

Borders in/of the Balkan Road Movie  
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I am never sure of the reality of what I see, if I have seen it only once; I know that until it has firmly established its objective existence by impressing my senses and my memory, I am capable of conscripting it into the service of a private dream. In a panic I said, 'I must go back to Yugoslavia, this time next year, in the spring, for Easter.' (West 1942)

## **Balkan Roads and Borders**

Throughout the centuries, migrations, journeys, travels, mobility, and nomadic life were and still are an intrinsic part of Balkan life and history. The journeys are made in search of daily bread, the myth of a promised land, or a new beginning. They have been delayed, if we compare them to the rest of Europe, because the Balkan countries' borders opened quite late. Sometimes, these journeys delve into history and collective memory in search for identity, roots, or a past that defines the present. The Balkan wars set on the road the new wave of refugees who were escaping from the spreading political chaos and ensuing poverty. All of these journeys, real and imaginary,<sup>1</sup> are narrativised in the Balkan road movie. It inevitably encompasses border crossings spatio-geographically (*Valkanisateur*, 1998, d. Sotiris Goritsas; *In July/ Im Juli*, 2000, d. F. Akin; *Journey to the Sun/Gunese yolculuk*, 1999, d. Y. Ustaoglu), temporally (including the past reminiscences in *Underground/Podzemlje*, 1995, d. E. Kusturica and *Dust*, 2001, d. Milcho Manchevski) or both (*Ulysses Gaze/Vlemma tou Odyssea, To*, 1995, d. T. Angelopoulos). Some of these journeys are more abstract, revealing the borders between classes or social groupings (urban vs. rural in *Premeditated Murder/Ubistvo s predumišljajem*, 1995, d. G. Stojanović) and between ethnicities (diaspora stories in *Escape*, 2004, d. D. Lungulov and *Head On/Gegen die Wand*, 2004, d. F. Akin; or stories about refugees and émigrés in *Sjaj u očima/Loving Glances*, 2003, d.S.Karanović). Their complex structure and intricate mapped-out trajectories allow the inscriptions of a number of metaphorical or symbolical

meanings. Journey as a modernist trope references coming-of-age stories, big mythical adventures, frontier adventures, identity quests, and the search for the Proustian *temps perdu*.<sup>2</sup> These premises delineate the three pronged approach. It is concerned with the journey as the metaphorical quest for identity and with the entailed cinematic text as the articulation of the essential feeling of Balkanness. Finally, it attempts to profile the interrelatedness of the journey, narrative structure and cinematic genre trespassing.

The concept provides a double definition of the Balkan road movie. Literally, it is understood as the narrativization of journeys across Balkan space and time, which reflects the redrawn regional geographical borders and its spatial (re)imagining. Metaphorically, the Balkan road movie is the narrativization of the different searches for identity and journeys of self discovery. The moments of border crossing mark the (ex)change of identity extending back in time to the period of the “mythomoteurs” (Stoianovich 303).<sup>3</sup> It also marks the changes of genre and the motif is not surprisingly found in comedies (*Valkanisateur*), adventure films (*Dust*), historiographic metafiction (*Underground*), war films (*Pretty Village Pretty Flame/Lepa sela lepo gore*, 1996, d. S. Dragojević), dramas (*Hotel de Lux/Luxury Hotel*, 1992, d. D. Pita), and in social realist films (*Tirana, Year Zero/Tirana annee zero*, 2001, d. F. Koci).

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, I explore the Balkan road movie as genre, studying its formula, constitutive elements, and borders. Second, I analyze the ways in which the various border crossings along the journey shape the meaning of Balkan identity, or Balkanness as its core. The theme of Balkanness—as a nucleus of national, cultural and regional identities—is negotiated among numerous identities (gender, religion, and class, for example). Simultaneously, the Balkan road movie is constructed through cinematically articulated prolonged arguments among different ethnicities, between the past and the present, Balkan and Europe, between official and mythical history, and among various social groupings.

Since the majority of Balkan cinematic production from the 1990s onwards can be included in this analysis, my close reading of two paradigmatic narratives will be enriched by a number of comparative cinematic references. As case studies, the films *Valkanisateur* and *Dust* mark the opposing poles of the genre's range. In the film *Valkanisateur*, two men from the Balkans/insiders, travel in space, moving from Greece, across the Balkans, to end up in Switzerland. Along the journey, as they imperatively remap the region in geopolitical terms, they discover that their own identities are built on the opposition of Balkan(isation) vs. Europe(anisation). The second film, *Dust*, belongs to the subgroup of the Balkan travelogue, which depicts the revealing journey's experience of the foreigner/outsider—Western traveler in the Balkans. According to Dina Iordanova (2001) this specific narrative is characterized by three elements.<sup>4</sup> First, it deals with the number of plots

positioned in the Balkans. Second, it perpetuates Western-made stereotypes and discards the very option of criticizing the Eurocentric construction of the world. Finally, it confirms the controversial positioning of the Balkans as “geographically part of Europe, but conceptually excluded from the European cultural space.” (56). The journey in *Dust* occurs mainly through time, in the mapping of the Balkans as a mythical domain. The identities of the foreigners and the natives are constantly (re)shaped through the genre premises of the western, which eventually restructure the *mythomoteur*. Strong genre hybridization—evident also in *Valkanisateur*—and numerous references and citations testify to textual self consciousness and create meta-cinematic layers. Both films are polygeneric, multilingual texts of intercultural sensibility as well as rich interpretative fields. The dense intertextuality and intertwined layers of metaphorical, mythical, symbolic meanings are made not only with the intention of imagining the region, but also of explaining and familiarizing the Balkans for a heterogeneous international audience.

