‘The Place of Violence Itself’: Continuity and Rupture in the Imaginative Geographies of Post-Yugoslav Cinema

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This paper examines films set in the post-Yugoslav space and highlights both the ruptures and unacknowledged continuities in the imaginative geographies of the cinemas of ‘self-balkanization’ (Longinović 2005) and ‘normalization’ (Pavičić 2014). Produced during the period of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001) and identified primarily with the work of Emir Kusturica, the cinema of self-balkanisation represents the post-Yugoslav space as a timeless land of violence, hyper-masculinity and ethnic tensions. This cinematic movement reflects imaginative geographies of the Balkans constituted by the West European discourse of ‘balkanism’ (Todorova 1997). On the other hand, the cinema of normalisation, which accompanied the political normalisation of the early 2000s, seeks to resist essentialisation and legitimise the Balkan Peninsula’s position within Europe. Despite stylistic differences between these filmic movements, this paper argues that they remain somewhat synchronous in their rendering of the Balkans as a pre-modern region spatially dislocated from and temporally behind ‘Europe’. More broadly, it underscores the extent to which neo-colonial imaginative geographies are ‘intimate enemies’ (Nandy 1983), as they are internalised and deployed even by those who explicitly aim to resist them.

Keywords: Balkans; post-colonialism; cinema; orientalism; balkanism; Emir Kusturica

Introduction

The two most prominent filmmakers from Yugoslavia in the first post-Yugoslav decade were the Bosnian-Serb Emir Kusturica and the Macedonian Milcho Manchevski. Kusturica's *Underground* (1995) and *Black Cat, White Cat* (1998) respectively won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and the Venice Festival's Silver Lion for best direction. Similarly, Manchevski's *Before the Rain* (1994) won Venice's Golden Lion for best picture and was nominated for an Academy Award in the category of Best Foreign Language Film. According to Frederic Jameson, the works of these directors present the post-Yugoslav space as 'the place of violence itself – its home and its heartland' (2004: 232). By this he proposes that their work focuses on the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia and renders the post-Yugoslav space as backwards, violent and temporally behind Western Europe. Jameson's use of spatial language – 'place', 'home' and 'heartland' – to describe these filmmakers' works does not just make for a neat metaphor. Kusturica and Manchevski built upon a pre-existing imagined geography of the Balkans discursively constituted since the mid nineteenth century through Western European travel literature, novels, news reportage and political discourse (Todorova 1997; Goldsworthy 1998; Hammond 2007).

Tomislav Longinović (2005) finds both filmmakers' works are archetypal examples of the 'cinema of self-Balkanization' – a cinematic movement that builds upon Western stereotypes of the region. Part of the reason for the success of Kusturica and Manchevski is that they represent the post-Yugoslav space as a timeless land of naturalised violence, hyper-masculinity and ancient ethnic tensions and in doing so their works reflect essentialist images of the region that circulated in Western media coverage of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001). For example, it was not uncommon for the causations of the wars to be explained by referencing medieval events, such as Serbia's defeat against the Ottomans at the 1389 Battle of Kosovo Polje, thus making inter-ethnic tensions appear as an essential and timeless feature of the Balkans (Iordanova 2000).

Nataša Kovačević (2013) and Jurica Pavičić (2014) argue there was a paradigm shift in filmic representations of the region at the beginning of political normalisation in the early 2000s. This process saw the authoritarian nationalist governments of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia and Franjo Tuđman in Croatia removed from office and new democratic governments initiated reforms with the aim of being accepted into the European Union. With the governments of Yugoslavia's successor states striving to

establish their European credentials, it became counterproductive for cinema to represent the region through stereotypes of 'Balkan' violence, pre-modernity and fragmentation. It was in this way that the cinema of normalisation developed, a cinematic movement with the ostensible goal of resisting essentialist images of the region. Certain aspects of it are noticeably different from that of self-balkanisation, such as more balanced gender relations, increased women's agency and the use of linear narrative structures. However, these works also underscore the extent to which imagined geographies of the Balkans have become internalised and are subconsciously deployed.

