EASTERN EUROPEAN SCREEN CULTURES

Ana Grgić

Early Cinema, Modernity and Visual Culture

The Imaginary of the Balkans

Amsterdam University Press

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Eastern European Screen Cultures

The series *Eastern European Screen Cultures* publishes critical studies on the screen cultures that have marked the socialist and post-socialist spaces in Europe. It aims to unveil current phenomena and untold histories from this region to account for their specificity and integrate them into a wider conception of European and world cinema.

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Cover illustration: Photograph of the Manakia brothers film reel. © Ana Grgić

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The work of memory collapses time. (Walter Benjamin)

Foreword: Travelling Down /Travelling Through

Dina Iordanova

There is something – when reading this book – that makes me visualize a photographic darkroom, from the time when pictures were still being developed from a negative. One would submerge photographic paper into trays full of chemical baths, then pull it with pincers, wash, let it dry, and, in the course of all this, see the images gradually emerge, take shape, gaining full contrast and defined contours. The figures in the photo would become distinguishable, the pictures would tell a story, and would become engraved on the mind of the viewer. It would be a riveting process of emergence: where once there had been only white photographic paper, now there was a testimony, a record of occurrence, a document of existence, and a newly shaped epistemological space.

In *Early Cinema, Modernity and Visual Culture: The Imaginary of the Balkans*, Ana Grgić opens up her darkroom to deliver to the world the early moving images that she is working with – of a lost, yet revered past – flickering and faint shadows yet discernible and spellbinding. Tactile. Haptic. She makes faces, facades, and chronicles come to light; she orders, names, and links them. She transforms the void into a story.

And yes, it was a void before. Early Balkan cinema simply did not 'exist' a few decades ago. The encyclopaedias and guides on early cinema were there, yet there was little in these volumes to suggest the existence of any faint – let alone thriving – film culture across the Balkan lands. All attention was focused on the West, with the occasional mention of what took place in the lands of former Austria–Hungary. The specialized film festivals would play, occasionally, a film from these territories, and such rare occurrences would be considered a colourful breakthrough. Whatever the Balkans had to contribute was away from the eyes and away from the mind. Cinema did not appear to have any discernible presence in this part of the world. Nor to have left any significant utterances.

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In Ana Grgić's text, the absent films, which have only sporadically been referenced over time, now emerge and transform into fully fledged cinematic

events – from *Grandmother Despina* and *The Weavers* (1907), or *The Journey to Sofia* (1909), to accomplished albeit nationalist features like *The Life and Deeds of the Immortal Leader Karađorđe* (1911) and *The Independence of Romania* (1912) – and become pillars of a new round of witnessing.

But there is so much more to uncover beyond the actual films: the context, the specific vernacular modernist film culture, comes to the forefront in this book equally vividly. For the work to be done properly, the precondition is to suspend preconceived notions of borders and insurmountable differences. The stories of itinerant filmmakers and novelty enthusiasts, the details of whose biographies and identities were shrouded in mystery for decades, like the Aromanian brothers Yanaki and Milton Manaki, Hungarian Louis de Beéry, or Romanian Jew Sigmund Weinberg, who traversed the lands of the Ottoman and the Austro–Hungarian empire around the turn of the century, from Vienna to Istanbul, come to life. Painstakingly pieced together, stories emerge that tell of vague testimonies of lost films, of cans full of flammable nitrate material that lie in village cellars for decades, of misspelled names, and riveting identity discoveries.

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At the Early Balkan Cinema Conference in Athens in 2015 – the only event to date to gather representatives of almost all nations in the region – the late Bulgarian film scholar Alexandar Yanakiev spoke of early Balkan cinema as crossword puzzle of blank spots on a map: Back then, most filming was done by people who were moving through territories that did not have today's demarcation lines. Not driven by identical objectives, their itineraries could seem disparate; their trajectories were not coordinated and would often appear erratic. There may be consistent information of someone's moves and filming work as far as this took place on the territory of one present-day country, then, on entry into the lands of a different present-day country, there would be an interlude and the protagonist would vanish for a while. Subsequently, new information of further activities picking up would emerge from yet another country, where the itinerant filmmaker would arrive at a later point. And many repetitions of this pattern, back and forth. So, we may know the story of an itinerant filmmaker in Romania, and then of his activities in Istanbul some years later, but nothing of what this person did in-between – Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Albania… What had been one large, imperial yet multiculturally convivial periphery back then, is today a chequered region full of many smaller or larger nation states, with different languages and different cultural agendas. What film historians

based in present-day countries had to do, Yanakiev insisted, was to talk to one another and seek to connect the dots and resolve the puzzle, by putting the missing bits in the picture. They needed to somehow reconcile the open spaces of past geographical imaginaries with the present-day realities of often rigid national borders and agendas. Then the whole story would emerge.

As Hamid Naficy has shown in his exploration of the early cinema of Iran, the geographies of cinema can vary substantially: the trajectories of Iranian filmmakers did not move on the Berlin–Paris axis but more on the territories of today's Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia. In the case of the Balkans, it is a story that needs to move through the economically uneven peripheries of two denominationally disparate crumbling empires, where the 'attractions' and the 'vernacular modernities' had a local flavour. Here, vestiges of slavery co-existed with emancipatory movements, Oriental shadow play puppet shows ran alongside popular coffeehouses where cinema made its first forays, and the punctured round roofs of hammams stood next to Orthodox chapels. One could see Catholic women in Tirana hiding their faces behind veils whilst in Istanbul Sultan Abdul Hamid II, a cinephile of sorts, displayed passion for modernist technology.

The Balkans were a region of alternative geographies, entangled histories, and, at the end, triumphant nationalisms. Film historians – like Boris Nonevski (1943–2021), Petar Kardjilov, Marian Ţuţui, Canan Balan, to name just a few from among an ever-growing cohort of dedicated international researchers – who ventured into disentangling the disparate and patchy material out of which the field of early Balkan cinema gradually emerged, needed to be stubborn and persevering. Each one of them, and many other researchers, dedicated and inquisitive, did their bit depending on where they were based. Following in these stubborn mavericks' footsteps, in bringing a coherent and vivid picture to life at the crossroads of Byzantine/Ottoman syncretism and iconography, Ana Grgić's study takes the reconstruction into a new phase.

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Many condescending remarks have been made about the Balkans over time – a Scottish travel writer claimed that the Balkans 'make more history than they can consume locally' (Saki, 1911) and a German political philosopher regarded them as a bad joke ('if the Balkans had not existed, they would have been invented', von Keyserling, 1928). Others have spoken of the region as 'mysterious,' 'fascinating,' or 'bewildering.'

