



Cinema of Flames

Balkan Film, Culture and the Media

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Part 1

Europe: Location or Destination? Narrative and History

Chapter 2

Are the Balkans Admissible?

The Discourse on Europe

Hungarian director István Szabó's *Redl Ezredes/Oberst Redl/Colonel Redl* (1985) is set in the last years of the Austro-Hungarian empire and tells the life story of Redl, a career soldier of lower-class origins who progresses in an army dominated by the aristocracy. When at military school, young Redl befriends von Kubiny, the heir of a rich aristocratic family. One snowy day the von Kubiny boy takes the Redl boy to visit his family's estate. The lackeys take the boys' hats and gloves, and a minute later they are seated at a table set with porcelain dishes and silver utensils. The Redl boy is very careful in manipulating the fork and knife, keen to act as an equal as far as table manners are concerned. Yet he is surrounded by so many unfamiliar things that he cannot help feeling clumsy: the lady of the house addresses the Dalmatian in an unknown language ('Sit down!'); then Redl is asked by the grandfather if he is a Pole. The question about his background triggers a jumbled explanation, in which Redl elaborates that his father was a Ruthenian from the Ukraine, but that he is also descended from an impoverished family of German aristocrats. His mother, however, was Hungarian, and to prove this superior line in his pedigree, Redl starts singing a Hungarian song, which reverberates incongruously in the embarrassed silence of the room. Then Redl abruptly shuts up. Despite his awkward manner he seems to have managed to establish some credentials and claim admittance to the higher social circle of the von Kubinys. However, his hosts quickly re-establish control, switching to French, a language of which Redl is ignorant, and the boy is now effectively excluded. The grandmother declares, 'Il est charmant, ton copin' ('Isn't he cute?'). The von Kubiny boy tells her that Redl does not speak French, to which she responds: 'Il faut en apprendre, mon cheri. S'est aussi important, pas seulement le chevaux' ('One needs to learn it, my dear. It is equally important, not just the horses'). Finally, the grandfather paternalistically pats Redl's hand.

Admissibility is the subject of the film from this moment on. Admissibility in this case is based not on dress code, knowledge and demeanour, but on presumptions about belonging to an ethnicity and a class.

Yet Redl, in spite of his unsatisfactory background, is situated on the territory of Austria-Hungary, and is standing face to face with the *European*. Even though he is the son of a provincial station-master, he has an inborn European legitimacy, similar to the Europeanness of the marginal personages of Joseph Roth's classical Austrian novel *Radetzkiy March*. Redl faces directly those from whom he must claim his admissibility, a situation full of subtle clashes and inequalities.

If one moves somewhat further to the south-east, to the Balkans, the encounter with the *European* looks different. The desire to be closer, to be admitted, is there but the encounter with the *European* normally does not occur face to face as it does in *Colonel Redl*. Yet, issues in the Balkans are often conceptualised by reflection on *Europe*, by placing things in a *European* context.

The events of a Bulgarian film from 1967, *Privurzaniyat balon/The Attached Balloon*, are situated entirely in a remote Balkan village. The opening scene, however, features a drummer, who reads aloud announcements to the villagers: 'As of today, in order to coordinate the local time with the Axis powers, European time will be introduced in the Kingdom of Bulgaria. Everybody is to set their clocks an hour back.' Then the camera shows the early morning routine in the village – ducks and hens, goats and cows waking up, and a rooster crowing at first light – which now translates to 5 a.m. European time. From there on everything will be taking place within the small universe of the village, and it is only the crow of the rooster that makes the claim of admissibility to Europe.

Another Bulgarian film, *Lachenite obuvki na neznayniya voin/The Patent Leather Shoes of the Unknown Soldier* (1979), is also set in a small Bulgarian village, and also, from the beginning, positions the whole story in relation to Europe. The film-maker, Rangel Vulchanov, is shown in front of Buckingham Palace, where he is shooting the majestic changing of the guard. Three minutes into this sequence, the footage of the Queen's guards is suddenly intercut with scenes from Bulgarian peasant life, and the sound of a prolonged Bulgarian folk song merges with the sounds of the British brass band. The images of the British soldiers begin to overlap with the images of the Balkan peasants dancing at a wedding, and the action gradually moves to the native village of Vulchanov. From there on the film-maker will be telling a story from his childhood and all events will take place in his native Bulgaria. But for an opening he chooses *Europe*. Another one of Vulchanov's films, the 1984 *Posledni zhelaniya/Last Wishes*, opens with scenes depicting clashes between soldiers on the battlefields of World War I. A ceasefire is announced, and European dignitaries appear in glamorous attire on the battlefield. It becomes clear that a short-term truce has been negotiated so that the annual golf match of the European excellencies can take place.

Unlike *Colonel Redl*, in these Balkan films the relationship to Europe is not shown within the same cinematic frame, but constructed through juxtaposi-

tions which automatically render the construct questionable. Moreover, the construct of 'Balkan in relation to Europe' heavily relies on the mediation of selected images and concepts, and thus opens up space for misperceptions. Nevertheless, the self-image of the Balkans is always constructed within a conditional *European* framework, and this is the framework which I would like to problematise and examine in this chapter.

Europe here is the cultural and socio-economic entity which overlaps approximately with the values that are believed to provide the basic principles for the cultural and social life in the Western part of the continent that goes by the same name: democracy, freedom of enterprise, free speech, respect for human rights, individualism. But most of all it is synonymous with prosperity and power that ensure respect. *Europe* is the opposite of everything associated with the Third World – for example, Africa. In the Balkan imaginary, Africa is associated with the foolish, Europe with the sophisticated. Africa is tribal, Europe is civilised; Africa is poor, Europe is affluent; Africa is incompetent, Europe is efficient; African affairs are messy, European interests are stringently managed; Africa is waste, Europe is cultivated; Africa is unattractive, Europe is beautiful; Africa is an overgrown jungle, Europe is a landscaped park. In the Balkan imaginary, Balkans may appear associated with all the characteristics that describe the Third World, but it is just an appearance. Their 'European-ness' is a profound characteristic of their inner essence that has been taken away from them and that is to be reclaimed.

Here Europe often stands for 'the West' in general. Terms such as *Europe* and *European* are used qualitatively, and are endowed with a glare of superiority, actually signifying the West in general and often including North America. Linguist Victor Friedman observes this 'ambiguity of the term *Europe*' even on the level of everyday language use, resulting in frequent discrepancies between the geographical and the political/cultural terms articulated even at the level of linguistic tropes. For example, in spite of being an American, in Macedonia he is commonly introduced as someone 'from Europe', Europe here being synonymous with the West. He also quotes the Greeks who say, 'I am going to Europe for my vacation', as if Greece were not part of that entity (Friedman, 1996, p. 128). The West is also often synonymous with 'the world', and when one claims that Balkan problems are problems of the world, or that the world does not care, one is actually implying only that Western Europe and North America are indifferent.¹

The main question I ask in the course of this exploration is: How does it come about that belonging to *Europe*, a paramount element in their own public discourse, turns out to be so problematic and even improbable for the Balkan countries?

I would claim that the answer is to be found in the elusive nature of the con-

cept of *Europe* itself, which facilitates the series of misperceptions ensuing from the positioning of the Balkans in relation to the ideal (*Europe*).