## Cultural Thematisation of the Journey

Raising the questions of identity in the Balkans, especially national identity has been supported by the occurrence of theoretical and historical factors. The post-modern theories of changing, fluctuating, non stable and multiple identities—founded upon the Saussure-Barthes’s theories of language, sign and meaning and the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm<sup>5</sup> as well as the construction of identity through and in the texts—arrived in the Balkans only in the late 1980s. At the same time, the resurgence of the concern with national identity resulted in the political and ideological destabilization of the region. While national identity was *sine qua non* for the formation of the nation state as the ultimate aim of the former Yugoslavia wars, the post-modern theories of identity became part of an attempt to rationalize the haunting and escalating nationalism.

In film theory, identity formation is explained by general schemata based upon Lacanian theories of the endless interplay of gazes. Identity is discovered only in relation with the Other. The process of Othering works through the gaze exchange, between us and the (small/Big) Other, that is, between the subject and object of the gaze. The constitutive gaze in road movies is ascribed to the traveler through the landscapes. For the local, he is the big Other/subject of the gaze, the norm in relation to which every object exposed to the scrutinizing gaze, is (mis)recognized. His gaze thematizes the issues of culture, identity, and nation. But the Othering involves both parties as confirmed by the gradual change of the engrained stereotypes used by the normative Other. The change of the vision (of the Balkans) enables both an analysis of “the stereotyper” and its “deconstruction”(Stam 2000,

21). It confirms the identity recognition to be played by the Big Other as the subject of the gaze.

Depending on whether the traveler is native or a foreigner to the region, Mete Hjort (2000) discerns two types of narrative development—thematization of the nation/region and consequentially of the (national/regional) identity:

The theme of nation [...], arises when the elements that are constitutive of banal nationalism are consistently flagged in the course of the narrative. The theme is typically topical in nature, and as a result, it tends to be subordinated to themes of the perennial type. [...] The explicit thematization of the nation tends to involve one of two approaches: monocultural hypersaturation and intercultural contrast. [...] The thematization of a nation, particularly in the case of hyper saturation, tends to promote opacity in international contexts, for local, topical and nation-specific thematic elements are likely to be only partially comprehensive in other national contexts. The risk of opacity that accompanies topical schematizations of specific nations in international contexts can, however, be somewhat mitigated by the more inclusive intercultural approach which is by far the most common incarnation of the theme of the nation. (16)<sup>6</sup>

In other words, Hjort delineates the representational strategies of the theme of the nation and their effects. Bearing in mind the targeted audience and the desired transparency of the thematization the nation could be represented through a number of banal and locally understandable elements. In this way it achieves the self-representation for itself while not being concerned with the transparency for the outsiders that do not know much about local history or customs. If oriented toward an international audience, film-makers are more prone to the portrayal of the nation through universal elements, comparative structure and perennial topicality offering simply another variation of the known schemata and situations in the local context painted in a stereotypical way.

The narrative about the people from the region traveling around the region is clearly monocultural thematization, which is characterized by “hyper saturation, use of specifically cinematic techniques and dialogue to flag national elements.” (Hjort 2000, 111). According to Hjort, on the other hand, intercultural thematization “uses contrastive cultural elements” (Hjort 2000, 113), whereas the contrast is created between the gaze of the outsider, as the bearer of the normative Western standards, and the wild, exotic and murky Balkans.

By Othering the Balkans, the foreigner (mis)recognizes his own identity and arrives at a cathartic experience. He finds new meaning in life when confronted with the suffering of the local population in the war-torn, ruined, or simply impoverished country. The figure of the Balkan person, on the other hand, offers a more complex analysis. He/she is involved in his/her self-definition, with a confirmation, denial or subsequent reversal of the common stereotypes. All ingrained features (barbarism, and regressive moves, for example) are reread

(noble savagery, return to paradise lost) and fused into a positive image. This redefinition of identity develops along two lines. First, it explains and naturalizes Balkan identity and the region for and by the gaze of the Outsider. Second, being also self recognition, it inverts the prejudiced outsider's image.

The best of the narratives play upon the thematisations of the nation as mutually-converting. If the narrative manages to use the gaze of the Balkan hero (as the subject) who in some way is—(1) estranged from the homeland (he returns from Diaspora in *In July*); (2) who travels to the previously unseen parts of the country (*Journey to the Sun*); or (3) who “travels” into the past (*Ulysses Gaze, Underground*)—than the monocultural becomes intercultural. In *Journey in the Sun*, a boy from Istanbul accompanies the dead body of his friend to the forbidden Kurdish regions near the Iraqi border. In *Ulysses Gaze*, a modern Ulysses travels around the Balkans visiting the devastated city of Sarajevo, reinforcing it as a mythical site and one of collective memory. *Cabaret Balkan/Bure baruta* (1998, d. G. Paskaljević) shows an unrecognizable and derealized Belgrade scape that acquires mythical underworld dimension. In *In July*, a young, Turkish man travels from Germany to Turkey, crossing all the Balkan borders. The reverse version of intercultural thematisation is seen in the narratives depicting the first encounters of Balkan immigrants with lands of promise. Turks encounter Switzerland in *Raise der Hoffnung/ Journey of Hope* (1990, d. X. Koller); Romanians meet Paris in *Asphalt Tango* (1993, d. N. Caranfil), and Serbs experience America in *Someone Else's America/ Tudja Amerika* (1995, d. G. Paskaljević).

