists binary and other relations in selected recitals of the Koran deconstructing those motifs. The first kind of relation between two elements, according to Shafieyan (2015: 59), can be named a “singular pair”. It means that “two opposites are gathered in one yet do not become one”. As an example, he gives the maxim that “although Allah is one, it exists everywhere and in everything”. The second category is “pairs”, in which none of the elements is dominant. As an example, Shafieyan gives a man and a woman. The third type (Shafieyan 2015: 60) is “binary opposition”, which includes two absolute oppositions, where the existence of one excludes the existence of a second component. An example here is the concept of faith, because one cannot be both a believer and an unbeliever. These are the most important examples analysed by the researcher and supported by examples from the Koran. In addition, Shafieyan also gives “neither pairs”, where the elements do not have mutual influence (Shafieyan 2015: 61) and “metaphorical binaries”, that is statements that are popular in poetry, or literature in general, but are not reflected in reality. Often these are motifs and symbols common to many cultures. An example of this is the juxtaposition of light and darkness, which carry concrete values where one component is dominant when used as a metaphor and the components are in fact equivalent to each other. As a recent example of a binary relationship, the researcher mentions a “hierarchy” where one of the two components is

dominant, but there is no opposition between them. The example given by Shafieyan here is Jesus Christ and Prophet Muhammad, who, according to Muslim tradition, are called servants of God and do not stand in opposition to God (Shafieyan 2015: 61–62).

2. Kosovo – At the border of cultures?

Samuel Huntington, an American political scientist, divides the post-Cold War world into different civilisations. He sets the boundaries of Western Civilisation (Euratlantic, European) at Europe, North and Latin America, and Australia and New Zealand (Huntington 2003: 21). Huntington (1994: 69) argues that the beginnings of new conflicts are primarily collisions of civilisations. He predicts that such a phenomenon will increase after the end of the Cold War.

Polish researcher Dorota Miłoszewska disagrees with Huntington. Miłoszewska (2008: 4) recognises that differences between civilisations do not necessarily lead to conflict, and not every conflict of civilisations must end in violence. The researcher also notes that Huntington does not seem to notice that conflicts also erupt between states of the same civilisation, and civil wars are even being waged. On the other hand, when it comes to building national identity and tradition, it is certainly important to mention the war in Kosovo and the process of Kosovo becoming an independent state.

According to the 2005 International Religious Freedom Report conducted by the U.S. Department of State,³ “ethnicity and religion are inextricably linked in Kosovo. While most Kosovo Albanians identify themselves as Muslim, the designation has more of a cultural than religious connotation”. It is therefore possible to wonder how much influence the religion–Islam–, whose zone of influence Huntington defines as a separate civilisation, has on the sense of national belonging in this case. Therefore, in the analysis I will also ask whether Mahdi Shafieyan’s conclusions are reflected in the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia*, which describes the culture of Kosovo Albanians.

When asked whether Kosovo belongs to a European civilisation within the meaning of Huntington’s, we would certainly answer yes, given the strong geographical distribution of civilisations in his theory. However, the influence of Islam on Albanian culture is significant (Marmullaku 1975: 10–15). In addition, we can look at the geopolitical situation of the region. Tim Judah, a long-time correspondent for *The Economist* in the Balkans, describes Kosovo’s specifics as follows:

³ International Religious Freedom Report conducted by the U.S. Department of State in 2005: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2005/51578.htm>

Kosovo is a tiny place with a tiny population, yet it was the reason that NATO fought its first war. (...) If Kosovo were in central Asia, or Africa, or in Caucasus, this would not have been the case. Kosovo counts because it is in the middle of Europe. (...) On every side the region is enveloped by the European Union and NATO. So Kosovo and its neighborhood are not some place out there in Europe's backyard, but rather they constitute its inner courtyard. (Judah 2008: XII)

In this specific geographical situation and in the complex ethnic situation of the region, which can be considered a mosaic of cultures and religions, Albanian tradition has developed and continues to develop. We are talking about Albanian tradition here, because Albanians from Kosovo are part of a larger nation, although it is now possible to wonder whether those identifying as Albanians from Kosovo are no longer a separate group (Judah 2008: 1).