By treating the construction of imaginative geographies of the post-Yugoslav space in the works of Kusturica's *Black Cat, White Cat* and Manchevski's *Before the Rain* and comparing them to those found in films of normalisation, namely *The Melon Route* (Schmidt 2006), *Armin* (Sviličić 2007), *Snow* (Begić 2008) and *Halima's Path* (Ostojić 2012), this article demonstrates that both cinemas remain similar in their rendering of the region. It is clear that despite attempting to resist essentialisation, the cinema of normalisation employs many of the same stereotypical tropes found in the works of the cinema of balkanisation that construct the peninsula as a pre-modern space physically removed from and temporally behind Europe.

Balkanism and Imaginative Geographies

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes imaginative geographies as the perception of space created through discourse. He demonstrates that these geographies are 'made by the mind' and that although they appear to exist objectively, they are in fact fictional, with the geography of the Orient being 'something more than what was empirically known about it' (Said 1979: 54). These imaginative geographies are formed through dividing practices whereby socio-cultural groups create geographical distinctions to separate their land from the 'the land of the barbarians' (Said 1979: 54-5). In effect, spatial distance becomes equated with socio-cultural difference.

Although drawing upon Said's *Orientalism*, Maria Todorova (1997) differentiates Western representations of the Balkans from that of the Middle East. Orientalism is premised upon a binary relationship between coloniser and colonised with the Orient discursively rendered as irrational, passive and feminine in contrast to the rational, progressive and masculine Occident. What Todorova terms 'balkanism' is a more ambiguous discourse. Rather than an absolute other, the Balkans are imagined

as an incomplete version of Western Europe corrupted by the eleventh century schism, centuries of Ottoman rule, its accompanying legacy of Islam and communism. Without the attractive alterity of the sensual Orient, the Balkans is discursively constituted as a straightforwardly negative liminal zone: hyper-masculine, pre-modern, irrational and violent. Moreover, balkanism constructs the Balkans as 'a frozen image', suggesting that like orientalism it positions the region outwith progressive linear history in order to deny it agency (Todorova 1994: 460).

The construction of the Balkans as Europe's incomplete-self is clear when one considers Anglo-American travel writing on the region. In Victorian and Edwardian travel literature it is variously described as 'the backwoods of Europe' (Creagh 1876: 26), 'savage Europe' (De Windt 1907: 15), 'the cut-throat part of Europe' (Fraser 1906: 205) and 'this least-known corner of Europe' (Upward 1908: xvii). These statements suggest that the Balkans were understood as a European environment, in a geographic sense, where the values of the Enlightenment were inversed. Instead of Western clarity, progress and civility, travellers encountered Balkan chaos, backwardness and violence.

In Todorova's account of balkanism the discourse stretches unbroken from the late nineteenth to the turn of the twenty-first century. This, however, is an oversimplification as a more sympathetic representational form emerged out of Serbia's World War One alliance with the Triple Entente and the wartime travel of British women to the region under the aegis of various philanthropic organisations, such as Scottish Women's Hospitals and the Serbian Relief Fund. In the immediate aftermath the conflict, the wartime goodwill towards Serbia was extended to encompass much of the peninsula. As the interwar modernist revolt against Western civilisation gathered pace, the Balkans emerged as a popular destination for Britons seeking an escape from what D.J. Hall characterises as 'the restlessness of civilisation' in his Lawrentian travel book *Romanian Furrow* (1933: 168). These cultural currents resulted in the formation of a more positive tradition of balkanism, albeit one that remained premised upon an image of an unchanging pre-modern Balkans.

In general, however, Todorova is correct in arguing that the pejorative strain of balkanism became increasingly prominent during the Yugoslav Wars with the region described as 'the danger zone of Europe' (Winchester 1999: 37) much as it had been during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The very term 'Balkan' came to connote centuries old ethnic tensions and congenital violence with Tim Judah framing the war in Kosovo as just 'another [of the Balkans'] historic cycles of revenge'

(2000: xix). Robert Kaplan even suggests 'Nazism…can claim Balkan origins' due to the geographical proximity of Vienna to the Balkans, that 'breeding ground of ethnic resentments' (1994: xxiii). Such highly pejorative images remain in popular currency with *Vice*'s 2012 travel series 'Around the Balkans in 20+ Days' opening with a montage of fuzzy 1990s news footage depicting bombings, maimed civilians and mass graves as a voiceover states: 'it seemed amazing [Yugoslavs] had ever been able to live together…historically they had all wanted to kill each other'. Through this representational frame, the violence the post-Yugoslav space experienced during the 1990s and early 2000s is viewed as an innate characteristic of the region's peoples rather than as the outcome of political collapse and the entry of the region into an increasingly globalised and punitive economic system.

