

Christina STOJANOVA

Stranger than Paradise: Postcommunist Immigration in the Eyes of Self and 'Other'¹

Abstract. Since the beginning of the millennium, Eastern European cinemas have produced a number of films, devoted to the problems of post-communist immigrants 'there,' in the new lands of promise, and of the feelings of those, left behind 'here,' in their native lands. It is enough to mention the Bulgarian *Letter to America* (2001), *The World is Big* and *Salvation Lurks Around the Corner* (2008) and *The Sinking of Sozopol* (2014) as well as the Romanian *Sundays on Leave* (1993) and *Occident* (2001). In addition to the few Eastern European films on human trafficking, like the Hungarian *Bibliothèque Pascal* (2010) and Bulgarian *Face Down* (2015), there have begun to appear films about migrants who pass through the postcommunist countries on their way to Western Europe like the Romanian film *Morgen* (2011) and the Bulgarian *The Judgement* (2014). This paper therefore is an attempt at mapping the territory by creating a taxonomy of the representation of emigration and immigration in postcommunist Eastern European cinemas. By building on theories of the 'gaze' and on efforts to adapt a post-colonial approach to Eastern European cultural production, the paper also lays the foundation of a complex and subject-specific methodological approach.

Keywords: Eastern Europe, postcommunist, post-colonial, self-colonizing, gaze, (im) migration, emigration, human-trafficking.

Okwe: "Because we are the people you do not see. We are the ones who drive your cabs. We clean your rooms. And suck your cocks."

– Dirty Pretty Things

Klemens von Metternich, one of the most conservative politicians of the nineteenth century and champion of Western European isolationism and xenophobia, is credited with saying that Asia begins at the Landstrasse, that is, at the street that leads out of Vienna towards Hungary. The last two centuries of the

Christina STOJANOVA

University of Regina

Email: Christina.Stojanova@uregina.ca

EKPHRISIS, 2/2017

TRANSNATIONAL CINEMA DIALOGUES
pp. 14-28

DOI:10.24193/ekphrasis.18.2
Published First Online: 2017/12/30

Eastern European² history could be defined as series of attempts to refute this arrogant statement of the Austrian politician: the need to catch up and overcome the deepening estrangement from the West, to be accepted 'back' into the bosom of Europe as a coequal, has come to resemble an obsession, shared by many Eastern Europeans. In their effort to extricate themselves from this outdated sentimentality and better grasp the intricacies of the postcommunist moment, scholars from the region have begun to increasingly use the post-colonial paradigm. In addition to its potential to grasp the postcommunist situation with regard to half a century of Soviet domination, it proved an adequate – albeit hotly contested – tool for the study of Eastern Europe after acquiring its independence in the second half of the 1800 and after WWI from the three European empires – the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman.

The post-colonial discourse began to gather momentum in the 1990s with Maria Todorova's influential study *Imagining the Balkans*, whose point was taken boldly further by József Böröcz with his "Introduction: Empire and Coloniality in the 'Eastern Enlargement' of the European Union," in the *Empire's New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement*, and most recently, by Cristina Şandru's book *Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of post-1945 East-Central European Culture*. As Aniko Imre writes in her article *Postcolonial Media Studies in Postsocialist Europe*,

In the mid-1990s the first tentative efforts to extend postcolonial studies to the other Europe ran into roadblocks put up by two different camps – Postcolonial studies scholars worried about the discursive dilution of postcoloniality and wanted to keep the field specific to the violent imperialism and racism of European empires. At the same time, intellectuals in postsocialist countries, which were in the first, optimistic throes of a quest for re-entry into European capitalism and democracy, were reluctant to consider their own affinity with citizens of decolonized countries (2014:117).

Yet, "as the euphoria about the region's overnight identity transformation has been tempered by the realities of its economic and democratic deficit, postcolonial studies has offered an increasingly attractive explanatory paradigm and historical perspective to academic observers" (Imre 2014: 118). Moreover, having struggled with the need of construing an adequate theoretical grid for the study of postcommunist cinema and culture, and more specifically – of representation of immigrants on screen both in Quebec and in Eastern European cinema(s), we cannot but agree with Imre's claim that the postcolonial discourse

[h]as thus put the nail in the coffin of the three- world division that structured the Cold War. Perhaps most important, it has offered an alternative historiography to hegemonic nationalistic narratives within a historical context that accounts for the region's multiple imperial legacies (2014: 119).

In order to reflect better the growing tensions between the core northwestern European countries and the peripheral southeastern ones – and long before Brexit

startled everyone with its unrestrained hate rhetoric against migrants from Eastern Europe – the term self-colonizing emerged in the English-language Eastern European scholarship as a somewhat unusual off-shoot of the post-colonial discourse. Coined by Bulgarian scholar Alexander Kiossev in 1999, the term signifies “a core of self-imposed, voluntary identification, formed by Eastern European nationalisms following the West’s image of the region” (qtd in Imre, 2014: 121), and could be better articulated as ‘conforming to’ or ‘accepting wholesale’ the dominant discourse – whether Soviet in the past, or the current one of European Union.

