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## **Byzantine spirit of the Undead and its legacy in the Sick Man of Europe**

### **Preface**

What is the character and extent of the Byzantine political-legal legacy? The contemporary discourse on political institutions uses new language to describe old mechanisms for accommodation and decentralization phenomena: millet systems, internal diasporas, population displacement of enclaves, consociation, asymmetric federalism, and even democracy as a part of modern institutionalized network systems. Employing Michel Foucault's archaeological and genealogical method, we tap into the undead body of Byzantine political legacy in order to show and extract the legacy of a specific 'spirit.' In other words, we identify the existence of a very specific sites which emerges from within a non-Being (in Plato's sense): a specific spirit whose technologies eventually trickled into the Ottoman political practices, and continues to influence regional politics. The argument is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the Hippodrome in Constantinople as a site where theatricalization emerges. Mime and comedy associated with theatricalization became tools to delude the demos. The second part identifies and connects the institutional strategies of relocating/juggling, and thence 'freezing' the population and its distinctions. Within the millet system of the Ottomans this political tactic contributed to the formation of an arrested specific self.

Accordingly, the socio-political aspect of this study concerns the persistent, underlying uniformities which contribute to identity formation within the Balkans from the Byzantine period to the present. The focus is on the continuation and/or restriction of identity formation as a part of a particular authoritarian legacy. The objective is to highlight and explain the particular authoritarian legacy or spirit which survives, inhabiting and constraining, self-formation and identity of individuals and modern states. While the old empires are not alive, their spirits haunt and sicken contemporary politics with the vileness of the zombie-like undead.

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### **Part I: Rites of passage, the self-formation, and liminality**

The theoretical framework of this study is liminality. We begin from a basic anthropological level associated with this concept. Liminality offers a tool-box to unpack the political legacy of Byzantium in the modern world. We then move to the etymological expressions and the role of drama and comedy in theatre as a means of societal self-criticism, and its links to political aspects and public “theatricalization” (à la Arpad Szokolczai) in the Byzantine legacy. Additionally, with the help of liminality as a diagnostic tool we introduce and trace the rites of passages and thus identify formation of both the theatre and (failed) political democracy. Liminality serves as a useful instrument to highlight the ruptures in the rites of passages, and subsequently follow the process of identity formation.

According to Szokolczai, for the development of selfhood, the most important and widely present dynamo is that of certain patterns of ritual assisting the self-formation in the process by which “human beings turn into the single, unique beings they are”<sup>1</sup>. Rituals of distinction are critical in identity formation. They mark the transition from one life and the new beginnings of another self, offering a person or group an element of individuation or feeling of membership in a community. As Victor Turner explains the ritual is “living ritual” above all:

Ritual is, in its most typical cross-cultural expression, a synchronization of many performative genres, and is often ordered by dramatic structure [...]. All the senses of participants and performers may be engaged; they hear music and prayers, see visual symbols, taste consecrated foods, smell incense, and touch sacred persons and objects<sup>2</sup>.

The rites of passage (as living ritual) thus enable, under the guidance of masters, the preservation and perpetuation of a community or society. Liminality, a concept associated with the rites of passage, is a useful framework to capture this process of the self-realization, or its failed rupture, and its relation to the unifying self within the context of a particular institution or environment.

Liminality originates from the Latin word *limen*, something situated in-between. As Agnes Horvath, Bjørn Thomassen, and Harald Wydra demonstrate, the genealogical root of this term possesses precise anthropological meaning: that something or someone is at a threshold or mid-point between beginning and an end. This paper’s utilization of liminality intends the concept as a toolbox to understand the context of the Byzantine Empire in itself as liminal, and as an instrument to extract the authoritarian spirit responsible for the hijacking, inversion, and parody of the virtuous and dem-

<sup>1</sup> A. Szokolczai, *Identity formation mechanisms: A Conceptual and genealogical analysis*, EUI Working Paper, “SPS” 1998, No. 98(2), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> V. Turner, *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*, New York City 1982, p. 81.

ocratic spirit. In other words, this research accentuates and examines the negative side of the Byzantine authoritarian legacy, which H el ene Ahrweiler perhaps might include in her barbarian category. While she focuses on the uplifting and freeing legacy of humanism, virtue, and broadmindedness, we attend to the authoritarian or barbarian spirit which employs sophistry and trickery to constrain and limit the human potential and freedom of democratic self and society; this is the liminality and authoritarian legacy of the Byzantine Empire.

Unlike Ahrweiler's emphasis on positive aspects, we focus upon the dangerous forces of permanent liminality, enabling the analysis to emphasize liminality as a passage into the hazardous state-of-affairs where self-formation permanently is suspended by the very forces which underlie it. Under the liminal conditions figures such as authoritarian leadership and tricksters, and processes such as imitation, can become frenzied. These conditions, when operating in unison, can escalate and become normal, rather than an acknowledged pathological state. The significance of being in liminal place, time, or institution is that human or societal identity might remain in a permanently suspended condition. For example, the suspension might manifest itself as an arrested process of transformation from rites of passage in which the past never ends and future never begins. The site of arrested rites of passage or permanent liminality typically is dangerous rather than creative. These dark forces which might produce and trap liminal identity or liminal spirits, best are explained in terms of the invisibility of their characters or non-Beings associated with actors, comedians, mimes and clowns. In short, the masters who trap humans, institutions, and nations into treacherous permanent spiral liminality are Horvath's tricksters, and include some contemporary politicians whose technologies target individuals and groups to appease popular concerns.