Discourses about place are also performative as they contribute to the constitution of the places of which they speak (Gregory 1995). As such, the imaginative geography of the Balkans produced by balkanism informs how the region is negotiated as a physical geographical space. In this way, the pervasiveness of balkanist discourse sees the imaginative geographies it produces superimposed onto real space, displacing the actual geography of the Balkans in the Western imagination. Said suggests that the process of othering involved in the construction of imaginative geographies 'does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction' (1979: 54). However, Ashis Nandy (1983), writing on colonial India, argues the ultimate violence of colonialism is the cultural hegemony of colonial values and perceptions that form a state of mind not easily resisted by colonised peoples, which he calls the 'intimate enemy'. By this he means that Britain justified the colonisation of India through gender and age-based dichotomies that were subsequently internalised by Indians who came to view themselves as immature, feminine and inferior in comparison to the mature, masculine and superior British colonisers.

Unlike India, the Balkans were never incorporated into a modern colonial empire. Indeed, it is a part of Europe that was conquered by the Ottomans, a syncretic, pre-colonial and 'Oriental' empire that, as Katherine Fleming (2000) notes, was bereft of the binarism – West versus East, European versus Oriental – that characterises academic understanding of orientalism. Moreover, the Balkan states that gained independence from the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries initiated a programme of nation building that erased Ottoman heritage and Muslim

histories with the intention of converging with the historical trajectory of Western European nation-states (Rexhepi 2018a; 2018b).

However, as Vesna Goldsworthy proposes, it was at this moment when the newly independent Balkan states were supposed to be joining Europe that they were 'symbolically differentiated from it' with their European credentials deemed lacking (1998: 12). It was in this period that the discourse of balkanism emerged and, as Andrew Hammond (2007) persuasively argues, it functioned to subordinate nominally independent Balkan polities to the economic and political imperatives of Western Europe much as orientalism did with the Middle East. For example, following independence, Balkan states relied on loans from Western European banks for infrastructure development and accumulated vast debts that inaugurated foreign control over the peninsula's finances. The nature of balkanism offered a convenient explanation for the poverty and regional warfare that Western interference helped create, as it suggested such conditions were the inevitable outcome of deficiencies in the indigenous inhabitants. Edith Durham (1904: 144-5), for instance, blames Serbia's financially 'desperate condition' on the idleness and corruption of the Serbs themselves and makes no reference to the debts the country owed to hawkish creditors. Statements like Durham's provided grounds for greater Western European interference in Balkan affairs. Few British travellers to the Balkans in this period saw the region's peoples as suitable for independence and instead advocated forms of external rule whether that be an 'efficient European control by representatives of all the Powers' (Fraser 1906: 15-6) or the 'immediate Austrian occupation' of the peninsula (Evans 1878: 83).

As the last suggestion for the future of the Balkans highlights, the late nineteenth century was the period in which the Dual Monarchy's presence in the peninsula grew, particularly after its occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Sandžak in 1878 and the annexation of the former in 1908. While Fleming (2000) characterises Habsburg imperialism as pre-colonial much in the same way as the Ottoman Empire, Catherine Baker (2018) highlights how the Austro-Hungarian administration viewed the Balkans in colonial terms as its own white man's burden. The British view of the Dual Monarchy's Balkan possessions was similar with travel writers regularly comparing the 'labours' of Austro-Hungarian administrators in Bosnia and Herzegovina with that of 'the same class of men in India' indicating that, in their view, both countries were being 'civilised' by European powers (Thomson 1897: 188).

Over the last century, then, the Balkans has been under various forms of external rule, whether that is administration from Vienna or as nominally independent polities constrained by Western political and economic imperatives. The supervision of the region continues to the present under the guise of European Union expansion. This process has limited national sovereignty by compelling Balkan states to initiate sweeping changes to monetary policy, implement stringent immigration controls and restructure political and institutional frameworks in order to pacify – or 'Europeanise' – the continent's apparently unruly eastern borderlands (Hammond 2006).