## Balkanisateur in the Conquest of Europe

*Balkanisateur* exemplifies successful manipulation of thematisations in deceptively light comedy. In the third film of Greek director, Sotiris Goritsas, whose oeuvre generally exploits the motives of journey and/or schemes for getting rich. The heroes of the film *From the Snow (Ap to Hioni, 1993)* are Albanians who travel to Greece looking for a better life. In *V/Balkanisateur*,<sup>7</sup> two friends travel to Bulgaria and Switzerland, hoping to make money from the difference in foreign exchange rates.

*Balkanisateur* is a combination of the amusing and easygoing narrative, good photography and effective *mise-en-scène*. In genre terms, it brings together the diverse traditions of social drama, road movie, buddy movie and national mentality-driven comedy that play upon a wide array of Balkan stereotypes. The story begins in a continental village, near the Greek-Bulgarian border, when the *gasterbaiter's* stories of getting rich quickly inspire a pair of friends, Janis and Fotis, to try their luck. After discovering the money exchange scheme that should bring them the desired profit, they embark on the journey to Switzerland. The road

leads through Bulgaria, via Zurich and back home. Their little plan fails, but their journey brings unexpected gain. It becomes the road to maturity, friendship and the accomplishment of the mission of Balkanization.

The various border crossings (Greece-Bulgaria, Bulgaria-Switzerland) simultaneously outline the patterns of changes of identity, genres and thematisations. The first part of the story is worked out through the monocultural thematisation between the villagers/insiders, and the estranged ex-insider. The home setting, shown through banalities of the forsaken Balkan province—*kafana*, ethno music, dusty roads, poverty, and the stalemate atmosphere—is a non-typical Greek village, far from the sunny islands and the coast. The villagers, sinking under the burden of local, inland traditions, dream about the glamour of the big world. Reminiscent of the Balkan mood of Chekopian inertia, these characters hardly do anything but make idle plans. Janis and Fotis are common ethno(stereo)types—Balkan patriarchal macho guys, lazy with unrealistic ambitions. The motivation for action is provided by the stories of the rich *émigré*. The narrative, nevertheless, does not evolve toward intercultural thematisation because the point of view of the *émigré*—in spite of being denaturalized—is not demarcated as different. Although an outsider's perspective, his stance is full of nostalgic benevolence that makes it closely resembling an indigenous perspective. He understands, defends and does not judge.

In the second part of the journey, as they pass through Bulgaria, the narrative develops into monocultural thematisation in a broader sense, or intercultural thematisation *stricto sensu*. If we accept the Balkans as one entity, homogeneous-in-diversity, then within its borders, we find a monocultural thematisation or “othering” within one regional, supranational community. One nation is othering the other Balkan nation, but the differences do not escape the confines of regional identity. Intercultural thematisation is established by the fact that these are not simply two nations from the same region, but two nations marking the poles of Balkan identity. The misunderstanding and cultural differences are present to assure the charm of a paradoxal Balkanness. Mediating between East and West, Greece has always had a particular status. It is the country on the barbaric fringes, as well as the cradle of European civilization<sup>8</sup> that reinforces its superiority vis-à-vis the rest of the peninsula. If the Balkanized Greek village is taken to be paradigmatic, then one confronts interBalkan othering. If the image of two Greek guys in under-developed Bulgaria is understood as paradigmatic, it is a Europeanized Greece and the film represents intercultural thematisation. In their journey through the Balkan darkness, Janis and Fotis, being representatives both of Balkan(isateur) and Europe(anisateur) contribute to the overall duality of structure. As Europeanisateurs, they feel superior in intercultural othering. As Balkanisateurs, they complain about the miserable work of the monks Kyrillos and Methodios in Bulgaria. Though they are pan-Balkan educators, they had not

succeeded in the expected (monocultural) unification of the region. A case in point: Fotis asks a Bulgarian, Vasili, whether he's Greek, Vasili answers “ne” which means no in Bulgarian, but yes in Greek.

The Bulgarian picaresque narrative is seen through the filters of mainstream cinema and with deep mistrust. Made of ethno-comical episodes depicting the wild realm, it shows both the land of primitivism and the heart of Balkanism. The threshold of civilization contains the scenes of the untamed Balkan wedding in the middle of nowhere, with a pregnant bride and an indigenous lifestyle. Bulgaria is shown to be some fifty years or so behind the West, which confirms the notion of Balkan jet lag. In the seminal book, *Imagining the Balkans*, Marija Todorova (1997) claims that the delayed development of the Balkans sufficiently explains the dominant pejorative attitude and ensuing denigrating stereotypes. Looking at the Balkans, the West sees its own past that it would like to forget. It sees the dawn of civilization or the last home of barbarism. Traveling through Bulgaria, lagging behind developed Greece, Janis and Fotis travel back in time, revisiting the fifties of their homeland. The space acquires a temporal dimension, the time materializes in space.<sup>9</sup>

Although they approach the border, the two friends actually never travel through the former Yugoslavia and the rest of the Balkans. The narrative and editing ellipse brings them directly to Switzerland. While the road leads to a promised Heaven, the gradual introduction of contrastive elements builds up the intercultural thematisation. The Swiss landscapes are pastoral, neat and clean, like glossy consumerist ads disturbed only by the anachronistic, unshaven *gasterbeiter* faces traveling in bumped cars. As they encounter the national banalities of a different kind—green pastures, pretty sugared houses, empty and smooth roads, cows and bells, dreamy valleys—they begin to suspect the bitter truth about their improper presence.

