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## No alternative but Europeanisation: slow violence and critical imaginaries in/from/with South East Europe

*Maria-Adriana Deiana and Katarina Kušić*

Since the end of the Cold War, the post-Yugoslav region has figured prominently in international politics and research as a space of international intervention. Framed as a space in transition from socialism to market economy, from war to peace, and from non-alignment to Europeanisation, the region has been a target for a wide array of material and ideological interventions. These interventions have, essentially, cemented the region as both a pivotal and a marginal site in the so-called European geopolitical imagination. To varying degrees across the post-Yugoslav space, the EU has been at the forefront of such projects involving state-building and peace-building initiatives, support for civil society building and gender equality, cultural diplomacy, market deregulation and different forms of border security and cross-border cooperation.

Critical scholars have long questioned the aggressive promotion of the EU *mission civilisatrice* that projects the EU as normative political trajectory and ideal of community for the post-Yugoslav space and South East Europe (SEE) more broadly (e.g. Horvat and Štiks, 2012; Majstorović, Vučković and Pepić, 2015; Kušić, Lottholz and Manolova, 2019). Crucially, this literature spotlights the different forms of epistemic violence through which Europeanisation proceeds in different, yet interconnected, ways: as a part of ‘transition’ narratives, as a never-ending return to Europe and in the making of region as a ‘case study’ and/or testing ground for theories and policies made elsewhere. In this chapter, we propose to think about these processes as forms of slow violence intrinsic to Europeanisation, and we highlight how this literature can be useful for understanding processes and building solidarities in the many spaces where Europeanisation as violence unfolds. We are inspired by the work of Rob Nixon (2011) who coined the term ‘slow violence’ to understand the environmental harm of invisible and extended processed. In the context of East Europe, Alexander Vorbrugg (2022) expanded it to capture the slow deterioration and abandonment that, instead of spectacular dispossession, marks the postsocialist transition

in Russia. In a slightly different vein, we also consider the slow and violent reworkings of political and academic frameworks quietly but dramatically reshaped under the weight of Europe. Here the work of Lauren Berlant on the concept of crisis ordinariness also infuses our thinking (Berlant, 2011).

As scholars with different personal and academic entanglements in the post-Yugoslav space, we have both grappled with these issues in our own research and collective academic engagements. Our paths have crossed through our involvement in the British International Studies Association's (BISA) working group on SEE, a collective created to bring together scholars in UK higher education with an interest in spotlighting the significance of the region for international studies and geopolitics. The working group has offered an opportunity to engage in much needed (self-)critical reflections on existing scholarship on/about the region, not understood through essentialist lenses but rather as a productive epistemic location entangled in connected global processes of marginalisation, racialisation and coloniality. Even though paradoxically situated behind a visa regime that often makes it inaccessible to scholars and activists from the region, it has successfully brought together ongoing efforts to theorise international studies from a plurality of positions and move beyond Eurocentrism.<sup>1</sup>

The working group has contributed to developing dialogues across post-colonial/decolonial studies and the insights emerging from the region. This includes engaging the ambivalent legacies of postsocialism, which have been long marginalised by the overwhelming focus on studying the post-Yugoslav space through the value-laden prism of nationalism, ethnic conflict and post-conflict solutions. We agree with the editors of this volume that postcolonial and postsocialist dialogues should not imply two distinct geohistorical processes and academic trajectories. Even though such framings have often remained in distinct academic circles, the power of the dialogue comes precisely from thinking them together (Chari and Verdery, 2009; Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018).

These conversations are particularly significant in the field that we inhabit: International Relations (IR). Thinking between the posts complicates post-Cold War narratives framed through the triumphalist emergence of international liberalism as the dominant solution for a more ethical and peaceful international order. Instead, this way of thinking explores the ambivalent, interlocking efforts to make socialism a relic of history and join the self-transformative journey to progress, modernity and liberalism, yet hold on to socialism's promises, political bonds and systems of sociability. Just as the postcolonial is not simply a temporal designation, post-Cold war implies attention to the ongoing contentions, reverberations and attachments to socialism as an archive of lived experiences that might offer possible alternatives to this triumphalist view, while demanding critical

interrogation of its own investments in colonial modernity. Additionally, thinking between the posts, as Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery (2009) invite us to do, is helpful to situate the region in wider analyses about the nested colonial legacies and racialised formations at the core of European modernity. Crucially for this chapter, thinking between posts enables us to capture this complex historicity, nested hierarchies and transnational reverberations that are irremediably discounted and erased with the emergence of Europeanisation as the region's only viable alternative.

