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*Emotions, Language and Identity  
on the Margins of Europe*

KYRA GIORGI



Emotions, Language and Identity on the  
Margins of Europe

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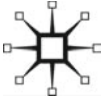
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DISASTER, DEATH AND EMOTIONS IN THE SHADOW OF THE APOCALYPSE,  
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# Emotions, Language and Identity on the Margins of Europe

Kyra Giorgi

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*To my parents*

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# Introduction

The Russian language is able to express by means of one pitiless word the idea of a certain widespread defect for which the other three European languages I happen to know possess no special term. The absence of a particular expression in the vocabulary of a nation does not necessarily coincide with the absence of the corresponding notion but it certainly impairs the fullness and readiness of the latter's perception.<sup>1</sup>

– Vladimir Nabokov

That pitiless word was *poshlost'* (*пошлость*), which the émigré novelist described, with typical relish, as a kind of kitschy pretentiousness, bad taste, banality and getting above one's station. Nabokov's point was that the absence in other languages of a single word describing a particular notion makes that notion less easy to comprehend or to translate conceptually. The lack of a non-Russian word that corresponds with *poshlost'* would, therefore, not only bind the concept exclusively to the Russian language but to Russian culture, history and emotion also. His broader proposition – that if a word has no linguistic equivalence in another language (that is, if it cannot be translated in a single expression), the concept it describes will not be wholly comprehensible in the culture of that other language – is at the heart of this study.

My focus is three word-concepts that are said to encapsulate emotions of melancholy, nostalgia and fatalism or regret (or a combination of any of these), and claims of linguistic and cultural specificity that have been assigned to them. The concepts – Portuguese *saudade*, Czech *lítost* and Turkish *hüzün* – will each be examined in their respective historical, cultural and personal contexts. I ask why they arose at the moments they did; what is particular about the cultural and national contexts in

which they emerged; whether there were any precedents for the word-concepts; and who promoted and/or invented them. Besides the fundamental task of critiquing assertions that *saudade*, *lítost* and *hüziin* embody and reveal collective consciousnesses, the book also aims to explore the wider phenomenon of self-identification through supposedly 'negative' feelings, and to identify the historical mechanisms behind the production of these emotions.

### **A summary of the three word-concepts**

Most words might be considered conceptual, in that they do not have fixed meanings but are cultural products to which particular notions, interpretations and responses can be ascribed. I use the term 'word-concept' to refer to *saudade*, *lítost*, *hüziin* and other 'untranslatables' because their conceptual elevation and alleged cultural specificity distinguishes them from the crowd.

The first under investigation is *saudade*, a word that in its general sense denotes a nostalgic, bittersweet longing. Centuries old, *saudade* is deeply embedded in Portuguese culture, and its importance as a cultural trope is not disputed. Given the prevalence of *saudade*, I focus on a single but important moment in its history: a short period during 1913–14 when the concept was recruited for the purposes of national regeneration and the dispute that emerged over this contentious program. Its main author was the poet Teixeira de Pascoaes, who refashioned *saudade* to promote a romantic and deeply regressive thesis of Portuguese destiny that he hoped would induce a 'Portuguese Renaissance'. Writing in defence of *Saudosismo*, the patriotic literary movement he inaugurated, Pascoaes asserted that the Portuguese were the only people capable of feeling *saudade*, that special longing which to him incarnated the Portuguese soul. Not all his contemporaries shared his enthusiasm. Pascoaes was opposed by, amongst others, António Sérgio, a thinker and educator with whom he engaged in an epistolary debate in the pages of a leading reformist journal.<sup>2</sup> This polemic, which neatly encapsulates the schism among the Portuguese intelligentsia about the correct way forward, is the primary text analysed in Part One.

The second concept is the Czech writer Milan Kundera's notion of *lítost*, which appeared in his 1979 novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*.<sup>3</sup> In Czech, the basic meaning of the word *lítost* is 'regret'. Debuting around a decade after the 1968 Soviet invasion of Prague, Kundera's re-imagined *lítost* is a kind of deterministic fatalism – an 'untranslatable' word that could purportedly explain the psychology of the Czech people and, by consequence, their alleged tendency towards

