Images of the Balkans

Images of Romania, Croatia and Serbia in the post-communist era

Images of the multi-national Yugoslavian state
Case Studies: Dimitriadis, Boutos, Chatziprodromidis

Tenth Lesson
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The historical context

- *Collapse of Balkan socialism*

- *Fragmentation* of the multi-ethnic Yugoslav state

- <u>Civil war between Serbs and Croats</u>

- Extremely **volatile political and social situation** in *Albania, Bulgaria and Romania* after the political change

- <u>Did the political situation normalise?</u>

- Efforts for **transition to a western-style democracy**: a difficult endeavor

- Historical *events that shake the European continent*

The post communist Balkans in the Greek literary production

- The modern Greek literary production and the **analogies with the Western depictions** for the Balkan Peninsula

- Post-communist Balkans as an **extremely widespread narrative framework** for contemporary Greek fiction.

- Main ideas found in the literary texts of the period: 1. ***Convergence between Greece and the West*** 2. ***Production of a discourse with clear orientalist characteristics*** 3. ***unifying the Balkans***

- ***Stereotypes regarding the Other and images of the Self***

Andrew Hammond- Passage for discussion

The West's response to the Yugoslav wars was to set the tone for the conceptualization of the whole peninsula. The understanding of Yugoslavia as a collection of fractious, malevolent entities was central to the wider discursive recovery of Victorian balkanism, the assessments and accusations that marked western commentary on the nation quickly spreading to encompass all post-revolution societies, and helping to make the Balkans <u>once again </u>a byword for mendacity and savagery. Indeed, for western commentators working elsewhere in the peninsula, the representation of Yugoslavia formed a **pre-arranged interpretative framework** *which needed* **very little modification** *when accounting* **for Romanian orphanages, Bulgarian poverty, Albanian anti-government protests, or any of those other post-communist crises** *on which western journalists and travel writers dwelled*

Describing the ethnicities emerged after the Yugoslavian Fragmentation

- The Greek interest in the **Croats and Bosnians** should be considered **limited**

- Brief references regarding Bosnia and Slovenia

- The *'Greek-Serbian' friendship*: a traditional, mysterious bond

- The deep interest for the Serbian Other: *from the negative connotations during the Balkan Wars to the contemporary images (proud, homogeneous, brave and friendly to Greece nation)*

- *Imagology, literary texts, politics and religion*

- Associating the Serbian Other with *backwardness, anti-European lifestyle, lack of modernization and nationalist brutality*

- The motif of '*incomplete nations*' (19th century)

The 'Greek-Serbian friendship' explained

- The Greek <u>attraction to the Serbian area</u> and the ***traditional positive images of the Serbian Other***

- Slogans describing an '***Orthodox brother***'.

- <u>Until 1860</u> the rhetoric of the **'*brotherhood*'** of the two nations <u>was based on the common struggle for independence</u>

- Moments in history when the Greek image of the Serbian Other <u>**takes a negative turn**</u> (***national rivalry in the region of Macedonia***)

- The role of an '***Eastern Federation***'

- The ***Greek dilemma*** between the <u>**Slavic Orthodox world and modernized West**</u>

Leonidas Chatziprodromidis: Images of Yugoslavia before and after fragmentation

- Balkan national myths serving as an '***escape from the grim reality***'

- Serbian- Croat civil war conflicts in the Balkan region are considered among the most ***violent and bloody in the 20th century***

- <u>Intense editorial interest in the region</u>

- The Balkans were once again becoming **the epicenter** of the world<u>, both for the international community and for Greece</u>

- Various international studies of ***historical and political nature*** (examining the reasons for the conflict, ***searching for ways of stabilizing the region***, or ***presenting images of the tragic Yugoslav civil war***, are appearing, attempting to shed light on aspects of the tragic events

- <u>*Similar publishing tendency can be found on the modern Greek production*</u>

Leonidas Chatziprodromidis: Images of Yugoslavia before and after fragmentation

- The testimony of **Leonidas Chatziprodromidis** (*journalist, anti-dictatorial action*): '*The explosion of nationalism*' (1991-collection of articles)

- *Correspondent* in Belgrade

- Journalistic language, exploring the Yugoslav problem from various angles

- Vivid depictions of the **explosive atmosphere** in the multi-ethnic Yugoslav state before fragmentation

- **Tension and general controversy**, focus on the political-economic aspect of the Yugoslav problem.