Traditionally, whoever would engage with the Balkans would either travel down or talk them down. Over time, the attitude became the normative

framework for telling stories related to the region: To be told, a Balkan story needed the legitimization of the foreigner's judgemental gaze; the story of Zorba the Greek, wild and exciting, could only be told by Basil, an inhibited Englishman. This narrative construct was deeply internalized in many key Balkan narratives that kept reproducing it. Even Theo Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze*, a film made as recently as 1995 and deeply rooted in the Balkans, deploys the same structure: even if A., the protagonist, is searching for the lost early images of happy conviviality, and even if his journey through the Balkans is permeated with sadness and pain, he is, once again, coming from the West and travelling down.

But this entrenched attitude has its consequences; it leads to an inevitable backlash. For how much longer will it be that only those who travel down – and those who are likely to easily talk down – will be the most vocal ones? How about substituting Pierre Loti for Tanpınar, Saki for Sait Faik, and Rebecca West for Miroslav Krleža and Desanka Maksimović? Or, even better, how about reading them side by side? Is it not time to allow different countries to have as much history as they want or need without feeling they are 'invented' and perennially receiving the meddling and condescending commentary of staggering Eurocentrics? A certain rebellious motivation of assertive self-preservation comes to stand against the arrogance of the Western traveller's gaze. It is a gaze that does not recognize specificities and sensitivities, a gaze devoid of empathy.

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To connect the dots, it takes travelling through – as opposed to the travelling down practiced by the foreign correspondents and travel writers. It takes actually going to these places – a haptic experience of touching the nitrate film and turning yellowish pages of old newspaper that feel like parchments. It takes physically showing up. It takes being present. It takes detective work – efforts to uncover, discover, and piece it all together. Seeing the connections in the disjointed lives of itinerant protagonists. Identifying what is the same and what is different, and talking about it. It takes loving the flickering images recorded by novelty merchants. And this is what Ana Grgić has done committedly for the past decade: She is the present-day itinerant protagonist who criss-crosses the Balkans, then brings it all together and connects the dots in a book that is an atlas of emotion.

Preface: The Balkan Imaginary of Ruins

To experience the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. (Walter Benjamin, *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*).

And, if the soul is about to know itself, it must gaze into the soul. (Plato, *Alcibiades* 133B).

Figure 1. The brothers Manakia in *To Vlémma tou Odysséa/ Ulysses' Gaze* (1995, dir. Theo Angelopoulos)

A: (voice-over) *"Weavers. In Avdella, a Greek village, 1905. The first film made by the brothers Miltos and Yannakis Manakis. The first film ever made in Greece and the Balkans. But is that a fact? Is it the first film? The first gaze?"*

Any traveller delving into the history of the Balkan region is soon confronted with an investigation of a past strewn with conflicting narratives, interconnected identities, and displaced images. Traversing the geographical and

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imaginary landscape of the Balkans has been an existential endeavour for me: a journey between memory and history, myth and reality, affect and vision, divisive politics and common contours. In Theo Angelopoulos's acclaimed film *To Vlémma tou Odysséa*/*Ulysses' Gaze* (1995), the exiled film director A. returns to the region in search of a lost film reel shot by the Balkan cinema pioneers, as the last vestiges of the Cold War world order are crumbling, to eventually end his trip in war-torn Sarajevo. A's quest ends amidst the ruins of Yugoslav wars, where my own journey begins, to become part of other global stories of emigration and displacement. This work, then, symbolizes my return to the Balkans, both figuratively and physically. The Bulgarian writer Kapka Kassabova warns: 'To journey to the place of your ancestors, you must be prepared to see what it is easier to deny' (2020, 1). In the early 1990s, the destruction of former Yugoslavia metaphorically entailed a search for a new or a desired identity and a rewriting and reconstruction of the past. Angelopoulos's film foregrounds the obsession and the desire to locate the beginning (the *arche*), an 'innocence lost' in the Balkans, through the search for the missing film reel that might provide an answer to the, then, current state of things, while the Manakia brothers,[1] as Balkan cinema pioneers *par excellence*, come to symbolize and represent the loss of the ability to be together.

My own research journey took me to film archives, state institutions, and university libraries across the region, where my gaze, that of a researcher and a spectator, was implicated in the reconstruction of a cultural and visual history of the Balkans. In the course of this exploration, I was repeatedly confronted with the same question: who is writing (looking) and who has the obligation to write (look)? I realized that while the hegemonic discourses in the countries of former Yugoslavia and abroad depicted who we should 'be' and how we should 'think,' I could not help but identify with the sense of loss, non-belonging, and a critical position of otherness. I was forced to look, and then to write about the experience of looking. Often, I felt like Angelopoulos's protagonist, compelled to search for that missing piece of the picture, hidden within the palimpsests of the discourse that would

1 There are several different spelling variations of the Balkan pioneers' names in Greek, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Macedonian, Turkish, and Albanian languages (Ienache/ Ion/ Ionel/ Ianakis/ Yanaki/ Iovan and Milton/ Miltos/ Miltiade/ Maltu, Manaki/ Manakis/ Manakia), which points to a shared cultural heritage and shifting historical narratives throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this study, the Vlach/Aromanian variation, Ienache and Milton Manakia, which appears on the logo for their photographic and cinema studio, is adopted throughout.

reveal all, and yet which remained elusive, unattainable, and perhaps even undesirable.

This is also a story of missing pieces, of beautiful fragments, of severed connections, and of inspiring endeavours. Throughout this journey, I caught myself unaware, complicit with fellow 'Balkanians' at various cultural manifestations in the region, as we shared elements of common history, culture, and cuisine, perhaps in an unconscious act of re-commemoration and of regaining our conviviality.

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Introduction: Charting the Terrain: Early Cinema in the Balkans

> The field of vision has always seemed to me comparable to the ground of an archaeological excavation. (Paul Virilio, 1984, 1).

> [...] the outsider's view is not necessarily inferior to the insider's, and the insider is not anointed with truth because of existential intimacy with the object of study. What counts [...] is the very process of the conscious effort to shed biases and look for ways to express the reality of otherness, even in the face of a paralysing epistemological scepticism. (Maria Todorova, 2009 [1997], ix).