### Rites of passage

The permanent liminality is a paradoxical condition because the passage is denied. Rites of passage, such as the rite of birth, adulthood, marriage, or death, are central in identity formation. Rites present different stages in an individual development – transition from child to adult – and the role of group culture in the process. While everyone participates in rites of passage, some individuals and societies are unaware or unprepared. Rites of passage such as nation building, elections, accessions, declarations of independence, and institutional development are critical for society. Hence, when tricksters rather than pure masters emcee a religious or national event, the preservation and permanence of the community can be arrested in the stage of the perpetual disintegration, creating a living nightmare.

As Arnold van Gennep, and later Turner, elaborates three stages associated with the rites of passages exist under the one umbrella of liminality: separation, liminality, and aggregation. This analysis focuses on the mid-stage or liminal stage because it is the

most critical aspect in the self-realization, preservation, and permanence of the community. As Turner explains, during liminality, particularly the mid-state, the whole order of society and identity is destroyed and suspended until those who participate in the rite (initiands) gain access into the refreshed aggregation under the supervision of the Master of the ceremony. Therefore, the character and quality of the master is crucial to the outcome. If the Master is a mime or a trickster, the rite often stalls in permanent liminality, becoming a living nightmare in which spirits of the undead inhabit the void of destruction. Such a permanent liminality creates an extraordinarily dangerous situation for society and individuals which Gregory Bateson and Reinhard Koselleck rightly frame as “schismogenesis” and “pathogenesis”. A trickster or mime, as performs in the site of the Byzantine Hippodrome in the guise of the theatre, can create nightmares for societies. As the notion of schismogenesis suggests, the nightmarish liminality can deeply fracture society, and under pathogenesis such schismatic relations become the norm.

Thus, as much as the passage in itself is demanding, so is the role of the Master in conducting the rite while trying to stave-off the trickster. Under the close supervision of the Master, individuals and groups participating in the rite are exposed to various moral and physical challenges including fasting, tattooing, circumcision, nakedness, ridicule or even abuse. Problems consequently arise when the Master is a trickster and the challenges of ridicule and laughter turn into the normal state of affairs in a society – in other words, when what was pathological turns to normal. The result may well be that rites of passage derail into the rites of desired moral defects in which pseudo-identities and pseudo-communities cherish or misunderstand the lack of achievement, loss of motivation, chaos, uncertainty, collapse of focus, and confusion of identity in relation to the larger community. Scapegoating and violence can occur. The initiands who participate in such distorted trickery of rites flounder in the belief that once they reach a certain age they automatically are transformed into adulthood while in fact receiving very little guidance. Individuals and societies lacking concrete value systems and/or direction mutate within this void. In other words, Batesonian rule pathogenesis and schismogenesis becomes normalcy.

### **Schismogenesis and pathogenesis**

While in Papua New Guinea, Bateson observed *naven* rites of passage and reached the conclusion that something terribly wrong must have happened in the past in these societies, so wrong that this error of ways remains and is transmitted as an error-substance legacy. Szakolczai summarizes: “[...] in this network of societies at a certain historical juncture meaningful human order must have broken down, interlocking the various segments into a series of schismatic relations which they [community] could not escape. These relations were lasting and became taken for granted but were by no means

‘functional’<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, Szokolczai continues that Bateson’s schismogenesis is comparable and closely related to Koselleck’s pathogenesis. The uncertain and divided identities are abnormal, and when accepted as normal betray a sickness. Relating this to the Byzantine authoritarian legacy, we echo Szokolczai who argues that within Byzantine territory a very specific kind of theatricalization in the form of comedy and grotesque laughter influences social life<sup>4</sup>. The impact unfolds as a process of pathological spirit or non-Being responsible for the permanence of the pseudo-identities and pseudo-communities. Here the link to liminality is striking. As such, this perspective offers a critical response to Ahrweiler’s important work on Byzantium’s legacy and continuity. Ahrweiler’s argument seems to wrongly assume sophistry is dead; we believe these destructive spirits, as argued by Szokolczai, exist although their social position is neither-here-nor-there. These negative spirits feed on the growth and energy of the positive spirits of demos, thereby altering the identity of the latter. Within the permanent liminality, arrested mid-stage or rites of passage, lies the site of the negative trickster spirits. Such is the spirit that Plato unmasks and reveals in *Sophist*. Yet, despite Plato’s warnings about the invisibility of non-Being, the spirit attached itself to the politics of Byzantine and continued through the Ottomans, subsisting all the way to the modern episteme of political and societal institutions. In that sense, a lacuna clouds Ahrweiler’s thesis, as the argument fails to capture and account for the discourses of negative spirit, or the element of zombie-like undead which feed upon the living, present in the Byzantine Legacy and perpetuated in contemporary politics.

