Contents

1

On the Emotions that Remained on a Bus

I have never wanted to write this book, although no topic has ever been more important to me. Nevertheless, we do not choose topics, topics choose us. My father was a poet. Later on, I was told that such a profession does not exist. My father was my love, my joy and my pride. Even so, there is no street from my childhood I do not hate. Now I live on the other side of the city and each visit to my childhood district depresses me. I didn't cross a single street in my childhood, holding my father's hand, without him making me look back at least three times. If he didn't make me, I would make him. We were a parent and child–and allies. Still, this is not a biography about my father. Out of all the people on the planet we know our parents the least, that is the Hegelian dialectic, and it would be vulturous to claim the opposite. Even if I wanted to write a book about my father, I couldn't. This is a book about how communism and a small-town mentality hurt me, and not how they hurt my father. Be that as it may, at least my father found freedom in his death–from everybody, including his children. My father wanted to be remembered for and by his poems. They are his biography.

These few lines are mine. My father was arrested the same morning I first went to the high school with the ominous name "Josip Broz Tito." I submitted the necessary documents together with my friends from school, as we all had the best grades. Unlike the others, I had a lot of awards and diplomas, but unlike the others, my name was not on the list. Actually, it was, though below the line. At 6 o'clock in the morning on September 2, 1985, while my fa-

ther was seeing me off to my first school class, and less than an hour before he was arrested, he was consoling me–certainly a mistake had been made, as it was impossible I had been left out, and they would certainly accept me. And he was right. I was crossed out from the list below the line with a pen and added above the line. I went back home running to tell my father the happy news, but my father was no longer at home. I was the 35th student in a class limited to 30. At that time I didn't know I was an extra student, just like four others, and I never did find out what sins our renegade group of five shared. In the years that followed, I won many competitions for my high school, and forgot that they had forgotten to accept me once. And I never thought my name was added to the list by the UDBA[1] people. Today, as it turns out, everything I know I owe to them. Thus, it is logical to dedicate this book to them.

Although they removed most of the documents from my father's police file in a most orderly manner, the UDBA people nonetheless subsequently decided to hand me one previously never received letter–my father's suicide letter from prison, which was written on December 12, 1985: "Dear Jasna, I know that this farewell letter will hurt you very much, but I don't want to live anymore. One day, when you grow up, when you think about it, maybe it will become clear to you why I acted like I did. I could endure everything, joy and poverty, but not injustice…" (that's enough, the rest is for me). They left this letter because they are cautious, and because they know some things will never stop hurting.

At Josip Broz Tito High School we had practicum at the metal factory, which was situated near the city's hippodrome, and it was there that we were introduced to the working process of socialism. While the others were assembling to watch the horses, I stayed with the working class. At that time, the prisoners from the Idrizovo prison were grooming the horses, and I was afraid that if I saw my father with the horses I wouldn't know what I was allowed to do. Once, in the school library, the librarian whispered to me that my father was a great man. In the letter to my father that month, I wrote that the librarian sent regards to him, and said that he was a great man. My father asked me not to mention any names in my letters anymore, that we mustn't hurt people. As a result, my letters became even colder, if that was possible.

People lie when they say they have memories of their traumas. When you suffer a trauma you build a parallel world. While we were being jolted along in a crowded bus on the way to the Idrizovo prison, I always imagined the same scene: walking my dog, which I didn't have, in the city park. It was always the same scene, and always the same dog. In the canteen in front of Idrizovo, we waited for hours and looked towards the main gate. The visitors were either very loud or very quiet; there was no misunderstanding among us. We were taken into a big hall called "the dining room," and although dining rooms are cosy, there was nothing at all personable here. We always sat at "our" table on the left side of the buffet, which offered the same five things sold in the canteen, and it was always the same table, and always the same five things. My father would come out first, which was no small thing considering the hefty prisoners who pushed from behind. Once he was seated at "our" table, he neither talked much, nor loudly. To our left, the police officer, who in the spirit of Lenin was called a militioner at the time, paced up and down. Afterwards, we took the same bus home. I put my face to the window glass, looking with open eyes at my dog in the park. I must admit, the city park remains disgusting to me to this day.