I will first identify and critically examine some of the implicit tropes of the ideology that aims at securing a *European* standing for the Balkans within their own present-day cultural and political discourse. I should immediately underline that this discourse is carried out country by country, most often building up on specific national distinctions rather than on commonalities with the other countries in the region. The cohesive element is that while each Balkan country only negotiates for itself, the subject of the plea – recognition of an inherent *Europeanness* – is identical transnationally, as are most of the arguments.

Second, I will explore the tropes in which the *European* standing of the Balkans is being problematised within the present-day Western cultural and political discourse. I will focus specifically on the substitution of the socio-political approach to the Balkans with a culturist one, and on the ambiguous and even controversial role that mediated representations play in this process.

As a third step I will put these two discursive lines side by side, which will allow me to point out a series of sensitive issues and discuss the ambiguities which come about as the mediation of the discourse unravels.

In relation to the Balkans, the concept of *Europe* has a double function – first as an inclusive and then as an exclusive one. The inclusive function can be quickly summarised: geographical proximity and shared historical past are in the roots of the extended rhetoric which views the Balkans as inherently *belonging to Europe*. The exclusive function states the opposite case: geographical remoteness and idiosyncratic historical experience are in the roots of the culturist argument that sees the Balkans as inherently *unfit for Europe*. In either case, the discourse is built on a deep-seated perception of the Balkans as a cultural entity which is defined in relation to Europe. Even if liable to negotiation, this very premise necessarily confines the discussion to abstract issues of suitability and admissibility, making any practical steps of political and economic coexistence dependent on the culturist perceptions of the region.

The Balkans within Europe

Geographically, the Balkans are part of Europe. This geographical location is something like their *habeas corpus*, hence the tremendous weight given to issues of territory – it is not just any territory, it is a guarantee of European presence. Culturally, as their history suggests, the Balkans are part of Europe as well. Or at least this is what is believed in the Balkans, where national ideologies depict the respective nations not as a 'margin' but as a 'bridge' between the Occident and the Orient.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the discourse on Europe, dormant during the cold war years, re-emerged in the public sphere of all the former Soviet bloc countries. This 'Europhoria' took a variety of shapes. The actual name 'Europe' now

came into more prominent use than had ever been the case before, with all sorts of establishments now so called – a hotel and a café named ‘Europe’ appeared in every big Balkan city, and sometimes a cinema theatre (in Zagreb, it was the ‘Balkan’ cinema that changed to ‘Europe’). The first operetta to be staged in Sarajevo in 1995 was titled *Europe*.² Primary and secondary school education, which had always been fairly Eurocentric (by which I mean concentrating on the developed world, including North America and the West of Europe, considering one’s nation as inherently belonging to the tradition of the developed Western nations and largely ignoring the problems of the rest of the world), was becoming even more so in the 1990s, and the media’s choice of which issues to cover would suggest proximity to Europe.

Realising that they ‘are in Europe, but not quite’ Aleko Konstantinov in 1898 noted that, another trope in the public discourse of the Balkan countries is the one of ‘return to *Europe*’.

The return to *Europe* has been the major task on the agenda of all East European countries since 1989. However, the chances for the Balkans to ‘return’ are far more remote than for the countries of *Mitteleuropa* (Central Eastern Europe), and not simply because of geographical location or because of the socio-political situation and economy. Back in Yalta in 1945, no difference between the Balkan and Central Eastern Europe was deemed essential and most of the Balkan countries, including Yugoslavia, who broke out only later, were transferred to the Soviet sphere *en bloc*. In the 1990s, however, the re-admission to Europe, was made conditional and was carried out individually, country by country. During the decade, while Central Eastern Europe was being reconceptualised and ‘re-admitted’ to the European realm, the Balkans became a chunk of the former Eastern bloc that would be left outside the cultural boundaries of Europe. Developments within Central Eastern Europe, such as the creation of the Visegrad economic alliance, the special provisions of the Partnership for Peace programme, and the appeal that their application for admission to NATO is given priority consideration, furthered the dissolution of Eastern Europe into Central Eastern European and Balkan parts.

New resentments between the Balkan countries appeared that evolved around the questions of their proximity to or suitability for Europe. Countries located geographically on the margins of the Balkans and closer to the West began struggling for the chance to be admitted to the Central European space, and public opinion in these countries abhorred any instance in which they were referred to as ‘Balkan’. Romanians thought of themselves as an extension of the Frankophone who just happened to be located in the eastern part of Europe. (This explains Romania’s outrage when in 1993 Bulgaria also applied for membership in the community of Frankophone countries claiming that 37 per cent of its subjects had French as their second language.)

Since their separation from Yugoslavia in 1991, Croatia and Slovenia have issued state documents explicitly stating their desire not to be referred to as 'Balkan'. In 'Why and Since When Are We Afraid of the Balkans?' Croatian anthropologist Dunja Rihtman-Augustin brings into discussion a number of examples from Croatian public discourse that demonstrate this abhorrence of belonging to the Balkans, revealing the trope as one of the main rhetorical figures of Croatian populist politics (Rihtman-Augustin, 1997, p. 35). This abhorrence has long been an element of Croatian politics. In the 1930s, for example, the leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, Stjepan Radić, insisted: 'Our duty is to Europeanize the Balkans, and not to balkanize the Croats and Slovenes' (quoted in Cohen, 1993, p. 15).

'A return to Europe implies that Europe existed in the same form at the time of departure as it does today, on the eve of the return,' noted Misha Glenny in his *The Rebirth of History* (Glenny, 1990, p. 216). In other words, a precondition for the 'return' of various countries in the east of Europe would be to restore a Europe that resembled the one of which they used to be a part. Different countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, however, have 'departed' at different times, and therefore the time of departure which needs to be restored to justify an adequate place for those seeking re-admission to Europe varies from country to country. It is misleading to think that 'the point of departure' is the time when the Eastern bloc left *Europe*, i.e. at the end of World War II (an assumption made by many political scientists).

The continuing dissolution of the former Eastern bloc into, roughly speaking, two entities – Central Eastern Europe and the Balkans – is structured around two different points of departure, a distinction which was blurred by the cold war division lines. Re-establishing a cultural and social space for the 'return' of *Mitteleuropa* was a different project than the one for the 'return' of the Balkans.

To 'return' to Europe, the Central Eastern European countries needed a restoration of the status which they had enjoyed between World War I and World War II. For the Balkans, however, the point of departure was different, and the 'return' therefore depended on the restoration of a different set of factors. Most would set their 'departure point' as far back as the time of the Ottoman invasion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a conquest that effectively meant isolation and abandoning the modernisation processes that were to be shared by most of the other European nations. A more recent possible point of 'return' could be set at the end of nineteenth century or early in the twentieth century, when national liberation struggles succeeded in establishing new independent states. In a move to 're-enter' Europe at that time, many of the countries in the region established new royal dynasties, with monarchs often recruited from across the European courts. The popular pro-monarchist tendencies in many of the Balkan countries today are an expression of the desire to re-negotiate a

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similar set of circumstances for 're-admission', which they believe could be negotiated for them by the offsprings of their respective monarchs, expelled at the time of communist takeover and now living in various European locations.