### Ahrweiler’s generalized spirit

Byzantium, according to Ahrweiler, was situated between earth and heaven. Geographically this locates the empire as a liminal *terra incognita par excellence* because it occupies a neither-here-nor-there site. Indeed, Ahrweiler attributes to Hellenism and Greece, and therefore Byzantium, only positive and meaningful achievements of Europe and humanity:

[...] this Hellenized, Christianized Roman Empire is known today as Byzantium, despite the fact that neither its citizens, its territories nor its State ever used the name Byzantium [...]. The Emperor, from the first to the last Constantine, was always known as the ‘Emperor of the Romans’; the imperial State was the ‘God-protected state of the Romans’; and the country was called ‘Rome’ and, more frequently in later years, ‘Romania’<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> A. Szokolczai, *Dreams, visions and utopias: Romantic and realist revolutionaries, and the idyllic*, [in:] *Utopia: Social theory and the future*, Farnham Surrey 2012, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> A. Szokolczai, *Theatricalized reality and novels of truth: Respecting tradition and promoting imagination*, [in:] *Social research, imaginative methodologies in the social sciences: Creativity, poetics and rhetoric in social research*, edit. M. Jacobsen, M. Drake, K. Keohane, A. Petersen, London 2014.

<sup>5</sup> H. Ahrweiler, *The making of Europe: Lectures and studies*, Athens 2000, pp. 122-123.

And earlier, “[...] Byzantium lasted a thousand years, a thousand years of pain and toil as it rose up between East and West the first to embrace the Christian faith and because it alone inherited, naturally and intact, the Roman imperial authority, which it now exercised from the New Rome, governed by the Greek spirit, namely Constantinople”<sup>6</sup>. Yet, Ahrweiler concludes the legacy, despite the “pain and toil” is why “[...] Greece’s entry into the European Community on 1 January 1981 was hailed as the symbol that would permit Europeans to refer to the continuity of the European cultural achievement through the ages, and to detach themselves from the narrowly economic and technocratic character of the institution”<sup>7</sup>.

Such analysis overlooks that this “pain and toil” exists within the liminal state; the approach minimizes the problems and consequences of Orthodoxy’s struggle with its opposition, the seventh century wars and advance of Islam, the Great Schism, and the Crusades. Ahrweiler’s focus then seems to accept an inflated, generalized Hellenic spirit allegedly forming all the European self, and neglecting the attribution of the Byzantine Empire as an intermediary and therefore liminal situation. In contrast, we contend, that Ahrweiler’s spirit is not the only Spirit which inhabits Europe, and a re-examination of the authoritarian Byzantine legacy is beneficial to understanding contemporary society and politics in the region. Indeed, Byzantine legacy also includes oppression (under the guise of juggling and managing societal and individual distinctions). The legacy deemphasizes, perhaps ridicules, voices of dialogue, difference, and demos, and perhaps neglects the Platonic emphasis on truth and virtue.

#### **Sites: Theatricalization, Hippodrome, Sophistry, and the Undead**

It is important to stress that there seems to be a clear continuation and connection between theatre, morality, and modernity in the legacy of acute authoritarianism as non-Being. Here though we must highlight in the Byzantine case the relative value of tragedy, as well as the ability of tricksters to control the vehicle of comedy, thereby theatricalizing the absurd and ribald. We briefly will elaborate on the relationship. The most obvious example of public space would be a theatre, local market, or parliament (imperial court). In these environments civic trust, social capital, and/or public democracy can develop. Indeed, Greek theatre served as an arena where democracy was forged and tested. Yet considering the Byzantine legacy, theatre also is the area within which events of extraordinary situations or catastrophes, such as wars, earthquakes, grotesque violence, and invasions can be mimicked. No doubt theatrical presentations can affect and effect the changes in world-view: from ancient to modern, or from religious to secular. Com-

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

ic theatricalization facilitated and influenced the permanent liminality of the Byzantine Empire, as well as the impact which its undead spirits continue to conjure. In fact, the sudden appetite for laughter and comedians rather than tragedy can be precisely localized in Constantinople's Hippodrome. Therefore, Szakolczai in *Comedy and the Public Spirit*, identifies the site of Hippodrome as a good marker to chase down the non-Being and its role in the modern politics.

First, the sudden appetite for laughter and comedians, rather than tragedy, can be precisely localized in the Hippodrome in Constantinople. While the birth of comedy and death of tragedy in Hellenic culture seems ambiguous, the Hippodrome, according to Szakolczai, was where the Mimes played the role of pseudo-Master. Their premier role presents a good marker to investigate non-Being and its role in modern politics. When the seat of power is the seat of trickster rather than a genuine Master, the tricking-power-technology is inverted and corrupted. Tricking is the greatest threat to the legacy of Antigone's 'no', that is her resistance, and hence to individuation and democracy.

Second, unlike the comedies which ripped, and mimes who performed in the centre of power on the Hippodrome, allegedly empowering the society via engagement in laughter right in the face of the real persons in power, the tragedy of Antigone reached further and much deeper into the individual and demos. Tragedy went down into the hearth producing the glorious awe. It is this awe which comedy sought to capture, control, or replace. According to Szakolczai, this false representation of awe is what the mimes, and above all comedies, best accomplished. The mimes did not have the political status or might to challenge those in power. The laughter established and intoxicated the demos who, paradoxically, elected and re-elected the worst possible politicians, the tricksters such as Aristophanes' Cleon.

