

Post-1989 Eastern European Itineraries with Eva Hoffman and Slavenka Drakulić[❖]

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ABSTRACT

My paper discusses post-1989 travel writing occasioned by the fall of the Berlin Wall and analyzes two travelogues by well-known Eastern European exiles, namely Eva Hoffman and Slavenka Drakulić. I explore the perceptions of the “Balkans” and “Eastern Europe” as reflected in *Exit into History: A Journey through the New Eastern Europe* (1993) and *Café Europa: Life after Communism* (1996). I am also interested in the dis/continuities of the travelogue genre—a genre which, according to critics and scholars like Larry Wolff, Maria Todorova, Vesna Goldsworthy or David Norris, has shaped the way this region came to be known and represented. By following the tradition of early travelogues about the Balkans and Eastern Europe and catering to a certain degree to Anglo-American expectations, i.e., “marketing the post-communist exotic” (to paraphrase Graham Huggan), these post-1989 travel narratives appear as another process of exploiting the region. However, I argue that with Hoffman and Drakulić the travelogue format enables a more critical reconfiguration and a more productive cultural translation of the Balkans and post/communist Eastern Europe.

KEYWORDS: Eva Hoffman, Slavenka Drakulić, travel writing, Eastern Europe, post-communism

*The article is the result of a research project supported by the National Science Council, grant 101-2626-H-003-005-MY2. I would like to thank the reviewers for their insightful suggestions and constructive comments which helped improve the current article.

* Received: September 1, 2013; Accepted: April 4, 2014
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霍夫曼與德古麗琪： 一九八九後的東歐旅行

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摘 要

本文特就知名流亡作家伊娃·霍夫曼 (Eva Hoffman) 及史拉玫卡·德古麗琪 (Slavenka Drakulić) 兩部遊記進行分析，探討一九八九年柏林圍牆倒塌後孕育而生的旅遊書寫。本文就《告別歷史舞台：新東歐周遊之旅》 (*Exit into History: A Journey through the New Eastern Europe*) 及《歐洲咖啡館：尋找自我的東歐世界》 (*Café Europa: Life after Communism*) 二部作品，探討作者認知中的「巴爾幹半島」與「東歐」。本文亦著眼於遊記的連貫性與不連貫性。根據沃夫 (Larry Wolff)、托多洛夫 (Maria Todorova)、高茲沃斯 (Vesna Goldsworthy) 與諾瑞斯 (David Norris) 四位評論家和學者的看法，旅遊書寫足以形塑讀者對當地的印象與觀感，而一九八九年以降的旅遊書寫，係承襲自早期巴爾幹半島及東歐的遊記傳統，並在某種程度上迎合英美讀者的期待。若依胡根 (Graham Huggan) 之見，是要「行銷後共產時代的異國情調」 (marketing the post-communist exotic)，可說是另一種剝削當地的過程。然而，本文認為，霍夫曼與德古麗琪的遊記書寫形式足以重新塑造巴爾幹半島和後／共產東歐地區，並透過文字讓讀者窺探當地獨一無二的文化內涵。

關鍵字：伊娃·霍夫曼、史拉玫卡·德古麗琪、旅遊書寫、東歐、後共產主義

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I. New Europe/Old Europe, Core Europe/Other Europe

The collapse of the Soviet empire and the toppling of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe resulted in a new global configuration. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening of what used to be almost impenetrable borders led to the “rediscovery” of the region by the West. The NATO expansion and EU’s gradual enlargement to the East brought about new challenges for the new member states, along with significant institutional and structural changes. The binary logic of the Cold War which characterized Western writings about the region gradually gave way to a wide range of media discourses and, at times, in-depth cultural analysis.

The wars in the former Yugoslavia, the NATO advancement in the former communist bloc, and the more recent crisis in Ukraine have however all been moments that brought to light what Étienne Balibar rightly called “‘triple points’ or mobile ‘overlapping zones’ of contradictory civilizations in Europe” (5), as well as multiple historical layers, all muffled during the communist period (Judt “Nineteen” and “The Past”). “Old Europe,” “new Europe” (Rumsfeld), “core Europe” (Habermas), “other Europe” (Derrida), “EU enlargement,” and “EU accession” are all familiar phrases about the transformation of the European space post-1989.¹ Such formulations, coined by politicians or cultural critics, speak however beyond the current political, military or economic transformations taking place in Europe (to which they

¹ While Derrida’s compelling *The Other Heading* was prompted by the fall of the Soviet Union and changes in the Eastern European bloc and only indirectly engages with post-communist Eastern Europe, the different perspectives on the War in Iraq and NATO’s involvement brought about new configurations and divisions of the European space. Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary of Defense, used the term “New Europe” with regard to Eastern and Central European states that were once part of the communist bloc and tended to support the US, called Eastern and Central European states that were once part of the communist bloc and tended to support US the “New Europe,” while nations that were part of the Western European system after WWII were defined as “Old Europe” (Rumsfeld). Rumsfeld’s division of the continent into “Old” and “New” Europe was a highly problematic division which led to an at least ironic reaction among the intellectual elites of the “new” allies. The leading Hungarian novelist Péter Esterházy’s tongue-in-cheek response is a case in point. Rumsfeld’s division prompted Jürgen Habermas to refer in rather essentialist terms to the “core” Europe that should define the European moral perspective on the war in Iraq. For Habermas, it is France and Germany or the “core Europe” that are to counterbalance the US. On the other hand, the former French President, Jacques Chirac, gave substance to Rumsfeld’s claims by stating that EU candidate states are in a position to choose between Brussels and Washington when they take positions on foreign policy matters. While the debate took place in major European newspapers and journals in which various intellectuals or politicians expressed their views, the edited collection *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe* (John Torpey) brings together all the main responses to the crisis in English translation.

are applied) and point to divisions, hierarchies, and unequal structures of power. At the same time they draw on or point to older, real or imaginary, delimitations within the European continent, i.e., what critics called “cultural geographies” (Shohat and Stam 13) of the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

These areas, the southern or eastern parts of the continent, have been found by Western commentators—from William Shakespeare to Neville Chamberlain and Bill Clinton—to be remote, obscure, and troubling.² However, in the mid and late 90s, in the wake of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, a growing number of studies have explored the gradual Western construction of the concept of Eastern Europe as “a work of cultural creation, of intellectual artifice, of ideological self-interest and self-promotion” (Bakić-Hayden 917). My paper continues the line of inquiry proposed by critics who analyzed the representations and creations of the Balkans and Eastern Europe by focusing on post-1989 travelogues written and published in the Anglo-American world by Eva Hoffman and Slavenka Drakulić, two well-known writers of Eastern European origin who revisited their native countries and the region soon after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

According to critics and scholars such as Larry Wolff, Maria Todorova, Vesna Goldsworthy or David Norris, the travelogue genre has shaped the way the region came to be known and represented from the early 18th century until 1945. The many travelogues occasioned first by the fall of communism, then by the changes and reconfigurations in the former Eastern European bloc in the last 25 years, testify to the endurance of the genre in relation to Eastern Europe and the Balkans.³ Travelogues about the former Eastern European space boomed in the early 90s, to then become a constant presence on publishers’ lists.⁴ The past two decades have also witnessed intensified critical attention with regard to travel writing, but studies have mostly focused on disclosing the imperial and colonizing complicities, the “imperial stylistics”

² “And what should I do in Illyria?” (Shakespeare, *The Twelfth Night*); for Chamberlain, Czechoslovakia was “a far away country of which we know nothing”; for Bill Clinton, the former Yugoslavia was the “powder keg of Europe.”