The cultural contrast further develops through the appearance of other characters from the Balkans. The first people Fotis and Janis encounter in Switzerland are their regional and “traditional” enemies. When they hit the stopped car in the midst of the road, at first they think that the driver is Serb. However, he turns out to be Turk driving a van full of women and crying children. The Turkish man is willing to help the Greeks out of solidarity as indigenous intruders in the heart of Europe. The Balkan nations themselves create a new “crystallized, collective image” (Todorova 1997, 122) of the Balkan population, which tends to erase the internal differences and smooth out the mutual conflicts. This “crystallized collective image” is not the knot of blunders and prejudices that confirm the “lack of differentiation” (Todorova 1997, 122) created due to the ignorance and disinterest of the distant observer. Rather, it is an attempt in polycentrism that “globalizes multiculturalism. It envisions a restructuring of intercommunal relations within and beyond the nation-state according to internal

imperatives of diverse communities” (Stam 2000, 271). The Balkan nations outside the Balkans alter their relations, emphasizing their shared characteristics. In the new imaging, historical enemies, oppressors and oppressed, Turks, Greeks and Serbs will get together of their own free will, mistakenly and confusingly alike and repositioned toward Europe. In the next village, the Greek friends meet “real” Swiss people. Two brothers—European versions of Janis and Fotis—owners of the little hotel, have different opinions about how and whether to help them. One wants to help them in exchange for money, while the other refuses on principle. In the end, the more xenophile brother gives them spare parts for free.

The role of the meeting point is assigned to Switzerland. It stands for the heart of Europe, the headquarters of international institutions (Geneva), a central and neutral spot of the Old Continent. It brings together European opposites in a number of surprising and unpredictable situations. In the hotel, the Greek friends meet a group of European tourists sightseeing in Switzerland. The relaxed atmosphere is helped by the wine and the sounds of diverse music. Throughout the film, the music played articulates “ethnic heterogeneity” (Shohat and Stam 1994, 223) and changing power relations. In Bulgaria, the ethno background music is pervasive; there is gypsy music at the wedding and finally Bulgarian versions of western popular music from the seventies. In the Swiss hotel the evening begins with Sinatra's “Something Stupid”, that is to be replaced by *bouzouki* and *sirtaki* as the romance grows stronger. As the Greek melodies invade the atmosphere, the hotel lobby converts into a make-believe romantic summer in Greece. Janis and Fotis romance the women<sup>10</sup> who come from France and Germany, countries that form the new European axis. Hence, their national provenance also stands for different models of European culture: “kulturnation” (Germany) and “European civilization” (France). Implicitly, the choice of the successful romance marks the more successful conceptualization of European relations. More tolerant, the Europe-loving French girl (fittingly named Marianne, the symbol of the French Republic) goes back with the charming Southerner, Janis. On the other hand, Fotis remains faithful to the woman he left behind, which goes against all the typecasting of the Southern macho womanizer-*gastarbaiter*. Although a Europeanized Greek, Fotis nevertheless refuses German—shaped Europe, i.e. he refuses German national culture. For him, as a fan of European Greece, ancient Greek civilization is a model superior to all others.

The denouement of their adventure is expectedly tragi-comic due to language misunderstandings. The Greeks based their plan on the exchange rate given in American cents, while in reality the exchange rate was in Euro cents. Janis and Fotis are doomed losers, but who only a few minutes later, achieve even bigger and unexpected gains. Back on the Greek border, they realize that their external journey was paralleled by an internal. They mature and adopt a more serious outlook on life, while the film's narrative fulfills the basic demands of an



*bildungroman*. After the last youthful adventure, they are back home to old customs. Fotis is happily reunited with his pregnant wife. Maria decides to stay with Janis in Greece. Sorting out their love relationships brings them emotional satisfaction. However, maturity involves social recognition, for which they will have to wait. Making big money or getting a serious job are yet to come. But, after temptations and trials, they are, at least, ready to accept the responsibilities and face the world's and life's problems in their homeland. Harmony is restored both through the establishment of marriage/relationships and through the innovative gaze they cast on their village after the travels through multicultural Europe.

The journey confirms and strengthens their friendship and the heroes turn into the contemporary Balkan buddy pair of the 'buddy-body' movie. The term is coined for the films in which the romantic comedy's couple is replaced by the contrastive pair of male buddies.<sup>11</sup> Simultaneously, the romantic harmony of the marriage turns into a harmony achieved through male bonding. Janis is a free, easy-going bachelor who melancholically envies the married, pessimistic, and serious Fotis who is afraid of life. The very first shot of the film, the interior of *kafana*<sup>12</sup>—they own and run together and that comprises their interests—defines their relationship. At first, it attempts to be a kind of Las Vegas attraction with Western music; a few shots later it is reshaped as the local joint with *sirtaki* and no profit. Further, the appropriation of the Western buddy pattern is refined through the added contrast of the Balkanisateur/Europeanisateur. Janis is very confident that the Balkan mentality would effortlessly outsmart the normativized West because customary law and resourcefulness would triumph over written law. He is the incarnation of Balkan narcissism, a superiority complex of the half-tamed barabaro-genius that inverts typical European (Western) racism. The Balkan type manages to bring a bit of Europe into the borderline region. He is the one literary "taming" the French passion and bringing Western Europe to the traditional Balkan borders. Quite appropriately, the quest for Europe is resolved through emotions and not through political means or any other logic.<sup>13</sup> It is announced from the very beginning by the cohesive gendered translation of cultural contrasts. The Balkans represented by two men is a male, patriarchal principle, that wins over a female principle embodied by the European women. Balkanisateur has accomplished his mission by balkanizing Europe. Popularizing Balkan's way (and its way to Europe), he repositioned the Balkans within a European framework. Fotis is more cautious since his character provides an ever-skeptical reading of the narcissistic self imagining. He is both tolerant and respectful toward European law. He suspects that there is the proverbial "catch 22" lurking in every rule that might seem to favor the Balkans. He is the Europeanisateur of the Balkans who realizes that Balkan otherness is sufficiently Europeanized already.