The subjugated status of the Balkans suggests that there is no essential barrier to the applicability of Nandy's concept of the internalisation of colonial perceptions to the region. Indeed, Milica Bakić-Hayden's notion of 'nesting orientalisms' demonstrates how inhabitants of the Balkans have internalised Western perceptions of themselves. She asserts that the imagined map of Europe is dissected by an axis of increasing orientalisation running northwest (Protestant, modern, rational and civilised) to southeast (Orthodox/Muslim, pre-modern, irrational and violent). There are a myriad of nesting orientalisms in the demographically heterogeneous Balkans with Catholic Slovenes and Croats seeing themselves as more European than Orthodox Serbs who in turn orientalise Muslim Bosniaks and Albanians, a process clearly at play in the films examined below. Moreover, the adoption of othering discourses by socio-cultural groups usually disparaged by them indicates their cultural hegemony (Bakić-Hayden & Hayden 1992; Bakić-Hayden 1995).

Cinema of Balkanisation

At first glance Manchevski's visually arresting *Before the Rain* and Kusturica's grotesque *Black Cat, White Cat* could not appear more different besides their setting within the post-Yugoslav space. Despite aesthetic differences, however, both films offer the Western gaze precisely what it has come to expect to see in the Balkans with the setting, *mise-en-scène*, characterisation and narrative structure placing the region outwith the imagined spatio-temporal boundaries of Europe.

The implied relationships between the Balkans and Western Europe in *Before the Rain* and *Black Cat, White Cat* are examples of Bakić-Hayden's nesting orientalism paradigm *par excellence*. Manchevski's work follows Alexander, a Macedonian photojournalist who has been covering the war in Bosnia, returning to his home country after two decades living in London. Due to his prolonged period of acculturation in

'cosmopolitan' and 'tolerant' Western Europe he struggles to understand the ancient enmities that divide Orthodox Macedonians from Muslim Albanians, something that eventually costs him his life. The overarching meaning of Manchevski's work comes from his use of contrasting settings with modern and urban London juxtaposed against pre-modern and rural Macedonia. The Balkan Peninsula may extend further south towards Greece but, given Greece's perceptual status as the cradle of Western civilisation, the tradition of romantic Hellenism and the country's affiliation with post-war capitalism, Macedonia is left as the most orientalised of all nesting orientalisms (Žižek 1999). In this way, Manchevski uses the modernity of London to accentuate the alterity of Macedonia and the temporal gulf between the film's dual settings.

Kusturica's work similarly juxtaposes its Balkan setting with the supposedly more modern, rational and civilised cultures to the northwest. Following the dubious business plans of Matko, a Roma engaged in petty criminal activities, and the romantic exploits of his teenage son Zare, the film plays out on the banks of the Danube – the main riverine artery linking central to southeastern Europe. The elegant cruise boats sailing downriver from Austria, complete with classical music and ballroom dancing, contrast with Kusturica's chaotic depiction of Roma life. The cruise boats connote the high culture of Habsburg *Mitteleuropa* with its typically denigrating attitude towards the Balkans. Indeed, for Prince von Metternich and other Habsburg elites, Asia famously began at the Landstraße, the road leading east out of Vienna, placing Kusturica's Serbian setting clearly outwith the bounds of respectable civilisation. The film's focus on the Roma, a people without a nation-state, also underscores the apparently threatening ethnic heterogeneity of the post-Yugoslav space. They are the most othered ethnic group within the region with their socio-cultural ostracisation symbolically reflecting the former Yugoslavia's own marginal position with regards Europe (Gocić 2001; Iordanova 2001).

Although Manchevski (2000) asserts that his film is not a teleological exploration of the causations of the Yugoslav Wars, it is hard not to read *Before the Rain* in these terms as he presents Macedonia as primeval land defined by tribal culture and laws. Intentionally or not, he plays into the tropes of balkanism and affirms the view, widely propagated in the Western media during the 1990s, that Macedonia was a powder keg of age-old inter-ethnic enmities ready to erupt into violence. The notion that medieval hatreds were the cause of inter-ethnic strife is clear in *Before the Rain* with one of Alexander's relatives proposing that the time is right to 'avenge our dead

over five centuries' suggesting that the Ottoman past is still very much the present. Furthermore, Manchevski's articulation of masculinity evokes the medieval period with bands of armed Orthodox and Muslim men – 'Balkan wild men' (Jameson 2004: 233) – roaming the countryside looking to settle timeless scores.