³ The surge of interest in the former Eastern European bloc that occurred after 1989 is not hard to explain. During the Cold War the countries behind the “Iron Curtain” were seen as more or less a homogeneous area. The communist system was quite effective in imposing a superficial uniformity on places far apart and thus after 1989 the differences and heterogeneity of the area became a subject of interest to travelers and scholars alike.

⁴ See Harding (*In Another*), Murphy (*Transylvania*), Kaplan (*Balkan*). Among the most recent titles are the travelogues by Anna Porter, Canadian novelist and publisher (*The Ghosts*), and by the Yale historian Marci Shore (*A Taste*).

(Pratt, Spurr), the patriarchal undertones/tendencies (Mills, Grewal), the colonial legacy in the wake of decolonization and post-colonialism (Behdad, Clark) and, more recently, the ways in which contemporary travel writing participates in, and responds to, the anxieties created by late twentieth century globalization (Holland and Huggan, Huggan *Extreme*, Lisle).⁵ However, scholarship dedicated to travel writing about the Eastern European countries after 1989 is still to emerge.⁶

It is beyond the scope of the present paper to map the wide range of travelogues about the region in the aftermath of communism, but it would be fair to say that at least two main directions have emerged and acquired significant visibility: on the one hand, journalists and historians visited or revisited the region and produced engaging accounts; on the other, children or grandchildren of Holocaust victims returned to the place of suffering of their families and uncovered in travel narratives the history of Jewish Europe from World War II through the Cold War, and at times the communist period.⁷ This significant amount of travelogues falls between the cracks of current scholarship and, when it does not, it is the autobiographical nature of such texts that is foregrounded and explored.⁸

My paper covers this absence in the current discussion on travel writing and focuses on Hoffman's *Exit into History: A Journey through the New Eastern Europe* (1993) and Drakulić's *Café Europa: Life after Communism* (1996). These two prestigious writers now live in the UK and Sweden respectively, and their works straddle the two main directions outlined above. These prolific authors have many other things in common: they are well established as both writers and journalists; they write in English, and publish with major US or UK publishing houses; also, both were born and grew up in the communist bloc, Poland and the former Yugoslavia respectively, left their

⁵ Other landmark studies on travel writing include Hulme and Youngs (*The Cambridge*) and Hooper and Youngs (*Perspectives*) but none of these cover post-1989 travelogues on Eastern Europe.

⁶ Andaluna Borcila dedicates one chapter in her forthcoming book (*American Representations*) to travel guides such as *Fodor's* and *Frommer's* with a focus on the interconnections between media and tourism representations and ways of seeing.

⁷ For the first direction, see travelogues by Applebaum (*Between*), Ash (*The Magic*), and Rosenberg (*The Haunted*) (Awarded the National Book Award for Non Fiction); for the second, see Dubner (*Turbulent*) Epstein (*Where*), Kaufman (*A Hole*), Suleiman (*Budapest*).

⁸ For autobiographical travelogues discussed mostly from the perspective of life writing and exile, see for instance Besemeres, Hornung, Linke, Luca, and Polouektova. Ironically enough, the overview chapter "Americans in Europe from Henry James to the Present" in the *The Cambridge Companion to American Travel Writing* does mention Hoffman's travelogue but under the wrong name of *Escape into the World* (Decker 142).

countries of origin—Hoffman as a young adolescent, Drakulić in the earlier 90s after a strong nationalist surge led to public attacks on her work in Croatia⁹—came back and wrote incisive travelogues, not only about their country of origin but also the larger region they both visited in the early 1990s.¹⁰

My paper reads their travel narratives in order to explore how writers of Eastern European origin relate in their post-1989 travel writing to the long tradition of “othering” the Balkans and Eastern Europe. If travel books can be read as amateur ethnography, those of authors exploring countries of origin can be seen as auto-ethnographic narratives, where the culture at issue is both known and foreign. The primary question I am concerned with is the extent to which travelogues about places of origin succeed in transcending the tendencies to exoticize or patronize subjects and countries described. Critics regard such a tendency as intrinsic to the travel genre (Huggan), but successful engagements with the genre have at times circumvented this defining feature. I am interested thus in the dis/continuities of the travelogue genre—a genre, which, as mentioned above, has shaped the way this region came to be known and represented. I find Hoffman and Drakulić’s books ideal post-1989 case studies because, as my paper shows, their roots in and routes to the region become tangled junctions when they engage in writing about neighboring countries. Such tangled junctions exist because, as I argue, belonging to a region, to a bloc of countries, becomes just as imaginary in their work as the literary construction of the Balkans/Eastern Europe. Despite the empathy, understanding and knowledge about the region that both Hoffman and Drakulić show, in the portrayal of neighboring countries they both rely on mediations or offer far-fetched explanations. I argue that their work is particularly important, as it is written by people from the region and

⁹ An unsigned 1992 *Globus* article accused five Croatian female writers, Drakulić included, of being “witches” and “raping” Croatia. According to the article, these writers failed to take a definitive stance against rape as a planned military tactic by Bosnian Serb forces against Croats, and rather treated it in feminist fashion, as crimes of “unidentified males” against women. Soon after the publication, Drakulić started to receive telephone threats; her property was also vandalized, thus making her leave Croatia.

¹⁰ Although Drakulić lives in Sweden and Austria, most of her books are written in English and published by major American and British publishers; they include: *How We Survived*, *Balkan Express*, *They Would Never*, and *A Guided Tour Through*. Hoffman’s titles include *After such Knowledge*, *Shtetl*, *The Secret*, and *Illuminations*.

tailored for, or at least directed at, an Anglo-American audience. It therefore plays a highly significant role in what I take to be the larger context of translating, reconfiguring and marketing representations of Eastern Europe or the Balkans in the early 1990s, because of the authors' belonging to the area, the claims they make and the numerous subject positions they inhabit.

II. Theoretical Cartographies of Eastern Europe and the Balkans

A short excursus into the “cultural geographies” (Shohat and Stam 13) and imaginary cartographies of the Balkans and Eastern Europe may provide the larger background for Hoffmann and Drakulić's travelogues. In fact, this is a necessary first step, because, as James Clifford notes, “travel . . . denotes a range of material, spatial practices that produce knowledge, stories, traditions . . . and other cultural expressions” (35); as such, understanding earlier discursive and travel practices about the region foregrounds the reconfigurations travel narratives undergo after 1989 with Hoffman and Drakulić.