## The Mythical Optique

My analysis of Milcho Manchevski's most recent film *Dust* (2001) as the case study for the Balkan road movie reveals it as the opposite of *Balkanisateur*. It is read as a multicultural and intercultural transposition of the western that, in return, rewrites a mythical version of the Balkan history by depicting the foreigner's journey through Balkan history, past and present. A system of comparative, intertextual and multimedia references in the portrayal of the events, region and people assures the perennial treatment of Balkaness. Balkaness and the pertaining new version of *mythomoteur* are seen as something that "resonates across historical and cultural/national boundaries" (Hjort 2000, 106). Widening and spreading Balkan tones, models and Balkaness as identity confirm the discrete but constant process of the Balkanization of the world.

*Dust* is a two-layered narrative. One narrative line is situated in present-day New York and the other in pastoral Macedonia at the beginning of the 20th century. In the contemporary beginning, a young African-American man named Edge robs an apartment in New York. Angela, the old lady, owner of the apartment, unexpectedly wakes up. But instead of calling the police, she begins to tell her life story, holding Edge at gunpoint. When she ends up in the hospital, Edge keeps visiting her and the storytelling continues. Angela dies and Edge carries on the telling of her story. Angela's life story represents the distorted western. In the "wild, wild West" in the very last years of the century, two brothers—Luke and Elijah—fall in love with the same woman—Lilith. The Cainesque Luke runs away from the family *ménage à trois* and ends up in Macedonia, becoming the bounty hunter. Instead of hunting for the rebels and money, he joins the Macedonian freedom fighters in their battle against the Turks. Elijah, the Abel-like brother, follows Luke in search of revenge. Luke dies saving the rebels, while Elijah takes the small Macedonian baby-girl with him to New York. The baby is Angela, the story teller. Back in the present, Edge finishes telling the story and finds himself inserted into the same ongoing remembrance story. The entangled narrative unravels as the road veers from New York-Wild West across to the Atlantic-Wild East. In temporal terms, it shuffles between present and past. It departs from the present goes back to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and ends in the realm of myth. In terms of genre, it interweaves road movie, western, and its mutation Eastern. Rare genuine western elements are left as such; the majority of them is given as strange and defamiliarised, while western and Balkan road genres convert into historiographic metafiction. According to Linda Hutcheon (1996, 178-208) the historiographic metafiction is equally occupied with the representation/rewriting of history and with the research of the history of representations. *Dust* ventures into the past, offering its mythical image; it mirrors the past in the present; constructs

tradition, articulates Balkanness through evoked history of imagining and performance. The text tightly knits together historical explorations of the western and Balkan history; it also includes the history of its (fictional) representation (through hybridized genres). The western displaced in the Wild East as Macedonia that accommodates archetypal imagery of the paradise lost becomes Easterner. The endless Balkan freedom fighting, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, is translated into the western conquest of new territories. Luke is a conqueror rediscovering the Golden Moments of the legendary Wild West made out through the evocation of the highlights of the genre's history.

Metafictional dimension and intertextuality are nested in the confluence of western elements from the different phases of the genre's developments (classical and super western) and variations (spaghetti western). Excessive violence is shown with graphic naturalism—that is the trademark of Packinpah—and baroque *mise-en-scène* of Sergio Leone. Furthermore, Manchevski consciously and neatly, like Anthony Mann uses composition and symbolism of the landscape and costumes to emphasize morality of the biblical-like story of revenge, catharsis, redemption. His heroes ironically wore white and black hats, wander through bucolic settings to confront the enemies in the spaghetti's festive scenes of Hawksian iconography and mounting tension (silent parts with dripping blood; tossing of the coin) The western brother/buddy competitive relationship is again *déjà vu* in the films of Mann (*Winchester 73*, 1950; *Bend of the River*, 1952; *The Naked Spur*, 1953), Ford (*My Darling Clementine*, 1946) or Hawks (the western trilogy). Luke, the lonely and the brave with the shadow from the past (*Shane*, 1953, d. G. Stevens), comes to the rescue of the rebellious village (*The Magnificent Seven*, 1960, d. J. Sturges, *Wild Bunch*, 1969, d. S. Peckinpah). The multiple genre's reflections are rather discreetly found in the New York narrative part. The gold coins, in jackpot manner, flow from the refrigerator when Edge looks at the photos that help him understand the Balkan mystery. They are the money Edge was seeking. They are hidden treasure usually searched for in westerns like *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* (1948, d. J. Huston) or *Meckenna's Gold*, (1969, d. J. L. Thompson).