The crisis of memory during the nineteenth century in Europe brought about the construction of museums, commemorations, and other conservational projects, in order to preserve *time* as a *historical object*. The arrival of cinema, and, some time earlier, photography, would play a major role in this modernizing and memorial process. Most European nations were undergoing a profound change, the beginnings of a drastic mutation from a traditional, rural society to a more modern, urban and industrial one. Society, and memory, in particular, was being called into question and subjected to scrutiny. A similar profound change has taken place in recent years – our daily lives have never been so invaded by the spectres of the past – thanks to the digital revolution and access to practically anything anywhere in the world. Today, there is an unprecedented over-abundance of material, both text and images, and almost every institution seems to possess its own archives. Contemporary societies once again are experiencing the crisis of memory, due to the nature and ephemerality of the digital and the speed of change. Over the last decades, both media and the academic community, have witnessed heated debates about interrelated issues of archives, preservation, access, and the digital, and the ongoing discussions concerning postcolonial legacies, race discourse, ecology, and identity politics. Film and media scholars are increasingly moving away from film

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history canons, classical Hollywood cinema, and 'Anglophone cinema,' and towards world cinemas, major non-Anglophone film industries, but also marginal, peripheral, and minor cinemas, accented and diasporic filmmaking, and shedding light on neglected and forgotten figures and films from the 'shadow archive,' in an effort to understand the development of modern visual media as a complex and multifaceted process. This effort has been sustained by the advent and global proliferation of internet and digital technologies over the last two decades, allowing for greater access to archival materials, films, scholarship, and more.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the communist bloc, the realities of the transitional period and the social, political, and historical contexts in Eastern and Southeast Europe have brought about the readdressing of national identities, on the one side through continuous re-assessments of history, which generate distinct discourses, and on the other through the recalling of memory, which generates nostalgia for the past. This book hopes to contribute to current academic discourse that seeks to address colonial and postcolonial legacies of modernity, European memory-building projects, and racial ideologies, in their aims to understand and extricate contemporary geopolitics, perceptions, and structures of power and value. Moreover, it seeks to engage in dialogue with similar contributions that speak from the position of otherness, marginality, and alterity. To this end, this work provides greater insight into the unknown cinematic past of the Balkans, consisting of forgotten, rarely seen, or little-known archival moving images, materials, and biographies that have survived natural disasters, wars, and undergone changing political systems throughout the turbulent twentieth century. Engaging with the issues of the archive, preservation, and cultural memory, the book examines the specific geopolitical position and the multicultural identity of the Balkan space at the turn of the twentieth century, which influenced the development of early cinema in the region. The intermingling, contamination, and fusion of artistic traditions from East and West resulted in a unique and hybrid form of regional visual culture, and the arrival of cinema signalled a new means of expression and communication.

The Balkan Space of Enquiry

The Balkans are geographically and symbolically situated on the crossroads of mainland Europe and the Near East. There is no universal agreement on the exact countries the region encompasses and the variations are many. At times, certain countries belong to this imaginal space and, at other times,

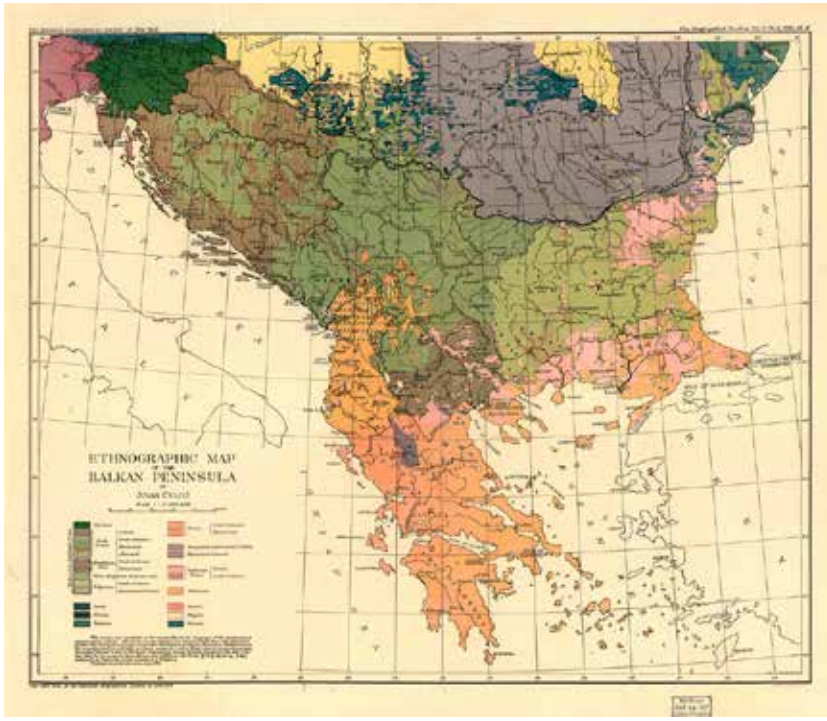

Figure 2. *Ethnographic Map of the Balkan Peninsula* (1918), Jovan Cvijić, William Breisemeister

they are excluded for various reasons (for instance, Romania and Slovenia due to their liminal geographical position, or Greece and Turkey when the term only encompasses the former communist-bloc countries of the region). This uncertainty and ambiguity reinforce the fluidity of the region, and tend also to contribute to negative associations with the term itself. Therefore, the 'Balkan' designation is spatially, temporally, historically, and ideologically contingent.

Drawing from Dina Iordanova's work on Balkan cinema (2001, 2006), I consider the Balkans more of a cultural entity than a geographical concept, one defined by Greek and Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Austro–Hungarian historical legacies and by the specific marginal and crossroads positioning of the region. 'Balkan' refers to those countries as sharing a number of elements of their history, culture, heritage, and self-conceptualization. For the purpose of this study, this corresponds to the geographical area roughly circumscribed by the borders of present-day Slovenia in the northwest and Turkey in the southeast, in order to account for the influence of the Austro–Hungarian and Ottoman Empires in the region. Therefore, this

rather inclusive interpretation of the Balkans includes the territories of present-day nations of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, and Turkey. However, since this work is more concerned with the imaginary construct of the Balkans rather than a precise geographical area, in what follows, I also discuss how this designation developed over time and entered hegemonic and media discourse.