The complicated and conflicting concept and reality of the term “Balkan” have been functioning in a way similar to Edward Said's “Orient”—as a timeless space onto which the West “projects its phantasmatic content” (Žižek, “Multiculturalism” 38). Maria Todorova in *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) was the first to delineate the discourse of Balkanism in this sense: “As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a *repository of negative characteristics* against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and the ‘West’ has been constructed” (188; emphasis added). While acknowledging the influence of Said's work on her study, Todorova also differentiates her project from the gigantic academic enterprise that examines Orientalism. Rather than seeing Balkanism only as a variant of Orientalism, she portrays it as an independent construction having to do with “the historical and geographic concreteness of the Balkans, as opposed to the intangible Orient” (11). She attributes to the Balkans a self-evident reality—“there is no doubt that the Balkans represent a cultural region” (181). Her book charts the discourse of Balkanism as it developed over the last four

centuries in scholarly, journalistic, and mostly travel writings, pointing to the intersections of symbolic geography and geopolitics in southeastern Europe.¹¹

In *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998), Vesna Goldsworthy develops the same idea of “imagining the Balkans,” but this time by analyzing the way in which the Balkans exist in the British popular imagination. She explores how “one of the world’s most powerful nations exploited the resources of the Balkans to supply its literary and entertainment industries” (8). British writers from Lord Byron to Bram Stoker and Lawrence Durrell created enduring images of the Balkans that continued to be evoked by historians, politicians, and journalists during the turmoil in the former Yugoslavia. Goldsworthy first looks at British travelers’ representations of the Balkans and reveals a consistent pattern of Balkan stereotyping throughout the 18th (Byron), 19th (Harry De Windt) and 20th centuries (Rebecca West, Olivia Manning). She shows how, over the past two centuries, a distinct Balkan identity has emerged in the texts of these writers. The result is what Goldsworthy calls a “narrative colonization” (8) of the Balkans—that is, the region’s literary exploitation, which has resulted in its continued misrepresentation.

In *Inventing Eastern Europe* (1994), Larry Wolff recreates the mental process of the West’s construction of the eastern part of the continent and maps the ways in which Western European writers have frozen into place a certain topography of civilization, condemning Eastern Europe to moral and spatial marginality in the Western story. According to Wolff, Western Europe, under the spell of the Enlightenment theory of progress, conceived of itself as the center of civilization, surrounded by a wider world of backwardness, barbarism, and savagery (7-8). In this scheme of things, Eastern Europe occupied an intermediate ground between barbarism and civilization (12), striving to approximate the West’s models of Enlightenment. More importantly, Wolff argues, Eastern Europe’s perceived intermediary geographical position between proper Europe and Asia corresponded to a perception of its cultures and societies as being an alien Other (6). Once created, this image was, on the one hand, invariably tied to the project of domination and control of this space by the “all-powerful gaze” of the West

¹¹ Her analysis takes us from the story behind the word “Balkan” (an Ottoman Turkish term that was not adopted by Westerners until the mid-nineteenth century), to Balkan self-perceptions, and ultimately to Western perceptions of the region from the fifteenth century through the twentieth century.

(141), and, on the other hand, it served the even more fundamental purpose of helping the West define itself:

It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century . . . civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent its shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe. It has flourished as an idea of extraordinary potency since the 18th century, neatly dovetailing in our times with the rhetoric and realities of the Cold War, but also certain to outlive the collapse of Communism. (4)

As evident from this excerpt, Wolff brings into discussion the end of the Cold War, and indicates that this did not mean an automatic deletion of the mental division of Europe. New associations were to be found to mark the differences, or the older division lines, prior to the Cold War, were to be re-established; thus the “Balkan” as a regional designation began to reappear.¹²

As with Todorova and Goldsworthy, a fair portion of the book is devoted to accounts of individuals who journeyed through the region. They came for a variety of reasons—scientific exploration, religious missions, diplomatic assignments—and they, accordingly, left very different sorts of documentation; yet, Wolff contends, their observations tended to support and further develop the incipient perception of Eastern Europe as a hybrid civilization unmistakably different from that of the West. One notices thus that in theorizing the perceptions of Eastern Europe and the Balkans (both, to various degrees, inventions of the West), the travelogue genre seems to have been one of the main common denominators and the starting point of the “invention” and “imagining” of these spaces. This might be the case because, as Todorova points out, “[a] travel narrative simultaneously presents and represents a world, that is simultaneously creates or makes up a reality and asserts that it stands independent of that same reality” (116).

Todorova’s and Wolff’s scholarly work illustrates the fact that “Eastern Europe” and the “Balkans,” although overlapping sometimes both as palpable reality and repository of significances, differentiated themselves in significant

¹² For a similar view, see Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*, 202-12.

ways. The post-World War II period (1945-1989) becomes a defining moment. The Cold War “Eastern Europe” was mostly regarded as being synonymous with “communist” Europe, and the boundaries between communist and non-communist countries, between East and West, seemed stark and the name used for the region marked, apparently unambiguously, social, political and economic differences. Moreover, as Todorova insightfully notes, the Balkans become split, and self-designations followed an East-West axis (140): “in the geographical and political classification after World War II a portion of the Balkans . . . had been willingly included into Western Europe, *something inconceivable but for the anticommunist paranoia*” (140; emphasis added).

After the Berlin Wall collapsed, the connotations and implications of newly established boundaries and, consequently, the definitions of “Eastern Europe” and the “Balkans” have been in constant flux, subject once again to the relations of power and rhetoric, practices and understandings within and outside the region. The different stages of accession into the EU and NATO of former communist countries, the on-going debate about Turkey’s possible joining of the EU, or the Eurozone crisis are just some of the factors that establish new boundaries and processes of signification.

Hoffman and Drakulić provide, from the perspective of the displaced intellectual, an insightful view into these post-communist reconfigurations and understandings of Eastern Europe and the Balkans in the early 1990s. Their travelogues record tensions and ambiguities and make a clear departure from earlier depictions of the region, thereby becoming important new points of reference for translating Eastern Europe and the Balkans to the US, as well as marketing the post-communist margins in the Anglo-American world.

III. Post-1989 Eastern European Itineraries

The travelogues analyzed in Maria Todorova’s, Vesna Goldsworthy’s and Larry Wolff’s works are from the past. These influential studies point once again to the need of carefully reading the works of the travelogue genre, which have shaped the image of the Balkans for centuries—and still do. A case in point is a 1993 travelogue by the well-known US journalist Robert Kaplan, whose articles feature in periodicals such as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic* and *The New Republic*. Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* has been a best-seller, and has even been referred to as an authoritative text by

Washington policy makers. While Kaplan's book has been highly criticized and dismissed by academics, it has remained a major reference in the minds of many journalists, travel literature writers, pundits, and policymakers. The most famous example is the White House's espousal of Kaplan's theses to justify the necessity of the NATO military intervention in the former Yugoslavia. President Bill Clinton's affirmation that "[w]e act to prevent a wider war; to diffuse a *powder keg at the heart of Europe*" (emphasis added) is a clear nod to older clichés about the region, revived by Kaplan in his best-selling book, with which the president himself was familiar.

