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*Reversing the Gaze: Western Perception and the Wars of the former Yugoslavia in Film*

This paper examines visions of the Balkans mediated through Western protagonists in the portrayals of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia within a series of recent films made in both the Balkans and in the West. The Western protagonists include foreign aid workers, journalists, reporters and photographers, UN soldiers and administrators, business entrepreneurs, artists, and intellectuals. These films are either specifically about the Balkans or are indirectly haunted by the wars of the 1990s transposed onto a Western urban context. I build upon the key works on the Balkan cinema by Dina Iordanova and Daniel J. Goulding, as well as the literatures on war in film, cinema and national identity, and the cinematic engagements with collective memory.

First, I examine films that are situated in the Balkans and whose narratives are presented through the Western characters' point of view, such as "Welcome to Sarajevo" (1997, d. Michael Winterbottom) and "The Savior" (1998, d. Predrag Antonijević). I then contrast these mainstream visions that otherize the Balkans with Balkan voyage films, such as "Ulysses' Gaze" (To vlemma tou Odyssea, 1995, d. Theo Angelopoulos) and "Lamerica" (1994, d. Gianni Amelio). While the voyage films seek forms of interconnectedness of Balkan history within a European historical narrative, they also never fully escape elements of cultural particularism or discourses of Balkanisms.

Secondly, I focus on the direct and indirect hauntedness of the West by the Balkans in films like "Pola X," (1999, d. Leos Carax), "For Ever Mozart" (1996, d. Jean-Luc Godard), and "Code Unknown" (Code inconnu: Récit incomplet de divers voyages, 2000, d. Michael Haneke). I argue that these French art films present a complex series of European distancings from the region's history and the Balkan present. While "Pola X" projects the uncanny Balkan ghosts onto a European terrain, "Code Unknown" and "For Ever Mozart" attempt to engage with the contexts of violence, conflict, and indifference in the West. All three films ultimately employ metaphors of Balkan warfare to explore Western problems and contexts. I further compare the Western protagonists in these European art films to the Western mediator characters in Balkan films or co-productions. I discuss the Oscar-winning Bosnian film "No Man's Land" (Ni ija zemlja, 2002 d. Danis Tanović) and the Serbian film "Pretty Villages, Pretty Flames" (Lepa sela lepo gore, 1996, d. Srdjan Dragojević), comparing these visions as well to the Palme d'Or award winner "Underground" (Bila jednom jedna zemlja, 1995, d. Emir Kusturica) and the Venice Golden Lion winning film "Before the Rain" (Pred dozd, 1995, d. Milcho Manchevski). I examine the Balkan cinemas' divided impulse to, on the one hand, gratify the Western gaze, and, on the other, to critique Western military and humanitarian intervention, as well as its media manipulations.

Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have noted in *Unthinking Eurocentrism* that, in the case of the developing world narratives on film, first world journalists mediate the relationship between the Western gaze and the Third World contexts, as if Third World protagonists were incapable to presenting their own narratives. Mainstream narratives such as "Welcome to Sarajevo" and "The Savior" replicate this vision in the Balkan contexts. I conclude, however, that in second group of films examined in this paper, mediator characters are often themselves transformed by the contexts of Balkan warfare, making for more complicated narratives of mediation and interchange than in films about

colonized regions. Further, the prevalence of over-reliance on mediation in Balkan war narratives offers still not fully explored possibilities for cinematic border crossings and forms of dialogue and linguistic translation among Western and Balkan protagonists. I end the paper with a brief discussion of Godard's "Notre Musique" (2004), in which visions of urban ruins in Mostar and Sarajevo do not present Balkan urban centers as mere "cities-martyrs" (Iordanova, 2001) within the region's seemingly inexplicable brutality and cruelty. Rather, in a cinema of reconciliation, this vision stresses embeddedness of the Balkans within Europe and the globalized world.