Finally, critical to this analysis, the spirit, is the excessive emotional energy of theatrical events that can be mimicked and released through laughter during the artistic performance. While, the birth of comedy and death of tragedy in Hellenic culture might seem ambiguous, the Mimes in Constantinople played a particular role of error-substance, pseudo-Master or non-Being. Comedy arrests the movement and self-reflection of the participants. Yet, the positive side of comedy is that it is personal and rude, directly targeting the powerful who are present in the theatre. In that sense, comedy appears to be a breeding ground of knowledge, strategy, tactics and above all citizens/demos for those who hold power to keep bodies in check under the cloak of democracy.

### **Theatre as non-places**

In particular, if one observes theatre as liminoid space, the power of laughter associated with comedy, comic figures, and its spirits represents the seeds of a specific legacy of liminality. The power lies in the theatricalization and the production of a certain mod-

ern knowledge (in the Byzantine case the dramatization of the social drama of the Empire), which then attaches itself to the knowledge of real democracy. The error-substance seeps into this realm, facilitating identification of the audience with performers. The Byzantine legacy represented in the laughter, mimesis (faking), and audience continually ferments pseudo-identity and alters the knowledge about reality. For instance, extraordinary events usually can be characterized in dichotomising terms: unification and separation usually go hand in hand. There is something exceptional in these moments of crisis. Theatre represents and participates in these moments. No doubt it affects and effects the change in world-view: from ancient to modern or from religious to secular. If theatre's original (acting) role, was "[...] assigning meaning to the apparently arbitrary and often cruel-seeming sequences of events following personal or social conflicts"<sup>8</sup>, today, or perhaps already in the Hippodrome, it metamorphosed into liminoid, voluntaristic association with pseudo-art, regressing from Plato and Hellenism. The legacy is not that of the Platonic search for truth but a quasi-reality in which the production of mimes produces no risks as the spirit seems to be corrupted. During emergency situations as frequently befell Byzantium, these figures, as Szakolczai writes, can turn "[...] an emergency to one's advantage, [executing] 'tricks' that can be made to function"<sup>9</sup>.

According to Turner "[...] manual gesticulations, facial expressions, bodily postures, rapid heavy, or light breathing, tears, [...] stylized gestures, dance patterns, prescribed silences, synchronized movements such as marching, the moves and 'plays' of games, sports, and rituals..."<sup>10</sup> characterise theatre as an expression of liminoid social drama. All these dramas can become lasting features of daily social life. If Turner is correct that "the roots of theatre are in social drama"<sup>11</sup> and that it possesses a hypertrophy of awe – as it refracts the real world – then it comes as no surprise that tricksters, sophists, and mimes can easily hijack truth, and thus politics. Thence how do we know or how can we distinguish between what/when is true and what/when is false in this social drama we call human affairs? How can we differentiate at the end of a performative act that the participants embody true rather than false spirits? Aware of the power and possibility of theatre and tricksters, we return to Ahrweiler and the legacy of Byzantium.

In principle, Ahrweiler is correct when she identifies as schismatic:

the moment when Greece submits to the Ottoman domination, while Europe awakens under or against the shelter of Rome, not without taking advantage of the intellectual contribution of the Byzantines, who had left their country after 1453, date of the fall of Constantinople in the hands of the Turks, and found refuge in the West where they carried their science and wisdom<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> V. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>9</sup> A. Szakolczai, *Theatricalized reality and novels of truth...*, pp. 158-159.

<sup>10</sup> V. Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 35-36.



Yet we question not the validity of the main pillar of Ahrweiler's spirit but her description's deemphasis of authoritarian politicians and administrators. The problem is that embodied within these intellectuals there seems to be a continuation of a specific error-substance which transmits a certain kind of knowledge responsible for the reversal of the real events; the spirits take advantage of comic theatre to engage in trickery. Ahrweiler acknowledges the schism between Asia and Europe, but what her argument lacks is an appreciation of the liminality which exists, at least in border regions, where elements of both identities are present and where tricksters embrace the Hellenism, but really are sophists engaged in comedy and rhetoric.

Trickery, or this magic-and-mayhem work, sometimes wrongly is assumed to be the true carrier of the real knowledge of here and now. Accordingly, Ahrweiler contends the intellectuals were pure guardians of Hellenism, and responsible for the modern European science, self, and us, Europeans. She, thus, overlooks that some of these mimicking intellectuals harboured a chosen kind of world-view consistent with the trickster logic. For this reason, we adopt the genealogical method to show that Szakolczai's argument on "late-Renaissance charlatans"<sup>13</sup> exposes a non-Being.

For example, from a sociological perspective, in Szakolczai's study of the spirit, there is something very culturally specific regarding humour. Yet, the sense of gestures, performance and/or humour we tend to link with a specific mentality, become an important social force through the Hippodrome and theatricalization. For instance, the critical role of humour is best viewed via Szakolczai's two concepts: "dotti" (Byzantine learned men) and "dottore" (a figure in commedia dell'arte). The *dottore* in Latin language denoted, and still denotes, a liminal and schismatic symbol, a timeless symbol of a ridiculing of university professors rather than Byzantine learned men. This public performance of ridicule can be translated as a sign of oppressive authority.