capitulation. Kundera proposed that the Czechs, in their congenital self-defeatism, had forfeited their natural place at the spiritual and intellectual heart of Europe, and it was partly because of this that only they could really experience the self-pitying lassitude of *lítost*. The concept is ostensibly a literary one; it is mocking and fanciful, designed to critique immaturity and misanthropic self-defeatism rather than stand up to serious scrutiny. Yet it also fits neatly into a continuity of Kundera's ideas on Czechness and fate, and is a useful point from which to launch an exploration of these. In late 1968 and early 1969, the dissident poet and playwright Václav Havel took Kundera to task for his notion of Czech destiny, and the two participated in a short but heated debate on the topic. Havel believed that Kundera was promoting a passivity and fatalism unforgivable in the context of the crisis of occupation. Part Two focuses primarily on the 'Czech Destiny' debate, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and a 1984 essay of Kundera's, 'The Tragedy of Central Europe'. Analysed in the context of his wider oeuvre, these texts help to sketch out the development of Kundera's ideas of Czech fatalism, in which *lítost* represents a kind of cynical halfway point between optimism and disillusionment.

Finally, this broadly chronological study moves into the twentieth century with the Turkish writer Orhan Pamuk's concept of *hüzün*. Formulated in his 2002 memoir *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, as well as some shorter pieces, Pamuk presents *hüzün* (literally 'sadness' or 'melancholy') as the 'melancholy of Istanbul'.<sup>4</sup> *Hüzün*, he explains, is a collective gloom that derives from the humiliation and shame associated with the loss of the Ottoman Empire, and is reserved for the quietly tortured and miserable inhabitants of Istanbul. Pamukian *hüzün* involves ambivalent feelings towards Europe and the West as well as those of rejection and inadequacy. His *Istanbul* book, with its prolonged exegesis of *hüzün* and general mood of melancholy fatalism, is the primary text investigated in Part Three.

This project was conceived following an extended stay in Portugal. Having left prematurely, I returned home with a vague sadness – a sense of longing and incompleteness. Until then, I had not given *saudade* much thought, but now it occurred to me, in the middle of a blistering Australian summer, that what I was experiencing was something like *saudades* for Portugal. Yet it was also clear that the *saudade* I had was not the same as that which would be felt by a Portuguese person far from their homeland. The beginning of my investigations into the concept coincided, quite by accident, with my reading Pamuk's *Istanbul*. The clear parallels between *saudade* and *hüzün* prompted me to retrieve Kundera's book, and the distant memory of *lítost* contained within it. I had been

immediately struck, in my first encounters with each concept, by how exotic and intriguing they seemed – and I could think of no words in my native language that could convey such complex emotions of desire and longing. Like the lack of affectionate diminutives, this was a real deficiency of English, I thought. Upon further investigation, I discovered that there were several commonalities between the three word-concepts as well as similar ones in other places. This was a phenomenon that had barely been touched upon, and so some kind of comparative study was in order. Ultimately, I decided to focus on the first three word-concepts that had brought me here – not just out of my own nostalgic desire to revisit these cultures emotionally as well as intellectually but because each provides a very good example of how ideas of fate, nostalgia and melancholy are intertwined.

### **The nature of the study**

A project of this nature poses several challenges. The most apparent is that of breadth. While each word-concept provides a lens through which to examine the features and construction of cultural essentialism, the elements that contribute to building these are almost limitless. Moreover, since the word-concepts and the texts promoting them demand an especial focus on the historical periods of their conception or promotion, it has also been necessary – as with any good historical study – to contextualise these moments within a wider cultural history. This can by no means be comprehensive in each case, and so I have chosen to refer to only some of the most relevant historical elements and trends. The primary texts describing the word-concepts, therefore, focus on the Portuguese 1910s, Czech 1970s and Turkish 2000s, respectively, but the historical-contextual scope of the book is more accurately from the fifteenth century (the Portuguese Age of Discoveries) to the present day (modern Turkey).

Although all three word-concepts were promoted by literary figures prominent in their day, it is important to stress that the present study is not a work of literary criticism; the primary texts are treated instead as cultural artefacts with their own personal, social and historical contexts. The claims made about *saudade*, *lítost* and *hüzün* are significant because they seek not only to explain collective psychologies and fates but – to greater or lesser degrees – influence how these national or cultural groups see themselves and how they are determined by others. Whether these claims are taken seriously or not is one thing, and this issue will be explored in the course of the study, but it ought to be taken for granted

that notions of collective identity can be influential in how people and nations conduct themselves and how outsiders perceive them. These notions may offer an alternative to the prevailing discourse of national or ethnic identity, or they may support it and, because of this, such word-concepts always have political potential. They may reflect real cultural phenomena or manufacture new ones. It is also worth pointing out that Pascoaes, Kundera and Pamuk are all prominent cultural commentators who have engaged, or do, in wider discussions about culture and identity. That they occupy such public roles makes their conceptual inventions all the more worthy of scrutiny.