The term self-colonizing gaze is applied here in attempt to further develop Kiossev’s understanding of the self-colonizing phenomenon, and is applied within the taxonomy of films about immigrants, inspired by various ‘gaze’ concepts, rooted in Lacanian psychoanalysis, Heideggerian existentialism, and Foucauldian dynamics of knowledge and power. Lacan, for example, considers fundamental the realization of being an object of the other’s gaze during the mirror stage as it not only marks a certain loss of autonomy, but also suggests coalescence of the ego complex. The importance of the other, of seeing and being seen, has been recognized by the existentialists and Heidegger as an axiom of our ‘being-in-the-world’. For Foucault, on the other hand, the relentless intensity of the gaze – especially in authoritarian and totalitarian systems – fosters self-regulatory behaviour on behalf of the subject.

The gaze taxonomy in this paper is bookmarked by E. Ann Kaplan’s post-colonial notion of the “imperial gaze” (2000) – which infantilises the observed, turning him/ her a projection of the privileged spectator’s set of principles and beliefs – and bell hooks’ idea of the “oppositional gaze” (1992). Theorized in dialogue with Laura Mulvey’s theory of the normative white “male gaze” (1975), which frames/ projects women on screen as objects of visual pleasure and desire, the “oppositional gaze” opens up possibilities for reading ‘against the grain’ cinematic representations of black women, but above all – which is important for this study – suggests the possibility of returning the gaze. Which inevitably evokes the post-colonial take on the gaze, inspired by Edward Said’s concept of orientalism (1975). It implies the possibility of returning the ‘imperial gaze’ by framing the former colonizers from the view point of the formerly colonized through the prism of what in this study is called the scornful gaze. Yet above all, the post-colonial gaze affirms the necessity of the formerly colonized to see themselves not only as victims of unfortunate historical circumstance – referred to below as the self-pitying gaze – but also as mature subjects, capable of seeing themselves, their destiny, and the world around them through the prism of the self-critical and the analytical gaze.

Therefore the self-colonizing gaze – that is, the attempt to conform to the expectations of the Western European viewers, favouring particularly bleak and sensationalist takes on postcommunist reality – is discussed here in relation to the above mentioned self-pitying, self-critical, scornful and analytical gazes.

This somewhat lengthy introduction serves to put in new perspective the discussion of films about Eastern European immigration and emigration after the Brexit rupture which, from today's vantage point, seems to be only the beginning of the further ghettoization of Eastern Europeans, especially those who seek prosperity in the core – and richest – Western European countries. Indeed, the removal of the last vestiges of self-delusion about the nature of the East-West rapport has begotten a new epistemic situation that is as irreversible as it is inevitable.

The Spectre of Redundancy

In one of his many essays, the Polish-born social thinker Zygmunt Bauman ironically paraphrases Marx when surmising the most devastating effects of what he calls liquid modernity, or culture of excess, redundancy, waste and waste disposal: “[A] spectre hovers over the denizens of the liquid modern world,” he writes “and all their labours and creations: the spectre of redundancy” (2004: 97). Indeed, he further writes, “the planet-wide victory of economic success has resulted in ever-growing number of human causalities”, who “circle the globe in search of sustenance, and attempting to settle where sustenance can be found,” becoming in the process “easy targets for unloading – or projecting – anxieties of social redundancy” (2004: 63)

The curve of the general attitude to the West during the protracted postcommunist transition to market economy and democracy – from euphoria to disappointment to rude awakening and depression – has been reflected succinctly in Eastern European films, dealing one way or another with immigration. Immediately after the Wall fell, Eastern European countries saw off the first enthusiastic wave of immigrants to the West, consisting mostly of people who were living, so to speak, on their suitcases, waiting for an opportunity to get away from the oppressive regimes. Then there were the inevitable fortune seekers and adventurers, a phenomenon masterfully framed through Western – imperial – gaze in *Krapatchouk*, a film made in 1992 by Spanish director Enrique Gabriel-Lipschutz. This very popular but short-lived spoof pokes fun at migrants from the imaginary (post) communist country Krapatchouk, which has freshly opened to the world, and their maladroitness in the lands of plenty. Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal*, made a dozen years later, builds on the same premise. Its Bulgarian-speaking protagonist (masterfully played and spoken by Tom Hanks), who hails from another imaginary Eastern European country – Krakozhia – gets stuck at a New York terminal due to a military coup at home. Despite their unequal budgets and popularity, both films unanimously concluded with condescending sympathy that these otherwise good, but strange and old-fashioned people, do not belong to the West, and should return as soon as possible to their charmingly unpronounceable homelands.