The Invention of the Balkans

For many decades, Western observers thought of the Balkans as a space separating 'civilized Europe' from the 'Oriental chaos,' an uncharted and mystical territory, wrought with a mountainous range and populated with small warring and wretched nations. The historian Misha Glenny argues that, while the language is less romanticized, the discourse that distances and mythologizes the Balkans still persists today (1999, xxi). Around the turn of the twentieth century, the Balkans sit on the margins of Europe (geographically, politically, and conceptually), and at the same time, they are peripheral territories of the Austro–Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, creating a uniquely heterogenous, intercultural, and hybrid space of meaning. Andrew Baruch Wachtel argues how: 'The Balkan Peninsula developed its diverse civilization over many centuries as geographic factors, combined with the inability of any one civilization to assert complete control over the local populations, encouraged variety' (2008, 7). This ambivalent and crossroads positioning, and the complex relations between the Balkans and the West, have been addressed by a number of scholars in the fields of cultural and visual history, anthropology, philosophy, postcolonial studies, and film and media studies. Notably, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) have been very influential on critical approaches and on the development of concepts on issues of ideology, representation, and identity in the region.

In her seminal work, Todorova traces 'the invention of the Balkans' to travel writing and journalism throughout history and explores its imaginary construction ([1997] 2009). The word 'Balkan' comes from the Turkish 'Bal Kan' which means mountain or stony place, and it was gradually used to designate the mountainous chain crossing present-day Bulgaria, eventually coming to signify the entire peninsula in the nineteenth century (Todorova 2009, 26–28). Western observers and commentators travelling throughout the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries used and spread

the term, accompanied by descriptions of the region's perceived decline and lowering of classical ideals under Ottoman rule (Ibid., 22). Yet, it was not until the beginning of twentieth century, and around the time of the Balkan Wars and World War I, that the strong negative connotations and perceptions of the term 'Balkan' solidified and the notion of 'Balkanization' also emerged (Ibid., 32).

While geographically situated on the European continent, the Balkans have been perceived as Europe's Other, its backyard, in many ways similar to 'Eastern Europe' as Larry Wolff has shown: 'such uncertainty encouraged the construction of Eastern Europe as a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe, but not Europe' (1994, 7). Furthermore, the Balkans functioned as 'a kind of a mirror' in which Europe could build a contrasting self-image, one that is 'advanced' and 'civilized,' while at the same time reflecting 'what Europeans had been but were no longer allowed to be' (Jezernik 2007, 14–15). In these travelogues and accounts, the Balkans embodied and combined what Julia Kristeva called 'the disturbingly strange' and 'the otherness of our ourness' (Ibid.). Todorova writes: 'Geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as "Other", the Balkans became, in time, the object of a number of externalized political, ideological and cultural frustrations and 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' (1994, 455).

The term 'Balkanization'[1] came to be synonymous with the notion of perpetual violence, war, and intolerance, and designated ethnic and political fragmentation attributed to the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. A British diplomat, writing the Balkan survey for the Carnegie Endowment in 1913, noted how: 'wherever and whenever in the Balkans national feeling becomes conscious, then, to that extent, does civilization begin; and as such consciousness could best come through war, war in the Balkans was

1 Balkanization has come to designate ethnical and political fragmentation of multinational states, and was coined at the end of World War I, but wrongly attributed to the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. Maria Todorova traces the history of the expression 'Balkanization,' and finds it was first used in the *New York Times* on 20 December 1918 in the article "Rathenau, Head of Great Industry, Predicts the 'Balkanization of Europe'," here conveying a future threat or impeding devastation (1997, 33–34). Todorova asserts that 'Balkanization entered the lexicon of journalists and politicians at the end of World War I when the disintegration of the Habsburg and Romanov Empires into a proliferation of small states reminded them of the secession of the Balkan countries from the Ottoman polity that had begun much earlier' (Ibid., 34), and the term was revived after World War II during the decolonization process (Ibid., 35).

the only road to peace' (1915, 31). Further, the Ottoman legacy as perception, as a process of interaction between the accumulating past and the perceptions of generations of people who are constructing the past, is built in the discourse of Balkan nationalism as one of the most important pillars, and displays remarkable similarity in all Balkan countries (Todorova 2004, 13). Some scholars have argued that what came to designate the process of 'Balkanization' in the region – 'nationalism, plans for the building of post-Ottoman empires and the continuous redrawing of existing political borders in the Balkans' – was a result of Europeanization and Westernization[2] (Jezernik et al., 2007, 8). At the end of the nineteenth century, the Balkan region was a multicultural milieu, where people of different religions, ethnic origins, and cultures co-existed, and where strong historical legacies of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire and Ottoman Empire resulted in a multi-layered local civilization. Due to this complexity, the anthropologist Sarah H. Green argues that violence erupts when attempts to use 'the cookie cutter' method to sever connections and relationships in the Balkan region are employed, precisely because the gaps function as connective tissue (2005). In the Balkans, the complex and, at times, conflicting identities (religious, ethnic, or linguistic affiliation), rendered the division of the territory into nation states a difficult and intricate process. The arbitrary borders foreshadowing and resulting from the two Balkan Wars serve as visible evidence of this method,[3] as well as the subsequent population exchanges (such as the Greek and Turkish populations after World War I).

Even though the Balkan countries are geographically part of the European continent, they have rarely been invested with the imaginary and perceived values of European-ness in ideological, socio-political, and cultural terms,

2 'During the processes of "liberalisation" of "enslaved" people in the nineteenth century, tolerance and peaceful coexistence were the very first victims of the imposition of western concepts like liberal democracy, capitalism, the nation-state and the like'. (Jezernik et al., 2007, 7–8).

3 The First Balkan War was fought between the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan Allies (Montenegro, Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria), and essentially had three underlying causes: the Ottoman Empire's inability to reform itself, the quarrelling between the Great Powers, and the formation of a confident Balkan League. After seven months of war and the Treaty of London, on 30 May 1913, the Ottoman Empire lost virtually all of its territory in the Balkans. The Second Balkan War, which started two weeks later, was fought by Bulgaria against Montenegro, Greece, Serbia, Romania, and the Ottoman Empire, and ended with Bulgaria losing most of the awarded territories from the First Balkan War.

both from inside or outside.[4] In her work on Balkan film, culture, and the media, Iordanova notes how the Balkan countries continue to negotiate a 'return to Europe' (2001), and over the last two decades, this is evidenced through a series of talks and negotiations for their political and symbolical admission to the European Union[5] and the associated process of 'Europeanization.' One of the aims of this book is to readdress such long-standing historical and hierarchical power relations, and to examine the extent to which early moving images played a part in the imaginary construction of the Balkans at the turn of the century, which rendered the region not quite 'European' in cultural terms.