This group can be distinguished primarily by the preserved culture of their ancestors. Albania was subjected to the collectivisation of agriculture after the introduction of communist rule, which entailed a complete disenfranchisement of the right to own land—which was the basis of the ancestral organisation of society—and deprivation of the right to private initiatives, including the case of religious practices (Marmullaku 1975: 88). In Kosovo (as well as in other parts of Yugoslavia), although new legislation was introduced—legislation that equates everyone under the law, regardless of gender, race, religion or social status—the fight against traditions has not been as drastic as in the Albanian People's Republic (Marmullaku 1975: 88–89). Albanians from Kosovo also formed a large diaspora outside the country, mainly in Switzerland, Germany, Austria and the Nordic countries (Judah 2008: 3). It can therefore be assumed that among the emigrants of Albanian origin, Albanians from Kosovo are the main carriers of the culture and traditions of their ancestors. This argument is confirmed by Alexander Lopasic in his article "Central Values of Albanians in the Diaspora", who also stresses that the isolation of the diaspora among the inhabitants of the countries to which Kosovo Albanians go has allowed the traditional value system to be preserved—in many cases to this day (Lopasic 1992: 104–105).

In his book *Albania and the Albanians*, Ramadan Marmullaku devotes a separate chapter to reflecting on Albanian tradition, family and tribal organisation. This chapter is divided into three issues: Albanian tribal organisation, the blood feud and women in society. These three titles perfectly organise the issues of the traditional model of the Albanian family and traditional cultures.

Traditional Albanian society was based on the division into tribes and clans. Moreover, it was a strongly patriarchal system. This traditional social

and cultural system was preserved until the second half of the 20th century, especially in northern Albania and Kosovo. Marmullaku (1975: 83) argues that "it is safe to say, though, that some features of tribal organisation have been preserved, although even these are gradually disappearing in the modern Albanian conditions of life and work". However, it should be remembered that Marmullaku's research was published in 1975. The researcher also adds that in his day naming was not very precise, and every larger family or clan could be named a tribe (Marmullaku 1975: 83).

Individual clans (*fis*) were able to point to a common ancestor twenty generations back. Heritage was based on the male line, according to the principle that "a man has blood and a woman kin". Clans were divided into families (*shpi*) consisting of several brothers and their families, which was a great solution for working together and managing assets. It also guaranteed self-sufficiency (Lopasic 1992: 89; Marmullaku 1975: 82).

One of the most important characteristics of the tribe was that it was also self-sufficient in matters related to social norms and compliance with the law. In Albania common law has developed for centuries, being based precisely on precedents of events in clans and families. The focus was also on conflicts between individual tribes and the resolution of conflicts. The most important collection of such rights became the Canon of Lekë, passed down from generation to generation through oral tradition and first published in 1933 in Kosovo by a Franciscan monk fascinated by the history and folklore of the region. The Canon was so popular that to this day its name is present in the idioms of the Albanian language (Lopasic 1992: 92). It was made of the rights that were applied in the family, but also of the official guidelines according to which criminal cases were judged as well as—as can be described today—civil ones. Due to the specificity of oral transmission and the approval of rights by the elders of local communities, the Canon was not uniform and had different local variants. The consequences of breaking the Canon rules were both legal and moral. Thus, one of the most important principles guaranteed in the Canon was the right to revenge (Marmullaku 1975: 85).

The right to revenge inextricably combines two phenomena: honour and oath (*besa*). The latter was a promise or a guarantee to a member of another tribe, a murderer or a person who insulted a given family, of a protective time when they could not be an object of any harm by the enemy tribe. Breaking such a promise was one of the greatest possible insults to honour for an Albanian (Lopasic 1992: 94; Marmullaku 1975: 86–88). For honour is the most important value in the life of an Albanian guided by traditional moral principles. As Lopasic summarises,

Honour is very highly prized, even above such things as liberty or life itself. The slightest reflection on the members of a man's family or ancestors was considered an offence against honour and could be avenged only by the shedding of blood. Honour, being so important, can be taken away from a man by spitting at him, beating or pushing him, threatening him, or accusing him of a lie; by breaking into somebody's house (one's house was considered sacred by the Albanians), breaking an agreed truce, or dishonouring a woman. All of these demanded restitution of honour by drastic means. This explains the important role of the feud, the instrument of restitution of honour and a mechanism for keeping it intact (Lopasic 1992: 90).