The realization of this phenomenon in contemporary politics can be witnessed in the 1990s wars in Yugoslavia, particularly Sarajevo and Bosnia. The cultural performances and sick sketch comedy of the 1980-1990s variety television show, Sarajevan Nadrealisti, was contra Dada, shaped the notion of the self, and delivered communicative synthesis to Yugoslav society. In their theatre of experiential performance, the actors brought forward the experience through symbolic expression in order to foster individual and societal self-aggregation into the next century. However, the most important aspect, is that this sick mentality/character can be found within those who are the tricksters and lack genuineness.

The most important aspect in the show was sick mentality and/or the "Nele Karajlić" syndrome/character. This sickness, or error-substance, was further transmitted throughout the European continent via theatricalization, comedy, mimes, clowns, and mani-

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<sup>13</sup> A. Szakolczai, *Theatricalized reality and novels of truth...*, p. 174.

festations related to comedians, laughter, tricksters, and role-playing. Ahrweiler's argument on the Hellenic/Byzantine intellectual contribution lacks this detail. Szokolczai, in focusing the attention on the decaying features of state and society from a sociological perspective, whilst looking at the specific theatrical features thereof, illuminates that something was not quite well even before the Byzantine politics/state.

Unlike Ahrweiler, Szokolczai captures this error substance rooted in the notion of spirit. This reveals a particular character or mentality that somehow replaced the institutions of philosophers with sophists. This quake seems to have contributed, to the concept of Byzantine spirit or its authoritarian legacy, which further highlights a possible paradox of opposites, excess and duality, which we seek to emphasize. Therefore, Szokolczai would disagree with Ahrweiler on the notion of excess and when, what, and how European identity is marked and formed. He argues while referring to Plato's *Sophist* that such spirits, which Ahrweiler calls intellectuals, are actually Plato's non-beings, tricksters, or "[...] in the terms of classical philosophy, when non-Being becomes real [...]. Such 'falsified' reality must be tackled in its own terms, and thus social understanding today requires imaginative methods"<sup>14</sup>.

This schism of excesses that is the opposing extremes, when observed through a sociological lens becomes a useful instrument in analyzing and clarifying the suspended transition to democracy and politics with the Balkans. Here one must add, and thus expand, Ivo Andrić's thesis to the excess of Byzantine spirit, concerning the spiritual change of medieval people living on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina under the influence of the Ottomans. In that light, one can concur with Ahrweiler and Angelika Laiou, that the spirit's transmission and mutation is in part directly related to Byzantine internal politics which kept insisting on the constant moving of populations. This internal aspect seems to be in part sociological and anthropological. This policy is illustrated in the internal displacement of people, such as Syrians, Kurds, Israel/Palestine, or Serbs from Croatian Krajina. The legacy of such movements – residing in "non-places" as Mark Augé argues – unconsciously fester the paradox of the acute moral nihilism, which we define as the sick man of Europe syndrome. Beyond great power interests, the sick man symbolises and embodies the pathogenesis which arises from the schismogenesis within the Byzantine Empire and its authoritarian legacy.

In examining the Byzantine political and theatrical legacy, the site, as liminal, and transmitted through theatre and in particular the comedy and laughter in the production, we concur with Szokolczai, and question the spirit of sophistry that somehow hijacked Byzantium political institutions and later the whole of the European self. The legacy of Byzantium first infects the Ottoman state, and thus the Balkans in particular. This institutionalisation made permanent the trickster authoritarian spirits which continue to wrestle Ahrweiler's Hellenistic spirits of virtue and truth in the region.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.

## Part II: The manoeuvring of Byzantine spirit into the sick mentality

Ahrweiler explains and admits, Byzantium most clearly manifests appropriate national selves. Actually, it does more than manifest the national identity formation, it establishes it. In the words of Ahrweiler

[...] as I became old in teaching Byzantium to young people, who are not always particularly interested in the history and civilization we call Byzantium, I realized that the best way to bring them closer to this study is to speak about modern experiences. That is why I often speak about Europe's constitution, that in my mind comes out of what I call 'the making of bridges and gates'; I use these terms for the discussion about the transitions from one world to another, the turning points of history. Changes, clashes, tensions occur at the intersection of past and future when past is not entirely past and future is not yet entirely present. In that way, one can speak about the passage from antiquity to Christianity that is to say of the passage from the Roman Empire to Byzantium, which inaugurates the making of the new world, the Christian world<sup>15</sup>.

Indeed, we concur with Ahrweiler that the "past is not entirely past and future is not yet entirely present"<sup>16</sup>. In this light, we wish to challenge her subsequent claim that there has been a passage to a new self. We contend that elements of the past resulting from the clashes and tensions persist as undead spirits. The political world-view of Byzantium was based on distinctions or dichotomization based on citizenship and religion, while absorbing and mutating into itself an institutional order for its own survival.