My ambitions for this project have, perhaps mercifully, been tempered by my varying linguistic capabilities in the languages covered, and this is reflected in the source material. The Portuguese case, for example, relies significantly on primary sources written in Portuguese, and the translations that follow are mine unless otherwise stated. The polemic between Pascoaes and Sérgio is only published in Portuguese, as are most of the secondary texts associated with it. Although the two thinkers are widely recognised within Portugal, they are not much known outside of it, and their dispute is rather obscure in comparison with the one between Kundera and Havel, which has recently been translated into English and around which there is some scholarly English-language critique. In the Czech section, I have relied almost entirely on these English translations (and, on occasion, French ones), with the popularity of Kundera's work in the West along with the high profile of Czech dissidence in the 1980s, in general, ensuring that most of Kundera's and Havel's work has been translated into English. A better comprehension of Slavic languages would have allowed me to examine at first hand many other potentially useful texts. The Turkish section refers mostly to English-language works, whether translations or originals, but I have also referred to Turkish texts where especially useful, such as comparing originals with their translations. Waiting to become fluent in all three languages would ensure that this study had never been written, and I have done my best to compensate for my linguistic shortcomings through the judicious use of the translations and advice of others. In all cases, where the book has necessitated a high level of language comprehension (such as translating dictionary glosses), or a translation needed to be verified or finessed, I have sought help from more expert scholars, whom I gratefully acknowledge above. Any errors are, of course, entirely my own.

The use of secondary sources by scholars from those cultural backgrounds under investigation has also been invaluable. While they do not all explicitly address the question of untranslatability, their cultural

authority and sceptical diligence have certainly boosted the authority of my own research. It is no accident that the three word-concepts have arisen in cultures preoccupied with questions of national identity – the result being that there is no shortage of autochthonous works exploring these questions. Due to their sheer volume, I have been far from exhaustive in my use of these sources. In most instances, I have limited myself to consulting only those prominent commentators whose work has also been translated into English and to privileging the most important or relevant theories of Portuguese, Czech and Turkish identity.

These linguistic limitations highlight the problem of critiquing concepts coming from cultures other than one's own. A significant claim attached to these word-concepts is that they are 'untranslatable' (i.e., that the sentiment, inseparable from the word in which it is embodied, cannot truly be understood by those who do not understand the language), with the implication being that there is something ineffable about the feelings they describe since they are related to linguistic and national identity. Regardless of the truth of these claims, it is undoubtedly so that native understanding of a language *does* facilitate an otherwise unimaginable dimension of cultural insight. Indeed, the very idea of their untranslatability is part of the attraction of words like *saudade*, *lítost* and *hüzün* to audiences outside the cultures from which they derive for they appear to offer a glimpse of unfathomable worlds. No doubt, some of these fascinating and perhaps entirely relevant nuances of language remained hidden from me in the course of my research and will likely remain so. My hope is that this study will be read as an overview or introduction to the phenomenon of fatalistic word-concepts, rather than a thorough dissection of each culture concerned, and provide an impetus for further investigations.

The introductory first chapter that follows offers some theoretical and conceptual groundwork for the comparative investigation of *saudade*, *lítost* and *hüzün* to follow. It shows how concepts of nostalgic and melancholic fatalism may be integrated into collective identities and highlights some of the social and historical patterns behind them. This is not to claim a formula for predicting the use of such concepts but rather to analyse how and why the adoption of emotions widely viewed as negative in modern Western cultures might have a significant role in projects of cultural and national identification. It also investigates how certain social and historical circumstances have, in some cultures, contributed to the adoption of melancholic sadness in projects of identity and belonging, and how some concepts function as cultural symbols that can

enjoy varying degrees of cultural import and significance – depending on their context and audience receptivity.

