

**Review: *Contemporary Balkan Cinema: Transnational Exchanges and Global Circuits*; Lydia Papadimitriou and Ana Grgić**

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**Contemporary Balkan Cinema: Transnational Exchanges and Global Circuits**

**Edited by Lydia Papadimitriou and Ana Grgić**

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Following Dina Iordanova's iconic monographs, and Dijana Jelača meticulous investigation on post-Yugoslav cinema and trauma, *Contemporary Balkan Cinema: Transnational Exchanges and Global Circuits* continues the exploration of Europe's Other by focusing on the region's post-economic crisis cinematic landscape.<sup>1</sup> Although the new millennium brought about remarkable achievements in terms of film festival successes, the significance of "the second century of Balkan cinema" (xxii) often remains unrecognised and under-negotiated in Anglophone scholarship. As part of the Edinburgh University Press's ongoing series *Traditions in World Cinema*, *Contemporary Balkan Cinema: Transnational Exchanges and Global Circuits* aims to bridge this gap by country-by-country chapters on regional national cinemas, which lists Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia, Romania, Turkey, Kosovo and Montenegro. The studies in the book primarily focus on transnational links in Balkan cinema in this way to bring the aesthetical, industrial, socio-historical as well as political perspectives of the often-overlooked cinematic region into a productive dialogue. More than that, one of the biggest achievements and novelty of Lydia Papadimitriou and Ana Grgić's edited collection is that, as Iordanova herself also highlights in the book's foreword, it veers away from the male-dominated cinematic historiography which put women filmmakers and the investigation of gender roles into scholarly background. Chapters on cinema of Cyprus (Constandinides and Papadakis, 87-100), Kosovo (Borrione and Muco, 121-139), Serbia (Daković, Milovanović and Leković, 190-208) or Slovenia (Petek, 208-228) all survey outstanding female directors - such as the Croatian Vlatka Vorkapić or Vanja Sviličić, the Bulgarian Mina Mileva, the Slovenian Maja Weiss, the Greek-Cypriot documentary filmmaker, Danae Stylianou, the

Serbian Vanja Kovačević, or the Kosovar Blerta Zeqiri- whose work informs audiences of sexist and patriarchal traditions in society, and the struggle of female as well as queer characters in contemporary social sets. This refreshing perspective makes the collection challenge the old-fashioned and well-known scholarly consensus which declared that Balkan cinema “is brimming with testosterone”.<sup>2</sup>

The collection reconceptualizes contemporary Balkan cinema not only by adopting female perspectives on filmmaking but, instead of focusing on the system change and post-Yugoslav wars, it puts the year of the global economic crisis as starting point. Characterized by severe unemployment, migration, new tendencies of neoliberal policies, and the European Union’s neocolonist framework, the new era saw the re-birth of nationalist and racist ideologies which clearly left an imprint on cinematic productions.<sup>3</sup> Be that Bosnian (Jelača, 34-50), Montenegrin (Jovanovic, 139-154), Cyprian (Constandinides and Papadakis, 87-100), Serbian (Daković, Milonanović and Leković, 190-208) or Turkish cinema (228-250), the narratives of several films reflect upon contemporary existential stuckness and financial hardship – something that Pavičić earlier named as the “cinema of normalisation”.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand however, the post-crisis years opened up ways to international and cross-border collaborations as well as film festivals that helped contemporary Balkan cinema to receive more attention and create in a great variety of (popular) genres (Doncheva, 52). The Montenegrin-Serbian *Igla ispod praga/The Black Pin* (Ivan Marinović 2016), the North Macedonian-Kosovar *Vrakanje/ The Return* (Kastriot Abdyli, 2018), the Bulgarian-Croatian Voevoda (Zornitsa Sophia, 2017) or the Croatian-Serbiab-Montenegrin *Svećenikova djeca/The Priest’s Children* (Vinko Brešan, 2013) are only a few of the collection’s mainstream examples, which, thanks to the inter-Balkan/inter-European coproductive background, successfully question orientalist approaches, while also sharing a unique South European flavour.<sup>5</sup> Paradoxically, the economic crunch thus fostered transnational and trans-ethnic

interactions among filmmakers and production companies and resulted in a new wave of quality art as well as mainstream films and the growth of regional film festivals and participation. This “affinitive cosmopolitanism” (Williams and Myftari, 29), has provided “an opportunity for working through collective and individual trauma’ and strengthened cinema’s role to ‘destabilise dominant (...) hegemonic narratives about war and ethno-national belonging on a transnational scale” (Jelaća, 38). It seems that, while topics of war, trauma, ethnic and religious conflicts are still key topics of Balkan cinema, the new (cross-border) films communicate a more universal image of the region and its inhabitants. For instance, Constantin Popescu’s *Pororoca* (2017) presents a father’s personal crisis as he is trying to find her disappeared daughter, Erion Bubullima’s *Sex, Storytelling and Cellular Phones* (*Sex, përrallë dhë cellular*, 2015) narrates a domestic crisis and infidelity, while Miloš Avramović’s *The South Wind* (*Južni vetar*, 2018) and Janez Burger’s *Ivan* (2017) mirrors everyday crime, societal corruption and one’s trapped-like situation in the contemporary crisis-laden economic context. While the national past and present as socio-political frameworks cannot be overlooked in the post-2008 filmic corpus, new cinemas often reckon with the explicit representation of war, ethnic conflicts and stereotypical Balkan representations. The edited collection enumerates several less-known examples which operate on a global level and are worth of future examination. As the chapters illustrate, Balkan cinema has arrived in a new stage: the growing presence at prestigious film festivals, the increased participation of female filmmakers and new topics and perspectives all predicate a promising next decade for the region’s film industries and urgently call for further scholarly analysis. These might include gender perspectives in recent Balkan cinema, the impact on and presence of the economic crisis on screen and contemporary topics of migration, Europeanization and the very position, identity and role of the Balkans in contemporary socio-political and filmic discourses. As an

institutional survey on the post-2008 cinematic Balkan landscape, *Contemporary Balkan Cinema: Transnational Exchanges and Global Circuits* is definitely the zero ground for that.

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<sup>1</sup> See Dina Iordanova. *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture, and the Media*. (London: BFI, 2001); Dijana Jelača, *Dislocated Screen Memory. Narrating Trauma in Post-Yugoslav Cinema*. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and *The Cinema of the Balkans* (London: Wallflower Press, 2006)

Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1997), 61-65.

<sup>2</sup> Mima Simić, “Gender in Contemporary Croatian Film,” in *Contrast: Croatian Film Today*, edited by Aida Vigan and Gordana P. Crnković, 89-100. (Zagreb, Croatia: The Croatian Film Association in Association with Berghahn Books, 2012)

<sup>3</sup> Dušan Bjelić, “Introduction: Balkan Transnationalism at the Time of Neoliberal Catastrophe”, *Interventions*, Volume 20, Number 6 (2018), 751-758.

<sup>4</sup> Pavičić, Jurica, ““Cinema of Normalization”: Changes of Stylistic Model in Post-Yugoslav Cinema After The 1990s”, *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, Volume 1, Number 1 (2010), 43–56.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Jameson, Fredric. “Thoughts on Balkan Cinema.” In *Subtitles: On the Foreignness of the Film*, edited by Atom Egoyan and Iain Balfour, 232-256. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004) and Longinović, Tomislav. “Playing the Western Eye: Balkan Masculinity and Post-Yugoslav War Cinema.”, In *Eastern European Cinemas*, edited by Anikó Imre. (London: Routledge, 2005), 35-47