First, the political aspects of Byzantine Empire did not crumble because of its extensiveness. The collapse was due to its authoritarian spirit which insisted and persisted on the dichotomizing distinctions. Second, despite the world-view, politics could not accommodate the social heterogeneity in a peaceful manner. The Byzantine Empire persisted in shuffling rebellious populations from one land to another. In that sense this Byzantine form of pre-emptive demographic management contributed to numerous conflicts and manifestations of national belongings. These conflicts manifested in various ways: as an ontological rebellion among Eastern Christians in Bosnia and Herzegovina and parts of Serbia against Ottoman attempts at conversion; open revolt with private wars as in the case of Serbian ascendancy; and various burgeoning sectarian movements, that is, Eric Voegelin's gnostic revolts.

One of the characteristic features of the authoritarian politics of the empire was that it bitterly struggled with the different world-views in the midst of prolonged transitory moments. It seems that it could not, just like the subsequent Ottomans, accommodate dissent into the institutions. This process is best observed in the Byzantine policy of manoeuvring the populations, in particular the heretical sects of Bogumils, Manicheans, and Paulicians. Aleksandr Vasil'ev relates that "[l]iving in Asia Minor, on the eastern border of the Empire, and firmly adhering to their doctrine, they [sectarian move-

<sup>15</sup> H. Ahrweiler, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

ments] sometimes caused grave trouble to the Byzantine government by their warlike energy. One of the familiar methods of Byzantine internal policy was to transport various nationalities from one place to another; for example, the Slavs were moved to Asia Minor and Armenians to the Balkan peninsula<sup>17</sup>. While the Byzantine Empire intended such manoeuvring to contribute to stability, in fact the tactic trapped individuals and groups in permanent liminality.

Secondly, the liminality seems to be a core factor in both empires, and arguably is a Byzantine legacy for the Ottomans. Byzantine internal politics rested on the persistence of moving and manoeuvring different world-views whilst frozen within the liminal Empire under one language. Likewise, the Ottomans employed the policy of freezing its different non-Muslim religious communities through millets. Both empires also share striking similarities: high centralization, political power detached from the demos, religious subordination to imperial bureaucracy, and an excessive pathos pervading the whole system. In the context of Byzantium, this politics of manoeuvring seems to have contributed to the increasing internal and external schism, well-illustrated between repression (East) and humanism (West). In concrete liminal terms, this meant for dissent to be tolerated, the self and/or social body must *a priori* accept the political and outright temporal order whilst permanently suspended in the non-place created for marginal peoples.

George Ostrogorski is quite explicit in that regard:

The sects of the Bogomils, the Babuni, the Patarens, the Cathars, the Albigenses, as also their predecessors in Asia Minor, are all so many outward expressions of the great movement which spread from the hills of Armenia to the south of France and flared up sporadically in different places. The heresy gained ground most rapidly in times of crisis and oppression, for it was in such periods that its basically pessimistic outlook...found richest nourishment, and in which its protest made its most effective impression<sup>18</sup>.

This is where one begins to see the glimpse of the drama of modern institutions, the struggle between trickster and philosopher, between seduction and truth. The authoritarian spirit contributed to a state of limbo and liminal legacy in which individual or societal aggregation was not permitted. The assurance of the absence of *a priori* revolt slowly allowed the gestation of a site of a sick spirit in politics, a sick spirit which found ascendancy, albeit juxtaposed with imperial decline.

Thus, we argue that via comedy a sophist politics corrupted the Byzantine political spirit, in secular terms, although this might have contributed to the great schism(s). Politics absorbed and mutated the spirit of Orthodoxy for its own survival. In particular, in the Balkans under the Ottomans the excess and schism reached deeper with the issue of religious conversion. This ontological cleansing during the liminal quake seems

<sup>17</sup> A. Vasil'ev, *History of the Byzantine Empire, 324-1453*, Madison 1964, p. 383.

<sup>18</sup> G. Ostrogorski, *History of the Byzantine State*, New Brunswick 1969, p. 269.

to have led to the phenomenon of what Franz Borkenau called the “die Übergang” or transition from one to another world-view.

These excesses in Byzantine politics seem related to a schismatic and above all schismogenic spirit. Szakolczai identifies the problem in Byzantine politics, namely that “[...] Byzantium evokes an unsurpassable image of eternal beauty, product of the millennial survival of the Roman Empire. At the other, however, Byzantine politics is considered to be impenetrable and obscure, dominated by revolting court intrigues, the consequences of extreme centralisation and bureaucratisation”<sup>19</sup>. This spirit of excess illustrates the mechanisms of a sick technology that seems to lie behind the mentality that persists on evacuating the democratic spirit from the self and society through comedy and laughter, sometimes assuming violent natures.

Accordingly, the perpetuation of permanent liminality leads the argument to extend from Byzantine politics to the Ottomans and thus the contemporary Balkans. Szakolczai highlights how tainted the authoritarian Byzantine spirit is: mimes, tricksters, and other pathological manifestations hijacked the demos from Ahrweiler’s spirit. These figures in unison contributed to a growth of errors on the individual and societal level in the form of the cognition/perception error, that is, to the rebirth of theatre in Europe in the form of comedy rather than Hellenic tragedy. During the liminal quake these figures flourished in supplanting the awe of the democratic spirit. Szakolczai writes that “[...] the way in which its [Byzantine spirit] schismatic features were accentuated through liminal crisis”<sup>20</sup> must be perceived as essential for understanding its mutation and permeability into politics and thus back into society. It is not surprising that without a prolonged liminal quake, natural (earthquake, tsunamis, or other disaster), but even more so artificial (comic theatre), these error-figures, as quasi guardians of the Polis, could not survive. Therefore, the spirit legacy of Byzantine politics is better related to the non-Being or tricksters’ mechanisms of control and persistence of the liminal mid-stage than to real Masters’ of ceremony and aggregation.