The loss of *honour* could have been tragic. Conflicts that began with a minor misunderstanding or gesture often dragged on, were inherited by successive generations and led to bloodshed in an open war between tribes (Marmullaku 1975: 86-88).

Marmullaku (1975: 86) emphasises here that the tradition of blood feud survived the most in Kosovo, which belonged to Yugoslavia, because the Communist authorities of Albania ruthlessly blunted this practice; participating in family disputes was severely punished. Even death penalty was at stake. Lopasic points out, however, that inherited disputes were able to go beyond the borders of Albania or Yugoslavia. The researcher describes phenomena mainly related to the 1960s and 1970s. Economic immigrants, or rather *Gastarbeiters*, often felt obliged to take back payment for crimes committed against their ancestors. This ended with the family's representative tracking down other immigrants, beating and sometimes murdering them. All this in the name of family honour (Lopasic 1992: 91-94).

The change in the law in Albania and the systemic transformations in Yugoslavia have also had a significant impact on the role of women in society. Marmullaku (1975: 89) stresses that the establishment of a new socialist government in Albania marked the beginning of the process of the emancipation of women in a legal, but above all, social sense. Any attempt to restrict the freedom or abuse any rights of a woman was prohibited and punished. What the role of women looked like before Marmullaku describes as follows:

Until the liberation in 1945, an Albanian woman did not enjoy equal civil or political rights; she held an inferior place both in society and in family life. According to patriarchal views, which were dominant in the town as well as the countryside, a woman's purpose of life was to bear children and work in the house. The Muslim religious law observed by the majority of Albanians permitted men to have several wives, and many of them did, especially wealthy beys and feudal lords. Thus religion and patriarchy and the low level of economic development made the position of the Albanian woman in society exceptionally difficult (Marmullaku 1975: 89).

An additional element of the tradition, which had a major impact on the situation of women and also young men, was arranged marriages. Marmullaku cites research carried out in the Mirëditë region of northern Albania (Uçi 1969: 76) in which, before the Second World War, marriages were exclusively arranged by parents without consulting the children. In 1969, for fifty-four marriages in the town of Reshën, twenty-six couples chose their own partners, fifteen were contracted on the initiative of the parents, but with the consent of the couples, and thirteen married according to tradition—the marriage was arranged by the parents, and the young couples were not asked for their opinions (Marmullaku 1975: 90).

The aforementioned traditions of social order appear on the pages of the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia* and are an essential element of the world presented. Therefore, the division used by Marmullaku will serve as a backbone for the analysis of the binary relationships contained in the novel.

3. Binary relations in *My Cat Yugoslavia*

The novel *Kissani Jugoslavia* (2014) is written from two perspectives—mother's and son's. They are family members who, because of ethnic cleansing and the war in Yugoslavia, decide to flee to Finland. They both feel alienated in their worlds, but each of them in their own way. The novel covers the period from the spring of 1980 to the second decade of the 21st century. The mother, Emine, feels overwhelmed by the traditional Albanian patriarchy and, after moving to Finland—left alone. Bekim, on the other hand, as a son of refugees who grows up in Finland, feels foreign in his country of residence and in his ancestral country. An additional element influencing the protagonist's sense of alienation is that he is homosexual, which makes him a double representative of minorities. Also very important for the plot of the novel is the character of Bajram, Emine's husband and Bekim's father, who is the central object of the memories of his son and wife. The novel is written in the past tense, most often in a first-person narration, and there are also passages written in the third person. The plot is based on numerous flashbacks (see Valkama 1983:104-151).

The figure of the cat which appears in the novel and is mentioned in the title could symbolise attachment to the traditions of the characters' ancestors' country. Tradition appears in the lives of the main characters, cohabitates with them completely uninvited and is nurtured just like the eponymous cat, which can become unbearable, possessive and demanding attention.

Reading an excerpt describing the journey of Bekim, the protagonist of the novel, representing the second generation of the immigrant family to

Kosovo, one will notice that his expectations of the homeland of his ancestors are different from reality. Bekim expects that the wounds of war will not yet be healed, the wrongs of the war will be remembered, and the people living in the capital will still be scared and uncertain of the future. It turns out, however, that everyday life and the pursuit of normality prevail.