Writings and travelogues in the immediate aftermath of communism illustrate how the older associations of the Balkans with the "barbarian" Ottoman legacy or 19th century stereotyping were quickly brought back into use, as was a plethora of new associations with the Third World.¹³ Moreover, even before the "difference" of the Balkans was revived and spelled out in the discourse of journalists and political scientists, it was mapped by layout editors, whose choice of pictures of drabness and chaos, Gypsy street fortune-tellers and underage pickpockets in Bulgaria, AIDS-infected babies and environmental pollution in Romania, and daunting crowds of Albanians coming to the West, effectively suppressed any "European-like" images of this part of the world as irrelevant and non-representative.¹⁴

After the Iron Curtain fell, writers of Eastern European descent traveled back and forth and their movements directly reflect the migratory dynamics and the transnational essence of the contemporary world.¹⁵ By focusing now on *Exit into History* and *Café Europa* my questions are: How do post-1989 travelogues, or travel narratives written by exiled Eastern European writers represent the region? Whose point of view do they take? Can we talk about clear-cut distinctions with regard to past representations? How do such writers position themselves in relation to the countries they visit and narrate? To put it differently, I would like to find out where we can place the travel narratives

¹³ Andrew Hammond ("The Danger") offers a detailed and insightful analysis of British travelogues and political coverage of the Balkans in the 1990s, illustrating how Victorian negative stereotypes resurfaced after the fall of the Iron Curtain; for journalism, see Tony Judt "Romania," for travelogues, see Kaplan *Balkan Ghosts*.

¹⁴ See for example Vulliamy 35-59.

¹⁵ Writers of Eastern European origin who travelled back and forth and wrote autobiographies, editorials or made documentaries about the region include Lisa Appignanesi, Andrei Codrescu, Vesna Goldsworthy, Kapka Kassabova, Petru Popescu, besides the ones mentioned above with reference to travelogues.

about post-communist Eastern Europe written by contemporary exiles—transnational Eastern-Europeans—such as Eva Hoffman and Slavenka Drakulić, and where such narratives stand on the past-present, East-West continuum.

Thematically, the two books under analysis include features that address the specific positioning of the region, the various interpretations and readings ascribed to this geographical location—between East and West, variably interpreted either as a civilizational crossroads of Orient and Occident, or as an European margin—and its problematic relation to Europe. *Exit into History* and *Café Europa* also engage with the on-going preoccupation with rewriting and interpreting history in the region, as well as the way “politics overdetermines cultural geography” (Shohat and Stam 13). While of course, they are not the only Eastern European exiles or transnationals touring the region and writing travel narratives, Hoffman and Drakulić are some of the most well-known: Hoffman’s breakthrough autobiography and later narratives about the Holocaust, and Drakulić’s high profile as an outspoken writer and cultural critic, made their books be widely read, circulated and translated.¹⁶

Born in Poland, Eva Hoffman moved to Canada as a child. Later, as a teenager, she made a definite decision to cease being a Pole and become an American instead. That earlier journey is beautifully described in her now canonic *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language* (1989), Hoffman’s story of immigration and adjustment to the US. *Exit into History*, “an intimate narrative journey” (as the cover reads), tells the story of Eva Hoffman’s return to her Polish homeland and five other countries in the midst of change, immediately after the revolutions of 1989.

Her two journeys, in 1990 and again in 1991, took her from Warsaw to Sofia, via Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, and are documented vividly. In the “Introduction” she offers her reasons for her travels: “. . . I wanted to see my Eastern Europe before it disappeared, but to see it, this time, without my childhood fantasies and projections” (*Exit into History* x), as “Eastern Europe remained for me an idealized landscape of the mind” (*Exit into History* ix). Despite her nostalgic

¹⁶ Drakulić’s *Café Europa* has been translated into Greek, German, Italian, Dutch, Swedish, Japanese and Mandarin. The Taiwanese edition is published by Cite Publishing Ltd., Taiwan under the title 《歐洲咖啡館：尋找自我的東歐世界》。

attitude, one cannot fail to notice her (American) journalistic urge to be a witness to history:

. . . when the revolutions in Eastern Europe began to reverberate. . . . I knew this was a historical event and I wanted to see for myself. . . . It was clear . . . that history was happening there—and I thought this was my opportunity to catch it in the act . . . aside from my very personal reasons for going there—I wanted to witness history in the making, to catch it *in vivo*, on the wing. (*Exit into History* ix-x)

Contemporary travel writers have attempted to escape the clutches of the “safe” tourist circuit and gone into war-zones, ghettos, deserts, glaciers, or shantytowns in their search for difference. Hoffman goes where “history” is “in the making,” to the then journalistically “hot” region. The process of history developing in front of one’s eyes becomes Hoffman’s first way of distinguishing the post-1989 Eastern European bloc. The journalistic impetus and interest in the area also become a means of signaling unicity and authenticity for her travels. As the very title of the book announces, *Exit into History*, the historical events the region undergoes acquire emblematic status and are a first clear distinguishing feature of the region in her travelogue. The “history” of the title can also be seen as the opposite of the communist stifled historical discourse, thus the identifying mark of the present, as well as an implied critical engagement with Fukuyama’s “end of history” thesis.

From the very first pages of the “Introduction,” where she defines the way Eastern Europe has been perceived in the West echoing the above-mentioned scholarly approaches to Eastern Europe, Hoffman establishes herself as an outsider. She reminds the reader that Eastern Europe was, for Westerners, always the exotic “other”:

Our psyches seem to be constructed that we need and desire an imagined ‘other’—either a glimmering, carved idealized other, or an other that is dark, savage and threatening. Eastern Europe has served *our* needs in this respect very well. For many centuries, it had been, to some extent cut off, separated and . . . strangely unknown. And for centuries, it had served as a stand-in for the exotic, the other. When Shakespeare wanted to indicate a

fabulous never-never land, he called it Illyria. (*Exit into History* xi; emphasis added)

Hoffman, the professor of literature, spells out briefly the thesis of the academic studies on the construction and exoticization of Eastern Europe (i.e. Wolff, Todorova, Goldsworthy which were published after her travelogue), but she returned immigrant positions herself as part of the “West” who needs and imagines the Eastern European other. The assumptions about and perspective on the people and places she encounters mark her most clearly as an outsider. She tries, however, to bridge this gap by offering in the following paragraph “her” version or, as she says, the “real” version of Eastern Europe, documenting it with moments in history:

The *real* Eastern Europe is a region of civilizations as old as and as strongly defined as those of the West. The Greater Moravian Empire, the ancestor of modern Czechoslovakia, was established about A. D. 800; . . . Romanians still profess a kinship with the Dacians, whom Romans found so hard to conquer. (*Exit into History* xi; emphasis added)

We notice from the introduction the tensions created by the multiple subject positions the author inhabits, but Hoffman is aware of them, and at times she reflects critically on the numerous contradictions involved in travel writing about her country of origin and Eastern Europe as her “native” region. She shares with Drakulić’s writings the awareness of the re-writings, manipulations and reinterpretations of Eastern European history: “and if story is closer to history in Eastern Europe, it is also closer to moral drama” (*Exit into History* xv) and “Eastern Europe today is haunted by its various pasts, pursued equally by its memories, its amnesias, and its willful deletions” (*Exit into History* xvi). Due to her roots and belonging, as well as her distance, she can easily observe the structural defining issues that came to surface in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism, i.e., the multiple pasts, amnesias, and willful deletions of memories.