This chapter begins with a short theoretical introduction to the themes common to the three case studies, starting with a discussion of the concept of culture-specific words and ideas of untranslatability. What does it mean to name feelings and emotions, or to label them untranslatable – can they truly be culturally and linguistically bound? An early example of naming and declaring such boundaries can be found in the early word-concept of nostalgia, with a mini-case study here. This is followed by a brief discussion of how sadness has been viewed in different cultural and historical contexts. Since each word-concept arises in a nation which could be described as ‘semiperipheral’ in relation to a supposed European core, I then look at the relationship between conditions of marginality and feelings of alienation in groups and individuals. This leads to a discussion of the mechanisms that are at play when a sense of exclusion relates also to notions of modern time and progress and how this creates a fertile ground for nostalgia and passivity. The chapter then skims the surface of a long European intellectual history of defining national characters, spirits and psychologies. Finally, it engages with the relationship between genius and melancholy, the role of the elite in the production of national stereotypes and these elites’ ambivalent attitudes towards modernity.

# 1

## Emotions into History

### Untranslatability

A good translator, it is often said, should be bicultural as well as bilingual. He or she should have a high degree of cultural and linguistic knowledge in each language that enables them to recognise, interpret and convey nuance and allusion. Where literary translation is concerned, then, they will be expected to convey not only the meaning of the text, but the *sense* of it also. Etymologically, to translate is to ‘carry over’; however, this raises the question of *what* is carried over. And, then, of what remains. Because even if one believes that a translator should aspire to these holistic heights, something does always remain.<sup>1</sup> The claims of untranslatability upon *saudade*, *lítost* and *hüzün*, whether explicit or implicit, all allude to a complex and privileged experience of emotion and history in which, even if the meaning of the word could be fully carried over, a truly meaningful understanding of it could not. Only from a deep emotional as well as collective historical experience, they suggest, would one even begin to comprehend what is at stake. Since it defies redefinition by others, a claim of untranslatability is always intended to be a declaration of cultural integrity.

As Anna Wierzbicka has pointed out, culture-specific words are ‘conceptual tools that reflect a society’s past experience of doing and thinking about things in certain ways; and they help to perpetuate these ways.’<sup>2</sup> Let us then pick up the thread left by Nabokov to look at another Russian word that provides a good example of this – *dusha* (*душa*). *Dusha* usually glosses as soul or spirit, but also refers more broadly to the spiritual sensibility and inner life of a person. It is an emotional and moral quality in that it is moral to be emotional – a *dush-evnyi* person feels strongly, even if those feelings are harmful – and *dusha*

is valued as the antithesis of the rational, the banal and the quotidian. Other Slavic languages have identical or near-identical cognates (e.g. *duša*, *душа*, *dusza*), but *ruskaya dusha* is said to be unique, bound up in a particularly Russian approach to interpersonal relationships, cultural production and history.<sup>3</sup> The concept gained traction amongst the Russian intelligentsia of the nineteenth century, who found it useful for defining their people's spiritual qualities against those of the degraded and excessively rational West.<sup>4</sup> In Dale Pesmen's enlightening study of perceptions of Russian *dusha* in post-communist Siberia, many of her respondents assume that while *dusha* is a constant element of Russianness, it is nevertheless vulnerable to historical circumstance. Some of them comment that the changes brought about by perestroika had injured *dusha* in people, because the system encouraged them to be selfish, and to focus too much on material pursuits at the expense of their internal lives; thus, while communism had made people's lives mean, their hearts had been purer too.<sup>5</sup> This is not unproblematic. By implying that Russians need restrictions for their *dusha* to thrive, these theories risk perpetuating notions that despotism, submission and autocratic leadership at the expense of personal freedom are the Russian lot and in fact allow them to 'be themselves'.

*Dusha* does not exist in a void, but is part of a whole Russian lexicon. Like any word, its meaning (or meanings) is understood through its relationship to other words and concepts, as well as through repetition and contextual use. In a sense, then, removing a word from its linguistic environment does naturally render it more difficult to translate, and this is precisely what Pascoaes, Kundera and Pamuk do when they single out their word-concepts for special attention. Being separated from their natural context frees them up to take on whatever new or embellished meanings the writer wishes them to have. A word becomes 'untranslatable' – or at least more difficult to translate – the moment it is separated from its lexical flock.

There are certainly social implications here, for untranslatability is as much about exclusion as it is about celebrating cultural uniqueness. Hegel observed that each party mediates its own identity through the extent to which it recognises the other, and the same is true of linguistic knowledge and recognition.<sup>6</sup> If we cannot comprehend the sociolinguistic bases of a culture, that is, if we cannot *read* it and if we cannot participate fluently in it, we cannot participate *fully*. And nonparticipation equals social (not to mention legal) disadvantage. Sociolinguistic literacy is an essential component of participation in a society, and the sense of belonging that derives from it.