I walked around aimlessly, my hands in my pockets, and eventually decided to sit down at a café where people were sitting outside talking about literature, education, and equality. I'd expected to see people licking their wounds and shutting themselves away in their homes, but soon came to understand quite how much those who had moved away from Kosovo, the *shqiptarët e diasporës*, had fallen behind. People's attitudes and values seemed to have remained unchanged from the time when they left the country, and they were preserved in tight-knit communities in overcrowded European apartment buildings in disreputable parts of town, places where the homeland was only present through radio and television (Statovci 2017, 153).

This passage corresponds well with Lopasic's thesis (1992: 104-105) that the Albanian diaspora is the main carrier of tradition, living in the past and isolated from the outside world. It can therefore be understood why the binary relationships that will be extracted in this article are suspended in the memories of Albanian culture, in flashbacks on which the plot of the novel is built, and not in the present world depicted.

The fragments analysed below are mostly from Emine's memories of her youth. I will also refer several times to Bakim's memories and to Emine's experiences in exile. I divide the analysis into three parts, which are the same as the aforementioned division of aspects of Albanian cultural tradition, according to Marmullaku. In each passage, I will show the relationship between the elements in them in the light of Derrida's theory and Shafieyan's interpretation of it.

3.1 Albanian tribal organisation

There are several ways to consider a binary relationship between *us* and *them*. Surely defining "us" absolutely requires the existence of some other "they" – to the extent that without them, we are not existing as *we*, and the strangers, the others, are non-existent without a definition of who *we* are. In addition, however, we can look at the Albanian family (*we*) and the inhabitants of the country where the immigrants live (*they*) as separate collectives that contain a certain hierarchy. Analysing excerpts from *My Cat Yugoslavia*, we can see that being Albanian and Finnish are juxtaposed in the rela-

tionship "us and them". There are clear references to traditional belonging to a family, clan or tribe.

In the flashbacks in which Emine talks about her life in Kosovo, one can also see opposition between Albanians (*we*) and other peoples living in the Balkans (*them*). In the stories of Emine's father, Albanians are the better (dominant in matters of morality) side of the comparison. However, the opposition we are noting here does not assume that Albanians cannot define themselves without the participation of other nations. Their honour and morality are their own undividable values that describe them without comparison to other nations. We can therefore see here the relationship called "neither pairs" by Shafieyan.

When I was little, my father told me a story about the Balkan peoples, explaining that they were all distinguishable by their own specific characteristics. Bulgarians were good when it came to business negotiations but were bad judges of character; Serbs were crafty, devious to their heart and soul; Macedonians had a self-assurance verging on self-destructiveness and were easily conned; Bosnians lied through their teeth and had a finger in every pie; but an Albanian, you could trust an Albanian like a rock. Albanians helped those in need, while the other Balkan nations swooped after money and possessions like vultures. (...) The story ended with the familiar aphorism: an Albanian's word is his bond.

"It's what's always happened to us Albanians," he said. "People always abuse us and our good heartedness. In some ways we're like the Macedonians, because we're too good-natured, too strong and trusting," he said. "That's why it's so easy to kick us" (Statovci 2017: 68-69).

Being Albanian is a value in itself. At certain points, it becomes a value so overarching that it can be referred to as Shafieyan's "single pair". *Albanism* is one indivisible value, but the sense of nationality is divided into individuals who feel it. Bekim talks about a conversation with his grandfather during a holiday in Kosovo:

Once I woke up in the middle of the night, and I was on my way to the bathroom when I bumped into my grandfather in the corridor. (...) "And I'm worried," he said. "Worried that one day you won't be an Albanian at all but something else altogether. And then you'll go to hell." (Statovci 2017: 132)

The vision of oneself and of the world around them is very different for a generation brought up in exile. In the world of emotions, Bekim begins to feel an opposition between being Albanian and being Finnish. *Finnishness* becomes an unsurpassed value, and Bekim's identity, without his will,

is dominated by *Albanism*. Finnishness becomes a dominant value for him, although it is impossible to acquire or achieve.