The desired concept of a Europe which one could 're-enter' also varies from country to country in the Balkans themselves. In order to 'enter' *Europe*, Macedonia, for example, would need a different set of circumstances than Albania or Romania. This issue is explored in extensive detail in regard to Greece by Michael Herzfeld, who calls the Greeks 'aboriginal Europeans', and who concentrates in his study on the basic rhetorical trope of Greek identity – the secularised idea of the fall from Paradise (Herzfeld, 1987, p. 20): 'In a discourse of culture where the highest accolade is to be called "European," it proves a justification of the frequently alleged national failure to live up to that demanding model' (ibid., p. 22). In his view, the metaphor of a fall from cultural grace is an attribute of the national self-image. In this context, the interpretation given to Turks (and therefore Islam) becomes particularly relevant, as they are held accountable for the alienation from the 'European'. He writes:

By the nineteenth century, the European standard of cultural excellence had become central to official nationalism. Perhaps the best measure of western cultural and political hegemony was its eventual success in persuading the Greeks to adopt the Turks as their natural enemies, and to treat Turkish elements in Greek culture as its worst failing – as a source of cultural pollution (ibid., p. 29).

Albanian Ismail Kadare makes the alienation from and the 'return to Europe', a leading motif. 'The Albanian nation, banished from Europe for so many years,' Kadare writes, 'knocks again, like the prodigal son, at its gate' (Kadare, 1995, p. 181). To Kadare, the return is unconditionally linked to denouncing Islam as an alien force, touting Christianity as an entry pass to Europe:

I am convinced that Albania will most likely embrace Christianity since it is linked to the country's culture, and to a nostalgic memory of the time before Turkish rule. In the coming years, Islam, which arrived late in Albania in the baggage of Ottoman overlords, will weaken – first in Albania, and then in Kosovo. Christianity, or rather Christian culture, will hold its own throughout the country. In this way, one evil (the 1967 prohibition against religious practice) shall give birth to good. Albania will carry out a great rectification of history that will hasten its union with the mother continent – Europe. (ibid., p. 34)

To claim their re-admittance to Europe, other countries, like Bulgaria and Serbia, would need to go back to the time they received their emancipation from the Ottoman empire, or even further back, to the nineteenth century, when first

evidence of the formation of a national consciousness can be discovered. The best guarantee of admission for them, however, would be a restoration of the circumstances in Europe at the time of the Ottoman invasion in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as this is the only time when their identity as a part of Europe is not likely to be questioned.

As such a remote departure point can barely be restored, a different project is taking place in these countries: an ideological restoration of similar premises. The history of these countries, which were conquered by the Ottomans in the late fourteenth century but managed to preserve their specific Slavic cultural and national identity throughout five centuries, until the end of the nineteenth century when their European identity re-emerged, is being stressed repeatedly. Unlike the imperial legacy of Austro-Hungary in relation to Central Eastern European countries (a legacy which is considered to have boosted social progress and is responsible for their privileged status in today's Europe), Ottoman rule is considered to have been a major interruption in the development of the Balkan countries as a part of Europe, and is conceptualised as a significant impediment to the fulfilment of these nations' European goals. The border between Christian and Islamic civilisations is treated as a threshold between modernity and traditionalism.

With a substantial contribution from historians, media and politicians in Bulgaria and Serbia today, Europe is being reconceptualised as a fragile area living under the permanent threat of an Islamic invasion, against which they act as the south-eastern shield. Such a situation would undoubtedly restore the status of the Balkan countries as ones that are *within* the European realm, albeit as its outpost. Thus, stressing the clandestine present-day European fears of a possible expansion of Islamic fundamentalism becomes essential to nationalist ideologies throughout the Balkans. It is a commonly held idea that the Balkans can be important to Europe only if they find themselves in the path of another Islamic penetration of the continent. As a result, no matter how abstract, the scenario of such an invasion is being debated again and again, validated by the very fact that it is being discussed. The 'shielding Europe from the fundamentalists' trope becomes a major ideological line. The belief that Europe will not allow the creation of an Islamic state in the south-east (first Bosnia and later, Kosovo), for example, was often spelled out by politicians and journalists not only in rump Yugoslavia but also throughout the Balkans. The arrogance of many of the aggressive nationalists in Serbia stems not from the fact that they do not fear punishment, but because they believe that the only place from where punishment could come, the West (Europe and America), actually secretly sympathises with them. American and West European politicians who insist on human rights and speak up in defence of Muslims are, they believe, performing a public relations stunt.

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Turkey has a special role in this 'shield against Islam' ideology. Although it is probably the least fundamentalist country when considered in a wider Islamic context, it is the only Islamic country which, until early in this century, had a substantial foothold in the Balkans. This explains the identification of Turks as 'natural enemies', as noted by Herzfeld in the case of Greece, or the huge ideological importance attributed to the battle of Kosovo in Serbia, or the outrage triggered by a 1990 statement by a Bulgarian politician, an ethnic Turk, who had claimed that 'the way to Europe goes through the Bosphorus'.³

Another specifically Balkan trope is maintained by historians and journalists from the region: our nations originally contributed to the project of modernity no less than any 'genuinely' European ones, and therefore we are as much a part of Europe as others. An example of this ideology is found in the popular art history theories of the 'proto-Renaissance' in the Balkans (a pictorial style manifested mostly in religious painting), which they see as bearing essential similarities to the masterpieces of the Italian Trecento (Bozhkov, 1969; Radojčić, 1969). The advancement of this line in the artistic heritage of the region was brutally interrupted by the Ottoman invasion at the end of the fourteenth century that cut the ties with the western part of Europe and led the Balkan cultures away from the general path of development that the West European countries, 'shielded' by the selfless sacrifice of their Balkan counterparts, followed. The point here is to prove that the Balkans were a cradle of European culture and that their history is intrinsically connected with Europe's development.

A further modification of this same argument is a trope which has become an intrinsic part of Balkan education and in the process of conceptualisation and re-negotiation of the inherent Europeanness of the Balkans – namely, that the Balkans are superior to the West of Europe. Back in 1933, when unsuccessfully tried by the Nazis on concocted charges of plotting the fire at the Reichstag, Bulgarian communist hero Georgi Dimitrov gave a well-publicised speech in which he quoted the media's description of him as a 'dark Balkan subject' and a 'barbarian'. He countered these slurs by saying that, at the time when German emperors were speaking Latin in public and only used German when talking to their horses, Bulgarians had a civilised nation-state and their own alphabet (Dimitrov, 1986). This trope of civilisational superiority and pride in one's higher (but flawed) heritage is one of the pillars of nationalist education throughout the Balkans, and is repeated even by the least educated in society. It is a trope used, for example, by a Serbian paramilitary, one of the peasant characters in the 1996 Yugoslav film *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame*, who, while holding a fork, delivers a monologue that describes how the Germans ('Krauts') were eating with their hands at a time when use of the knife and fork constituted basic etiquette for any ordinary Serb. Thus the argument that

'as we were civilised from early on, we are more European than you' is still actively used.