- Highlighting the **process of rising nationalist tendencies**

- Exploration of how **nationalism 'operates'** in the Balkans

- Examining the correlation **between Balkan national myths** and the **social, political and economic problems of the Balkans**

Leonidas Chatziprodromidis: Images of Yugoslavia before and after fragmentation

- A '*mosaic*' of nationalities and minorities

- *Polarization, alienation from Western civilization*

- The constant _involvement of foreign interests in the region_

- Testimonies, historical texts and literature. Travel literature as historical document

- *Historising the growing tension and the multifaceted economic, social, political and national problems within Yugoslavia*

- *Gradual loss of control* of the state by the central authorities

- Despite the above-described complex relations within the country, even in the early 1990s the author seems to consider fragmentation as unlikely event

Chatziprodromidis and his definition of nationalism

- The *phenomenon of nationalism* is studied *as the evolution of the communist past*

- The positive elements in the Yugoslav socialist regime ('bright moments in the Stalinist middle ages')

- **Identifying the regime with the delay of modernization**

- Defining **nationalism** as the 'last stage of communism'.

- Balkan nationalism as an antidote to **the fundamental problems plaguing the Balkan region**

- The Balkan national myths perceived as **'an escape from reality, a means of putting aside economic and social problems'**

Chatziprodromidis' texts for Yugoslavia

- The ***reproduction of certain well-known stereotypical patterns*** associated with the Balkan region

- <u>The differences</u> between the ***Yugoslavian and the Western culture***

- 'Perhaps in the Balkans the most manly solution is civil war' (***illustrating the strong Balkan temperament***)

- The construction of the Serbian nation as ***the most friendly Yugoslavian*** nation to Greece

- Contemporary aspects of 'The ***Macedonian Question***': 'FYROM', 'Republic of Macedonia' and the slogans regarding Macedonia's Greekness

'The assassination of Yugoslavia' (1999)

- **Attempts to focus on the chaos** by the fragmentation and the civil war in the country

- Images of a '***people in confusion***', ***powerless, and under crisis of values***

- Modern depictions of the Balkan Other as **'a man in decline'**

- **Misery, fear, tension and doubt**: society facing a deep political crisis

- *Politicians and their relationship with the underworld*

- *The international community's heavy responsibility for the Yugoslav problem*

- The 'peculiar Balkan fascism'

'The assassination of Yugoslavia' (1999)

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- The belief according to **which the nation-states that emerged had returned to medieval living conditions**

- Losing <u>contact with European reality and modern civilization</u>

- Images of the contemporary Balkans as synonymous with **primitivism, savagery, fluidity, dark forces and violence will**

- <u>The construction of a relative narrative framework</u>

- **Absence of state structures, brutal criminality, sexual exploitation and the extremely close interconnection of the political scene with the underworld**

'The assassination of Yugoslavia' (1999)
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*The **criminal gangs**, who are now fighting for **national ideals**, are accused of coming to the front <u>basically to steal</u> and are fighting precisely <u>to take over areas for looting</u>. [...] The war has accelerated to the utmost the phenomenon of the social rise of the **underworld**, which is now becoming the **new economic nomenclature**.*

*All the old Belgrade **underworld, smugglers and patrons** become **owners of businesses**, companies, <u>entertainment centers, where the cheap sexual power of girls from the former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Romania</u>, together with the loot during the war, serve for the **primary accumulation of capital**.'*

Pavlos Dimitriadis text for Romania

- '***Romania- The revolt of the people***' (early 1990s)