Adding emotions to the mix further complicates matters. The idea that being part of a language group provides access to a particular consciousness is not new. But this idea reached its most coherent and influential form in the linguistic nationalisms of the nineteenth century, following the ideas of Fichte and Herder in particular. In Herder's conception, nations were organic entities that developed according to the spirit of their people, or *Volksggeist*, which was transmitted primarily through language.<sup>7</sup> The concept of the *Sprachnation* (language nation) made language *the* determining marker of national consciousness, and implementing language uniformity became an important part of defining new nations – often at the expense of minority language groups. The natural borders of language comprehension were elided with the new geopolitical borders of the modern nation-state.

The concept of untranslatability was implicit in these philosophies. The spirit of a people might reside in its language, but that language contained a whole world of experience, perception and feeling that could never be decoded. If language is linked to collective consciousness, then those who have more than one language have more than one consciousness. True bilingualism, then, might not always be desirable, for it can be perceived as a lack of patriotism or outright disloyalty, and the belief that 'those who do not speak like us do not think like us' then provides an excuse for the dominant monoculture to indulge in persecution and discrimination. Those who speak another language have a whole world to themselves to which they can escape and operate freely. The mystery of what they do in that world, and what they 'carry over' to the other, has been the source of countless anxieties and injustices.

### **Naming emotions**

What, then, does it mean to label feelings and emotions 'untranslatable'? We use language not only to communicate but also to classify – to give order to our world and make sense of our responses to it.<sup>8</sup> The words native speakers use to describe emotions are not 'culture-free analytical tools', but come laden with all the semantic devices which that language's culture imposes upon them.<sup>9</sup> In short, giving a name to something influences our perception of it. Accordingly, when a feeling or emotion is named it is recognised not just as a new condition but one that is distinct from others. So while we perceive sadness, melancholy, depression, despair, acedia and anomie as being related in the affective states they describe, they are unique in that each bears its own history and associations: depression is a pathology of modern life; acedia is

associated with the Christian concept of sin; and anomie is inextricable from its sociological origins. In a similar way, the English lexicon has adopted conceptual words from other languages – such as *Schadenfreude*, *ennui* and *karma* – that are not sterile and universal but bring with them a certain amount of cultural baggage. Other, more quotidian words – such as ‘algebra’ from Arabic, ‘tomato’ from Aztec and ‘kindergarten’ from German – have arguably not.

Where sadness or suffering are concerned, naming can bring them into public consciousness and, in so doing, reduce both the stigma of shame and the anxiety of isolation. Cultural and symbolic articulation via naming not only enlarges the potential scope of these feelings by moving them into the open but also validates them by giving them the status, in the long term, of historical phenomena – with all the pretensions to posterity and truth that go with this. The naming and classification of diseases provides perhaps the most obvious example of instances where afflictions have become respectable via official recognition. Moreover, as the ever-expanding new editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or *DSM*, indicate, it is easier to bring a pathology into the world than to get rid of one. Naming an illness gives the sufferer the comfort of knowing what is wrong with them, the practitioner a problem to solve, the pharmaceutical industry a target market and society a cultural reference point.

With our three word-concepts, which negotiate between an individual affliction and a communal one, the case is not very different. While *saudade*, *lítost* and *hüzün* are not, in the conceptual frameworks examined here, recognised disorders, attaching these words to their respective fatalisms goes some way towards creating a space for public acceptance.<sup>10</sup> Definition instantly grants a kind of legitimacy, however precarious and questionable this might be.

The act of naming shifts the burden to the wider community. The affliction no longer resides solely with the afflicted – now, it exists *in its own right*. If we as individuals are powerless against such feelings, it is no wonder. Their authority derives from those who name them, most commonly medical practitioners but also, as this study discusses, the ‘unacknowledged legislators’ of the world – the poets and writers who seek to define the collective body.