Aware of the problematic status of labels such as “Central Europe,” “Eastern Europe,” “Central Eastern Europe,” “Central Southern Europe” or “Balkans,” she dismisses them—for the “sake of simplicity and convenience” (*Exit into History* xiii)—since the distinctions between them, as a matter of

semantics, did not seem crucial to resolve. Accordingly, she collates the five countries she visited as “Eastern Europe,” “Central Europe” and “the Balkans” almost interchangeably, emphasizing, however, the role of the Soviet domination in creating “Eastern Europe,” which, according to her, did not exist before the onset of communism. Hoffman’s view about Eastern Europe as an entity that came into existence after World War II comes in contrast to Wolff’s thesis, according to which, as previously mentioned, “Eastern Europe” was invented in the 18th century (*Exit into History* 3).

Her background gives Hoffman the empathy, the curiosity, and the language skills necessary to speak at length to Central Europeans (she gets by with Polish and Russian, and needs translators only in Hungary and Romania). Yet, she perceives herself as an American, who openly asks what she calls “American” questions and brings American assumptions, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unconsciously, to her task. Her partial belonging to this region offers her the possibility of dismantling some of the myths of Eastern Europe. The “myth of uniformity” is of special relevance in this context: “I realized, of course, that the very notion of “Eastern Europe” is to some extent a fiction, and that countries through which I was going to travel have distinct histories, traditions, identities” (*Exit into History* xiii). Unveiling the myth of uniformity allows the writer to apply and demonstrate her awareness of the US multiculturalist approach, but this also illustrates how her social and cultural analysis of Eastern Europe actually follows certain ready-made patterns and rules. In so doing, she foregrounds the importance of her US perspective, rather than understanding and communication beyond agendas expected by her audience:

Now that the stifling blanket of Communism has lifted, the countries of Eastern Europe are once again revealed to be a mélange of ethnic groups, classes and subcultures. . . . *I tried to do some justice to these striations and distinctions.* I traveled to peripheral villages as well as capital cities, visited factories as well as editorial offices . . . talked to newly uncloseted aristocrats, to Polish Jews and Hungarian Gypsies and Bulgarian Turks. (*Exit into History* xiii-xiv; emphasis added)

There is an inherent tension in the ways she positions herself or is perceived throughout her travels. Although she describes being treated and

received as an American (her expertise in US culture is called upon and she is asked to talk about race, racism, drug use and the difficulties in the publishing industry in the US), she is also perceived as a local: “I tell you,” she hears from a receptionist in a Warsaw hotel, for instance, “I’m sometimes ashamed of what these foreigners see when they come here” (*Exit into History* 113). By default, Hoffman is not, in this case, a foreigner. But when she travels outside of Poland, she is inevitably perceived as an American observer despite her avowal that Eastern Europe was her home. This identity fraught with contradictions is not taken for granted by Hoffman, the perceptive cultural analyst, but becomes the productive locus of reflective commentary, as the following quote illustrates with reference to an encounter with Bulgarian intellectuals:

I can see that everyone at this table understands the intricacies of our momentary relationship and its possible misunderstandings so that the oppositions, the putative inequities between the observer and the observed, the interviewer and the interviewed in effect vanish. I am hardly the coldly objective researcher, they are hardly the unconscious material. (*Exit into History* 389)

The inequities, of course, do not vanish, but such insightful reflections are laden with potential ways of producing more in-depth and reconfigured travel writing to the region, just as they do show the choice of the “observed” to gloss over the unequal balance in terms of representation and agency.

The problematic relation to Europe is of major concern to Hoffman and as we shall see, with Drakulić: “Elsewhere in Eastern Europe people debate how much they are part of the “real” Europe; but Bucharest seems barely to cling to the edge of the continent, threatening to fall off into some other space, some other idea entirely” (*Exit into History* 290). The chapter on Romania (just like all the others) does offer a concise historical overview and ethnographic background—in a matter of fact tone and in less than a page the reader catches the spirit of Romania’s “muddled past” (*Exit into History* 289)—as well as bits of systematic information on present-day political and economic realities. But Hoffman’s observant, thoughtful and charming reports, fragmentary and based on travel notes from short visits as they are, are “prescient” (*Exit into History* 6), as the political scientist scholar, Lavinia Stan, characterizes her views when taking them as a point of departure in the 2012

monograph *Transitional Justice in Post-Communist Romania: The Politics of Memory*.

In spite of insightful and even “prescient” views, or what other critics call “complex exercises of intercultural communication” (Dumitriu 314), it is impossible not to note, for example, the labels Hoffman applies to the countries she visits. Romania, for instance, is “a Bermuda Triangle of the mind, a place that concentrates all one’s anxieties about unnamable dangers and the darkness of the unknown” (*Exit into History* 262). Hoffman pictures Romania via the well-known icon of Dracula, the “blood-feeding aristocrat” (*Exit into History* 262). She states bluntly that: “the real model for the mythical Dracula [Vlad the Impaler the son of Vlad Dracul] is blood curdling enough” (*Exit into History* 262), and does not shy away from making far-fetched comparisons or connecting simplistically various events. The most obvious case is, of course, the association between the legendary bloody image of Dracula and the violent Revolution of 1989.

Furthermore, on the basis of what she hears from the people she gets in touch with, Hoffman pictures Romania mostly via negation, as a land lacking in various items, or aspects: “there’s nothing to eat in Romania,” “It’s utter chaos,” “things are awful” (*Exit into History* 263). Other sources for such statements are her “trusty *Fodor’s*” or Olivia Manning’s *Balkan Trilogy*. One notices thus how her perspective is often mediated by clichés, or general prejudices. It resembles a camera eye offering first a very general, large and even vague picture, which gets closer and gradually acquires focus, to point out, at times, the “exotic,” or the “dark other,” as in: “Transylvania could be said to be . . . the heart of turmoil, if not of darkness” (*Exit into History* 267).

While she does reiterate popular clichés, Hoffman tries to counteract them by highlighting the beauty and “European nature” of the places she visited. Such an instance is when she expresses her surprise to discover Cluj as a lovely town, “unmistakably European, in a way that surprises me—recognizable beautiful Europe, in this far region of the world! . . . But while the architecture is European, the atmosphere is somehow . . . well, Balkan. ‘*Bizhnitze? Bizhnitze?*’ men whisper to us confidentially” (*Exit into History* 269-70).¹⁷ The distinguishing feature of the travelogue genre, namely mapping foreign territory through a “preassigned generic path” (Holland and

¹⁷ The Romanian word “bișnită,” spelled slightly differently by Hoffman, is a slang term referring to illegal dealing. It is an approximation of the English word “business.”

Huggan 69), does take over at times, and both the highly appreciative views and the cliché-like statements follow clear-cut categories like “European” vs “savage.”