Eastern European national cinemas, albeit slow in coming to terms with the realization that the West is far from thrilled by the ‘return to Europe’ of their countries,

towards the end of the 1990s began producing films, whose thematic and aesthetic modes reflect adequately the loss of innocence vis-à-vis their significant Western Other.

The Self-Pitying Gaze

Among the first postcommunist works, focusing on the dark sides of immigrant experience, is the Bulgarian *Letter to America* (Pismo do Amerika, 2000). The director Igljika Trifonova has chosen the magical realist mode, which allows her to blend seamlessly such incongruous set of opposites as the American and the indigenous Bulgarian way of life, the urban and the rural, and to involve “issues of borders, mixing, and change, revealing the crucial purpose of magical realism: a more deep and true reality than conventional realist techniques would illustrate” (Postcolonial Studies). Taking its cues from the internationally successful Bulgarian documentary *Forgotten by God* (Zabraveni ot Boga, dir. Eldora Traykova, 1999) about the loneliness and hardships of the aging population in Bulgaria’s depleted rural areas, *Letter to America* “shows what has left of the once closely-knit and vibrant Bulgarian communities. In tune with “the magic realist tradition”, the film deploys folklore mythologemes of “old wise people, offering much-needed miraculous solutions to otherwise unsolvable problems” (Stojanova in Imre: 220). According to pre-modern Balkan beliefs, “a grave illness could be cured through the magical powers of waters, herbs or soil from one’s native land, or with the help of an ancient healing song, which comes straight from the depths of the collective unconscious” (Stojanova in Imre: 221). Having stumbled upon such a song, the protagonist tapes it and sends it off as a wondrous cure to his gravely ill émigré friend in far-off America. As Bauman has it, it is traditionally believed that, “to find oneself in a ‘far-away’ space, is an unnerving experience ... beyond one’s ken, out of place and out of one’s element, inviting trouble and ... harm” (1998:13). By displaying unpopular aspects of the emigrant experience like loneliness and sickness, the film taps into Bulgarian collective consciousness, traumatised by emigration, which has reached epic proportions since the fall of communism. The film thus releases pent up emotions as perceived from “here,” from the “old” country, and could be interpreted as a beautiful poetic lament, coming from a land bled white by emigration, where the fading memory of a once-spirited indigenous culture whose last stand the old people are, would inspire “an urge to feel at home, to recognize one’s surroundings and belong here” (Bauman, 1995: 47)

Another two, equally successful films, made over the subsequent decade or so, have confirmed the penchant for the self-pitying, sentimental gaze from ‘here’, demonstrated with *Letter to America*. Stefan Komandarev’s fiction debut, *The World is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner* (Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade, 2008) is a classical *bildungs* story about the Bulgarian born, but raised in Germany teenager Alexander (or Sashko), who embarks on an identity quest with his motorcycle-riding rocker of a grandfather. Like *Letter to America*, the narrative

needs an almost mythical Wise Old Man to anchor the confused immigrant identity of Sashko. This larger-than-life grandfather not only shows him the beauty of his native land and the healing powers of its waters, herbs and soil, but also grooms him for the complicated immigrant life by cracking unconventional wisdoms, disguised as aphoristic one-liners (therefrom the film's unusual title).

The Sinking of Sozopol (Potuvaneto na Sozopol, 2014) by Kostadin Bonev, on the other hand, does make an attempt to demystify its wallowing main character, construing him as an egotistic narcissist, who 'midway in the journey of his life' (Dante) arrives at the seaside town of Sozopol to drink himself to death, but not before sorting out the reasons why he has lost to emigration the two women he still loves. Yet the director succumbs to the ubiquitous self-pitying mood of his peers for whom the eponymous Sozopol is not the real one, whose fragile beauty has been almost destroyed by postcommunist building initiative, but – as the mythical Russian city of Kitezh – though irretrievably sunk into the collective unconscious, remains a symbol of the sublime for several generations, depleted by emigration and lost in the labyrinths of the perennial transition from one socio-economic system to another.

The Self-Critical Gaze

The most immediate reason for the reluctance of Eastern European directors to construe the West as the sinister Other, behind the postcommunist troubles of their countries and the growing waves of emigration, is partially rooted in the ideological fatigue of decades-long, officially endorsed demonization of the West as arch-enemy of Communism. Indeed, as Rosalind Galt writes in her brilliant defence of Emir Kusturica's *Underground* (Bila jednom jedna zemlja, 1995), the relationship between East and West consists "as much of [Western] fantasy and [Eastern] desire as of history and geography" (2006: 140). Indeed, the negative image in the West of Eastern Europe, especially of the Balkans, manifest in popular and official texts, can be understood in psychoanalytical (Jungian) terms as a projection of its "shadow" – that is, hidden or repressed contents of the Western collective unconscious. In Eastern European popular discourse, on the other hand, the West is consciously construed as the significant "Other," a role model and a desired destination, but at the same time also – because of the ever-growing economic divide – as a frustrating super-ego challenge and source of inferiority complexes.