As the regional genre variation, Eastern is not gastronomically titled (although it has been referred to as *baklava* western as well as Byzantine western a few times) as the more common: spaghetti, *kraut*, *paella* or *borsch* western. It is labeled in geographical (East/ern) or period terms (Byzantine) that underlie the natural, evolutionary displacement of its narrative. Already with Packinpah and Huston, the western moved toward Mexico, toward a new century and new themes. In *Dust*, the film moves toward the “West of the East”, into the Balkans at the height of colonization as the genre's last frontier. Arriving in Paris, Luke goes to the cinema and watches newsreels. In the block showing exotic countries and people is the short film *The Visit of the Sultan Rašid V to Kumanovo and Skopje* (1905) about the visit of the Ottoman Emperor to the “colonial” Balkans. Made by the Manaki

brothers, Greek-Macedonian cinema pioneers, it is one of the very first preserved films from their legacy—the same legacy Harvey Keitel tries to locate in the *Ulysses' Gaze*. During the projection, the short film is preceded by the intertitle “Macedonia—Jewel in the Crown of the Ottoman Empire” equating the relationship between Macedonia and the Ottoman Empire with the colonial relationship between England and India. Macedonia is the oriental “jewel” in Sultan's “crown” as India was for the British Empire, while the film converts into a cinematic trope of colonization.

The Balkan travelogue, in this case, is the journey through time, shifting between the New York present and the Balkan past. The narrative is relocated to the 20th century while the hero encounters historical figures. The insertion of the fictional characters within a verified historical context is done in a lucid way, similar to *Zelig* (1983, d.W. Allen), *Forrest Gump* (1994, d. R. Zemeckis) or *Underground*. On the ocean-liner, in the pseudo-authentic footage—made as old black and white film news—Luke meets Freud and Einstein. Upon arriving in Paris, he sees Picasso. A while later, the audience sees Angela on the photos with Tito. Another time frame is built through elaborate web of Biblical allusions and references. The very title quotes funeral service words “ashes to ashes, earth to earth, dust to dust.” The dialogue is replete with lines from the Old Testament and the New Testament, while the characters have Biblical names—(Prophet) Elijah, Luke (Gospel according to Luke but also Luke as Lucky Luke of the comics) or Lilith (female demon who drowns). Angela is angel and saint protector of repentance and remembrance. The other names are generic or vocational like in the early Christian community—Teacher, Grandpa.<sup>14</sup> The symbolic iconography evokes Judas's kiss; gold as payment for betrayal and disappointment; meanings clustered around the water—death and (re)birth of the soul, sin and purification.

The changed western keeps the traditional function of the mythologisation of the past/history. The Balkan past is revised according to the command “when history becomes myth, print the myth!” (*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, 1962, d. J. Ford). Elegiac, glorified, ideologically naturalized memories in an eternal rephrasing become the Eastern. The mythologizing perspective is assured by Luke whose bewildered gaze, finally identifies the Balkan skirmishes and battles in terms of the Western Armageddon fight between good and evil. The shiny cowboy is the ethical corrective in the Balkan conflicts, otherwise shown to be like the legacy of spaghetti westerns and narratives of the Mexican revolution. Macedonian heroes are equally driven by the lust for gold (*Duck you Sucker!*/*Giulia testa*, 1971, d. S. Leone), prone to violence without firm coda as they are zealous freedom fighters (*Viva Zapata!*, 1952, d. E. Kazan). “The Othering” in the other direction makes the Balkans an ennobling experience for Luke. He is changed and regains his lost idealism. Arriving in Macedonia, he sides with the rebels and their nominal moral imperative “do not kill for gold, but kill for ideals.” Angela proudly

claims “Luke never killed a man without good reason.” The savage realm gives the dignifying aura to the Wild West outlaw, providing the most positive version of Balkanization. The concealed gold coins are symbolical countervalue of the hidden Balkans that make possible all cathartic events. Thus, the Balkan gold is not a cursed one, but rather connects time, spaces, nations, and cultures. Only after discovering the gold, Edge can step from New York, via Angela’s mesmerizing memories into his rewarding Balkan adventure. He is the new actor on the Balkan stage of remembrances and foretelling.

In spite of jumping back and forth between centuries, the narrative time is not a linear one, but rather a circular one. Manchevski’s concept of time in *Before the Rain* (1994) is “The circle is not round, time never dies.” In *Dust*, it is explained “The centuries do not follow up each other but coexist like parallel universes” (*Dust*), floating in the mists of time. Linear time bends and buckles into a circle. Its trajectory is paved by the repetition of the *déjà vu* events and rituals in different contexts.<sup>15</sup> The bowing of time is endorsed by the style of Medieval Orthodox Metaphysics founded upon the revived medievalism which combines Byzantine, Orthodox, national mythical and Biblical elements. Its constitutive elements are iconography, legends, and religious symbolism that visualize the historicized *zeitgeist*, thus contributing to the perennial imagining of the theme. The film contains the beautiful aerial views of churches scattered on hilltops and on barren hillsides. The decisive confrontation takes place in front of the fresco of the *Judgment Day*. The souls that are weighed and judged give the western duel an orthodox spiritual allure. When Neda takes dying Luke into her arms, the film shot paraphrases the Serbian painting “The Girl from Kosovo”. It is like *tableau vivant* from a mediaeval episode considered the *mythomoteur* of the Serbian nation. It is saturated<sup>16</sup> with the ideals of martyrdom, sacrifice, victimization, injustice and suffering. Secular defeat at Kosovo Polje is reread as a glorious moral victory and spiritual reward, insuring that future generations will follow the example. The defeat changed into destined victory is a myth that lies at the heart of the Balkans, casting new light on the purpose of Balkan history in its eternity.

