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## Tanja Zimmermann: Der Balkan zwischen Ost und West. Mediale Bilder und kulturpolitische Prägungen.

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This book examines the de/re/construction process of the image of the Balkans as a space embedded in the European discourse in different media from 1830 to the present day. According to the author, the Balkans have served as a stereotypical media paradigm for a simulacrum of particular Western and Eastern phantasms. Those phantasms had and continue to have effects on the process of recreating new cultural and political concepts of identity and space in the Balkans.

Zimmermann analyses literature, travelogues, paintings and scientific writing to guide us between the different poles of the creation of predominantly negative and secondary Balkan stereotypes. As the Great Ottoman Empire slowly dissolved by the mid-19th century, two of the Great Powers (Russia and Austro-Hungary) saw an opportunity to increase their imperial influences. However, they discovered small, corrupt, and bankrupt states at odds with each other. Soon this region would be called the Balkan Powder Keg. It is interesting to learn that the initial interest by both Western and Eastern imperial states were not the Balkans but liberated Greece. However, for the travellers who met Greek liberation fighters, the fighters did not mirror the pre-constructed stereotype of Hellenic civilization, but were instead perceived as disorganized combatants and bandits. Hence, Pan-German and Pan-Slavic antagonistic discourses created a stereotype of the fatalistic, primitive, devious and bloodthirsty Balkans. For instance, Aleksandr Pushkin and Michał Czajkowski both sent their fictional characters to disappear into the Balkan void.

When Bosnia became part of Austro-Hungarian Protectorate, the image of the Balkans slowly altered through texts such as travelogues, doctors' anecdotes, and Freud's visit to "a space beyond the pleasure principle", where pathological eroticism unites with thanatological phantasm. Later in the book Zimmermann links such Balkan phantasms

with Baudrillard's theory of simulacra hyper-reality and video installations of Marina Abramović.<sup>1</sup>

The longest chapter is devoted to the analysis of Yugoslav identity creation under Tito. It is well researched and founded on abundant media materials. As a reaction to the 1948 conflict between Tito and Stalin, the creators of Yugoslav identity tried to counter accusations of being primitive and backward by turning them into an affirmative multicultural model. Miroslav Krleža and Otto Bihalji-Merin, the leading intellectuals of that time, tried to construct Yugoslav identity based on a heretic sect of Bogomils, medieval religious dualists, who did not belong to either Catholic or Orthodox Church. They converted to Islam by the mid-15th century and anticipated Bosnian multiculturalism. Bogomil symbolism reflects religious belief specific to Yugoslavia as well as Yugoslav position as distinct from both Western capitalism and Eastern communism.

Zimmermann aptly succeeds in explaining how the ideas and concepts used to create this original, positive, and alternative image of Yugoslavia transmuted and then created the fertile ground for the break-up of Yugoslavia. The focus on peoples' folk art (e.g. Bogomil tombstones, medieval Macedonian frescos, naïve paintings, autodidacts, archaism, etc.) turned in the case of Serbia into nationalistic populism through the reawakening of the epics about Kosovo. Zimmermann meticulously analyses the transformation of the Kosovo myth that was used for the creation of the first Yugoslav project. For instance, Ivan Meštrović's model for the Kosovo Temple from 1915 was converted into a nationalistic Serbian propaganda instrument in the late 1980s. The author presents how the newly constructed, affirmative third way ended up in death and destruction. Subsequently the last chapter deals with thanatological phantasms and its post-

1 According to Zimmermann, Baudrillard claimed to have found an empirical proof for his theory in Western inaction during Sarajevo siege. The war of extermination against the Bosnians confirmed a long existing Balkan phantasm and therefore nothing could happen in reality what has not already happened in the medial simulacra.

Bosnian war (1992-1995) implications on visual media (self)perception that was caught between reality and fiction.

Zimmermann's primary focus is on the influence of foreign images on the construction of identity among Slavic people who lived in the territory of the former Socialist Federalist Republic of Yugoslavia. The author succeeds in presenting the duality of the Balkans in a multidisciplinary way (literature, history, art history, memory and media studies), while her art-history background (her first doctorate is in art history) offers the reader a superb analysis of various media examples of "inbetweenness", such as *Danatti all'inferno / The Damned Cast into Hell* by Luca Signorelli as a source of Freud's simulacrum or Ron Haviv photo from Bijeljina in 1992 that inspired/provoked many artists and philosophers to write about it.

Zimmermann had until recently been teaching East European literature and art history at the University of Konstanz, Germany. Her multidisciplinary approach was clearly mirrored in how she methodically analysed various materials, including (but not limited to): literary works (e.g. Pushkin, Ivan Turgenev, Lev Tolstoi, Czajkowski, Susan Sontag, Peter Handke); films (e.g. *V gorakh Jugoslavii / In the mountains of Yugoslavia* (Abram Room, 1946, USSR), *W.R. - Misterije organizma / WR: Mysteries of the Organism* (Dušan Makavejev, 1971, Yugoslavia), or *Bitka na Neretvi / Battle of Neretva* (Veljko Bulajić, 1969, Yugoslavia); paintings (e.g. Signorelli and Krsto Hegedušić); photographs (e.g. Haviv and Tanja Ostojić); sculptures (e.g. Antun Augustinčić, Meštrović, and Bogdan Bogdanović); video art installations (e.g. Jean-Luc Godard and Marina Abramović); philosophical texts (e.g. Slavoj Žižek and Jean Baudrillard); travelogues (e.g. Cyprien Robert, Bernard Wiemann, and Josef Martin Prester). Such a vast amount of data has been carefully evaluated in order to guide us much like Ariadne's thread through this huge labyrinth of territory and identity (dis)integration and inclusion/exclusion of the Balkans since 1830s.

The book has an exceptionally broad perspective that documents the (re)creation of narratives on

Balkans from both Western and Eastern Great Powers and, more importantly, for avoiding polarization of the Balkans along the East/West axis. Unlike other outstanding authors dealing with the Balkans as a mythical place located between Orient and Occident (e.g. Maria Todorova, Vesna Goldsworthy, Žižek, Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić), Zimmermann comprehensively presented solid media records from mostly Russian but also other Eastern and Western sources. For instance, she takes the reader through certain parts of Russian nation building myths (Tatar yoke) that help us understand why Russia applied certain stereotypes in its perception of the Balkans and its people.

The only missing references are perhaps Yugoslav theatre plays or movements that could further demonstrate the process of reinventing homo yugoslavicus as was the case for example with plays by the theatrical movement KPGT (an acronym from the first letters of the words for theatre in the various languages of the former Yugoslavia – Kazalište Gledališče Pozorište Teatar).

*Der Balkan zwischen Ost und West* is a revised version of the author's dissertation for her postdoctoral lecture qualification (habilitation treatise). It is a multifaceted and very important contribution for future multidisciplinary research in the field of Balkan Studies and is meant for those whose interests lie in the fields of South & East European Studies, Cultural Memory Studies, Cultural History and Media Studies as well as literature, art and the media in Russia, South Eastern Europe and Poland in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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## Filmography

Bulajić, Veljko 1969. *Bitka na Neretvi / Battle of Neretva*. United Yugoslavia Producers; Eichberg-Film; International Film Company; Igor Film; Jad-

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