Whenever we talked about Islam, dictatorships, or foreign languages at school, I always lowered my head, as I could feel them all turning to look at me. And when they asked me to say something in my mother tongue, some of them even said out loud what a shame it was that speaking such a language was useless here. And whenever I was late, I often heard it was high time I learned this wasn't a third-world country. *Living and going to school in Finland is like winning the lottery. Remember that.* (Statovci 2017: 57)

But the more I studied and the more job applications I sent off, the quicker I realized that that doesn't happen to people like me. *Immigrants have to grow a thick skin if they want to do something more than wait hand and foot on the Finns, my father used to say. Go ahead as they do. Ruin your life by being like them, but one day you'll see that if you try to become their equal, they'll despise you all the more and then you'll end up hating yourself. Don't give them the satisfaction.* (Statovci 2017: 31-32)

Bekim's father, Bajram, also experiences this opposition, but in his opinion, this sense of belonging to the circle of Albanian culture is the dominant element, the better one.

Marmullaku and Lopasic describe clans as closely connected economic branches of the family based on a patriarchal scheme, where the wife enters her husband's house, which is also the home of her in-laws. In *My Cat Yugoslavia*, too, the structure of society appears in this way. Such a model of the family is well illustrated by the architecture described in the novel.

The first floor of the house, with an identical layout to that of the ground floor, was still unfinished. And the third. My father had never gotten round to buying windows, doors or floorboards for the upper stories (...). One floor for each son, he'd said and given my brothers a victorious, self-satisfied smile. They would bring wives into the house, and each would settle on his own floor, have children, and look after him and my mother, and thus they would be able to grow old and die with dignity. (Statovci 2017, 50)

The binary relationship that comes to the fore here is the collective and the individual. The dominant element, valued positively, is the family. The father of the main character, by preparing the house as an apartment for the next generation, points out that living in such a community allows the older generation to die with dignity. Death alone would be something dishonourable, torn from dignity. One can also see here a "singular pair" or "hierarchy" relationship, where the family is the parent, the dominant element, but there is no opposition between it and its individual members.

The idea of a clan, a family, changes on the pages of the novel as the story progresses. The next generation, living in exile, does not consider the family to be of the highest value. There is no longer any question of a common hostship created by an extended family. Emine, after many years in Finland, admits as much:

Our children abandoned us one after the other. They left home and went away to study and work in other cities. At least that's what they told us, though it turned out to be nothing but a pretext. I'd never imagined a child could turn against his parents like that. (Statovci 2017: 217)

For a generation of children in a binary relationship family/individual, the dominant and at the same time positively valued element is the individual and independence. The values contained in the culture and social model of the country of ancestors are blurring; the views of the older generation cease to be indicators of the laws and traditions to follow.

Emine herself, when she leaves her home and husband, feels doubts, and the situation becomes very complicated for her mentally. Although her girlish dream was independence and her own career, when she begins her independent life years later, she feels fear and uncertainty, she feels surprised in a new social setting. Here one can see again a strong attachment to the traditions of the country from which she comes, but also a sign of the times:

At first I found being by myself difficult. I needed to do the laundry only once a week, the dishes didn't pile up, nobody else slept in my bed but me. I had never lived alone, though I'd wished I could on numerous occasions, and now I felt vulnerable, naked. I had nothing to do, nowhere I was expected to be at a specific time. (Statovci 2017: 231)

The individual and the family are slowly becoming Shafieyan's "neither pair"; they cease to have a direct influence on each other, although their earlier binary relationship left behind consecrations in the emotions, habits and views of the characters.

3.2 The blood feud (and honour)

A key element in the phenomenon of revenge or vendetta is the feeling of the violation of honour and the shame resulting from it. Here one can see an interesting juxtaposition, where the sense of honour itself balances between two spaces: the preservation of a good name and a sense of shame. In such a combination, the overwhelming dominant and the goal is to preserve a good name, preserve honour. Treatments aimed at retaining a sense of hon-

our are noticeable in the novel, even in the smallest detail. Emine, in one of the retrospections, highlights how important this perspective was to keep the house clean. This becomes an excuse for explaining what an Albanian sense of honour is with its extremes.