The post-Yugoslav cinema did indeed try to release some of these pent-up frustrations and "see the West as a dangerously inefficient authority" (Stojanova in Allmer, 2012:231). Indeed, in *Before the Rain* (Pred dozhdot, dir Milcho Manchevski, 1994), the UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) troopers are shown as an "incongruously decorative presence, scorned by both Macedonians and Albanians for their inability to avert the tragic confrontation in the ethnically mixed Macedonian village" (Stojanova, *ibid*). Stole Popov's *Gypsy Magic* (Ciganska magija, 1997) offers a "more caustic portrayal of the UN forces as a bunch of irresponsible holiday-mak-

ers who only care for drinking and sex, and occasionally pick a fight with the local thugs under the guise of ‘peace-keeping’” (Stojanova: *ibid*). But then again, while the post-Yugoslav brand of returning the gaze did take to task the role of the West in the Yugoslav wars, they did it in a mild, even friendly manner, targeting most severely their own. As for the myth of the West as welcoming immigrant Mecca, it remained untouched – after all, Manchevski’s émigré protagonist, targeted by both sides in the village strife, and ultimately killed for his staunch belief in Western values, is a successfully integrated artist-photographer in London.

The Scornful Gaze

The myth was challenged by Polish director Janusz Zaorski, one of the leading directors of the Polish Cinema of Moral Anxiety in the early 1980s – his dark critical-realist film *The Mother of Kings* (Matka Królów), made in 1982, was banned for five years. With his caustic style, his star-studded film *Happy New York* (Szczesliwego Nowego Jorku 1997) offers a sarcastic look at the day to day realities, faced by a group of newly-minted postcommunist immigrants, and tackles with gusto their inevitable cultural clash with the already ‘Americanised’ Polish émigrés.

The self-ironic representation of irresolvable incongruities of the Eastern European and Western mentalities and their inevitable clash involves characters who, albeit similar to those featured in *Krapatchouk* and *Terminal*, are far from victims of social and cultural circumstance. They return the critical Western gaze with a vengeance, by framing the Americans and especially Western Europeans in a manner, which Maria Todorova – by quoting the popular dictum of the famous Bulgarian writer Aleko Konstantinov: “We are European but not quite” – interprets not as an “admission of non-Europeaness,” but as a disapproval of it (1997: 41).

The films of the scornful gaze group – commercially very successful – branch into various shades of absurdism and black humour, which spares neither the Westerners nor the Easterners. The works of prominent directors of the New Romanian Cinema offer renditions of this otherwise painful clash of values, ranging from the mildly ironic in Nae Caranfil’s *Sundays on Leave* (*È pericoloso sporgersi*, 1993) and Cristian Mungiu’s *Occident* (2002), to the bitterly sardonic in Cristian Nemescu’s *California Dreamin’* (2007). Yet, since these films touch tangentially on the issue of emigration – which nonetheless lurks on the background as an eventual, but improbable possibility – they would not be discussed here.

The escalating scorn in the exchange of gazes between immigrants and locals reaches its sado-masochistic paroxysm in the Bulgarian film *Mission London* (*Misiya London*, 2010), based on the eponymous best seller by Alek Popov. The director Dimitar Mitovski “construes both the Bulgarians, living in London as part of the diplomatic core, and as legal or illegal immigrants, and the local Brits, as culturally specific variations of the powerful Trickster archetype” (Stojanova 2013: 174). Like the archetypal Trickster, described by Jung, “this bunch of opportunists, petty thugs,

and snobs" are born in the no-man's land between two epochs – the modernism and post-modernism, capitalism and globalism, colonialism and post-colonialism, communism and postcommunism – being "not just a strictly national occurrence, but an omnipresent one" (Stojanova: *ibid*).

The Analytical Gaze

The subsequent films about emigration became invariably darker as the immigrant waves contained less and less political dissidents, adventurers or privileged cosmopolites, and more and more people, forced to search 'sustenance where sustenance could be found', to quote Bauman again. As Imre has it,

[W]hile joining the EU has undoubtedly brought more social and economic mobility to a small, well- educated, or wealthy East European elite, the majority of postsocialist populations have become the losers of capitalism, but were increasingly made to feel guilty for their incapacity to adjust by the neoliberal elites, by their own governments, and surely, by the West (2014: 125).