Hoffman asks questions—about economics, politics, and the moral changes taking place—almost endlessly, but her narrative is more about people than politics. The sketches of her meetings with more or less famous names or simply anonymous persons from the early 90s are relevant from this point of view. The book offers fascinating and revealing encounters with intellectuals, artists, political activists and ordinary individuals; they all narrate their life histories, hopes and fears, offering valuable snapshots of the texture of everyday life in post-1989 Eastern Europe. A short talk with a teenage boy she met in a post-office is emblematic from this point of view and captures the spirit of the moment. The young boy inquires about the cost of living in the States and expresses his firm desire to become a businessman in “America.” After their short exchange Hoffman concludes, not without capturing with dry irony and a sense of humor the spirit of the moment, that “the American dream [is] in its pure form, undisturbed by any information” (*Exit into History* 294). It is the personal voice and the life narratives of the ones she encountered that come out clearly, and render a rich polyphony to the text, as Hoffman proves a wonderful listener, recording with sensitivity and wit the short narratives of jolly censors, compromised dissidents, young intellectuals, established scholars, and politicians, who all seek to knit their complex pasts into an uncertain future.

Although she masters post-structural theories about subject position and is perfectly aware of the narrator’s agency, as seen above and acknowledged throughout the text,¹⁸ she does write her own prejudices and judgments after recording such stories. Travel for Hoffman becomes literary movement and a tool for examining outer landscapes and also inner ones. The obvious difference between the theoretical background and her intended approach (both outlined in the “Introduction” and “Afterword,” which frame the book) and the travelogue proper is rife with contradictions, making it a productive site of cultural analysis:

¹⁸ “Any observer’s experience is filtered through her, or his lenses and quirks, and all travelers are at the mercy of haphazardness and chance” (Hoffman, *Exit into History* xvi).

The Iron Curtain has lifted, but imaginative curtains take longer to remove . . . I think that Eastern Europe should be an occasion not for projection, but for its reverse—for self-reflection . . . one of the challenges . . . facing those who would understand them [Eastern European countries] is to adjust the categories, lenses—even the emotions—through which to comprehend their experience in order to keep up with the changing experience itself. (*Exit into History* 409-10)

Hoffman sets out to analyze critically many commonly shared Western misperceptions of Eastern Europe and the numerous *other*-ings of the region; in the course of the work, however, she herself alternates between subject positions and uncritically repeats clichés (the Oriental character of the Romanians is obsessively reiterated), failing to adjust the lenses, passing judgments and giving verdicts.

Even though she often perpetuates and enacts the Westerner's gaze as well as the clichés and stereotypes of the countries and peoples she visits, her bicultural perspective given by her Eastern European roots is useful in probing and illuminating the complex politics and representations of the region. Thus, Hoffman distances herself from the highly biased and prejudiced "classical" travelogues written by British or American authors through the constant awareness of her own situation, twisted as she is between belonging and distancing, between affective ties and disconnectedness with the other countries she visits besides Poland, as both native and visitor, both observer and self-observer.¹⁹ From this perspective, Hoffman's book is an excellent case study of the confrontation between multiple expectations with reference to Eastern Europe (the writer's, the audience's, the interpolated locals'), the inherent problems of belonging to a region (uniform under totalitarianism but highly heterogeneous and varied), and the challenges of taking up a genre already rife in imaginary cartographies and cultural biases. Her text charts changes in the geopolitical landscape she describes and successfully captures the spirit of the moment, but the transgressive potential

¹⁹ For popular "classical" travelogues see for example: Rebecca West, *Black Lamp and Grey Falcon* (1941), Olivia Manning, *The Balkan Trilogy*, three independent volumes published between 1960 and 1965. For more recent ones, perpetuating 19th century stereotypes, see: Georgina Harding, *In Another*, Delva Murphy, *Transylvania*, and, of course, Robert Kaplan's highly acclaimed *Balkan Ghosts* mentioned above.

of the genre, which can allow the writer to flout conventions and pre-scripted codes of representations of the region, or offer unsettling effects upon the reader, is missing.²⁰ However, *Exit into History* becomes emblematic of the exiled Eastern European revisiting her homeland and points to a further stage in the on-going process of sketching a more comprehensive account of histories and representations of this area.

Slavenka Drakulić is a Croatian writer and novelist who writes in English, shuttles between Sweden and Croatia, publishes constantly in periodicals such as *The Nation*, *The Guardian*, *La Stampa*, *Dagens Nyheter*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Eurozine*, and *Politiken* and lectures widely in Europe and the US. She wrote her first travel narrative, *How We Survived Communism and Even Laughed* (1992), on assignment for *Ms. Magazine*, about Czechoslovakia, Poland, Bulgaria and East Germany at the beginning of the 1990s, to see “the small, everyday things . . . fragments of recent reality” (*How* xxii–xxiii) and to speak about “women, their lives, their feeling” (*How* vii). *Café Europa: Life after Communism* (1996), her second travel narrative, written between 1992 and 1996, is a more comprehensive examination of life in the former Yugoslavia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Albania after the fall of communism. Hoffman’s polyphonic text, recording a wide array of voices and perspectives, gives way to Drakulić’s perceptions and highly analytical views, which offer a complex sociological and psychological portrait of the early post-communist societies.

While Eva Hoffman revisited the countries having in view her “American” expectations of social and political changes after the fall of communism, Slavenka Drakulić examines the same geographical space from the perspective of a local, including herself and her country of birth within this space. In the introduction, “First Person Singular,” she offers an insightful observation on the different usage in terms of personal pronouns in totalitarian societies (the plural *we* stands for common experience, anonymity, resignation, submissiveness) and democratic ones (the singular *I* means responsibility, individuality, initiative):

. . . in Eastern European countries the difference between ‘we’ and ‘I’ is to me far more important than mere grammar. ‘We’

²⁰ Jamaica Kincaid’s *Small Place* can be seen as such an example in the postcolonial context, namely an anti-travelogue that flouts and challenges travel writing on the Caribbean Islands.

means fear, resignation, submissiveness, a warm crowd and somebody else deciding your destiny. ‘I’ means giving individuality and democracy a chance. (*Café Europa* 4)

While Eva Hoffman situated herself as an outsider, Drakulić, from the very introduction, refers to herself as part of the “we,” “us,” and underlines her belonging throughout the book, even though, as we shall see, she also problematizes belonging and affinities in a complex way: “Clearly, in the context of this book, ‘we’ and ‘us’ mean the people of ex-communist countries, and. . . . I am one of them” (*Café Europa* viii), while later she is part of “us,” “poor Balkan suckers” (*Café Europa* 71). In spite of different subject positions, which the two authors acknowledge, there is a striking similarity with reference to establishing dichotomies (“we,” i.e. the East, vs “they,” the others, the West), and even implicit hierarchies (“poor... suckers.”) However, neither the “West” nor “Europe” are taken for granted, and they are subjected to constant inquiry and pertinent questioning.

Drakulić, the highly self-reflective and self-critical writer, takes her own past and present travel experience, both within and outside the post/communist bloc, as an object of analysis. It is the very lucid view about her own reactions and understanding of the places she visits that becomes a first step in contextualizing, making sense of and explaining the countries she visits. A return to Croatia makes her notice that she feels “*obligated* to my friend with a baby . . . to my relatives and friends there” to bring nappies and all sorts of other basic necessities (*Café Europa* 39; original italics) and then wonder “Why do I do this every time I go back to Zagreb? Why are my suitcases always full of such trivia?” (*Café Europa* 40). This allows her to engage at large not only with the asymmetrical financial status (she as a Croat married and living in Sweden, they as working and being poorly paid in Croatia), but also with mentalities, expectations, and traditions.