This study takes a critical approach to the 'invention of the Balkans' as a place of symbolic darkness, and aims to shed light on the heterogeneity and richness of the region and its fluid and complex form, neither Eastern nor Western but a *being* in-between, a physical space of cross-hybridization and interculturality, by highlighting the variety of filmmaking activities and interests, and cultural approaches to moving images present in the early period. Since strong negative connotations associated with the term 'Balkan' were being solidified at the turn of the twentieth century, and the pejorative use of nomenclature such as 'Balkanization' emerged during World War I,[6] it is crucial to understand in which ways cinema, as the new mass medium and art form, contributed to the formation of such concepts. My book aims to dispel some myths pertaining to the popular image of the region, and to contribute to scholarship that problematizes and challenges such notions (Orientalism, Balkanism) by offering a counter-narrative.

4 The British writer Z. Duckett Ferriman notes in his book *Greece and the Greeks*: 'A Greek says he is going to Europe when he is going to France and Italy. He calls Englishmen, Germans, or any other Western people who happen to visit or reside in Greece, Europeans in contradistinction to the Greeks. The occidentals in Greece do likewise. They are Europeans, and by implication, the Greeks are not [...] The Greek is racially and geographically European, but he is not a Western. That is what he means by the term, and the signification is accepted by both Greek and foreigner. He is Oriental in a hundred ways, but his Orientalism is not Asiatic. He is the bridge between East and West [...].' (1911, 132)

5 Greece has been a member since 1981, Slovenia joined in 2004, Romania and Bulgaria in 2007, and Croatia in 2013. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey are still in accession negotiations.

6 When World War I erupted on 28 July 1914, the perception of the Balkans as the European Other threatening the peace, stability, and order of the West was re-affirmed. Gavrilo Princip embodied the Balkan Other, his 'barbaric' actions were the cause of the war, drawing the 'innocent' European countries to fight: 'No other murder in history is perceived to have triggered such calamitous events – world war, imperial collapse, socialist revolution' (Glenny 2012, 303).

Modernity, Cinema, and the Balkans

The turn of the twentieth century, which also coincides with the arrival of moving images and cinema, sees a widespread aspiration towards a 'European' modernity across European geographical peripheries. The culture of modernity, and modernization in the name of industrial capitalism, are closely intertwined with the concept of Eurocentrism. In their work on popular culture and media, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have described Eurocentrism as 'single paradigmatic perspective in which Europe is seen as the unique source of meaning, as ontological "reality" to the rest of the world's shadow,' which needs to be challenged by 'critical and polycentric multiculturalism' (1994, 2). In her study on early cinema in Istanbul, Canan Balan warns of reducing 'a study of a developing country's early cinema spectatorship to a study of lacks and absences,' which tends to be 'a consequence of the prevailing Euro-centric modernity paradigm' (2010, 28). Eurocentrism is of course 'a specifically modern phenomenon, the roots of which go back to the Renaissance, a phenomenon that did not flourish until the nineteenth century' and forms one dimension of the world's modern capitalist ideology and culture (Amin 1898, vii). Interestingly, Shohat and Stam note that, 'Eurocentrism, like Renaissance perspectives in painting, envisions the world from a single privileged point' (1994, 2). Much of the writing on early cinema histories in the Balkans tends to privilege 'firsts' and 'pioneers,' and notes lacks and absences behind the conditions and delayed development of a national cinema, further contributing to a limited understanding of the region's complexity during this period. This book will make recourse to interdisciplinary methodologies drawn from cultural and visual histories of the Balkans, film phenomenology, critical theory, and archival theory to offer both an alternative and a multifaceted perspective in tune with 'polycentric multiculturalism,' in order to understand the relationship between early cinema and modern visual culture.

Anglophone scholarship on early cinema has examined the relationship between cinema and the culture of modernity[7] for several decades, but the majority of enquiries have been limited to European and North American experiences, though there are exceptions.[8] The film historian Miriam

7 Especially significant is the volume edited by Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (1995), which brings together several texts on this issue.

8 Such as Zhang Zhen's *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen. Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937*, a pioneering enquiry into the production of cinema in Shanghai culture using Miriam Hansen's concept of 'vernacular modernism.' Another precious non-Euro-centric study is Canan Balan's PhD dissertation "Changing Pleasures of Spectatorship: Early and Silent Cinema in Istanbul".

Hansen suggests that 'modernism encompasses a whole range of cultural and artistic practices that register, respond to, and reflect processes of modernization and the experience of modernity,' which varies according to social and geopolitical locations (1999, 60). Perhaps, then, cinema and, in particular, the development of early cinema, as both a phenomenon and an integral part of modernity, and a catalyst of Eurocentrism as a central paradigm of culture and ideology in the late nineteenth century, needs to be continuously re-evaluated through a non-Western normative lens, through critical interpretations of non-dominant, minor, and generally more neglected cinema and visual culture histories. Some broad questions guiding this research are: Where and how do the Balkans fit within the discourses on early cinema and the culture of modernity around the globe? What can we learn from early cinema production, exhibition, distribution, and reception modes in the Balkans? How does this inform our broader understanding of early cinema studies and modern visual culture?

Visual Culture, Early Cinema, and Hapticality

Cinema, or rather moving images, began well before the first public projection of the Cinematograph organized by the Lumière brothers on 28 December 1895, at the Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris. Alexander Kluge argues that 'cinema has existed for over ten thousand years in the minds of human beings' in the form of 'associative current, daydreams, sensual experiences and streams of consciousness. The technical discovery only made it reproducible' (1975, 208). Moreover, while 'the genealogy from photography to cinema is well documented' (Gray 2010, 3), many other forms of entertainment and storytelling tend to be generally unacknowledged. In a response to David Parkinson's claim that cinema is 'the most modern, technologically dependent and Western of all the arts' (1995), Gray suggests that cinema development should be considered under different terms, due to several factors: 'the convergence of several long-term processes, such as: the appeal of visual stimulation for humans; an awareness of certain peculiarities of vision; a nineteenth-century interest in technology, machinery, and spectacle; and some financial acumen by specific individuals' (2010, 2). In

More general studies on modernity include: Tejasvwini Niranjana, P. Sudhir, Vivek Dhareshwar, eds. *Interrogating Modernity: Culture and Colonialism in India*, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1993, and Sharan A. Minichiello, ed. *Japan's Competing Modernities: Issues in Culture and Democracy 1900–1930*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998.

the Balkans, for instance, the pre-figurations of modern-day cinema can be located in cultural traditions, such as the shadow play theatre popularized during the Ottoman times, and even further back to ancient philosophy, such as the allegory of Plato's Cave and the knowledge of a true form of reality through the understanding of Forms and Ideas. Cinema has too often been seen as a child of rational optics, 'faithful to reality through chemical reproduction and mechanical projection,' one that seemingly shattered 'the magic of Wayang, the phantasms of Father Kircher and the childishness of Reynaud' (Morin 1954, 19). Several other Eastern cultural dimensions characterizing cinema tend to be overlooked and overshadowed by a dominant rhetoric in which cinema's origins are traced back almost exclusively to Western arts and history.