More than anything our house was impractical. Kosovan homes were not designed to meet the needs of their inhabitants; quite the opposite. (...) We cleaned the house every day, because a cluttered house was *marrë*, and no self-respecting person wanted to bring shame on his or her family by living in an untidy house. Even houses had face that they mustn't lose. It was a matter of honour. An Albanian is prepared to die to preserve his honour and keep himself from losing face, because losing face was a fate many times worse than death. That was something the other Yugoslavian nations didn't always appreciate. A girl found indulging in inappropriate behavior or a boy caught gambling and drinking alcohol would permanently scar the family's reputation, which people would often salvage by evicting the culprit from the home. Albanians refused to feel any form of shame. They would rather flee from it, run to the ends of the earth, while at the same time dedicating their lives to showing that they had nothing to be ashamed of in the first place (Statovci 2017: 47-48).

The sense of shame grows in the characters after moving to Finland, where the lord of the house, the father of a family from a highly patriarised society, is unable to provide his family with the status they were accustomed to in Kosovo. This gives rise to quarrels between the father and the adolescent children, who want to be friends with their peers on a just basis. However, from his father, he hears only the following:

Don't you ever bring Finnish people into my home.
Don't you ever tell anyone that we don't have money.
Don't you ever call me a liar. (Statovci 2017: 90)

In the passage above, which cites Bajram's words from a conversation with his son, we see an interesting relationship between a sense of shame and a desire to maintain a good name. The first two "orders" focus on keeping up appearances in front of neighbours in the new country. This corresponds to the previously analysed we/they relationship. However, in the last sentence, there is a value quoted by Lopasic according to which calling an Albanian a liar becomes one of the greatest insults.

The feeling of shame or loss of honour also makes the father of the family described by Statovci compulsively try to force his children to profess the religion of his ancestors. In this scene, honour and a good name are still de-

sirable, but the dominant element is a sense of shame, which makes a return to a sense of a well-executed mission unattainable.

Sometimes, not often, my father talked to us about God—as if every now and then he awoke to the thought that it had been a while since he last wondered what God would say about the choices he'd made. He would stand behind us to make sure we were praying, though he wouldn't pray himself (Statovci 2017: 92).

This scene is awkward for both sides. The father of the family feels ashamed of the choices made in his life, which deprive him of his *Albanism* and, consequently, of honour. On the other hand, the children feel compelled to profess a religion that is traditional to their father's family, with which they have less and less in common.

The preservation of a good name and the loss of honour are undoubtedly a binary opposition; a strongly valued good name cannot exist when there is a loss of honour. However, clashing with another culture makes the characters stand in a space in-between that did not exist in the tradition in which they grew up. In terms of binary oppositions, this juxtaposition is becoming more and more like "couple", where none of the elements is dominant, and tends to "neither pair", where one will no longer affect the other.

3.3 Women in society

Emine's memoir describes a heavily patriarised family. This is not only about a woman's subservience to her husband but also to her father. This is evident in many aspects of the girl's life. However, for the reader it becomes especially clear in the run-up to the wedding. We observe the complete passivity of the future bride. She is not against her marriage to Bajram, but she is also not genuinely in favour of him.

As someone well respected by the locals in our village, my father assured me that love for the man with the beautiful smile and the stubble that barely showed against the light, the man whom I was to marry at the age of seventeen and who strode along a dirt track winding away from the main road toward a cluster of three houses, that love for that man would come later if it wasn't there to start with. And as the eldest of seven children, I trusted my father (Statovci 2017: 13).

Reading the above passage, one can say that the girl unreliably trusts the decisions of her father. There is an important question about love for her future husband—Emine again passively waits and trusts her father's words, believing that all her feelings in this situation are natural and obvious. Al-

though a moment later one learns that Emine dreams of the life of a big star and is infatuated with the Yugoslav singer that she saw on TV, she puts a clear line between the world in which she lives and the dream world created on television (Statovci 2017: 16–17). The dominant party here is the father, who serves as a representative of the ruling Albanian traditions of the patriarchy.

Another phenomenon affecting the binary division woman/man is the desired role in society. From Emine's story, one can learn that she had dreams of a career and wanted to get an education. However, the most important role of a woman in the family, according to Emine's father, is to take care of the house. Yet he enthusiastically accepts the news that Bajram is a student at the university, which is as important as his family's wealth.

“Did you know that your husband's family just agreed to pay for everything? They even asked how much the wedding preparations would cost. (...) It means you are the luckiest girl in the world, Emine (...) Did you know that Bajram studies Balkan languages and literature in Prishtina? (...) At the university,” he added and cupped his hands over his forehead to shield his eyes from the light of the setting sun. He sounded happy and smiled again. *A poor little girl like you. It's just as well you're pretty and good at your work; there's no other reason a fine family like that would have you*, was what he was probably thinking (Statovci 2017: 43).