At the same time, in order to engage with the present, Drakulić’s narrative probes into the recent past, the communist and pre-communist periods from World War I onward. Her numerous travels “abroad” both during Tito’s regime in Yugoslavia and in its aftermath, as well her relocation to Sweden upon marriage, are juxtaposed with her views as a “local” or “insider” as a way of better rendering the post-communist transitions. Different from Hoffman, she writes as someone who did live under the communist regime (and is familiar with the ways in which communism marks

one's behavior even after its demise) and as one who realizes the pitfalls that still lie ahead for nations emerging from the Soviet yoke. She notes during her visit to Tirana that:

It is a paradox that what people today miss the most is the security they have lost with the fall of communism: jobs, pensions, social and medical security. . . . As a result you don't invest, build or save in the name of the future. You just grab what there is today, because it might not be tomorrow. So future is still non-existent in practical terms. (*Café Europa* 67)

Such observations offer an in-depth understanding of the long-term legacy of the communist system and its present effects, and thus offers a valid psychological portrait of ex-communist countries.

Drakulić's strategy is to place side by side past and present moments, as well as Westerners' views about the East, Easterners' views about the West, and Easterners' views about other Easterners, as a way to deal with the misunderstandings and negotiations that took place during the early 90s in such encounters. All these juxtapositions and transpositions are structural strategies that characterize Drakulić's book. While the legacy of communism is properly engaged with and provides ways of putting things into perspective, the numerous positions the narrator inhabits—a former Yugoslav national who is well-travelled since early childhood, an established writer and cultural critic giving talks in numerous international venues in the 90s, a Croat forced into exile due to the nationalist upsurge under Franjo Tudjman, a transnational cosmopolitan relocated in Sweden—give Drakulić the travel writer an excellent vantage point and sound grasp of comparative analysis of the countries she visits.

Her concise narrative addresses, in a direct but unassuming way, most of the key questions of the then "explosive" Balkan situation, always bringing into discussion the international perspective. Following a topical rather than chronological approach, as was the case with Hoffman's travelogue, she discusses such issues as the problematic relationship between the Balkans and Europe, the evolving national identities as an expression of political choices, the rationalization of difference, the relationship between citizenship and nationality, the effects of the communist legacy when set against the incipient stages of capitalism, and the responsibilities of the writer.

In order to dispel the condescending vision of the Balkans as a region of bloody feuds, murders, and even genocide, Drakulić revisits instances of Balkan history and constantly rejects the image of some isolated and immutable Balkan politics (as in the case of Kaplan or earlier travel writers). Instead, she proposes a comprehensively dynamic perspective that connects the region to the overall European history, prefiguring the more recent and comprehensive views along this line. Thus, far from being essentially different from the rest of the continent's tragedies, the Balkan horrors, according to Drakulić, simply magnify and condense these atrocities. If Eva Hoffman spelled out in a concise but clear manner the thesis about the imaginary construction of Eastern Europe by the West before scholarly work on the topic, or was "prescient" with reference to Romania's "usable past" (*Exit into History* 292), Drakulić's view about the Balkan wars announces the transnational historical or sociological approaches that scholars like Étienne Balibar or Zsuzsa Gille later put forth.²¹

Sometimes causal connections do look far-fetched: Romania's peasant civilization is said to explain muddy streets in the capital, and winter fur hats are seen as directly related to the peasant roots of the country (*Café Europa* 200, 31); the tone at times also becomes (self) moralizing: Drakulić refers to the socialist health system, connects it with bad teeth, and concludes with the American saying "there is no such thing as a free lunch" (*Café Europa* 135). However, the charm of her writing is to be found in the arresting details about post-1989 everyday life. From discussing the problems of buying a vacuum cleaner to blaming the government for one's bad teeth and to debating the evils of former communist rulers, Drakulić offers a taste of daily existence in the newly free countries of Eastern Europe and reveals paradoxes gleaned as she glosses over the spectrum of post-1989 changes from Albania to the Czech Republic. Thus, the effects of the changes of 1989 are seen in small, everyday things: sounds, looks, smells, and images. Drakulić's perceptions are not, however, accidental glimpses, but are rather laden with meaning, and thus become a pretext for analysis and decoding. She spots, for instance, that in Budapest one can buy sweets in a shop called "Bonbonnière Hemingway" (*Café Europa* 8), and that "the naming" is not devoid of meaning. She notes

²¹ Balibar sees the wars in the Balkans *not* as a European exception, a "monstrosity grafted to its [Europe] breast, a pathological "aftereffect" of under-development or of communism," but rather an image and effect of the very European history which needs to be confronted (6).

that Eastern Europeans are so anxious to become like their Western counterparts that every city and town has a “Café Europa” that is a pale imitation of similar establishments in Paris and Rome. She points out how the old names are seen as a symbol of the past, “of primitivism, of ‘non-European’” (*Café Europa* 11) and are replaced with foreign ones, which stand for unfulfilled desires and are signs meant to indicate that “this is not the old, communist, poor primitive Oriental, backward Eastern Europe” but that “we belong to the West too, except that we have been exiled from it for half a century” (*Café Europa* 10).

The notion of “Europe” is continuously revisited and problematized with Drakulić; a significant part of the book, and the title itself, explore what I call a reverse “imaginative geography.” While Drakulić, just like Hoffman, also discusses the way in which Europe views Eastern Europe, the Balkans, as its “poor relatives, and cousins,” she, even more importantly, focuses on the associations attached to Europe by its “margins.” She notices and emphasizes how “Europe” is no longer the name for a continent but for a whole set of values and assumptions within the continent proper:

What does Europe mean in the Eastern European imagination? It is certainly not a question of geography, for in those terms we are already in it and need make no effort to reach it. It is something distant, something to be attained, to be deserved. . . . Europe is plenitude: food, cars, light, everything—a kind of festival of colors, diversity, opulence, beauty. It offers choice: from shampoo to political parties. It represents freedom of expression. It is a promised land, a new Utopia, a lollipop. (*Café Europa* 12)

Here Drakulić powerfully captures Cold War divisions that are still internalized in its aftermath. During the Cold War, in the unofficial discourse and private sphere of the former Eastern European bloc, the Western countries in Europe (and elsewhere) stood for wealth and prosperity. The problematic relation to “Europe,” the paradoxical positioning of the Balkans as geographically part of Europe but conceptually excluded from the European cultural space, is also vividly illustrated here. When used in the Balkans, the idea of “Europe” is a comprehensive one, and it includes the Balkans as well.

If used in the West, however, the notion admits a Balkan element, only as a neglected “backyard” which one needs to maintain.²²

The title of Drakulić’s book refers to the countless cafés and shops that have eager, “me too,” Western European or American names like “Bonjour,” “Target,” “Four Roses,” “Lady,” or even, “The End,” and, as already mentioned, “Bonbonnière Hemingway.” In Zagreb, a beautiful cinema, once named “The Balkan,” has been rechristened “The Europa,” encapsulating thus people’s desires and pointing to the disavowal of their identity and location.²³ In Sofia, where a smile is at a premium (“A Smile in Sofia”), the “Café Wien’s” meticulous recreation of an elegant Viennese ambience produces “a Brechtian alienation effect” (*Café Europa* 7), as do the “depleted supermarkets” and the humble “Café Hollywood” in Bucharest. One notices how Drakulić employs the language of everyday life, rather than the jargon of traditional economic and political analysis, to describe how people who have lived fifty years under communism badly want to be considered once again European, and how their desire is almost palpable.