These migrants were – and are! – leaving behind economies, devastated by crash privatization, marketization, and above all, by kleptocratic elites – all unmistakable symptoms of what Bauman summarily defines as the "political economy of uncertainty" (2001: 52).

It was the Hungarian film *Bolshe Vita*, made as early as 1996 by Ibolya Fekete, which for the first time focused on the drama of postcommunist economic migration, seeing it as harbinger of the bitter fight for survival awaiting Eastern Europeans in the brave new postcommunist world. The postmodern, patch-work style of *Bolshe Vita*, mixing the tragic, the ironic and the comedic, the sacred and the profane, seizes upon what Francois de Bernard describes as the "most spectacular and potentially sinister consequence of the erratic globalizing processes, the progressive 'criminalization of the globe and globalization of crime'" ().

As the years passed, the films about Eastern and Central Europeans, emigrating to the West, morphed into even darker themes and tones, born from the incongruous juxtaposition of the myths and expectations 'here,' in one's native land, with the realities 'there,' in the new lands of promise, resulting in complex emotional and psychological problems both 'here' and 'there.'

The Self-Colonizing Gaze of Sex Trafficking

Surprisingly, there are precious few Eastern and Central European films on sex trafficking, with the provision that, in general, the bulk of such films – even if some of them are made by Eastern Europeans – are produced in the West, and therefore not discussed here. The Bulgarian TV series *Danube Bridge* (Dunav Most, 1999, Ivan Andonov) was among the first to tackle the problem, not without exoticizing (and eroticising!) it, which is understandable, bearing in mind that the filmmakers were

trying hard to reach the ratings, enjoyed by the Turkish TV soap operas. Therefore *Danube Bridge* represents a series of well-crafted socio-psychological snapshot of the first postcommunist decade, and as such were just registering the convoys of sex-slaves, crossing voluntarily or involuntarily the bridge, linking Bulgaria with the West via Romania.

It has to be noted that in most of the subsequent films on this topic, women are shown – at least initially – as more or less willing participating in their own demise, which speaks volumes about the psychological and social context that precipitates such a self-destructive decision. *Francesca* (dir. Bobby Păunescu, 2009, Romania) brings to the fore the pitfalls of this dubious pragmatism. By leaving its eponymous heroine in limbo at the bus station on the border between Romania and Hungary, the director registers her inability to choose between two equally miserable and humiliating outcomes: to either stay at home and mildly prostitute herself to her lascivious but influential Godfather, or leave for Italy to meet a future, which most definitely leads to prostitution.

Andrei Gruzsniczki's *The Other Irene* (*Cealaltă Irina*, 2009) and Cătălin Mitulescu's *Loverboy* (2011) are also important works on the subject of sex-trafficking. In the former, as in *Francesca*, sex-trafficking is used as a narrative device suggesting a possible background story, explaining Irene's sudden and mysterious death in the foreign land. *Loverboy* – despite of its sharp melodramatic bend – tackles the subject head-on, outlining a strikingly realistic model for recruitment and sexploitation of young women. Yet it is in these films that, in order to illustrate their heroine's longing for a better life, the directors adopt self-colonizing tropes, including ubiquitous criminality and violence, extreme poverty, eroticized Gypsy ghettos, brothels, and scenes in the nude, which sometimes border on soft porn.

A prime example of this tendency is certainly the much spoken-about 2010 Hungarian film, *Bibliothèque Pascale* by Szabolcs Hajdu, and the Bulgarian *Face Down* (*S Lize nadolu*, 2015) by Kamen Kalev, both of which look like catalogues of all the above mentioned self-colonizing tropes, enhanced by the masterful camerawork, which throws in high relief their narrative deficiency and makes them look cold and illustrative. The eponymous library, for example, is actually a posh, decadent Liverpool brothel where the patrons enact their literary/sexual fantasies with illegal Eastern European prostitutes, who are dressed and groomed to act like Lolita, St. Joan, and Desdemona, subjected to all kinds of perverted sexual sadism, and eventually killed. The plot follows a beautiful Roma woman Mona who, in order to regain custody of her daughter left in the care of her fortune-telling aunt, must tell a social worker her story. What she spawns as a result is a wild surreal adventure, which is actually a poetic displacement of the depravity and exploitation Mona has actually lived through. The star-crossed lovers in *Face Down* are also Roma – he an undercover agent of the French police, and she a recently recruited sex-slave – and their impossible love predictably ends in tragedy.

Naturally none of the films on sex-trafficking goes beyond exploitation of the rich possibilities, offered by the aesthetic speculation with this social phenomenon. Their social consciousness, so to speak, is limited to vilifying the petty Mafiosi and the corrupt police, but rarely implicates the powers-that-be – Eastern or Western – who make this possible. Indeed, it is the inability or the unwillingness of the authorities to combat the Mafiosi, thus making them even more “numerous, powerful, well-armed and prosperous,” and the tragedy of these women – as well as that of their swiftly criminalizing countries – even more profound (Bernard qtd in Bauman 2004: 63).