Todorova (1997) asserts that balkanism lacks the sexual undercurrents of orientalism. However, this neglects the sexualisation of Balkan wild men that occurs in the cinema of self-balkanisation. Rebecca West describes the Balkans as 'a world where men are still men and women still women' with her appreciative tone indicating that she views the pre-modern virility of Balkan men positively against a Western European masculinity feminised by liberal modernity (1941: 208). Although less romanticised, Kusturica's work also sexualises the region's men with *Black Cat, White Cat* depicting a stereotypically Balkan spectacle of guns, moustaches, misogyny, fornication and heavy drinking that reproduces the Western European vision of Balkan masculinity on screen. In this way, his film evokes a stage of historical progression that the enlightened West, with its supposedly equal gender relations and civilised articulations of masculinity, is perceived to have surpassed.

The narrative structure of both films spatially and temporally distances the post-Yugoslav space from the progressive modernity of Western Europe. In Kusturica's filmic world, character development is static with his characters remaining as violent, irrational and backwards at the end of the film as they were at the beginning indicating a lack of progress. The inverse of progress can even be observed with Zare, the boyish and least stereotypically Balkan character. The climax of *Black Cat, White Cat* is his wedding and his first act as a married, thus newly mature man, is to transform into the stereotypical wild man by grabbing a semi-automatic weapon, stealing a boat and kidnapping the wedding officiator.

Before the Rain has a non-linear narrative structure. Robert Rosenstone defines Manchevski's work as a new kind of history film: 'a history of what has not yet happened' – a warning against the future (2000: 190-1). It begins in the future, middles in the past and ends in the present, suggesting that the violence of the past is destined to repeat itself. In Manchevski's work history becomes a fatalistic cycle of violence with Macedonia located outwith the linear progressive time of the West. As a *New York Times* film critic put it, 'war in Macedonia would be nothing new' (Cohen 1995).

The setting and *mise-en-scène* of both Manchevski and Kusturica's work suggests pre-modernity, or at least failed modernity. In *Before the Rain* the timeless

landscape of Macedonia creates an enchanted atmosphere. Playing out in the mountains around Lake Ohrid, the setting is exotic and tinged with magical realism: crumbling frescoed monasteries sit perched on mountaintops; mystical-looking Orthodox monks perform ancient religious ceremonies; Byzantine churches and terracotta rooftops dot the landscape; and the daytime sky is a permanent ochre colour like that of pre-historic cave paintings. If it were not for the occasional Adidas tracksuit, that ubiquitous post-communist stereotype, and semi-automatic weapons, the film could be set anytime in the last half millennia. Similarly, there appear to be no roads in rural Macedonia with Alexander only able to visit a childhood sweetheart in a neighbouring village by traversing the rugged mountains. The only motor vehicle shown is a dilapidated bus that the protagonist takes from Skopje to his familial home suggesting that modernisation, if present at all, is corrupted. Indeed, a radical reading of *Before the Rain* suggests it is a tale of the symbolic rejection of modernity by the post-Yugoslav space through the murder of Alexander who sought to impose modern Western solutions to ancient and intractable problems.

Black Cat, White Cat also constructs a space of corrupted modernity. Kusturica adopts steampunk aesthetics, a style of design characterised by its use of anachronistic technology, that suggests the modernisation process in the post-Yugoslav space was abortive. Unlike modern Western forms of transportation, those used in *Black Cat, White Cat* are antiquated and perversely modified like the customised mechanical wheelchair of Grga, a vampiric local gangster. More so than Manchevski's work, *Black Cat, White Cat* exhibits elements of magical realism. Max Weber ([1917] 2009) popularised the notion that the modern West became disenchanted through the decline of organised religion and belief in superstitions and magic. In contrast to the rational West, Kusturica's filmic world is a pre-modern enchanted space where supernatural occurrences still coexist with daily life. Indeed, his film becomes a grotesque fairy tale as a bride turns into a bird; two supposedly dead grandfathers come back to life; and a romance develops between a tiny runaway bride and a giant that echoes *Cinderella*, complete with two ugly sisters (Iordanova 2002). The enchantment of the post-Yugoslav space is a leitmotif recurring throughout Kusturica's work as in *Time of the Gypsies* (1988), as the protagonist can psychically communicate with his pet turkey and control metal with his mind while the Roma community at the film's heart practice pre-modern religious ceremonies. At no point, however, does the supernatural become central to the narrative in Kusturica's films suggesting that in the enchanted former

Yugoslavia it is simply part of the fabric of daily life, much as it would have been in Western Europe before the rationalising forces of modernity took hold.