Naming an affliction can also serve to humanise its sufferers. The word *banzo*, for instance, was used from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries to describe the condition of severe trauma and disassociation suffered by slaves recently arrived in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> It covered various symptoms including apathy, cessation of eating, geophagy (dirt-eating), self-harm, catatonia

and psychosis.<sup>12</sup> In this case, the naming of the slaves' trauma allowed a Portuguese physician, Luís Antônio de Oliveira Mendes, to suggest that slavery was a disease-causing pathogen like any other.<sup>13</sup> Although the Brazilian slave trade did not end until the 1880s, and *banzo* as a diagnostic word has been consigned to the annals of defunct diseases, the term was revived in the twentieth century to describe experiences of longing and displacement that some Brazilians of African origin feel for their ancestral homeland.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Chagossian islanders, expelled by the British from their native Diego Garcia and prevented from returning, have named their homesickness *sagren*.<sup>15</sup> In both cases, having a word that can articulate the uniqueness of their suffering may not diminish it, but provides, at the very least, conceptual ownership and the small element of agency and dignity this implies.

The opposite can also be true. 'Drapetomania' was a word invented by Southern physician Samuel Adolphus Cartwright in 1851 to describe the 'disease' of slave abscondment.<sup>16</sup> In Cartwright's conception, a slave who defied God's natural order and desired freedom was simply ill, and many southern slave owners were delighted to be handed a pseudoscientific justification for their exploits. While Cartwright's invention was dismissed fairly swiftly, particularly in the abolitionist North, drapetomania as a relic of racist pseudoscience remains a good reminder of the dangers of definition.

Another is that naming a condition may actually perpetuate it or even bring it into being. Jean Starobinski has referred to the talk surrounding fashionable illnesses as a 'contaminating agent' which, by inveigling itself into the popular consciousness, actually causes people to suffer from conditions such as neurosis or psychosis.<sup>17</sup> Starobinski was of course referring to mass suggestion, psychosomatic illness and self-diagnosis, but his assertion that a named affliction is at once a comfort and a curse is a salient one. 'Verification' can be a powerful means of altering perception of the self and others, with the impact ranging from entirely harmless to very hazardous indeed.

### **Nostalgia: an early word-concept**

The case of nostalgia provides an early example of the problems in declaring a particular body of people to be imbued with a certain emotional disposition. The concept has not, after all, always been the apolitical referent of bittersweet longing that it is considered today. Combining *nostos*, meaning 'home', and *algia*, 'pain', the pseudo-Greek term was coined in 1688 by Johannes Hofer, a Swiss physician

who, according to the classificatory zeal of the time, sought to elevate *Heimweh*, or 'homesickness', into the pathogenic pantheon.<sup>18</sup> Troubled by the high incidence of debilitating longing among young Swiss soldiers posted abroad, Hofer put it down to the fact that few of them had ever been displaced from the maternal bosom – of either mother or motherland. This explanation was not, however, uncontroversial. It was denounced by some Swiss commentators as unpatriotic, since it suggested that the youthful soldiers were weak-willed or even cowardly, and so a disgrace to their nation.<sup>19</sup>

The pathologisation of longing therefore was, for some, insufficient to remove responsibility from its sufferers. Nostalgia was linked to an overwhelming love of one's country, which might indeed be considered a positive thing, yet it was at the same time representative of a distinctly unpatriotic debility. Could one suffer excessive nostalgia and still be a good Swiss soldier? Or might the failure to experience nostalgia indicate, in those critical early years of national independence, insufficient Swissness? Linked in this way to the duty of national service, nostalgia in the country of its birth became emblematic of the suffering of the armed forces, and a site of semantic contestation over loyalty and belonging.

It had proved itself early on to be a more complex and problematic creation than Hofer or his detractors could have envisaged. All this confusion over the role of individual will in one's submission to nostalgia highlighted how sorrowful, reflective emotions can be quite attractive indeed, particularly where they relieve the sufferer of the burdens of action and engagement. Yet it also showed how applying these traits to a national or ethnic group could present the danger of inventing a tradition of apathy that might turn out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy<sup>20</sup> – this, as we will see, was what Havel had in mind when he denounced Kundera's notion of a Czech fate. Such a possibility will remain, however, as long as people feel the need to define the boundaries of the communal self.

## Melancholy sadness

At the heart of this study are feelings and emotions that are generally perceived as negative in modern Western cultures: melancholy, nostalgia, fatalism, regret. All of these suggest inertia, pessimistic introspection and the absence of joy, and are generally considered harmful to the self or others, with sadness the primary offender. In a culture that makes a fetish of 'personal development', sadness is a kind of parasite – it