In the following, we take stock of these developments to posit the post-Yugoslav space, and SEE more broadly, as a productive vantage point for understanding the multifarious forms of violence through which Europeanisation proceeds around the world. In the next section we trace the contours of these critical dialogues, discussing contributions that help us interrogate the workings of Europeanisation as materialised and felt in the region. After a reflection on our own positionalities, we outline our own engagement in making sense of 'Europeanisation as violence'. Katarina's research on the Europeanisation of agricultural governance in Serbia highlights how civilisational explanations were used to diagnose problems (having similarities with countries in the Global South) and diagnose solutions (becoming more European). These ambivalent dynamics also emerge in Maria-Adriana's research on the Sarajevo Film Festival wherein efforts to Europeanise the Balkans, cinematic narratives that both reproduce and challenge balkanising understandings of the region, and powerful critical and imaginative interventions on Europe that dispel its relegation to the EU's dysfunctional periphery intersect. We conclude the piece outlining some reflections on the potential of mobilising Souths and Easts as method informed by situated knowledges and parallel connections.

### **Mapping the field: from object of study to Yugoslplaining**

The ruins of the teleological narratives that guided – and in many cases still guide – both international engagement with the post-Yugoslav region and local politics are now exposed. While, in the early days of 'transition', anthropologists were tasked with deconstructing the linear narratives of democratisation and market transition (re)produced in political science, IR and economics, today we see a wider interdisciplinary literature taking these narratives to task. As our research testifies, the region's structural position vis-à-vis Europe is increasingly understood, not only in hierarchies of representation as a balkanised and forever balkanising internal other, but also as a site of exploitation of labour and resources, and a space of violent bordering of the EU.

We identify three significantly interrelated threads in the scholarship that critically interrogate existing frameworks of analysis and disrupt knowledge production of the region merely as object of study.

### *A space of intervention and Europeanisation*

Given its prominent role in the post-Yugoslav space, understanding the multifarious practices and effects of Europeanisation has been at the centre of critical scholarship on the region. In the past two decades, the EU has been increasingly involved in preventing conflict and promoting peace and security outside its borders. However, its shifting configurations, as a geopolitical space and a global security actor, have been shaped by inherent tensions between consolidating bordering tendencies and aspirations for increased cooperation among EU member states and its neighbourhood. Artificially renamed the ‘western Balkans’, the post-Yugoslav space has been a key target of such security policies and practices. When investigating this international involvement, thus, we must bear in mind that a differentiated process of EU accession in the post-Yugoslav region overlaps with projects of state-building and post-war reconstruction largely driven by the rhetoric of EU enlargement and peace-building, but arguably aiming at stabilising the region in the interest of EU security.

To capture this complexity, Vjosa Musliu (2021: 5) provides a useful working definition of Europeanisation as ‘a set of practices and projects that are in turn used to building particular states and societies that are amenable to European governance, as well as liberal and open economics’. We suggest that the effects of this seemingly benign logic for the region are ambivalent, producing a politics of complicity, attachment, impasse and in some cases material dispossession. On one level, as Musliu (2021: 3) observes, Europeanisation has become ‘infinitely amorphous, vague in referent and ambiguous in usage’. At the same time, precisely as Europeanisation has become ‘everything and nothing’, the task of today’s critical scholarship is to unpack its concrete manifestations (see Neuman Stanivuković in this volume). Musliu (2021: 3) does this by investigating the everyday performances of Europe, thus studying Europe and Europeanisation ‘as a way of life, other than as a global logic imposing itself in peripheries’. We share Musliu’s urgency to move away from seeing the effects of the EU as restricted to the formal accession process – conditionalities, the screening and opening of individual chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, the technical cooperation that socialises national elites, etc. – and instead investigate it as a ‘project, a process’, questioning ‘what Europe represents in and for the region’ (Musliu, 2021: 4–5).

One illuminating broadening of how we understand the ‘effects’ of EU/international involvement in post-war reconstruction in the region comes from Daniela Lai (2020) in her work on socioeconomic justice in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). In her work with peripheral (outside of Sarajevo) communities in BiH, Lai shows how a limiting understanding of transitional justice – introduced and operationalised by EU and international agencies – made ethnicity the crux of BiH justice. This makes it nearly impossible to recognise socioeconomic violence that transpired before, during and after the war in BiH, and leaves it essentially unaddressed. Europeanisation of justice here has meant conceptually emptying the concept and the process of any socioeconomic content. Also, it has meant the empirical bypassing of socialist experiences that provide the reference point and comparison against which the economic suffering of Yugoslav (post)war period is understood.