Before the Rain and *Black Cat, White Cat* clearly represent the post-Yugoslav space as outwith the spatio-temporal borders of modern Europe, which always lie perceptually far to the northwest. Both films imagine the region as a pre-modern space complete with the accompanying representations of extreme violence, *machismo* and irrationality. Indeed, the grotesque and mystical cinema of Kusturica and Manchevski says to Western audiences, 'we are like this, and in fact, we're even worse than you thought we were, and we love it!' (Jameson 2004: 235).

Cinema of Normalisation

As mentioned above, a number of scholars see the beginning of political normalisation as a watershed moment for filmic representations of the region. Films of normalisation are defined by a number of commonalities that attempt to resist the stereotypes found in cinema of balkanisation: they address the trauma of war; their characters live normal lives and develop throughout the narrative; they are usually set in cities or towns; and they attempt to discuss the values of neoliberal capitalism, often through uncompromising realism (Kovačević 2013; Pavičić 2014). One of the most notable differences between the cinemas of balkanisation and normalisation is also the increased agency of women. Indeed, Ostojić's *Halima's Path*, Begić's *Snow* and Schmidt's *The Melon Route* all have strong women protagonists with the former also focusing on women's experience of war.

The stereotype of the hyper-masculine wild men that populate *Before the Rain* and *Black Cat, White Cat* is resisted, and they are replaced with male characters psychologically traumatised from the wars of the 1990s. In both *Halima's Path* and *The Melon Route* men take their own lives due to their overwhelming guilt regarding their wartime conduct. Sviličić's *Armin* focuses less on the aftermath of war and uses the setting of urban Zagreb to reject the pre-modernity of the cinema of self-balkanisation. These films are also less experimental and auteuristic than *Before the Rain* and *Black Cat, White Cat.* In the cinema of normalisation, characters develop through linear and progressive narratives that reflect the narrative conventions of commercial films produced in Western Europe and North America in an attempt to resist the stereotype that the post-Yugoslav space is stuck in the past. Going beyond this, Marin Hirschfeld (2011) argues that since the beginning of political normalisation there has been no

dominant filmic style in the former Yugoslavia with nationally specific aesthetics breaking essentialist perceptions of the region.

The features of the cinema of normalisation discussed above resist the essentialisation found in the cinema of self-balkanisation. In a number of other aspects, however, such resistance falters with their representations of the post-Yugoslav space becoming startlingly synchronous to the works of Kusturica and Manchevski. This indicates that pejorative balkanist images have assumed a level of cultural hegemony and have become hard to resist even for those whose explicit aim is to challenge them. This is especially so in the imagined spatial relationship to Western Europe, depictions of timeless landscapes and the corrupted process of modernisation.

To turn to the symbolic geography of Europe outlined by Bakić-Hayden, both Schmidt's *The Melon Route* and Sviličić's *Armin* present their Balkan settings as outwith the boundaries of Europe, which are always a little bit more towards the northwest. Both directors are Croatian and while Western Europe may not perceive their nation as an essential part of the West they evidently do. As Slavoj Žižek (2008) argues, Croatia's history of Habsburg rule and Catholicism can function as markers of a *Mitteleuropean* identity that facilitates the displacement of the Balkan frontier further to the southeast towards Orthodox Serbia and Bosnia with its large Muslim population. In *Armin,* the titular protagonist and his father travel from rural Bosnia to urban Zagreb and in *The Melon Route* the protagonist, an unnamed Chinese refugee, tries to cross the River Sava between Bosnia and Croatia, which in the film is referred to as the boundary of Europe. The narratives of both films are structured around the journey of their protagonists from the Balkans to Europe, represented by Croatia, which at the time was in line to become a member of the European Union.[1] In this way, they fail to resist the spatial relationship found in cinema of self-balkanisation where the spatio-temporal coordinates of the Balkans are outwith European modernity.