Through my work, I will aim to offset, if not shift, the dominant perspective through which early cinema history is observed, by positing the study through Balkan 'haptical lenses' and 'hybrid modernity,' and tracing the construction of visuality and perception through cultural traditions that pre-date the arrival of cinema. In art, haptical, first referred to by the art historian Alois Riegl, privileges the eye as the organ of touch and includes the senses in our understanding of human perception, while in film phenomenology, notably in the work of Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks, haptical acknowledges that film spectatorship and the very act of viewing cinematic images can be embodied and visceral. In my view, haptical visuality is already present in visual cultures in the Balkans prior to the arrival of cinema, notably in minor and popular arts, such as weaving, tapestry, jewellery manufacture and decorative arts, and religious artistic traditions, such as Byzantine fresco paintings and Ottoman architecture. Therefore, a reading of visual culture in the Balkans alongside examples of textual analysis of early films made by local pioneers, such as the Manakia brothers, from a haptical perspective, allows a more nuanced understanding and richer interpretation of these cinematic images. With the advent of the digital and the looming threat of material disappearance (i.e. the film object), contemporary film and art theories have again turned to and popularized the notion of the haptical, acknowledging the embodied and sensual relationship between the spectator and the cinema experience. Yet, the corporeality and viscerality of early cinema viewing experiences, has been examined by a number of scholars within different national and regional contexts (Hansen-Bratu 1993; Tsivian 1998; Dahlquist, Galili, Olson & Robert 2018, and others). My work builds on these investigations, and provides a reading of initial encounters with cinema in the Balkans, documented in the press of the time, which reveal similar responses to the new visual medium.

Connecting a Disconnected Space: A Working Methodology

The focus on the national tended to be the predominant factor in assessing the development of early cinema throughout the twentieth century. Giorgio Bertellini notes how: 'Not by chance, the problematics that would intrinsically expose the multiculturalism and multilinguistic fabric of silent cinema – i.e. cross-national commercialisations and "influences" – have for a long time received scant attention' (2000, 235). According to Jennifer M. Bean, the privileging of the national can be explained due to: (1) economic agendas, i.e. the majority of film archives across the world are state-sponsored, which places the demand on the assessment of cinema 'under the rubric of nationality and nationhood'; and (2) the position of film and media scholars within academic structures, which demands 'a scholarly and curricular commitment to nation- or region-specific cultures and traditions' (2014, 7). The leading Balkan film scholar, Dina Iordanova, argues that work on Balkan cinemas cannot be circumscribed by political borders, but requires adopting a transnational and intercultural framework, and employing a mixture of geographical, historical and political elements that 'do not coincide with concrete countries and leave the conceptual contours of the region fuzzy and flexible' (2001, 6).

Instead of considering the development of early cinema in the Balkans through a binding framework of national parameters, I envisage in its place the notion of transnational and intercultural film heritage, history, and historiography to allow for comparative reading. The nationally exclusive approach would be limited, because it understands the development of cinema and film style and form bounded by national borders and actors, and does not account for cross-cultural influences, thus limiting the effect of transnational exchanges. Itinerant cinemas and travelling showmen continually crossed borders, and gave rise to an ambulant form of entertainment, often settling in the country they visited to expand cinema activities. Early cinema production, exhibition, and circulation was marked by mutual collaboration, altering national borders and political leanings, resulting in a re-definition of what can be termed a Balkan interculturality on Europe's outskirts. The characteristic composition of the region requires a more flexible methodology when examining its cinema history, its influences and interpretations.

This book's temporal parameters are loosely defined by the proliferation of modern visual media and the arrival of moving image shows in the region in the 1890s, to the onset of World War I, which marked a significant interruption of cinema activities in the Balkans and Europe. It situates

itself alongside similar studies of early cinema history in a variety of local, national, and regional contexts (Balan, Gunning, Zhen), and studies of Balkan cinema employing transnational and cross-cultural approaches (Iordanova, Ţuţui). This is due to: 1) the unique multicultural formation of the Balkans and its visual culture; 2) the mobility and exchange of people, materials, and cultural forms within empires; 3) the cosmopolitan character of early cinema and its development; and 4) the complexity of the historical, social, political, and cultural context of the region at the turn of the twentieth century. This framework allows for a more nuanced and layered reading and interpretation of moving images produced in the region.

Journey through the Archives

While a large proportion of film materials in Western European and North American archives have been digitalized for easier access, and many scholarly studies have been done on the development of early cinema, the Balkan material is primarily only accessible at the archives. Consequently, a significant part of the research for this book consisted of archival visits in Paris, London, Lyon, and Vienna between 2013 and 2019, while the longest period was spent in the region's film archives and newspaper libraries, in Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia in 2013, and again in 2019 in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Albania, allowing me to access a variety of archival materials and conduct interviews with the archivists. Due to temporal and financial constraints, I could not conduct archival research and consult primary sources in Greece and Turkey in situ. I therefore rely heavily on secondary sources in order to provide context and commentary as required, but where possible, I still make recourse to digitalized newspaper sources.

During my fieldwork, it became apparent that it is mainly thanks to the efforts of the archivists in the Balkans, who work in especially difficult conditions (such as a lack of state funding for archival work and heritage projects), that many early films have been preserved, catalogued, and made available for research. In these strenuous circumstances, the film archives in the Balkans need support and attention beyond strictly national frameworks, as precious and unique materials are held in these archival vaults and threatened by the ravages of time. The archival moving images and documents in film archives across the Balkans are in danger of disappearing, both physically and spiritually. Physically, as the material supports on which they are imprinted decay over time and the national film

archives in the Balkans are often underfunded and struggle to undertake state of the art preservation procedures of their film heritage.[9] Spiritually, as often these films are unavailable to audiences, and are screened very rarely as part of specialized programmes at cinematheques, film museums, or archival film festivals, thus resulting in their visibility fading from our collective memory.