At the same time, a number of recent Balkan works reveal an inferiority complex about what is perceived as truly European. One example is the Bulgarian film *Traka-trak/Clickety-Clack* (1996), in which a runaway-train plot and an all-star cast are intended to provide an allegory of the present state of the marginalised Balkans. In a remote Bulgarian town near the Turkish border, a group of people board an international train with the intention of travelling to a nearby destination. The train, however, fails to stop and leaves the country, heading at full speed toward the West. It passes Serbia, Croatia and Hungary, to reach Paris and even goes beyond it. For the duration of the film one observes the reactions of the trapped passengers and listens to their discussions of the absurd situation. It is a metaphor of post-communist Bulgaria – headed for the West, but trapped in an accelerating train which is out of control. The whole menagerie of 'new' post-communist types is here – Gypsy small-time smugglers, Ukrainian go-go dancers, Russian diplomatic workers trading in Kalashnikovs, a Polish pimp with two prostitutes and Rambo-like paratroopers. In their seemingly ordinary dialogues the characters touch on most of the concerns of contemporary East Europeans – troubled vernacular economies, strict travel restrictions, black marketeering, racism, growing differences within the once monolithic Eastern bloc, violence, crime and nationalism. The attempt of the runaway train to penetrate the West serves as a metaphor of the failed effort by Bulgaria to enter Europe. In a symbolical move some of the passengers try to sneak into the special car carrying a group of European Phare experts, but a UN blue helmet rudely pushes them out. At the end, it turns out to have been merely a nightmarish dream, and the protagonists actually never left their remote little town. The concluding message of the film reads as a reassuring: 'East, West, home is best.'

The symbolism of impeded travel to Europe is also a basic premise of Greek Theo Angelopoulos' *Topio stin omichli/Landscape in the Mist* (1988), whose protagonists, two young children, set out to join their father, who is working as a *Gastarbeiter* somewhere in Germany, but never manage to leave Greece. But while in Angelopoulos' work the confinement in the Balkans is endowed with deeper metaphysical dimensions, another widely popular Greek film, *Balkanizateur* (1997), shows Greeks who freely travel to Switzerland only to feel like complete outsiders and outcasts. A similar treatment is given to the insecure Romanian officials in Mircea Daneliuk's *Senatorul melcilor/Senator's Snails* (1995) who, pressured by concern about their coverage in Western media, try to corrupt the French journalists by offering them an absurd snail feast. In the film, the ability to offer a snail meal becomes an allegory for the misunderstood superior refinement of Europeanness.

The Balkans outside of Europe

As Stuart Hall noted in the early 1990s, 'No sooner have the barriers collapsed but Europe is busy constructing a new set of margins for itself' (Hall, 1992, p. 52). Willing to admit their own limitations and preparing to be flexible in negotiation for admission to Europe, the Balkans were now presented with the even more overwhelming burden of feeling guilty about their cultural incompatibility with the rest of the continent.

During the cold war books on Eastern Europe regularly omitted chapters on one or more of the Balkan countries, citing the excuse that there were no specialists competent to write on Romania, Bulgaria or Albania. Scholarly books dealing with issues relating to the whole Eastern bloc were traditionally limited to examples from Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, as if the other countries did not exist or were all the same by definition – an absence which soon thereafter became a good ground to declare the countries in the south-east of Europe different. The most popular scholarly work on Eastern Europe was preoccupied with the formation of the concept of Central Europe and rarely cared to include the Balkans, thus effectively working toward the conceptual exclusion of anything that could be described as a Balkan space. This trend is clearly visible in popular books which were often used as texts within the system of Western higher education on Eastern Europe, such as the works of Timothy Garton Ash (1989) or Jacques Rupnik (1990). The work of these and other East Europeanists established Central Eastern Europe as an area of a thriving intellectual discourse. Here, the Balkan space was regularly subsumed under the trends seen in the Central Eastern European countries. Apparently, nothing of intellectual value was happening beyond Czechoslovakia, Poland or Hungary; the Balkans were not interesting to them. In the 1990s, however, these same scholars gradually repositioned themselves as Balkan experts, and now frequently write on Balkan matters, thus filling the need for fluid-pen pundits at a time when newspapers badly needed coverage on Balkan issues.⁴

This attitude was further perpetuated by scholarship and journalism in the Balkan countries themselves: as Slavoj Žižek (1995) has observed, whoever happened to be located to the West of this eastern part of Europe was in a hurry to declare themselves a westernmost boundary, thus pronouncing everything to the east and the south a barbarian wasteland. American-based Romanian Andrei Codrescu (1990), for example, discusses issues of European cultural discourse and includes in this discourse his native Romania (a country traditionally excluded from the European), while at the same time remaining persistently turned to the West, apparently oblivious to the fact that a contribution to this discourse could possibly originate from further south and east of where he stands.

It would be too much to claim that in the second part of the twentieth century the West European countries and America have been involved in a systematic effort to maintain the image of the Balkans as primitive or inferior; one can speak instead only of a continuation of the routine use of primitive metaphors, not an intended vilification of any particular nation.

If one scrutinises the Western portrayal of the various Balkan countries before the advent of political correctness, examples of frivolous slander abound. See, for example, Thomas Meehan's 1971 hoax piece in *The New Yorker*, in which the author ridicules a non-existent Bulgarian author to indirectly criticise the elitist approach of the Swedish academy to world literature. In this piece the author, described as a regular contributor to *The New Yorker*, writes to express his outrage that little-known authors in the West, like Georgios Seferis and Yasunari Kawabata, had been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in the last few years. He claims that this time the award has gone to a Gregor Drubnik, a writer about whom not only has no one in the West heard but who is also unknown even in his native Bulgaria, as he is a member of an ethnic minority and writes in an obscure language, comprising only 243 words in total: 'Pludnik, a frustratingly ambiguous Slovene dialect that has for centuries defied the translating efforts of some of the world's most eminent linguists, many of whom, after wrestling with Pludnik, have fallen victim to serious mental illness.' Drubnik's only book of fables, *The Sullen Swineherd*, was barely comprehensible to anyone 'unacquainted with the arcane traditions of nineteenth-century Bulgaria':

If literary cognoscenti everywhere were surprised that the coveted award had gone to the obscure Bulgarian scrivener, no one was more surprised that Gregor Drubnik himself, who until winning it had never heard of the Nobel Prize for Literature. A squat, roly-poly man, with dark, melancholy eyes that peer owlishly out from behind rimless spectacles, Drubnik, who hides his bald pate beneath an ill-fitting carrot-colored wig, has for the past 55 years lived alone in a rude 12-room duplex upstairs over a bowling alley in the heart of downtown Plitznitska, a remote hill village in the mountains of central Bulgaria, where the principal industry of the glum and exceedingly hostile peasants is stringing goats' teeth on rubber bands to fashion souvenir ankle bracelets. In his humble duplex, . . . has for decades worked literally from dawn to dusk on his brief, 25-word fables, laboriously turning out no more than six or eight a year. In fact, so slow a writer is Drubnik that there are many days in which he produces fewer than five words during over fourteen hours at his IBM '100' Electra typewriter. (Meehan, 1971, p. 87)

However, Meehan was writing more than a quarter of a century ago, since when there have been many changes, including the advent of political correctness in

the USA. It is perhaps too much to claim that in the second part of the twentieth century the West has been involved in a systematic effort to maintain the barbarian image of the Balkans; one can speak instead only of a continuation of the routine of representation as a primitive 'backyard,' not the intended vilification of any particular nation. Even more, during the years of Tito's rule a pro-Yugoslavian rhetoric was extensively used for Russian-bashing of various kinds. Since 1989, however, the barbarian image of the Balkans has been revived and brought back into circulation, with the substitution of socio-economic and political considerations for culturist ones.