Yosefa Loshitzky (2011) describes how filmic representations of migration often depict the European Union as a fortress. In the cinema of normalisation the fortified borders of Europe highlight the spatio-temporal remoteness of the Balkans from Western Europe. In *The Melon Route,* Bosnia is a closed world with the Sava becoming an insurmountable barrier to Europe. Indeed, the overcrowded boat piloted

[1] Croatia became the second successor state to Yugoslavia, after Slovenia, to join the European Union in 2013.

by Mirko, a psychologically fragile people smuggler, capsizes on the river drowning all on board bar the aforementioned unnamed Chinese refugee. Similarly, in *Armin*, the titular character and his father experience great difficulties in reaching Zagreb to audition for a German film. The characters take a dilapidated bus, similar to that in *Before the Rain*, from their rural Bosnian village to the city but it breaks down forcing them to traverse muddy fields and hitchhike beside motorways. The difficulty in crossing from Bosnia to Croatia in both of these films is suggestive of a vast spatio-temporal gulf between the post-Yugoslav space and Western Europe.

Europe is never visually represented in *The Melon Route* as the film's protagonists never manage to cross the Sava. However, given the protagonists' desperation to cross the river and the film's representation of Bosnia, the implication is that Europe is very different from the post-Yugoslav space. Schmidt's film may not portray Bosnia in exotic terms like Manchevski's Macedonia but his use of harsh realism verges on poverty porn that objectifies and stereotypes its subjects. In Bosnia, modernisation has been aborted: Mirko lives in a dilapidated shack with one semi-working light bulb; he fishes with homemade bombs; and industrial ruins are strewn across the landscape. As one reviewer put it, the country becomes a 'depressing, rain soaked…degraded realm' inhabited by 'zombies' (Young 2006). Schmidt goes beyond just representing Bosnia as a land of corrupted modernity. One of the more unexpected aspects of *The Melon Route* is the presence of a Native American panpipe band at the local market with Schmidt's Bosnia becoming Europe's Wild East. In this way, *The Melon Route* constructs the post-Yugoslav space as a liminal zone, much in the same way as balkanist discourse, where the rule of law has collapsed and been replaced by violent warlords and corrupt officials. Indeed, Mirko's climactic suicidal mission to depose the local crime boss turns into an extra-European orgy of violence with echoes of Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* (1969).

Sviličić's *Armin* has been praised as 'the most typical example' of normalisation cinema due to its unflinching realism and urban setting that resists self-balkanisation (Pavičić 2011). However, its dualistic setting of rural Bosnia and Zagreb, which in this case represents Europe, alongside its spatially cyclical narrative structure that begins and ends in the unchanging countryside reaffirms the displacement of the Balkans towards the southeast. The home village of Armin and his father is represented in stereotypically backwards fashion with stray dogs roaming the streets and ramshackle houses built on steep hillsides that close off the outside world. After their difficult

journey to Zagreb both Armin and his father marvel at the modernity of the anonymous big city. In one scene they are shown gazing in awe out of the window of a taxi at the glassy high-rises that tower above them while in another they gorge on McDonalds as if literally and metaphorically starved of modern consumer culture. As wonderful as the city appears to them at first, both become disorientated by modernity. This is especially true for Armin's father whose caricature yokelisms contrast with the business-like mentality of the hotel's German guests, who either fail to understand him or treat him with derision. The film ends where it began in rural Bosnia with the circular narrative suggesting that very little has changed as a result of their time in Zagreb and in doing so it fails to resist the stereotype that the Balkans are temporally located in the unchanging past.

Unlike *The Melon Route* and *Armin* that highlight the alterity of the post-Yugoslav space by depicting a journey from Bosnia to the West, *Halima's Path* and *Snow* present Bosnia as insular and cut off from outside influences, a stereotype that films of normalisation ostensibly aim to resist. *Snow* focuses on a tight knit community of rural Bosniak women, whose menfolk were mostly all killed at the 1995 genocide at Srebrenica. The everydayness of their lives is interrupted by the arrival of an investor and Miro, his local Serbian accomplice, who want to buy their land. It eventually transpires that Miro was involved in the murder of the women's husbands. *Snow*'s rural and pre-modern setting perpetuates the stereotype that the Balkans is temporally behind Western Europe much in the same way as Manchevski's *Before the Rain*. The women's way of life seems scarcely changed since the medieval times. Elderly Fatima weaves traditional *kilims*, which can magically levitate, adding a tinge of magical realism to proceedings, and the women collectively harvest plums to make jam that slowly boils over an open fire. Young and old alike help prepare the jam suggesting that it is a recipe passed down unchanged through the generations. The entire scene would not be out of place in a cookery-cum-travel show like Rick Stein's *From Venice to Istanbul* (2015) where he describes the food of the former Yugoslavia as 'unchanged by time. They cooked this way before the Ottomans, before the Romans, probably before the ancient Greeks'. Similarly, the women's village is so remote that they cannot sell their jam in the market. Instead, Alma pushes a cart through a remote landscape dotted with ruined houses, which presumably represent those left abandoned following the war, to a desolate stretch of road in an attempt to sell the goods to passers-by of which there are none. This sense of being entirely cut-off from the modern world is enhanced by the