### **Despirited: Gestures and performance in Byzantium**

As already emphasized, the Byzantium embodies two extremes: fear and openness. However, a central issue when assessing Byzantium’s politics is that “[f]or the English-speaking world of the twenty-first century, or the world of western Europe in general, Byzantium is something of a black hole, a shadowy force if known at all, unlike the empire of West Rome whose physical remains are conspicuous and very real reminder of its former presence”<sup>21</sup>. This “black hole” and “shadowy force” suggest the liminal nature

<sup>19</sup> A. Szakolczai, *Comedy and the public sphere: The Re-birth of theatre as comedy and the genealogy of the modern public arena*, London 2013, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 79.

<sup>21</sup> E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon, R. Cormack, *Byzantine studies as an academic discipline. Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, Oxford 2008, p. 4.

of Byzantine regime. Yet, this dark or nil spirit, to borrow from Horvath's terminology, appears multifaceted rather than singular, hence hard to capture. This mutating spirit presents an alienated and excessive pathos, which in the Ottoman Empire leads to the "politics of extremes" or the sick man of Europe.

The label of sick man of Europe also relates to a fundamental question posed by Szakolczai: "whether there was any philosophy [philosophers] in the Byzantine world"<sup>22</sup>. The implication is that sophistry and tricksters rather than philosophers and real masters provided leadership in the political and social realms. Accordingly, from a sociological perspective we argue that the Ottoman Empire was the direct successor of the authoritarian spirit characterized by the replacement of philosophy with sophistry and tragedy with comedy. The pathologies which the spirits carried festered into sickness. The virus spread into the streets of Balkan towns and other European cities, contributing to the long-term distancing from Plato's political philosophy and the care of the self, and created the toxic environment for the transformation of Europe into the sick man. In that sense the concept or label of sick man of Europe is particularly useful for this analysis, because it clarifies Ahrweiler's argument. The sick man of Europe captures the transmission and mutation of the undead (that is viral and zombie-like) authoritarian legacy from the socio-political and international relations context into one of the roots responsible for the schismogenic and acute moral nihilism related to the European self.

#### **Authoritarian spirit as the sick man: the millet system in the Balkans**

The Ottomans' millets were political and geographical enclaves based on ethno-religious differences intended to separate religions. The system was an accommodative modern method of dividing and policing groups by giving, indirectly, enough room for indigenous national ideology to fester within the Ottoman Empire. This modern accommodative mechanism conversely seems to be incorporated into the early European modern state formation, presenting nations in embryo. Ivo Banac succinctly explains, while indirectly pointing towards Byzantine political legacy, this process of the millet system in relation to the eastern Mediterranean, in particular Bosnia and Herzegovina and the creation of the Serbian character. It is worth quoting in full:

[...] an aspect of the so-called *millet* system, whereby the non-Muslim subjects of the Porte were provided with an autonomous self-government under their respective religious leaders, the term conveying both nationality and religion in the Ottoman scheme of things. The non-Muslim *millets* (Orthodox, Jewish, Armenian) were subject to their own native regulations and to the Şeriat (Islamic Law). Their dealings with the Ottoman state were conducted through their respective community leaders. As ethnarchs of the Serbs, the patriarch of Peć thus had not only all the prerogatives of their spiritual station but also the authority that belonged to the medieval Serbian kings<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> A. Szakolczai, *Comedy and the public sphere...*, p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> I. Banac, *The National question in Yugoslavia*, Ithaca 1995, pp. 134-135.

In addition, this system or rather autonomy of different religious groups gave certain commercial privileges to European merchants and their ideas. The millet system thus enabled the infiltration of western ideas, particularly the French torch of liberty, deep into the Ottoman Empire. These dynamics further contributed to the liminal situation and uncertainty of individual and group identities. Yet the process of secularization and religious reformation in the Ottoman Empire under tanzimat reforms still would be a more difficult than imagined. Furthermore, the system's policy of juggling populations became critical in light of external threats. The issue of national and/or nation character then was raised and the question was whether millets at the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth turned out to be nations rather than just religious communities. Halil Inalcik contends that millets of "Non-muslim communities under the Ottomans" could, under Islamic law, convert to the "True Religion" or remain second class "citizens". The non-Muslim population would be 'voluntarily' assimilated into Islam as in the case of the Balkans<sup>24</sup>. For Inalcik the problem of minority and different religious groups was solved by separation and non-contact.