The end of the cold war seemed to suggest that 'Eastern Europe' had ceased to exist, noted historian Larry Wolff. He indicated, however, that this did not mean an automatic deletion of the mental division of Europe. Either new associations would be found to mark the differences, or the older pre-cold war division lines would be re-established (Wolff, 1994, p. 14). In the case of the Balkans, the re-mapping was taking place in both directions – the older associations with the barbarian Ottoman legacy were quickly brought back into use, as were a plethora of new associations with the Third World, a process explored in detail in Maria Todorova's work on 'imagining the Balkans' (Todorova, 1994, 1997). Even before the 'difference' of the Balkans was spelled out in the discourse of journalists and political scientists, it was mapped out by layout editors, whose choice of pictures of drabness and chaos, of Gypsy street fortune-tellers and underage pickpockets in Bulgaria, of AIDS-infected babies and environmental pollution in Romania, and of daunting crowds of Albanians coming to the West, effectively suppressed any 'European-like' images of this part of the world as irrelevant and non-representative. Yet the role of visual referencing remained unaccounted for. Looking at the changing dynamics of international news flows, media scholars Johan Galtung and Richard Vincent noted that in the post-cold war situation the reporting of First/Second World relations was undergoing transformation and that the coverage of the Second World was now comparable to that of the Third World, 'with Eastern Europe/the Soviet Union (later the ex-Soviet Union) playing a role relative to the European community not so different from the role of South America relative to North America' (Galtung and Vincent, 1992, pp. 3–4).

Older geopolitical division lines were presented as geographical common sense.⁵ In a 1994 RAND corporation publication prepared for the US army, for example, Thomas S. Szayna explained that

The term Eastern Europe, in reference to the non-Soviet former members of the Warsaw Pact and Albania and Yugoslavia, was a political term appropriate during the Cold War. Following the breakdown of the East–West division of Europe, the term has lost relevance. The geographical terms central Europe

and the Balkans are more accurate and preferable in the post-Cold War era.
(Szayna, 1994, p. 1)

The refusal to approach the Balkans by focusing on the real problems, and the substitution of economic and political considerations with rushed talk about profound cultural incompatibilities, is most visible in Samuel P. Huntington's 1993 popular theory of a 'clash of civilisations'. Huntington's definition of civilisation is as follows

the highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes humans from other species. It is defined both by common objective elements, such as language, history, religion, customs, institutions, and by the subjective self-identification of people.
(Huntington, 1993, p. 23)

To Huntington, politics and economy are secondary to the civilisation divides which determine the deeply embedded fault lines that will ensure that people continue to oppose each other, precluding dialogue and cooperation and conditioning future conflicts. Not much can be done to avoid these future conflicts, as they are predetermined by non-interacting civilisation entities.

A professor of political science at Harvard, in his work Huntington addressed the global political dynamics of our times. His preoccupation was global, not regionally Balkan. Widely featured in the American media, however, his views were most often mentioned in conjunction with the Balkan conflict, as providing a suitable model with which to grasp the crisis – namely, to see it as a culturist one, ensuing from an inevitable clash between incompatible civilisations, and effectively waiving the need to look any further into its economic or political roots. In conversations I have had with political scientists, I have been reassured that Huntington's views have not been really influential within the discipline (with the exception of the numerous high-profile featured talks he has given at academic institutions across North America and Europe). Huntington's theories, however, were widely publicised by the mainstream US media; and the professor himself gave a number of media interviews elaborating on his views. His theories of the civilisational clash were often adopted as an underlying ideology of the American media understanding of international conflict, as I will show below with an example from the influential *Chicago Tribune*.

In his work, Huntington dismisses politics and the economy as grounds for future world conflicts, and proclaims clashes between civilisations the major source of conflict for the years to come. Looking at Europe, among the civilisations that Huntington distinguishes are the Western, the Islamic and the

Slavic-Orthodox ones. For the purposes of clearly indicating who the West's enemies might be, however, Huntington equates the Islamic and Slavic-Orthodox civilisations: 'As the ideological division of Europe has disappeared, the cultural division of Europe between Western Christianity, on the one hand, and Orthodox Christianity and Islam, on the other, has reemerged.' This cultural split, in Huntington's opinion, is 'the most significant dividing line in Europe'. Overcoming it would be unthinkable, because

The peoples to the east and south of this line are Orthodox or Muslim, they historically belonged to the Ottoman or Tsarist empires and were only lightly touched by the shaping events in the rest of Europe; they are generally less advanced economically; they seem much less likely to develop stable democratic political systems.

By classifying Orthodox Christianity and Islam together and ignoring their differences and internal tensions, Huntington in one blow invalidates the whole elaborate ideology of a 'shield against Islam', which is seen in many Balkan countries as a crucial stake for their place in Europe. What is particularly problematic in Huntington's approach, however, is his rush to proclaim the cultural division as the only relevant point of reference in the new division of Europe. He makes no mention of economic or political dividing lines within Europe, or of the respective institutionalisation of such division lines in a number of pan-European or Western organisations (such as NATO, the EC or the G-7), which in this light are seen as bodies existing for the sole purpose of consolidating the cultural identity of the West against the dangers of hostile civilisations. One is left with the impression that the main function of these organisations is to preserve cultural identity, a view which found its ultimate expression in Tony Blair's claim that the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia should be seen as an act designed to save 'the values of [Western] civilization'.⁶ The idea of an essential division between civilisations is brought in to substitute for all other aspects of interaction, and is described exclusively in terms of hostility: Huntington talks of future enmities, clashes and conflicts, and never of cooperation or convergence.

Huntington's formula presents the reality of today's and the outlook for tomorrow's world along simple clear-cut lines and conveniently avoids the intricacies of economic and political interaction, making it particularly appealing to many Western journalists, who now do not need to do any extensive background research into these areas. The elegant binary clash of civilisations negates the necessity to examine a whole range of political and economic factors in reporting, as all these aspects can now be played down for the sake of focusing on the 'culturalist' aspect. Many reporters perpetuated Huntington's

approach in their coverage of the Balkans by ignoring political and economic background. Illustrations can be found, for example, in the influential *Chicago Tribune*, which, at the time of daily anti-Milošević demonstrations in Belgrade in the winter of 1997, reported that

Centuries of domination by the Ottoman Turks and a cultural affinity with Orthodox Russia have not instilled an intuitive grasp of democratic principles among the Balkan peoples. What's happening now in the streets may look like a pro-democracy movement, but it isn't.

In the same issue of the *Chicago Tribune*, senior writer R. C. Longworth spells out this thesis in detail:

In Eastern Europe, half of the former Communist countries – the Western Christian half, including Poland and Hungary – have reshaped themselves since 1989 into modern democracies with market economies. The other half – the Orthodox Christians such as Serbia, Bulgaria and Russia – have barely begun: without exception they have wasted the last eight years.