But Europeanisation also operates in frames much wider than EU membership and international interventions. Piro Rexhepi (2023) has, for example, shown how the inclusion of BiH in Europe requires a particular ‘Europeanisation’ of Islam in the Balkans. This recasting depends on using whiteness to differentiate it from its Arabic other, and stands in stark contrast with Muslim activists’ world-making in the 1970s and 1980s that launched a global critique of socialism and capitalism rooted in Pan-Islamism.

Our own research testifies that the workings of Europeanisation must be understood as an assemblage of policies, institutional, bureaucratic and b/ordering processes, everyday practices, structures of feeling and a specific aesthetics. These different modes of Europeanisation (re)configure the region through multifaceted internal hierarchies, while also continuously (re)producing hierarchies between local and global politics. Musliu (2021) shows how the revival of Tirana as a ‘European city’ proceeded through balkanising and orientalisng images. These images, captured in the mayor’s exclamation that ‘Tirana will not be Calcutta’ have a twofold effect (see Oancă in this volume). First, they cast both Albania and countries in the East/South as inferior in the global political economy of value. Here, Albanians are not simply victims of Balkanist discourses but active agents of their perpetuation: they see themselves and others through the same lens. Second, these images once again reify the myth of Europe as a space devoid of inequality, violence and suffering. As Böröcz (2006) put it, Europe becomes the exclusive location of goodness unavailable to SEE without tutelage and subordination. Such statements, and the emerging scholarship making sense of it, is tasked with moving beyond understanding racism and whiteness not only as ‘imports’ into the South East and East Europe (as spaces until then supposedly excluded from formation of global coloniality), instead locating the region as an active (re)producer of global racial hierarchies – an issue we return to in the next section.

*Global entanglements*

These intersections of multiple hierarchies make the positionality of the Balkans at times difficult to comprehend and articulate. Writing from a decolonial perspective, Piro Rexhepi (Gržinić, Kancler and Rexhepi, 2020: 18) summarises it well: ‘the (post)socialist world still cannot resolve its (geo)political position of being in pact and proximity of Euro-American coloniality or its product and defying periphery’. Similarly, Manuela Boatcă (2013: 7) described the Balkans as the ‘epigonal Europe’: a semi-peripheral reproducer of modernity with the attitude of aspiration and main role of accomplice. It is not so easy to translate this understanding in research practice.

One area where it has been done exceptionally well is in the emerging study of race and racialisation in SEE (Bjelić, 2018; Baker, 2018a; Rexhepi, 2023). Catherine Baker’s (2018b: 29) work has investigated ‘how global racial formations have been adapted and translated into, across and through the Yugoslav region’. The Yugoslav region is thus recast as ‘deeply embedded in transnational racialised imaginations and therefore a global history of coloniality’ (Baker, 2018b: 4). Sunnie Rucker-Chang (2019) has similarly recognised ‘various forms of Blackness in Yugoslav space’ – from Afro-Albanian communities in Montenegro to students arriving from the Global South and Romani communities. This diversity, she argues, ‘open[s] possibilities for a localised understanding of how Blackness functions as a result of and beyond the global colour line’ (Rucker-Chang, 2019).

These global racial formations, and racism as their expression, did not enter the region with the dawn of postsocialism. Piro Rexhepi has shown how the 1980s Yugoslav Islamophobia (culminating in the imprisonment of twelve activists of Young Muslims in Sarajevo) was a particular product of a global understanding of Islam as a security threat, and the very local history of anti-Muslim feelings and structures in pre-socialist and socialist Yugoslavia. Importantly, he also excavates the different world-making that these activists were engaged in. Instead of distancing from the East – like in the proclamation of ‘Tirana will not be Calcutta’ – activists like Melika Salihbegović and Alija Izetbegović connected their own struggles in Yugoslavia with the transatlantic slave trade and colonial conquest in order to critique both capitalist and socialist ideas of humanity, civilisation and development (Rexhepi, 2023: 50).

Global entanglements have also been the focus of research on Yugoslav socialism, and specifically the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as one of its key institutions. Paul Stubbs (2021: 133) argues for a decolonial historiography of NAM that would first ‘bring Yugoslavia back into global social relations’ – a move against erasure – but he also points to the need

for ‘decentring this positionality and ensuring that other sites of analysis and struggle, and the relations between them, are taken into consideration’. In other words, an argument for salvaging Yugoslav agency from the weight of Eurocentrism needs to be paired with a focus on ‘other-than-EU’ global entanglements of this position. This not only counters silences in the historical record but also helps recover solidarities and politics that can be used to imagine different futures (Stubbs, 2019; 2023). Yet, these East–West solidarities were not exempt from the racial hierarchies in which they operated. Scholars have excavated the racial investments that ran alongside non-aligned solidarities in Yugoslav projects of modernisation (Subotić and Vučetić, 2017; Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018).