Christopher Bayly also inquires into the identity of the Empire and its people, and notes, the Sultan was at the same time "[...] Ottoman Khan, a Caesar [...] and latter Khalifa, or successor, to the Prophet and a universal king in the style of Alexander"<sup>25</sup>. The Sultan was a Muslim ruler and his regime could only provide patronage for different religious groups through the systems called millets. The Ottoman Empire allegedly differed from within itself, due to the exceptional element: namely, Islam, as to who is the chosen people, how it practices patronage, and how it accommodated groups. The position of the Sultan and the population policies illustrate the continuity and legacy of the authoritarian element. The authoritarian spirit of Byzantium infested the Ottoman Empire, strengthening the disease against the possibility of a politics of truth. Thus, regarding the Eastern Question, the Ottoman Empire's tolerant policies and above all the treatment of the conquered territory and the population were different, but not necessarily better.

Indeed Karl Barbir, Norman Itzkowitz, Dennison Rusinow, and Maria Todorova each contend regarding integration and decentralization that if non-Muslims (Gnostic sects like Bogomils, Orthodox Serbs, Catholics and Jews) in millets did not convert to Islam their social and political status would not be lifted beyond that of second-class citizens. Todorova rightly argues that the "Ottoman Legacy" continued deep into popular culture in the Balkans. The concept and institution contributed to the survival of the legacy of the sick man of Europe.

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<sup>24</sup> H. Inalcik, *The Problem of perceptions*, [in:] *Imperial legacy: The Ottoman imprint on the Balkans and the Middle East*, edit. L.C. Brown, New York 1996, pp. 23-24.

<sup>25</sup> C. Bayly, *The Birth of the modern world, 1780-1914: Global connections and comparisons*, Malden 2004, p. 34.

Millets, thus, offered freezing rather than the exit strategies à la Ahrweiler of primitive power-sharing, partition, secession, and federalism to appease the internal threats including to some extent negotiations with diverse nationalities. The objective of exit reforms then was to overcome the Empire's identity sickness, and thereby rescue its status as a glorious power within the European continent. The legacy of schismogenesis was strong, however, and the local struggles within the Ottoman Empire, in particular the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Kingdom of Serbia), continued creating the environment for historic events. Each schismatic event confirms the permanent liminality, tricksters' role, and pathogenesis. The Balkan Wars (1912-13) included two successive military conflicts that deprived the Ottoman Empire of almost all its remaining territory in Europe. Thus, the onus for the Byzantine political legacy remains the same: wrestling democratic selfhood and free speech whilst being suffocated by the tricksters of undead political institutions and policies.

Separation, millets, and the forceful conversion or naturalization (both linguistic and religious) of locals into Islam in the Ottoman Empire proved the best method to strengthen the Empire, and also the most durable political mechanism for dividing and ruling. Yet, the pathogenic essence of the institutions and policies undermined the expression of a democratic self, the very European identity which Ahrweiler contends triumphed. Today, these undead spirits haunt and eat at Europe and the broader West, as they did the Ottoman Empire. Twenty-first century publics must acknowledge the liminality and identify the tricksters and their theatrical spectacles of politics in order to aggregate societies of virtue and truth in which individuals and communities enjoy freedom irrespective of religious and/or cultural affiliation. Such a transition is necessary if Ahrweiler's Hellenist spirit is to supplant the current authoritarian (Byzantine) legacies.

## Conclusions

In sum and going back to the main question of the paper: What is the character and extent of the Byzantine political legacy? Certain political institutions manifested dominant authoritarian character which became political legacy, shaping some nations' characteristics and their dominant ideology: nationalism, which then under oppressed conditions, seeks to provide a state for a nation. The analysis focused upon the issues of the accommodation of national and religious identities and diversity in the region of Byzantium/Ottoman/contemporary Balkans. It nevertheless applies more broadly to other regions, including some of the former Soviet Union. In the Soviet period, authoritarian regimes used accommodative political instruments to offer limited rights related to language and ethnicity. Contemporary Central Europe – Poland, Hungary, and the Czech and Slovak republics – now face this past. As the New Europe, and relatively new members of the EU, these nation-states maintain an awareness of the problems which devel-



op, not from heterogeneity, but rather from the trickster elements or undead spirits of authoritarian regimes. The challenge is to defy the sick legacy and embrace equal treatment of individuals and groups.

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the source and consequences of permanent liminality in the political-legal administration of the Byzantine Empire. The paper argues ambiguous and incomplete identities of individuals, groups, and society associated with certain authoritarian political arrangements and consequent arrested liminal period(s) contributed to the decline of the Empire. Further, and significantly, the unresolved situation of disaggregated identity, or spirited away demos, persisted in the Ottoman Era and continues to infect contemporary socio-political affairs in regions in the Balkans and other countries of the former Soviet Union which now seek to balance the interests of a nation-state with the diversity of Europe. The paper does not consider the Orthodox Spirit, but rather analyzes the role of pseudo-intellectuals and sophists who derail the democratic and philosophical Hellenist traditions with authoritarian policies and tools. The research compares and links the institutional attempts of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires to manage and manipulate differences and distinctions through mechanisms such as theatricalization and the millets. The argument concludes that these strategies created the basis for the perpetuation of the sick man of Europe to the extent they focused on juggling the distinctions and identities of the empires rather than pursuing the development of the democratic self. Thus, in liminality is revealed and contained undead and viral authoritarian spirits, sometimes manifested in populist or extremist ethnic leaders, whose technologies trick the demos and disrupt the democratic imagination.

**Keywords:** Byzantine, Ottoman, liminality, demos, millets

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