arrival of the Serbian men as their car breaks down, they have no mobile phone signal and Miro resorts to walking for miles along muddy tracks in an attempt to reach help.

Halima's Path also has a primordial setting that evokes a sense of timelessness and remoteness from the supposedly progressive West. Ostojić's film tells the story of the eponymous protagonist's search for her estranged niece, Safija, who eloped with a Serbian man, Slavomir, before the war. The film opens with a panoramic aerial shot of the Bosnian countryside in 1977. There are no noticeable signs of modernity while in the background oriental Turkish *oud* music plays and the Muslim call to prayer echoes across the landscape. *Halima's Path* bypasses the state secularity of socialist Yugoslavia and evokes an earlier period of Bosnian history, that of Ottoman rule. In doing so, Ostojić's film appears to suggest that inter-ethnic enmities have been bubbling under the surface in Bosnia for centuries with the narrative pitting Serbs against Bosniaks and, much like the experience of Alexander in *Before the Rain*, when Safija tries to bridge the divide her own side turns against her.

Ostojić's film quickly moves to contemporary Bosnia but it is still a world that modernity has bypassed. It is a closed space, a rabbit warren of dirt tracks that lead to nowhere in particular. This perception is at its strongest when Halima attempts to track down Safija. She asks the driver of the typically dilapidated bus how she can cross into the Republika Srpska with the driver replying that it is impossible and that he knows nothing of life on the other side.[2] Modernity, if present at all, appears corrupted in *Halima's Path*. Slavomir returns to Bosnia after a period working in Germany with a flashy Mercedes, a tailored suit and a fashionable haircut. However, the next time we meet Slavomir it is clear that life in the post-Yugoslav space has corrupted his imported vision of modernity: his Mercedes is rusting in the garden of his half built house; his hair has grown wild and long; he dresses in scruffy clothes; and he spends most of his time idly drinking and brawling in the local bar. The former Yugoslavia, then, is represented as a space where Western modernity can only be corrupted with such representations failing to resist the stereotype of degraded modernity found in Kusturica's *Black Cat, White Cat*.

[2] The Serb majority Republika Srpska forms a constituent part of Bosnia and Herzegovina alongside the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Conclusion

Although Longinović and Pavičić argue that the cinema of normalisation resists the stereotypical images of the post-Yugoslav space found in the cinema of self-balkanisation, in many respects it can be seen that the rendering of space and time in these two filmic movements are closely related. Through their implied spatial relation to Western Europe, the hyper-masculinity of male characters, narrative structure and magical realism, both *Before the Rain* and *Black Cat, White Cat* represent their respective settings as outwith the imagined spatio-temporal boundaries of Europe. It is unsurprising that films of normalisation attempt to resist the dominant cinematic style of the 1990s that embraced Western stereotypes of the Balkans. Produced during a period where the successor states to Yugoslavia sought to demonstrate their admissibility to the European club, these films illustrate a balancing of gender relations through strong female protagonists and men debilitated by war guilt and trauma. Yet, as Nandy proposes, colonial perceptions can form a state of mind for the colonised that once internalised is challenging to resist. The same can be said for the imaginative geographies constructed by *The Melon Route*, *Armin*, *Halima's Path* and *Snow*, which render the post-Yugoslav space as a timeless region removed from Europe much like the discourse of balkanism they aim to resist. Without realising it, the very films that attempt to show the Balkans as just like the rest of Europe actually contribute to the region's continued spatio-temporal exclusion.

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