This summary shows the extent of parental responsibility but also shows what roles and responsibilities in society are assigned to each gender. Here one sees a clear female/male opposition, where a man is the dominant element and a woman is defined solely by reference to a man and a role in his family. However, it cannot be said here that this is an extreme kind of “binary opposition”, according to Shafieyan's theory based on Derrida's thoughts.

For Bajram, who grew up in Kosovo and is a fresh member of the first generation that lives in Finland, the social responsibility assigned to a woman is obvious. For Emine this approach to the matter is often frustrating. She remembers her girls' dreams of independence but is unable to get beyond the traditional patriarchal model for her family. She describes her frustration, among other things, in the passage below.

In all those years Bajram never once said thank you, though he had plenty of opportunities to do so. He didn't thank me that his favorite towel was always laundered and ready for him, didn't thank me for the fact that he never once had to go to work without breakfast, neither that his shoes always looked polished and new, nor for the fact that our children never woke him up at night, neither because I never mentioned his snoring, nor for the fact that I never left him in a situation in which he might have needed me, because in his life I was always present. Nothing hurt me as much as his lack of thanks. It hurt

more than all the work, the endless drudgery of beating the mats, washing the floors and walls, dusting the shelves, and preparing food (Statovci 2017: 136).

Husband, man, is here again a clearly dominant element. The performance of housework by a woman is not appreciated in any way, it is not even judged in terms of duty or lack thereof—it is simply completely obvious, and in this obvious way completely imperceptible. It is also clear that the wife must become a mother. Being a mother is a testament to the status of a woman in the family.

I duly obeyed Bajram and his parents and never made a fuss, though the majority of the household chores and work in the fields fell on my shoulders. For a long while I was unsure of my status in Bajram's house, a feeling that only worsened when I didn't become pregnant at once. (Statovci 2017: 134)

In the passage above, we read that a young wife cannot be sure of her status in the household, even if most of the household responsibilities rest on her shoulders, if she does not become a mother to the next generation. The description of such dependence once again emphasises the dependence of the "definition" of a woman on how a man and his family see her. It can be assumed that without the existence of a definition of a man, there would be no definition of a woman, and only at that level—the definition—there is a binary opposition here, where one element is nonexistent without the other.

Conclusions—My cat ancestors' culture

Deconstruction carried out by an attempt to extract binary relationships allowed the following conclusions regarding the traditions of the country of the main characters' ancestors in the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia* by Pajtim Statovci. First, in the world depicted, the Albanian diaspora of Kosovo is a group that preserves the traditions of its ancestors. They live in seclusion, and their perceptions of the country culture traditions stopped when they left the country. This corresponds well with the materials presented in the article on the Albanian diaspora and its traditions. In this context, there is also a binary opposition of we/they, but after further analysis, it turns out that the Albanians described in the novel can define themselves without the participation of "others", which makes this relationship begin to weigh towards "neither pair". *Albanism* also means a parent relationship, a "single pair", because it is an indivisible value, but it is felt by individuals. Being in exile, however, means that the nationality felt by the characters is not an unequivocally positive value. Moreover, in the opposition family collective, the individual seems to be overvalued by the generation brought up in exile. Interesting conclusions

can be drawn from observing the value of honour (here in the relation good name–loss of honour). In the country of the ancestors, honour was the main value on which all social relations were based—but we see compulsive attempts at compensation of the first generation of expatriates to build a sense of honour. The last issue discussed was the role of women in society. In this case, it can also be concluded that there is a change in the value of binary relationships. In the Albanian society described by Statovci. In the 1980s, a woman was defined through the prism of a relationship with her father or husband. After the family moves to Finland, the binary male–female relationship becomes neutral.

The analysis showed that the binary relationships in the novel are not based solely on the binary relationship of the Derridian supplement. Less explicit relationships were much more common. In fact, we have been able to distinguish less obvious relationships, e.g. a hierarchical or single pair relationship, talking about an individual's relationship with nationality. The analysis also showed that the text of the novel *My Cat Yugoslavia* clearly corresponds with known phenomena from Albanian tradition and what is described in the source texts.

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