The narrativisation of the past and the search for identity are the all-inclusive motives set by the film’s motto—questions: “Where does your voice go when you are no more? What do we leave behind? Is it the story of our lives? Is it how others remember us? Is it the children we leave behind? Or the material records such as movies and photographs? Is it only the ashes in the urn? Is it the Dust? ” (*Dust*). Answering these questions, the film provides pure pleasure from complex storytelling about collective memory. The film also offers a diasporic/traveler memory shaped in multiple narrative voices and a web of gazes. Their audio-visual growth is structured in concentric circles. The central gaze belongs to Luke, through whose eyes we encounter the rustic sights for the first time. The central part—the flashback—is mediated by Angela’s storytelling.<sup>17</sup> The images

accompanying her narration—in the heavily accented, rough and trembling voice—are probably the ones projected on the memory screen in her head.<sup>18</sup> The new time and landscapes seen through Luke's eyes, then through Angela's and finally through Edge's, explode into the mythical realm. Edge, at first a passive listener, becomes increasingly involved in the story and ends up displaced by its narrative. The intercultural thematisation grows as the process of Othering widens. At the beginning, Luke and Elijah stand for the number of binarisms—white/black, nature/civilization, West/ East, New /Old World, Old/New Age. Upon Luke's arrival to the Balkans, the meaning of traditional western dichotomies (Kitses 1969)—Individual vs. Community, Nature vs. Culture West vs. East—is contextually enriched. With Angela as manipulative narrator, the story is expanded to include the present vs. the past, female vs. male; urban vs., rural, diaspora vs. indigenous; colonizers vs. colonized. Edge's character embodies the oppositions of ethnicity, race, age and class.

The Balkan travelogue narration is the grid which shapes representations and performances of Balkaness. The film links the consensual imaginings of the Balkans from different periods<sup>19</sup> into rewritten *mythomoteur*—versions of the past and foretelling for eternity. The Byzantine terms are superimposed with western ethical and mythical concepts and the historical framework of the Balkans. The Balkans as construct rests upon their metaphysical and mythical qualities, emblematic of the narcissistic self-imagining and the spreading of Balkanization as a spiritual revelation for the foreign traveler.

## On the Balkan Trail

The instabilities of the genre (Balkan road movie) and (Balkan) identity are mutually enhancing and supportive. Their normative work and inscription reshape the cinematic texts as they are being permanently cinematically remapped in the process. The dialectic practices delineate the widening specter of the notions of Balkaness. Thorough their collaboration, they succeed to “anchor”—together with the work of chosen context and imposed interpretative framework—the signified Balkaness as an ever ambivalent and changeable “floating signifier”. The articulation of Balkaness occurs through genre contamination as well as through the intertextual, palimpsest and post-modern performance of cinematic texts. The genre constantly spills over its established borders, becoming contaminated by the elements of a coming-of-age psychological drama, a national historical narrative, an ironic myth. Its unstable existence remains on the verge and in the margins, since border crossings stand for the ever-changing views toward the Balkans, which is embodied in its fluctuating relationships with Europe and the West. The Balkan road movie read as metaphor stands for the essential Balkaness defined in

comical, mythical, topical, perennial, monocultural or intercultural ways. The multilayered text crossing through time, figures the Balkanness through knotted allusions, imitations, dense pastiche, or references to images and performances established in other arts, genres, epochs and cultural contexts.

But regardless of the mode, the wandering quest along roads and borders ends with the restoration of Balkanness. Initially problematized or called into question, Balkanness is seen in a new way and/or often exalted. Read from different perspectives, exhibited in different genres, narratives, chronotopes proliferating in the web of gazes, and (re)visions, Balkanness seems to both undergo Europeanisation (of the Balkans) and perform Balkanization of the world. The Westernization of the Balkans as well as the (positive) inspiring Balkanization of the world mark the poles of the cubistic visualization that are offering pleasure of permanent change and multiple, diverse border crossings.

## Notes

1. on the more detailed systematizations of the journey, traveling, border crossing as related to “accented cinema” see Naficy (2001 222-289).

2. on journey, borders and frontiers as tropes in Hollywood cinema 1930-1990 see Ray (1985)

3. The term used by Stoianovich (1994) is coined by Anthony Smith (1986) to designate the basic myth or narrative set of symbolic values, identity constituents (memory, language, territory). “It is a defense of a ‘particular’ mythical claim, of a nature so precious as to demand any sacrifice to defend it.” (Parsi 2005).

4. Iordanova (2001) claims:

First, the distinctive travelogue-type narrative structure is characterized of a large number of ‘Balkan’ plots. Second, by submissively accepting instead of critically challenging a narrative structure, which inevitably positions and constructs them as objects of the Western traveler’s gaze, recent films from the Balkans that aim to address the current troubles of the region largely cater to traditional stereotypes. By doing so, Balkan film remains uncritical and fails to recognize the controversial effects of the Eurocentric construct. Third, this lack of critical examination provides grounds for wider speculation about the paradoxical positioning of the Balkans as geographically part of Europe, but conceptually excluded from the European cultural space. (6)

5. for the insightful comments about the Althusserian-Lacanian paradigm see Carroll pp.65-74.