Meanwhile, large and small pan-European projects to digitize newspapers and journals are being undertaken, which means that an increasing number of early newspapers are becoming available via institutional websites for consultation.[10] However, these are still limited and not representative of the total number of early press publications, which hold precious information on cinema activities in the region. The local historians and archivists have relentlessly researched, recorded, and preserved film and its manifestations from the early period, without whose efforts I would not have been able to cover such a large and complex region. Due to the linguistic complexity of the region,[11] the great majority of this research seldom travels beyond the national borders, and is practically inaccessible to scholars around the world. More often than not, the films and texts under examination here are unknown in the neighbouring countries, and few local scholars, notably those such as Petar Kardjilov and Marian Ţuţui, have ventured beyond national confines.

Due to the disappearance and loss of the majority of films from the early period,[12] early cinema scholars often use non-filmic material to reconstruct the development of cinema, and engage in interdisciplinary studies and

9 My meeting in winter 2019 with the director of The National Film Archives of Bosnia and Herzegovina confirmed as much, the archive is greatly underfunded and film preservation projects are not an option. This is also evident through the recent archival situation in Albania where, due to the state of decay in which film reels were found in the Central State's Film Archive, an emergency preservation campaign was launched by a group of local filmmakers, archivists, and a concerned international film community, to save its cultural heritage through the founding of the Albanian Cinema Project. For further details refer to the project website: http://www.thealbaniancinemaproject.org/.

10 A very useful resource is the Domitor Journals Project initiated by Michael Cowan and Patrick Ellis, which provides links to digital collections of periodicals relevant to early cinema studies: https://domitor.org/journals/.

11 There are several principal languages spoken in the Balkans and many not mutually comprehensible: Turkish; Greek; Romanian; Bosnian; Croatian; Serbian; Slovenian; Albanian; Bulgarian; and North Macedonian.

12 Film historians estimate that around twenty per cent of early films are preserved, which may be somewhat optimistic. For example, studies have shown that about 70 per cent of US silent film productions are considered lost (Pierce 2013, 1–2). There are no equivalent statistics and studies that confirm numbers for early cinema in the Balkans, but, taking the case of Romania

intersectionality. This study is principally informed by archival documents and extra-filmic material (photographs, advertisements, local newspapers, and critical descriptions) sourced in the archives across the region and beyond, alongside a number of secondary sources, such as academic studies on national film histories, historical accounts and memoirs, literature, and travel writing. Even though few early films made and shown in the region have survived today,[13] the preserved audio-visual and written documents in the region's archives still allow for a greater insight into the visual and cultural history of the Balkans and its relation to the rest of the world during this transitional historical period. By researching the dynamics of local and foreign film productions, the mobility of filmmakers and film entrepreneurs, exhibition, and circulation of moving images and their cultural reception, my book inevitably raises questions about film preservation and access to archival material in the digital age.

The Field of Vision

There are extensive historical studies covering the Balkan Wars and the events surrounding World War I (Glenny 2012) or historical studies of the region within broader world histories (Kaser 2011; Wachtel 2008). In terms of postcolonial theory and cultural history, the work of Edward Said (1978) and Maria Todorova ([1997] 2009) have had a strong impact on critical approaches on the Balkans, with concepts such as such as 'nesting orientalisms' (Hayden and Bakić-Hayden 1992, 1995), or 'self-exoticism' (Iordanova 2001) and 'self-balkanization' (Longinović 2005) within film studies itself, being developed to address issues of representation and identity in the region. There are publications in local languages, which either focus on early cinema in the countries of former Yugoslavia framed by national parameters (Kosanović 1985, 2000; Slijepčević 1982; Knežević 1992; Volk 1986), focus exclusively on national cinema histories (Dobrinčić 1950; Hoxha 1994, 2002, 2007; Lako 2003; Mëhilli 2011; Kosanović 1980, 2008; Majcen 1995, 1998, 2003; Lovrić 2017; Škrabalo 1998; Petruševa 2003; Rîpeanu 1972, 2004, 2008, 2013; Traven et al. 1992; Kastratović 1999; Milunović 2018; Căliman 2000; Arkolakis 2003, 2009; Soldatos 2002), or provide critical insights into cinema development

as an example, and referring to the film catalogue compiled by the Romanian film historian Bujor Rîpeanu, out of 25 fiction films made in Romania until 1918, only one has survived (2004).

13 Notably, some early feature fiction films, *Karađorđe* (1911) and *Independenţa României* (1912), and several newsreels, home movies, and ethnographic footage of the Balkans.

in selected locations or cities (Balan 2010; Erdoğan 2019; Kečkemet 1969; Kosanović 1988, 2005b, 2012; Montina 2019; Bunjac et al. 2013; Čakširan et al. 2018; Godina n.d.; Christofides and Saliba 2012; Besarević 1974; Tomanas 1993). The same applies to studies available in the English language, which tend to focus on national film histories (for example Kosanović 2005a; Ţuţui 2011; Karalis 2012; Nasta 2015). There are also edited collections on early cinema in the Balkans divided by chapters on individual countries (Nonevski 2003), studies focusing on early cinema pioneers the Manakia brothers (Nonevski 1985, 2005; Ţuţui 2004; Stardelov 2003; Jankuloski 2017; Christodoulou 1997), and early cinema pioneers and foreign cinematographers active in the region (Slijepčević 1979; Šimenc et al. 1985; Midžić 1996, 2006; Maslovarik 2013; Kardjilov 2006, 2012, 2020; Erdeljanović 2005, 2006, 2012). The predominance of national cinema histories is a result of many factors: lack of access to archival materials; linguistic and political challenges; financial difficulties; and the tendency of national film institutions to privilege and support the writing of national film histories. The publications with similar conceptual frameworks (transnationalism, mobility, cross-cultural influences) are limited to local contexts (Balan 2012) or focus on activities of selected film pioneers (Kardjilov 2008, 2017, 2020), while those with similar geographical scope have limited focus on the early period (Ţuţui 2008). In short, there are no existing studies on the development of early cinema in the Balkans within the same conceptual and spatiotemporal parameters adopted by this book.