(Im) migrants at the Door: the Self-Critical vs the Self-Colonizing Gaze

As Eastern Europeans grapple to survive amongst the ruins of their societies, economies and cultures and come to terms with immigration, there began to appear films, which reflect tangentially on the waves of migrants from the broken Middle Eastern and North African countries. Some of them happen to pass through Eastern Europe, on their way to “where sustenance could be found” – that is, in the West. The highly publicized standoff of migrants and locals at the borders of some postcommunist countries in 2015, is symptomatic. On one hand, the migrants vocally express and demonstrate their unwillingness to remain in the impoverished postcommunist countries they are passing through. And, on the other, leaders of these countries express equally vocally their citizens’ alleged collective protest against settling migrants on their lands.

Following Bauman, this mutual animosity could be explained with fear of rejection, and reciprocal projection of social redundancy anxiety, triggered by the anonymous forces of globalization. The migrants, he wrote back in 2004, epitomize the ways these forces “reshuffle people and play havoc with their social identities” (2004: 128). These forces demonstrate how they could transform each of us, “from one day to another,” into a refugee or “economic migrant,” reminding us “what they could do with impunity” by dumping “at our doorsteps those people who have already been rejected...” (ibid). “We hate them,” Bauman goes on to say, “because we feel that what they are going through in front of our eyes may well prove to be, and soon, a dress rehearsal of our own life. Trying hard to remove them from sight – round them up, lock them in camps, deport them – we wish to exorcise that spectre” (ibid).

Bauman’s pessimistic socio-psychological analyses of our liquid times – he replaced many years ago the usage of “post-modernity” with “liquid modernity,” – are eloquently supported by two films from two diametrically different aesthetic perspectives. The first one, the Romanian Film *Morgen*, directed by Marian Crisban and released in 2011, proves once again that art, in its natural preference for the individual and the exceptional – and the self-critical – is indeed a corrective to politics. The second film – *The Judgement*, a Bulgarian/ German/ Croatian co-production, directed by Stefan Komandarev, released in 201 – is a quintessential example of self-colonizing approach due to the director’s cogent efforts to adapt the film to Western expectations.

According to Northrop Frye, both tragic and comic modes are concerned with the ability of the main character to act vis-à-vis his/her environment (or society), but while tragedy is concerned with the character's separation from society, comedy has as its subject the character's social integration. Over the last two millennia or so, since Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Frye claims, the high mimetic mode of the Greek tragedy, associated with the much greater power of heroes to act has steadily moved to almost non-existent, gradually morphing into what he calls ironic mimetic modes of contemporary prose and drama, thus reducing the tragic hero to an *alazon* (or impostor) and even worse – to a *pharmakos* (or scapegoat). Seen in this light Nelu, the protagonist of *Morgen* – a nondescript and repressed personage, who lives on the outskirts of a Romanian-Hungarian border settlement – is a veritable *pharmakos*. Half-peasant, half-townsman, Nelu's daily routine consists of a dull and underpaid job, and arguments with his chronically unhappy wife. The only time he feels relaxed is during his solitary, early morning cross-border fishing trips. It is because of these routine fishing trips, which Nelu so stubbornly pursues to the dismay of his wife and her powerful local Mafioso of a brother, that he evolves from "predestined, inarticulate victim," caught up in an irresolvable conflict between his outer life and inner yearnings – to a truly tragic hero, who, as Northrop Frye says, is ready to sacrifice himself although fully conscious of his doomed cause (1990: 39). This momentous change is triggered by Nelu's incidental meeting with Behran – yet another *pharmakos* and Nelu's alter-ego of sorts – a middle-aged illegal immigrant of Kurdish origin, stuck in this border settlement without papers. The responsibility that comes with taking care of the amicable Behran, who speaks but a few words of German (one of them being the eponymous *morgen*, or tomorrow) gradually alters not only Nelu, but also his environment. The turning point comes with Nelu's realization that the Romanian border police pretend that illegal immigrants do not exist in order to avoid taking care of them. And when that fateful *morgen* comes, Nelu – risking his life, his family and his freedom – sets Behran finally on the road to Germany, regardless of his – and ours! – realization that Behran would be most likely captured and deported back to Turkey.

Morgen is made in the ironic dramatic mode, preferred by the small and low budget films of the New Romanian Cinema, whose authors – as Julia Kristeva beautifully formulates it in her "Toccatà and Fugue for the Foreigner" – may not necessarily be defeatists, but are amongst "the best of ironists" (2002:271). Caught up within the existential struggle "between what no longer is and what will never be", Crisan displays a profound kinship with these perennial outcasts, the migrants.