6. Mette Hjort’s (2000) essay “Themes of the Nation” in the book *Cinema and Nation* explores the ways national cinema thematises the nation. He proposes several models: perennial and topical themes (linked with M. Billig’s “banal nationalism”) as well as mono and intercultural thematisation of the nation.

7. the film is cited under the titles *Valkanisateur* and *Balkanisateur* depending of the language. Serbian translation *Balkanisateur* successfully draws up the main point of film—the ways the two guys balkanize everyone.

8. about particular split or dual position of Greece see also Shohat and Stam (1994, 55-58) “Greece : where it all began”.



9. comp. “films can convey what Mikhail Bakhtin calls chronotopes’, materializing time in space, mediating between the historical and the discursive...” (Shohat and Stam 1994, 102)

10. The previous experience with the women they met by accident in Bulgaria was quite different. Two Bulgarian “ladies of the night” use the Greeks to get rich dinner in the decent hotel. Later, in stead of staying in the hotel, they take them to their home. One couple makes love in the separate room behind the closed door, the other is supposed to do that by the side of the blind grandmother in a grotesque and frustrating situation.

11. The gender difference is rewritten in terms of race, age, social status, position, philosophy (*Tango and Cash*, 1989, d. A. Konchalovsky; *Lethal Weapon*, 1987, d. R. Donner; *48Hours*, 1982, d. W. Hill, etc.). For more see Cynthis J. Fuchs (1993) essay “The Buddy Politic”.

12. *kafana* is local version of the restaurant, pub and coffee shop. It is a place for a quick drink, long conversation or idle spending of time. It is a place to eat and enjoy supper mainly with local, ethno food and entertainment. For more see Mattijs Van de Port (1998, 117-207). Sometimes he translates the term as bar or Gypsy bar that is only vaguely correct translation.

13. com. with *Nešto između Something in Between* (1982, d. S. Karanović) as

Portrayal of a young American woman journalist, who, in brief six- weeks stay in Belgrade, finds herself caught ‘in-between’ her sexual and sentimental attachments to two Yugoslav men who are best friends. At a deeper level , the film explores the ambivalent posture of Yugoslavia, herself trapped ‘in between’ political tensions of East and West and the cultural and economic collision of North and South. (Goulding 2001, 175)

14. The Edge as the only contemporary character is named functionally. He marks the edge (s) between the story lines and chronotopes but also unites them.

15. Time of the past is spatially accommodated in obvious metaphors of Balkan films: it is underground (*Underground*), a tunnel (*Pretty Village*, *Pretty Flame*) and bucolic imaginary of *Dust*.

16. The famous legend quoted in Rebecca West's novel-travelogue *Black Lamb and Gray Falcon* (1942), tells about the prophet Elijah who turns into a gray falcon flying from heavenly Jerusalem to Kosovo on the eve before the 1389 battle. Arriving at Kosovo, the bird asks emperor Lazar —Serb's leader —to choose between earthly and heavenly kingdom. Instead of the earthly, Lazar chooses the heavenly one, thus invoking eternal, spiritual salvation and worldly, physical defeat.

17. As pointed by S. Slapšak (2002) “Angela, as her Greek name indicates, is a messenger, a bearer of stories, [...] Angela is a messenger of the world of dead and the world of memories.”

18. compare with the problematisation of the narration the film *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948, d. Max Ophuls) by G. Wilson (1986).

Whenever a fiction film includes a verbal narration of past events by a character who is supposed to have witnessed them, and the import of this telling is conveyed on the screen in a flashback, there is a potential question about how the flashback is to be construed [...] I it that the shots in the flashbacks are meant as a sort of ‘visual translation’ of the verbal narrators' assertions? [...] Or is it that the flashback depicts, from its own proper perspective the *actual* occurrences that the narrator then claims to be describing. (105)

19. persuasive example of the ways past determines and is repeated in the present is given in Manchevski's answer to the question whether Luke stands for NATO.

He's not NATO, because the script was written before NATO came to have their fun in the Balkans, [...]“But once the bombing happened, [...] it was impossible to ignore it. We had it in the back of our minds. Everything you see influences you, even subconsciously. I guess I was a little more careful in portraying the fact that Luke is absolutely ignorant of what's going on. (Holley 2005)

Manchevski, thus, explains how his concept of Luke's character was influenced by the NATO bombing i.e. by the similarities and differences between the position and “intervention” of NATO and Luke and the Balkans. Unlike NATO that intervened with clear conscious, decision and reason Luke was blissfully ignorant about the real situation.

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## Film Credits

*Valkanisateur* (1998, Greece/Bulgaria/Switzerland) d.Sotiris Goritsas; w.Sotiris Goritsas, Sakis Totlis (story); ph.Stamatis Yannoulis; e.Takis Koumoundouros; m.Nikos Portokaloglou; cast: Stelios Mainas,Gerasimos Skiadaressis, Yiota Festa, Vassilis Halakatevakis, Bessy Malfa, Nikos Portokaloglou; rt. 98 min.

*Dust* (2001, UK/Germany/Italy/Republic of Macedonia) d.Milcho Manchevski; w. Milcho Manchevski; ph. Barry Ackroyd; e. Nicolas Gaster; m. Kiril Dzajkovski; cast:Joseph Fiennes,David Wenham, Adrian Lester, Anne Brochet, Nikolina Kujaca, Rosemary Murphy, Vlado Jovanovski; rt.127 min

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