- Dimitriadis- journalist in the conservative newspaper Apogevmatini

- Romania's image under Ceausescu: ***isolationism, persecution and constant surveillance***

- A **documentary** concerning the crucial, revolutionary days against the regime

- Recording a series of testimonies that at times seem to ***hover between truth and myth***

- Travel literature, personal ideology and propaganda

- ***Systematic recording of the historical events, accompanied by the quotation of unpublished personal stories told to the author by Greek students***

- Dimitriades forms an **extremely negative picture** of the Romanian regime

- ***Misery, conspiracies of power, violation of human rights, and the horrible torture of dissidents***

Pavlos Dimitriadis text for Romania

- Romania is presented as a state in which **every movement is monitored and controlled**

- **Personal freedom**: <u>a thing of the past</u>

- Accusing the regime even of **genocide** against part of the Romanian nation,

- <u>Images of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu in Western and Greek imaginary</u>

- The journalistic language of the text and the revolution perceived as an "**authentic movement**"

- **Propaganda and tyrannical aspects of the regime**

- The **'Timișoara massacre'** and the historical truth

- Ceaușescu and the popular base

- The notion of **isolationism**- total **ignorance regarding Western civilization and contemporary European history**

Pavlos Dimitriadis text for Romania

- *The contrasting image that the regime attempts to present abroad in comparison with the actual image of the state*

- The regime's **propaganda** is active through *diplomacy, international activities or even sporting successes*

- Exporting an image of *prosperity* to the international community

- *Depictions of poverty, oppression and terrorism*

Pavlos Dimitriadis text for Romania

''No, the Romanians did not follow the example of the Eastern Europeans. They were not influenced by them. Besides, they **had learned very little about foreign developments**, since the regime's **media reported whatever they wanted**.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was not known in Romania...[...] The people **could not take it any longer**. **Propaganda, promoted sports, foreign diplomacy and international activities**, moves made to create the image of an advanced state and a prosperous society, could no longer fool them.

The **reality was harsh and irrefutable**. **Poverty, food rationing, hunger, black market and humiliation. Oppression, terrorism, discrimination and the law of the absurd**. All these were 'thorns' that bled the heart of every Romanian'.

Pavlos Dimitriadis text for Romania

- The fully <u>directed life of the citizens</u>

- **The terrible shortages** of raw materials

- The *terrifying activity* of the regime's *secret intelligence service* (the legendary **Securitate**)

- A widespread climate of **fear a**mong the Romanian people

- <u>Comparing Romanian and Greek reality</u>

Pavlos Dimitriadis text for Romania

‘’*She comes closer <u>and she closes the curtains. No lights allowed</u>. The men of the '***Securitate'** *may shoot...I'm coming down immediately.*

*It's Roxanne, a girl who works at the hotel. **She starts asking me how life is in Greece**. I don't know what to answer her. Despite all **my complaints** when I'm back home, **here where I am I think Athens is wonderful.***

*If I **tell her about my country, she won't believe it**. She <u>**lives like all Romanians so far behind.**</u> Nevertheless, **I do mention some things. She's impressed**. [...]*

*'Run - run and see'. Roxanne stands in front of the TV and **looks impressed**. She's watching 'Mickey Mouse' **for the first time**. The <u>Romanian borders has begun to open</u>'.*

Pavlos Dimitriadis text for Romania

- The violent fall of the socialist regimes and the corresponding Greek reality: *consolidating the superiority complex through relative comparisons*

- The fall of the communist regimes and the Balkan myth

- ***West and Europe*** Vs ***isolationism, political persecution, instability and propaganda***

- The described ***instability*** after the fall of Ceasuscu

- ***Black market, extradition and shortages of basic food***

- ***Uncertainty and fear-*** The Romanians as ***unaware*** of the basic connotations of the term 'Democracy'

- The image of the Ceausescu regime and the relative Western images

- The creation of ***an 'apolitical', tired*** and ***frightened generation of citizens***

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