In an interview in this same section of the newspaper Huntington himself underlines this point:

NATO membership for Central European states that historically have been part of the West seems to me to be absolutely essential to stability in that area. At the same time, we ought to reassure Russia that NATO has no designs on Bulgaria, Romania, or Ukraine, for instance, which historically have been Orthodox societies linked to Russia.⁷

Even in the annals of the daily news bulletin of a respected newscaster such as *Radio Free Europe*, which specialises in this region's affairs, one can regularly come across claims like this one by an Albanian expert, according to whom:

The biggest obstacles to reform [in Albania] are probably the political and cultural ones. . . . Many state officials at various levels display little concern either for the work ethic or the responsibilities of their office. Such an attitude has roots in the Ottoman era and accounts for the low productivity of much of the administration.⁸

The effects of Huntington's views were initially apparent mostly in the workings of journalism. Since *Clash of Civilizations* was first published, however, an army of US scholars have perpetuated its message. Even those who disagreed

included Huntington's essay in the core readings for their courses and thus gave publicity to his conveniently simplistic view. The American college population became the primary audience for his insight into the future of international conflicts, and Huntington reached out much further than one could have expected initially – his thesis became a core part of the world vision for those training for executive careers in public administration. Along with the culturally grounded rediscovery and re-admission of Central Eastern Europe within the European space, the Balkans were proclaimed a 'culturally incompatible' chunk of the former Eastern bloc and were now left outside European semantic boundaries. It did not take much to make these new division lines, offered under the guise of a 'civilisational' discourse, seem plausible, and it worked particularly well for American students, most of whom can barely claim a solid background knowledge in area studies. It is realistic, therefore, to expect that the new generation of ambitious college graduates will increasingly embrace the civilisational division lines as a framework in approaching international policy issues later on in their professional lives.

These are only some of the many facets of the continuing process of the re-mapping of the East European space after 1989, which resulted in the division of former Eastern bloc countries into Central Eastern European and Balkan parts: the Balkans were separated from the other former Eastern bloc countries on the grounds that this was geographically appropriate. As a result, people inhabiting the lands beyond the Western Christianity boundary were declared to belong to a different type of civilisation (for which claim the differences between themselves were deemed unessential). The international media helped facilitate this project by simply accepting its premises and providing the relevant type of coverage.

Interpretation and identity: bickering around the image

The substitution of the cultural for the political, with the cultural assuming dominance, explains the crucial importance of all issues related to image and representation in the case of today's Balkans. While for Huntington the reduction to the culturist was a tool for estrangement and logically resulted in the exclusion of all other civilisations from the sphere of enlightened democracies (= 'Europe'), in the Balkans it triggered situations where local ideology used the reduction to the culturist for the purpose of enhancing the inherent-belonging-to-Europe argument. These last attempts were doomed, however, as they were building on premises that were better suited to justify exclusion rather than encourage inclusion. Once the discourse had moved into the culturist field, the battle for 'belonging to Europe' was half lost, as it was now effectively limited within a sphere which lacked firm criteria and allowed frivolous speculation, thereby creating a fertile ground for mediated

misapprehensions and mismatched aspirations. It was now largely confined to discussions of representation and self-representation and involved acts directed to the attention of an imagined attentive global audience, one that remained undefined and obscure, as it was largely constructed to serve the immediate discursive needs.

The culturist substitution resulted in a number of concrete and sometimes controversial manifestations, some of which I would like to trace here.

Succumbing to the culturist argument

Paying meticulous attention to idiosyncratic features of Balkan culture and highlighting unfavourable traits of the Balkan character embodies an attitude shared by many intellectuals of Balkan extraction who, ironically, are the ones most ready to articulate and reiterate the culturist clichés and engage in a specific form of self-bashing. Many of the stereotypes about the Balkans are uncritically repeated and perpetuated by insiders, who, like Croatian politician Žarko Domljan insisted in 1991 that Yugoslavia was not a nation but 'a mixture of ancient tribes'.⁹ Or like American sociologist of Croatian extraction, Stjepan Mestrovic (1993b), who developed maverick theories on the barbarian habits of the Balkan heart.¹⁰

In the 1990s, it no longer takes aloof foreigners to problematise the Balkans, as the region is willingly problematised by insiders, who uncritically adopt and eagerly perpetuate the culturist paradigm. Dušan Makavejev, the best-known film director from Yugoslavia, ridiculed the Western envoys in Bosnia for applying rigid Protestant ethics to what he called 'a profoundly Byzantine culture', where the negotiators' 'funny maps and signatures [were] not honoured 15 times in a row' and where they could not achieve anything else but the 'collecting [of] meaningless autographs like teenage groupies on heat'. The efforts of the West failed, as Makavejev explained, because here one dealt with a profoundly different culture:

An old partisan from Herzegovina, the late Vladimir Dediđer, who was not an innocent, told me how, when one has to sign an agreement that one is not intending to honour, the signatory, while signing with his right hand, has to keep his left hand in the pocket, holding his testicles. This gesture makes the signature invalid. This is what international negotiators, who are ignorant of the culture they deal with, miss. (Makavejev, 1993, p. 6)

While not intended to damage, this stance nevertheless effectively enhances the claim that the key to understanding the Balkans is to look into the deviations found in their distinct culture. In film, the celebrated 1995 Cannes winner, *Underground*, offered an outspoken confirmation of the substandard ethics of

its Yugoslav protagonists, while the celebrated 1994 Venice winner, *Before the Rain*, showed tribal mayhem that dauntingly reached as far as a tranquil London locale.

Bickering about the international image

The painful recognition of the fact that Balkan nations rarely enjoy a very favourable international image is often expressed in incidents where the blame over undesired representations is explained away as conspiracies masterminded by hostile Balkan powers. Take cinema. A recent controversy (1998) surrounded the failed project of British producer Tarquie Olivier to shoot a biographical film about Kemal Atatürk, starring Spaniard Antonio Banderas, with Australian Bruce Beresford set to direct.¹¹ Reacting to news of the planned production, hundreds of outraged Greek-Americans engaged in a massive letter-writing campaign condemning the project, which intended to depict Atatürk as a modernist politician comparable to Gandhi. To those letter writers, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was 'a rapist, murderer, child molester and destroyer of Greek civilisation', a 'savage maniac' and 'a disgrace to human civilisation as we know it' – qualifications mostly earned as a result of Atatürk's forced expulsion of nearly two million Greeks from Anatolia in the 1920s.¹² This controversy bears direct reference to an older one which evolved around the British film *Midnight Express* (1978). Although the film was based on an American survivor's autobiographical account of the mistreatment of inmates in Turkish prisons, it was a popularly shared belief in Turkey that the film was commissioned by the Greek lobby in the UK with the clear intention of damaging the international image of the country.

Another aspect of discontent over the international image is the angry reaction of Balkan individuals who realise that, when it comes to the representation of the Balkans in the Western media, Third World depictions are often favoured over European-style images, with photo editors routinely preferring images of sloppy peasant women to those of high-heeled Sarajevan urbanites. A Sarajevo journalist featured in the documentary *Truth under Siege*, for example, expressed outrage that the Western media tend to show Sarajevan residents as primitives, as if they were 'from Kurdistan'. The sense of (even marginal) identity with the West is so deeply entrenched that Balkan intellectuals routinely dismiss the plight of other deprived peoples, as is visible in this case where 'Kurdistan' becomes synonymous of such a desperate case of primitivism that it cannot possibly be worthy of serious consideration, and any comparison with which would be offensive.

Holocaust as a favoured frame of reference

The Holocaust rhetoric and imagery have been appropriated and exploited to

the utmost, and much in the conceptualisation of the Balkan conflict draws from the Holocaust trope. Zlata Filipović (1994), whose diary was published in the West, is referred to as a Sarajevo Anne Frank. The revelations of the existence of Serb concentration camps, where Bosnian men were held, triggered numerous comparisons to the Nazi death camps.¹³ Court TV materials on the World Wide Web about the tribunal at the Hague feature direct links to materials about the Nuremberg trials.¹⁴ Here the indicted war criminal Goran Jelisić is presented under his nickname, 'The Serb Adolf'. Duško Tadić, a supervisor in a concentration camp and the first one to be sentenced, is called 'Ivan the Terrible', which is a reference not to the Russian Tsar, but to the notorious Nazi camp guard who used the alias.