The Judgement, on the other hand, is made in the truly grand-operatic and melodramatic – Hollywood – style of an expensive multinational co-production. Despite its ambitious transnational agenda, however, it reluctantly emerges as a nationally specific film thanks to the powerful interpretation of the three main actors, who manage to turn their characters from self-colonizing stereotypes into epitomes of the post-communist crisis of masculinity.

According to Peter Brooks, the melodramatic genre becomes popular at a moment of social breakdown and collapse of values for, by operating through the Manichean extreme opposites of Good and Evil, Victims and Villains, it deploys – and provokes – excessive emotionality. The conflict in the film is generated by the dilemma, concerning an ailing child from a group of illegal migrants the main characters are transporting from the Greek-Turkish-Bulgarian border to another transfer point within the country, from where the group would eventually be taken further west. In fact, the migrants, and more particularly the ailing child, serve as a moral catalyst for the main characters, who position themselves in accordance to the conventional viewer's expectations. Thus the Captain – a former communist functionary-turned-postcommunist kleptocrat and in charge of the lucrative smuggling operations – is the Villain of the much hated postcommunist alpha-male type and a version of the traditionally supercilious Balkan machismo, who insists that the child be abandoned as it slows the group down. His antagonist and ethical antithesis – the introverted and silent Father, a hybrid between the monolithic positive cultural hero of Socialist Realism and a doomed art-film anti-hero – insists the child be saved by all means. The most interesting and unpredictable character is the Son – while at odds with both his Father and the Captain, after their death it is up to him to take the convoy to safety. Yet the finale remains open as to whether he would take them to the transfer point and thus replace the Captain as a valuable mountain guide, or hand them to the border police, which does not seem to be the right thing to do either as the powers-that-be – as in any melodramatic narrative – are the core reason for the spreading social evil.

In Conclusion

The discussion so far has hopefully demonstrated that very few of Eastern European films about immigration display a self-colonizing impetus with regard to Western values and Western viewers. The overwhelming majority of these films pursue the problem organically, from inside, on the basis of their own local and national experience, and in terms of the most suitable narrative and stylistic tropes. Even the pursuit of universality of transnational cinema in *The Judgement* – which due to its lucrative international budget comes dangerously close to becoming a command performance – does not mean suffocating its cultural diversity and local originality. To quote Bauman for the last time, “[U]niversality means no more, yet no less either, than across-the-species ability to communicate and reach mutual understanding... Such universality ... is the sole alternative to blind, elemental, erratic, uncontrolled, divisive and polarizing forces of globalization” (1999:202).

Notes:

- 1 A short version of this paper was presented at the International Conference on Cinema and Visual Culture in Post-Communist Europe: From Crisis to Euphoria and Back Again, “Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (May 27-29, 2016).

- 2 On the basis of a profound academic research (Stojanova 1999), it is assumed that over the last two-and-a-half centuries the similarities in the economic, political and social structures of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Poland, Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia (now Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro) – including their most recent social and cultural processes, and products –justify the usage of the term Eastern Europe.

Works Cited:

Bibliography

1. Bauman, Zygmunt. *The Individualized Society*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2001.
2. —. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2004.
3. —. *In Search of Politics*. Stanford University Press, 1999.
4. —. *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
5. —. *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995.
6. Böröcz, József. "Introduction: Empire and Coloniality in the 'Eastern Enlargement' of the European Union." József Böröcz and Melinda Kovács (eds). *Empire's New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement*. Shropshire, UK: Central Europe Review, 2001.
7. "Characteristics of Magical Realism." *Postcolonial Studies*, www.english.emory.edu/Bahri/MagicalRealism.html. Accessed April 10, 2017.
8. Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990 [1957].
9. Galt, Rosalind. *Redrawing the Map: The New European Cinema*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
10. Imre, Anikó. "Postcolonial Media Studies in Postsocialist Europe." *boundary 2* 41:1. Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 113-134.
11. Kiossev, Alexander. "Notes on the Self- Colonising Cultures." Bojana Pejic and David Elliott (eds.). *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe*. Stockholm: Moderna Museetm, 1999, pp. 114-18.
12. Kristeva, Julia and Kelly Oliver. *The Portable Kristeva*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.
13. Şandru, Cristina. *Worlds Apart? A Postcolonial Reading of post-1945 East-Central European Culture*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.
14. Stojanova, Christina. "The Trickster in Bulgarian Identity Discourses and His Manifestations in Postcommunist Bulgarian Cinema." *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, vol. 4, issue 2, 2013, pp. 161-180.
15. —. "Postcommunist Cinema Twenty Years Later: Negotiating Survival and Social Change." H-M. Pappius and S. Latek (eds.). *From Totalitarianism to Democracy: Twisted and Unfinished Road*. The Polish Institute of Arts & Sciences (Montreal, Canada) & The Polish Academy of Arts & Sciences (Cracow, Poland), 2012, pp. 223-246.
16. —. "A Gaze From Hell: Eastern European Horror Cinema Reconsidered." P. Allmer, D. Huxley and E. Brick (ed.). *European Nightmares*. Wallflower, UK / Columbia University Press, USA, 2012, pp. 225-238.