I started studying my father's file, and was driven by one overwhelmingly urgent, personal need. I was neither hungry to find out who my father's spies were, nor why they spied; I wasn't led by the need to understand the great history; I didn't want to dismantle the logic of Yugoslav communism, and even less the small-town version of Macedonian communism. This came later, when the emotions were released from everything that eventually made any difference, or could still make a difference. I had to leave them at a bus stop so I could continue. At that time, you know, there weren't many bus stops where our buses stopped…

I wanted to come to peace with my family's past. I felt some kind of past loss, some intangible sadness. Imagine for a moment a person living with the burden of a sadness that cannot be publicly grieved for. I seized the meaning of this when I was reading Judith Butler's, *Antigone's Claim* (2000). The last paragraph of the first chapter reads: "Antigone refuses to obey any law that refuses public recognition of her loss, and in this way prefigures the situ-

ation that those with publicly ungrievable losses–from AIDS, for instance–know all too well. What sort of living death have these people been condemned to?"[2] Knowing that the total official number of personal communist files in Macedonia is 14,572 (unofficial sources claim more than 50,000 files), I started counting the children and the relatives of the pursued and persecuted under communism, asking myself: Where are these people today? What are they doing now? What are they doing with their sadness?

I started talking with my friends and colleagues about my father's file. It turned out that they all knew my father was in prison, that my family was excommunicated. Even so, they never asked, and I never told them. It was as if we had made a secret pact to console each other in silence, as if we had no idea where to go with our stories from the communist time; it was a kind of cultural amnesia, a consensus–talk about everything, but *that*. Of course, from time to time, I talked about my father's imprisonment to a boyfriend or a close friend. "You know, my father was in prison once, under communism." After the fall of communism, their reactions were always either complete silence or uneasiness. Not because they didn't have any empathy, but because there was no recognizable ritual they could invoke, no pre-defined method with which they could reply. Where would they place my sadness? What name would they give it?

Once, on the day of the anniversary of my father's death in 2002, at the commemoration at the cemetery in my father's birth village of Prisovjani, my best friend asked me: "We all cried, why didn't you?" I answered: "If I start crying in public now, I will never be able to stop."

Once, much later, I read a book by Viktor Erofeyev called *The Good Stalin* (2004). Erofeyev was a child of the nomenclature, the golden youth under Kremlin protection. His grandmother once called his mother to tell her that the child vomited because he had eaten too much caviar. Here, no one ever wrote such a book; the sons of Dedinje, Pantovčak and Vodno[3] played rock-and-roll, made "black wave" films (they were allowed), and from India they brought Buddhism and started living the "avant-garde." That sado-masochistic relationship between art and ideology finally ended when the majority of these sons later went *too right* to remember

their childhood. In *The Good Stalin,* it is described how young Erofeyev's literary outbursts prevented the Old Erofeyev, who was at the top of his Soviet career, from becoming Andrei Gromyko's Deputy Minister of the Interior. Erofeyev concludes: "Who am I to condemn the fame of the 20th century? If there had been one less bullet, just one less crematorium oven, I wouldn't have been in this world as well."[4] And it turns out precisely that *they*, damn it, had always had a more interesting story than "ours." We emerge from the scum of life, from the displaced. "They" were born as heroes, from the blood of those who had fallen at the altar of their lives.

When I publicly spoke about my father's file in December 2005, I started receiving anonymous and partially anonymous threats to the safety of my family (see the chapter entitled "Hard Wing"). And nobody is an idiot. I can live without my father's past, but I cannot live without my son's future. It turned out that communist-related topics are still traumatic, and they are not as naïve as they would seem to be, and I stopped trying to understand whether the police group with whom my father was arrested was part of the UDBA's internal sub-structures. That cannot be found out anyway, except by "interrogating" the same structures. Besides, my father's communist tragedy is far bigger than *just* the hard UDBA story from the 1970s, and far more tragic than *just* his imprisonment in the 1980s, as his total communist Golgotha lasted more than 40 years.

It's only in these last few years that the idea for phenomenological insight into communism comes to me. What kind of human engineering was needed to establish that ideology? What did it mean? What did the combination of communism and the small-town mentality mean in the Macedonian version of the story? How was the sacrificing of such proportions possible, and why did communism require that? And finally, what did that "Intimist" mean? What did being an intimist in communism mean, an intimist in our small-town world? This book is one of the possible answers to these questions, and it is an answer to the question of how I understood the period, and of how I see the Macedonian rabble of communism and the small town today.