Issues of the use (and abuse) of Holocaust referencing were brought up in the so-called 'LM' controversy early in 2000. ITN reporters who had filmed Serbian detention camps in Bosnia in the summer of 1992 were accused in a 1996 article in *Living Marxism* ('LM') magazine of deliberately manipulating the footage to make it reminiscent of familiar Holocaust images of concentration camps. ITN sued *Living Marxism* for libel and won. One of the arguments was that ITN reporters had never stated that the footage was of a 'concentration camp'. In all fairness, however, I should mention that even if this was the case, the footage was used by others in documentaries which edited it together with documentary footage of Nazi camps, thus creating an unambiguous visual referencing.¹⁵

Most importantly, the metaphors of Jewish victimisation have been used (or abused) by virtually all sides in the Yugoslav conflict, and everybody – Serbs, Slovenes, Albanians and Bosnian Muslims – has represented themselves at one time or another as Jews in peril (Živković, 1994). The Holocaust became the scale by which events in Bosnia were measured.¹⁶ Occasionally, those who introduced direct parallels to the Holocaust did so in the belief that such comparisons would have a powerful impact on the public opinion, thus reducing the Holocaust to a tool in a public relations strategy.¹⁷

In his book, *Sarajevo, Kashmir and Other Poems*, Pakistani poet Irshad Ulla Khan (1994) makes a dedication 'to the victims of the Holocaust'. In his view of the world, a universal anxiety starts in Kashmir and then moves on to Sarajevo, and these places are seen by him as equally valid dimensions of the shared suffering of humankind, summed up by the concept of Holocaust. At the same time, while commenting on the Balkans has produced innumerable references to the Holocaust, only rarely have other genocidal situations – like those in Armenia, Cambodia or Rwanda, for example, or other large population transfers, like the ones in Kashmir or Anatolian Greece – been referred to as a means of interpreting the Bosnian carnage, as if they were irrelevant here.¹⁸

The Eurocentricity and specific superiority of the Holocaust discourse has

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been problematised in a different context by black theorist Paul Gilroy, who quotes the writer James Baldwin:

The Jew's suffering is recognized as part of the moral history of the world and the Jew is recognized as a contributor to the world's history; this is not true for blacks. Jewish history, whether or not one can say it is honored, is certainly known: the black history has been blasted, maligned, and despised. The Jew is a white man, and when white men rise up against oppression they are heroes: when black men rise they have reverted to their native savagery. The uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was not described as a riot, nor were the participants maligned as hoodlums: the boys and girls in Watts and Harlem are thoroughly aware of this and it certainly contributes to their attitudes toward the Jews.

(Gilroy, 1993, p. 216)

Gilroy insists that it is not only possible but necessary to discuss the history of blacks and Jews together, and to see the Holocaust in the general context of the modern history of racial slavery and terror in the Western hemisphere. He goes as far as to claim that by refusing to allow a comparative analysis of the Holocaust, Jewish intellectuals, who reflect on racism but exclude the experiences of slavery and other races as irrelevant, have in effect consolidated the interests of Eurocentrism.

When this last view is applied to the use of the Holocaust trope within the discourse on the Balkan conflict, it is impossible to ignore the underlying Eurocentric motivation for the overzealous willingness to find comparisons to the Holocaust but simultaneously to deny comparisons to any non-European ordeals. The Holocaust trope is favoured so much, not only for its moral compatibility but also because it is a *European* experience. The very fact that these other examples of genocide are European is the ground on which they are rendered irrelevant.

Disillusionment with and bitterness at friends

In our age of global interconnectedness news reporting is no longer a one-way process. During the Bosnian war, all Western reporting had a twofold function, as print media reports and broadcasts were the main source of information not only for audiences in the West but also for the people of Bosnia itself. BBC, CNN and Radio France International supplied news not only to their audiences in Europe and the USA but also to besieged Sarajevo, and have often been cited by former Yugoslavs as their main source of reliable information. The situation is pretty much the same across the Balkans. The broadcasts of Radio Free Europe are still listened to by large loyal audiences across South-Eastern Europe. There have been instances when broadcasts that were not intended for

Balkan audiences have had a significant impact – for example, the Italian commercial television broadcasting which was received in Albania and was to a large extent responsible for the decision that many Albanians made to emigrate.

Alongside the reporting of continuing developments, all unfavourable representations and allegations of impeded cultural legacy, found in the West European and American media, are instantly transmitted back to the Balkans, where they quite naturally trigger a specific public reaction, which is particularly strong among those who are trying to counteract the negative social tendencies in their countries. Seeing themselves depicted as outsiders whose movement to democracy is interpreted as an illusory and doomed one, liberal-minded intellectuals in the Balkans often feel isolated and outraged. They feel that they have been cast out of a process that began less than a decade ago with a different promise – one of re-admission to Europe, not of exclusion from it. Their reaction is one of disillusionment and bitterness.

Many in former Yugoslavia believed in vain that the West would rush to intervene and put an end to the conflict there, and were puzzled for quite some time when it did not: 'When the war started, for a long time we hoped that one of the big powers would come and calm our small bickering nations', or 'The world seemed so cruelly indifferent, merely because normal life went on (still!) outside our borders' (quoted in Lešić, 1995, pp. 27 and 55); or 'From time to time we see pictures on the television of the sleek, well-fed people in other parts of the world, and it seems so absurd that they should sit there, not giving a damn about the fact that here in Bosnia we are dying like flies' (quoted in Cataldi, 1994, p. 66).

Early on in the Yugoslav conflict, one came across statements like this quite often. Gradually, a disillusionment took over, and near the end of the 1990s one rarely saw any further manifestation of these expectations, which came to sound banal and naive even to people trapped in the Balkan quagmire. Opinions about a desired external intervention profoundly changed with the Kosovo war of 1999.

The irony is that the dismay most often finds expression in bitterness directed against those Western intellectuals who acted as advocates for the Balkans. Their visibility turned them into the resentful target for those on whose behalf they had tried to act. In one of his essays, for example, Sarajevoan Zlatko Dizdarević describes the satellite-transmitted TV encounter between French and Bosnian intellectuals during which prominent film-maker Costa-Gavras, director of such politically engaged films as *Z* (1969) and *Missing* (1993), promises to premiere his new film in Sarajevo. Dizdarević comments bitterly on this 'generous gesture', and points out 'that he [Costa-Gavras] would also have to send along a movie theater in which to show it' (Dizdarević, 1993, p. 151). It is certainly strange that a personality like the outspoken French film

director of Greek extraction would come under such critical fire. But it is no wonder – the politicians and intellectuals who did not care were not visible in the media, and therefore were never criticised.

The paradox of this bitterness aimed at friends is best visible in the writings of Sarajevan Dzevad Karahasan, who was exiled to Austria during the war. In an essay entitled 'An Argument with a Frenchman', Karahasan (1994) talks of an encounter with a French journalist who seems to be genuinely interested in the Sarajevan situation but is receptive only to information that would fit within his preconceived framework. Thus, instead of an active role in the exchange with the Frenchman, Karahasan claims he was relegated to the position of a 'passive object' (*ibid.*, p. 65), a situation which makes him comment acrimoniously:

When my Frenchman entered my home I was moved, grateful, and prepared to do anything to show him how much this visit from the faraway world meant to me. When he entered my home, my Frenchman was overwrought by the tribulation of my city, filled with good intentions and determined to do something noble for me personally as well as for all of us. Our encounter was therefore elevated and graced by beautiful, noble feelings. Our attempt to communicate was similarly founded on an entirely sincere effort to understand each other, and to agree.