17. —. "Stranger Than Paradise: Immigration and Impaired Masculinities." Christine Ramsay (ed). *Making It Like a Man*. WLU Press, 2011, pp. 101-129.
18. —. "Fragmented Discourses: Young Cinema from Central and Eastern Europe." Anikó Imre (eds.). *East and Central European Cinemas in New Perspectives*. Routledge, USA, 2005, pp. 213-228.
19. —. "Beyond Dracula and Ceausescu: Phenomenology of Romanian Cinematic Horror." S. J. Scheider, T. Williams (eds). *Horror International*. Wayne State University Press, USA, 2005, pp. 220-234.
20. —. *The Eastern European Crisis of Self-Knowledge (1948-1989): The Relationship Between State and Society as Reflected in Eastern European Film – A Genre Approach*, Doctoral Dissertation. Concordia University, Montreal, 1999.
21. Todorova, Maria. *Imagining the Balkans*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Filmography

22. *Before the Rain (Pred dozhdot)*. Milcho Manchevski. Republic of Macedonia (Vardar Film), France/ UK (coproduction). 1994. Film.
23. *Bibliothèque Pascal*. Szabolcs Hajdu. Germany (A + C Reuter New Cinema), Hungary/ UK/ Romania (coproduction). 2010. Film.
24. *Bolshe Vita aka Bolse Vita*. Ibolya Fekete. Hungary (M.I.T Studio). 1996. Film.
25. *California Dreamin' (Nesfarsit)*. Cristian Nemescu. Romania (Media Pro Pictures, RNCC). 2007. Film.
26. *Danube Bridge (Dunav most)*. Ivan Andonov. Bulgaria (BNT). 1999. TV Series.
27. *Face Down (S Lize nadolu)*. Kamen Kalev. Bulgaria (NFC), France/ Belgium (coproduction). 2015. Film.
28. *Forgotten by God (Zabraveni ot Boga)*. Eldora Traykova. Bulgaria (ProFilm, NFC). 1999. Film.
29. *Francesca*. Bobby Paunescu. Romania (Mandragora Movies). 2009. Film.
30. *Gypsy Magic (Ciganska magija)*. Stole Popov. Republic of Macedonia (Vardar Film, Triangl Film). 1997. Film.
31. *Happy New York (Szczesliwego Nowego Jorku)*. Janusz Zaorski. Poland. 1997. Film.
32. *Judgement, The (Sadilisheto)*. Stefan Komandarev. Bulgaria (Argo Film), Germany/ Croatia (coproduction). 2014. Film.
33. *Krapatchouk*. Enrique Gabriel-Lipschutz. France (Société Générale de Gestion Cinématographique (SGGC), Belgium/ Spain (coproduction). 1992. Film.
34. *Letter to America (Pismo do Amerika)*. Igljika Trifonova. Bulgaria (Klas Film), Netherlands/ Hungary (coproduction). 2001. Film.
35. *Loverboy*. Cătălin Mitulescu. Romania (Strada Film), Sweden/ Serbia (coproduction). 2011. Film.
36. *Morgen*. Marian Crişan. Romania (Mandragora Movies), France/ Hungary (coproduction). 2011. Film.
37. *Mother of Kings, The (Matka Królów)*. Janusz Zaorski. Poland. 1982/1987. Film.
38. *Occident*. Cristian Mungiu. Romania (Temple Film). 2002. Film.
39. *Other Irene, The (Cealalta Irina)*. Andrei Gruzsniczki. Romania (Fundatia Arte Vizuale).

2009. Film.

40. *Sinking of Sozopol, The (Potuvaneto na Sozopol)*. Kostadin Bonev. Bulgaria. 2014. Film.
41. *Terminal, The*. Steven Spielberg, USA (Dream Works). 2004. Film.
42. *Underground (Bila jednom jedna zemlja)*. Emir Kusturica. Yugoslavia (Komuna, Pandora Novofilm), France/ Germany/ Bulgaria/ Czech Republic/ Hungary. 1995. Film.
43. *World is Big and Salvation Lurks Around the Corner, The (Svetat e golyam i spasenie debne otvsyakade)*. Stefan Komandarev. Bulgaria (RFF International, Pallas Film), Germany/ Slovenia/ Hungary/ Serbia (coproduction). 2008. Film.