The understanding and definition of Europe evolve throughout the book. If at the beginning of the book older dichotomies are highlighted, and then Europe as a “name” stands for “desire” (*Café Europa* 5), in the final chapter Drakulić asks “What is Europe after Bosnia”? (*Café Europa* 213). In bringing up the genocide in Bosnia, and Europe’s failure to take a clear stand, she clearly questions the desires and values attached to the name of the continent.

Both bitter and funny at times, Drakulić’s book is very self-critical and incisively self-reflective, without sadness or deprecation, and leaves one with a sense of melancholy, open-endedness and perhaps even optimism. She writes beautifully, having a gift for clear prose and a journalist’s eye for exact

²² Slavoj Žižek voices a similar view with reference to the multiple displacements of the frontier as far as the Balkans are concerned:

For the Serbs, they [the Balkans] begin *down there*, in Kosovo or in Bosnia, and they defend the Christian civilization against the Europe’s Other; for the Croats, they begin in Orthodox, despotic and Byzantine Serbia, against which Croatia safeguards Western democratic values; for Slovenes they begin in Croatia, and we are the last bulwark of the peaceful *Mittleuropa*; for many Italians and Austrians they begin in Slovenia, the Western outpost of the Slavic hordes; for many Germans, Austria itself, because of its historical links, is already tainted with Balkan corruption and inefficiency; for many North Germans, Bavaria, with its Catholic provincial *flair*, is not free of a Balkan contamination; many arrogant Frenchmen associate Germany itself with an Eastern Balkan brutality entirely foreign to the French *finesse*. (*The Fragile* 3-4)

²³ As a Bulgarian critic rightly observes about disillusionment with the EU, there has been a backlash in terms of the Balkan culture, and “old small taverns and kafanas opened, a new type of arrogant Balkan intimacy haunted the air” (Kiossev 6).

detail—clothing, smells, tastes, and colors—thereby making her home feel familiar to the reader.

The notion of “Europe” is continuously revisited and problematized in the travelogues taken here under consideration, as a concept of inherently ambiguous nature that carries an internal tension built between granted location and elusive destination. Both Hoffman and Drakulić enact in their writing a repositioning of the post-1989 Eastern Europe in the European context with reference to the process of “unthinking Eurocentrism,” a project conceived by Shohat and Stam, who insist that “the awareness of the intellectually debilitating effects of the Eurocentric legacy [is] . . . indispensable for comprehending . . . contemporary subjectivities” (1). Though insufficiently elaborated, their implicit (Hoffman) or overt (Drakulić) critically self-conscious examination of marginality opens new paths to be developed and explored.

IV. The Post-communist Exotic

In trying to grapple with the questions I posed at the beginning of the article—who has the cultural authority and knowledge to represent another people?; how does this depiction take place?—I argue that while the traditional travelogue style of narration is still prevalent, East European travel writers negotiate with and reconfigure somewhat critically Western imaginings and rhetorical strategies. However, as my analysis illustrates, even writers of Eastern European origin offer at times a pre-assigned generic path to their native region, thus depicting their own cultures through the eyes of a Westerner (or local cosmopolitan who has spent sufficient time in the West²⁴). One cannot fail to notice, with both Hoffman and Drakulić, a voluntary or internalized self-exoticism and the rendering of Eastern European cultures as compliant to or dependent on the Western framework. Therefore, the “otherness” of the Balkans/Eastern Europe, which as Todorova, Goldsworthy and Wolff illustrated, originated in the West, is taken up and at times internalized by the exiles, transnational writers themselves, who claim to represent the region from within, although their narratives prove their tangled subject positions.

²⁴ Drakulić was criticized and suffered recrimination and persecution in her native Croatia for her “cosmopolitanism” and rejection of nationalism.

Studies on postcolonialism provocatively criticize “the global commodification of cultural difference” (Huggan vii), a “general mechanics of exoticist representation/consumption within an increasingly globalised culture industry” or “the alterity industry” (Huggan x). What Graham Huggan suggestively calls the “postcolonial exotic” is “to some extent, a pathology of cultural representation under late capitalism—a result of the spiraling commodification of cultural difference, and of responses to it, that is characteristic of the (post)modern, market-driven societies in which many of us currently live” (33). Appropriating such an approach, I would suggest that the self-othering and voluntary exoticism present in *Exit into History* and *Café Europa* could be seen as a marketing strategy, managing and packaging the Eastern European post-communist “other” so that it meets Western expectations but does not significantly challenge them.

By apparently following the tradition of early travelogues about the Balkans and Eastern Europe and catering to a certain degree to Anglo-American expectations, these post-1989 travel narratives appear as another process of exploitation of the region. However, the travelogue format and the tradition they seem to follow offer Hoffman and Drakulić a privileged space for enunciation, which enables a more critical reconfiguration and productive cultural/historical translations of the Balkans and post/communist Eastern Europe. They recode the representations and images of Balkanism and Eastern Europe and relate cultural differences to matters of power and rhetoric rather than essence. At the same time, “succumbing” to the market does not necessarily produce the negative, homogenizing scenario one might expect, since “global processes of commodification may engender new social relations . . . empowering the previously dispossessed” (Huggan 12).

As complex and nuanced travel narratives, *Exit into History* and *Café Europa* depart from the traditional travelogues of *Other-ing*, initiating a framework of dissent and a critical rethinking of the post-1989 Balkan and Eastern European space that, more recently, has been successfully continued by the new generation of fiction writers of Eastern European origin established and published outside their native countries.²⁵ While such travelogues cannot be seen as an agent of Western domination and mapping of

²⁵ See for instance Aleksandar Hemon, Téa Obreht, Miroslav Penkov, Ismet Prcic, in the US, David Bezmozgis in Canada, Saša Stanišić in Germany as well as the booming new post-soviet generation which includes Ellen Litman, Gary Shteyngart, Anya Ulinich, Lara Vapnyar among others.

the Balkans and Eastern Europe, the way they insert themselves in the discourse of post-1989 Eastern Europe/the Balkans is at times self-critical (Drakulić), but not very transgressive. However, the cultural “in-between-ness” of the two writers—“never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional . . . a pressure, and a presence, that acts constantly, if unevenly, along the entire boundary of authorization,” in Bhabha’s terms (297)—is prolific and seductive at the same time. It also brings about necessary cultural translations, which come out of the specific socio-historical experience brought about by life under totalitarianism and its immediate aftermath in the Eastern European countries. This often overlooked and neglected context of the former East-West divide, namely the former Communist countries and the Anglo-American world, together with the complex background of communist and post-communist processes, and market-oriented complicities that inform the writings of Hoffman and Drakulić, make the two travelogues play a highly significant role in the context of transnational encounters and representations of post-communist Eastern Europe in the early 1990s.

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