Limitations and Structure

Being immersed in the (hi)story of early cinema in the Balkans is also a way of constructing an imaginary of ruins, where the discipline and notion of archaeology seems to fit the undertaking of writing a reflexive cinema history, one that is based on partially preserved film heritage and archival documents. In this way, the positivist and exhaustive notion of the archive is challenged through the acknowledgement of various lacunae, fragments, voids, and loss. This work is determined by certain limitations: it studies a specific space within a circumscribed time period, and is dependent on the current availability of archival materials. Re-discoveries of silent films continuously occur in the most unexpected places, and history evolves, giving birth to new significations and interpretations. Working on such a large and culturally complex region, the danger of glazing over some issues is present, however, the advantage is the ability to construct an overall

picture of early cinema, and establish connections in an effort to shed bias. My book only begins to scratch the surface of the richness and variety of the cultural history of the region around the turn of the twentieth century and further studies are needed. The mosaic-like character of investigation is dictated by the discourse, contingent on the uniqueness of the Balkan space, the uneven texture of surface and its fluctuation within the time and space continuum. In this respect, Giuliana Bruno's work on the Italian film pioneer Elvira Notari and her cinema activities (1993), which involves an analysis of a field marked by various lacunae, and offers a reconstruction through a meta-discourse (due to only three films being preserved), has been of constant inspiration. My work does not privilege surviving moving images over archival texts, but allows these to enter into dialogue. If, as Iordanova argues, writing about Balkan cinema is connecting a disconnected space, my methodology is informed in a similar fashion by a conceptual mapping of the geographical and imaginal space that designates the Balkans, to allow the connections between surviving visual and textual artefacts to emerge as sense-forming constellations.

Therefore, the book is structured in five mutually complementary chapters, each focusing on a set of issues relevant to the investigation of early cinema, modernity, and cultural history in the Balkans. The first chapter investigates the legacy of visual cultures in the region on the development of perception, and engages with the concept of the haptic to describe the sensual and embodied encounter with archival moving images. I argue that the complexity of the Balkans needs to be observed through a transnational and cross-cultural lens to account for the cultural and historical legacies (Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Austro–Hungarian), which left their indelible mark on the culture of local populations. Furthermore, I show that haptical vision is integral to Balkan visual culture, absorbed and transformed throughout centuries in the form of popular and religious art, and present in architecture, painting, sculpture, metalwork, textiles, and jewellery design.

The second chapter focuses on the spaces of early cinema screenings within the broader context of the urban, modern experience and changing night-time practices. Several impressions of viewing moving images are described as embodied and sensual encounters between the spectator and the cinematic body. An encounter with the cinema apparatus, recounted in *Balkan Film*, evokes the heterogeneous social space of such early cinema shows, and their ephemeral, ambulant character alongside fairground entertainment. Moreover, the Bulgarian writer and intellectual Ivan Andreichin claims that cinema is an art form suited to the modern age, which provides spectators in urban environments with 'intensive life.' While, Ivo Andrić's

short story reveals how early *moving* image devices (the Panorama) allowed viewers to journey across spatial realms of imaginary and real worlds. Finally, I explore the coffeehouse as a characteristic site for the experience of urban life specific to the Balkan space, captured in the fleeting images of Josip Halla's *Café Corso*. Cinema emerged as a form of night-time practice akin to the long-standing consumption of coffee as a stimulant, modifying the spectator's experience of time and space.

The third chapter examines the trajectories of filmmakers, film entrepreneurs, and moving images in the early period, to underscore how the transnational mobility and intercultural exchange informed and shaped the development of local cinema. Here, the legacy and work of the Manakia brothers and Louis Pitrolf de Beéry can shed some light on the itinerant and shifting narratives of this early period, as well as expose the enthusiasm and the will to document, develop, and imagine the future possibilities of cinema. Their work needs to be viewed beyond the confines of contemporary political borders, not only due to their itinerant trajectories and contribution to several national film histories, but also because of the traces they left across archives in the region. As a result, I argue that the notion of movement is crucial for understanding the complex, intricate, and ever-changing narrative of early cinema in the Balkans. During this time, the Balkan space was marked by the mobility of foreign and local film exhibitors and practitioners and the movement of films through their circulation, distribution, and exhibition across the region, leading to cross-cultural exchange and creation of cross-border networks.

The fourth chapter focuses on the role of early moving images, produced by foreign cinematographers and film production companies, in the shaping of the Balkan imaginary. The early moving images shot in the Balkans or made with Balkan themes, contributed to the creation of the Balkanist discourse before the start of World War I, by offering stereotypical views and sensational accounts of Western travellers' adventures to a semi-oriental land. I analyse a selection of footage, such as Pathé's reconstructed actualities, the Charles Urban travelogues, and newsreels covering the Balkan Wars, which reveals the Western European gaze as either fascinated or horrified by the Balkan Other. The loosening of the Ottoman stronghold hastened the metaphorical colonization of the territory as well as the emerging interests of the Great Powers. Further, news of uprisings and wars drew foreign correspondents and cameras to the region. The multi-layered and semi-colonial Balkan imaginary provided early moving picture makers with a rich repertoire of 'cinema of attractions'-like images, instants of Orientalism and Otherness to entice the spectators' imagination and guarantee a full house.

The fifth chapter examines the work of local cinema practitioners within the global context of filmmaking, the process of modernity, and the desire for self-reflection, as they increasingly became aware of the significance of self-representation as opposed to being represented. Their efforts to document local events and everyday life scenes should be recognized as a desire to immortalize a disappearing image of the region in a period marked by turbulent events. These early views exude affect, connectedness, and hapticality between the viewed object and the viewing subject, the body of the film and the body of the spectator. Here, I also discuss the role of cinema in the nation-building process, through the analysis of two preserved feature fiction films, *Karađorđe* and *Independenţa României*, which narrate the modern nation. Symptomatic of the historical, social, and cultural context of the time, these epic films construct a national narrative and recount the progress to independence, and include national symbols such as characteristic elements of folklore and traditional customs. First Romanian views filmed by Paul Menu inspire the local press to write about the documentary and sentimental value of moving images and the importance of capturing local events. My analysis of several texts published in the press of the time, reveals the longing and fascination of local audiences to see familiar views and customs spectacularized through the power of moving images on the silver screen. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

This book aims to show that the proliferation of moving images in the Balkans, as a unique space of meaning situated on the crossroads of East and West and constructed through cultural, geographical, political, and ideological frameworks, can shed light not only on the development of cinema in the early period, but also have reverberations on how world cinema is conceived and theorized today. It is precisely the peripheral position of the Balkans, that sense of 'the danger and the freedom of the boundary situation' (Todorova 2009 [1997], ix–x), which allows living 'in and beyond the West, knowing the boundaries of its language, and looking southward and eastward as if toward regions of the unthought' (Spurr 1993, 196).