Why was our parting so bitter, then? Am I indeed such an ungrateful scoundrel, because I wasn't suffering as much as my guest had expected and had decided for me to suffer? Was my guest truly so shocked by my suffering that his emotions obstructed his view of the causes behind that and other, much greater suffering? Was my suffering truly enormous, and have I become so numb that I cannot see its dimensions and feel its depths anymore?

(*ibid.*, p. 62)

The Frenchman remains unnamed, and soon after this encounter Karahasan directs his bitterness to 'the West' in general. In another instance, writing for German audiences (in Vollmer, 1995, p. 162), Karahasan identifies the individuals who, he feels, are responsible for the disparaging way in which people of the Balkans are perceived in the West. His targets become influential intellectuals publicly standing for the cause of Bosnian Muslims, like German poet Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, one of the intellectuals who spoke publicly about Bosnia's ordeal. Ironically enough, his sight is set not on those who remained indifferent but on those who tried to commit themselves.

The ironies discussed here – succumbing to a denigrating self-representation, readiness to exoticise oneself, bickering about the international image,

abusing the Holocaust framework and bitterness directed to friendly minded supporters – are reactions to the contested Balkan admissibility to Europe and the problematised Balkan Europeanness. While the obsessive struggle for admissibility to Europe may at first glance seem an innocuous fixation, it is accountable for many of the gravest misdemeanours that characterise the Balkan region today.

It is doubtful if much could be done to change the positioning and the interpretations allotted to the Balkans. Would there be much change if the young Redl from Szabó's film was told not to bother singing Hungarian songs and if his hosts were asked not to talk in French? All we can do is point at the inherent inconsistencies within the discourse on Europe and maintain awareness about its uses and abuses.

Notes

1. In a book of short essays entitled *Children of Atlantis*, young displaced people from former Yugoslavia repeatedly ask the question, 'Why is the world so unfair to us?' (Lešić, 1995). A German publication carries the indicative title *That We in Bosnia Belong to the World* (Vollmer, 1995).
2. *Europe* was composed by the Briton Nigel Osborne, written by Sarajevo Goran Simić and directed by Dino Mustafić. Paul Harris, 'Opera against the Odds', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 February 1995, p. 16.
3. Ahmed Dogan, leader of The Movement of Rights and Freedoms, an ethnic Turk party in Bulgaria.
4. Timothy Garton Ash had shown no prior interest in the Balkans, but towards the end of the 1990s he published a series of essays on issues like the Kosovo war and its aftermath in publications such as *The New York Review of Books*, *The Times Literary Supplement* and the *Guardian*. Jacques Rupnik gave a number of talks on Balkan issues, and wrote on the Balkans in a series of leading French periodicals. Why these (and other) non-specialists were encouraged to convert to the Balkans rather than give the floor to dedicated Balkan experts is an issue which merits investigation, particularly when one bears in mind that the record of cases when non-experts were preferred by the media (in the capacity of pundits) and by politicians (in the capacity of advisers) to the existing Balkan experts is indeed an extensive one.
5. The fact that many of the Balkan countries belonged to the so-called Eastern bloc (referred to by some other scholars as the Second World) had given them a status equal to that of the countries which are now referred to as Central Eastern European. A potential 'package deal' transferring the entire former bloc to *Europe* was thus contemplated as a desired post-communist

- solution by these countries. On this, see my 'Media Coverage of Bulgaria in the West and Its Domestic Use' (Jordanova, 1995).
6. Tony Blair in an interview with Partick Wintour, *The Observer*, 16 May 1999, p. 17.
 7. Tom Hundley, 'Balkan Reform Crippled by Communist Past, Impoverished Present', *Chicago Tribune*, 16 February 1997, Section 2, p. 8. The quote is taken from just one of several articles mostly devoted to applying Huntington's views to the processes in Eastern Europe and to revealing how desperate and ill-fated any democracy movement in the Balkan countries is. R. C. Longworth, 'Clash of Cultures: Realism Intrudes on Our Rosy View of the World', *Chicago Tribune*, 16 February 1997, Perspective section, pp. 1 and 10; Samuel Huntington, 'On the Record', *Chicago Tribune*, 16 February 1997, Perspective section, p. 3.
 8. Fabian Schmidt, 'Albania's Government: Confusion, Incompetence and Lack of Vision', *RFE/RL Newslines*, 27 November 1997.
 9. Quoted in Barber (1995, pp. 195–6). This particular quote is taken from Milton Viorst's 'The Yugoslav Idea', *The New Yorker*, 18 March 1991, pp. 58–79.
 10. Mestrovic's (1993b) theories about the barbarian Balkans should be regarded as a continuation of his general theoretical claim that the 'barbarian temperament' is a crucial construct of post-modernity. If applied to the barbarian wasteland of modern-day America, these theories may be seen as an amusing theoretical equivalent of moralistic televangelism. Applied to the Balkans, however, a region which barely enjoys a positive international image, these theories cannot just be dismissed, as their role can be seriously damaging.
 11. Notably, the news about the failed film project was reported not on the culture pages but in the international news column of the *Guardian* (Joanna Coles, 'Ataturk Star Retreats in Face of Greek Rage', *Guardian*, 17 July 1998, p. 15).
 12. The unprecedented scale of the 1920/21 forced migration has been the subject of a number of works of Greek literature. In cinema it is explored in Nikos Kunduros' *1922* (1978).
 13. See texts by Gutman (1993), Vulliamy (1994), Schiffer (1993), Rieff (1995) and Hukanović (1996), among others.
 14. Courtroom TV Network. Court TV Casefiles: Bosnia War Crimes Tribunal (© 1999). Available: <<http://www.courtstv.com/casefiles/warcrimes/>> (10 May 1999).
 15. See, for example *Crimes against Humanity*, produced by Worldnet, the film and TV service of USIA, in 1995.
 16. Udovicki and Ridgeway, for example, approached the subject matter of

- Yugoslavia's ethnic wars by asking the question: 'Was it as bad as Nazism or in some ways even worse?' (Udovicki and Ridgeway, 1995, p. 1).
17. James Harff, the manager of the Ruder Finn PR agency, was quoted as saying that he considered his greatest achievement to have been to win over the Jewish circles for the Bosnian cause. This enabled his agency to equate Serbs with Nazis in the eyes of the public (Peter Glotz, 'Der Fall Handke: Wie sich Intellektuelle und Journalisten über dem Serbien-Aufsatz heillos zerstritten', *Die Woche*, 16 February 1996, p. 17). An exhibit at the US Holocaust Museum called *Faces of Sorrow* triggered vocal protests from Serbian-Americans, who felt the effect of this equation with Nazis (Steven A. Holmes, 'Photographs of Balkans Draw Fire. Serb Groups Fault Holocaust Museum', *The New York Times*, 24 September 1994, p. L6).
 18. With the notable exception of Robert Hayden's article 'Schindler's Fate' (1996), in which he approached the issues of population parting in Yugoslavia by placing them within the larger context of other compatible events worldwide.