The deeply ambivalent position of the region – constantly understood through narratives of civilisational backwardness, and often even racialised as ‘off white’, while remaining deeply invested in projects of whiteness and coloniality – can also be seen as a productive: a space where the complexities of Europeanisation as violence can be explored beyond the binaries of North/South. This intersectional thinking is crucial for making sense of current practices of EU bordering and security that make the post-Yugoslav countries, especially Croatia, the new enforcers of racialised and militarised EU borders. One of the effects of Europeanisation imaginaries has been the severing of global connections in favour of relations to and with EUrope as the centre point of political and research imaginations. The examples provided here show the value of scholarship that de-centres Europe while not ignoring its power.

### *The politics of knowledge production*

While the empirical entanglements with Europe and its racial and civilisational hierarchies have been researched and conceptualised extensively, a parallel research programme investigates the hierarchies of knowledge production. This is not surprising given that the region has served, especially within IR, as a showcase for theories and laboratory for methods devised elsewhere (Kušić 2021; see also Zinaić, 2016). Underpinning this scholarship is the aim to position the region as analytically productive, for both conceptual development and for understanding the current global moment. This was the goal of a series titled *Yugosplaining the World*, published in 2020 on the *Disorder of Things* blog (Hozić, Subotić, Vučetić, 2020). The series emerged as a way of ‘talking back’ to the hordes of experts from the West. ‘Westernsplaining’ interpreted the horrors of the 1990s and their reverberations as isolated from world history and somehow uniquely ‘Balkan’. In a moment where, yet again, the world at large is unravelling under the weight



of nationalism and nativism, the texts illustrate powerful analyses precisely from the Yugoslav experience. Instead of Westernsplain the Balkans, the authors Yugoslplain global politics to show that the Balkans are not an isolated case of disorder, but an epistemic place from whence global politics can be productively studied.<sup>2</sup>

The project of ‘talking back’ has explicitly shaped academic publications. The collection published on the blog of the BISA SEE working group<sup>3</sup> reflects on the materialities of inequality in knowledge production, whether in collaborations with regional researches whose working conditions are dramatically difficult compared to higher education in the Global North (Majstorović, 2022), or in research conducted by researchers from the Global North without language and area studies training (Piersma, 2022). These discussions expanded the growing sophisticated reflections on methods and approaches used to understand the Yugoslav region (Radeljić and González-Villa, 2021). Gëzim Visoka and Vjosa Musliu’s (2019) edited volume, for example, brings together Kosovar scholars to articulate local critiques of state-building in Kosovo. Dženeta Karabegović and Adna Karamehić-Oates (2023) similarly bring Bosnian diaspora together to examine their contributions to the development of Bosnian studies. And finally, the collective project Yugoslawomen+ critically reflects on knowledge production and coloniality from the perspective of SEE migrants working within the contradictions and hopes of critical IR scholarship in the Global North (see Yugoslawomen+ Collective, 2021).

Brought together by a critical reflection on ways of studying and theorising from the post-Yugoslav region, these interventions uncover the everyday violence of Europeanisation in the Balkans and point to larger frameworks that prevent better understanding that violence. They ponder moving away from the Eurocentrism that constantly pulls post-Yugoslav scholarship towards the EU as the most important, and often only relevant relation. And they critically reflect on the ways in which knowledge production is embodied in positions of migration. Within these themes, the knowledge produced in and about the region connects to the burning questions that also face other spaces of Europeanisation.

### Locating our bodies, writing and research

Our own positionalities and diverse stakes in writing about/with/in the post-Yugoslav region highlight many of the points reviewed above. Moreover, they also account for the materiality and relationality of our own writing encounters – one of the explicit goals of this edited volume.

*Katarina*

Growing up in the 1990s and 2000s in Croatia, I was/am very much a product of both transition thinking and Europe as a structure of feeling. It is, of course, difficult to evaluate the person we once were, but when I think of myself as a teenager and young adult, I think of teleological optimism: we were children of transition who were to make everything better. I started university in 2007, eight years after the death of Franjo Tuđman and six years before Croatia joined the EU. I had won a scholarship to a private US university in Dubrovnik where we studied business, economics and management with the explicit goal of becoming new – meaning more transparent and less corrupt – regional business leaders. It was a motley crew of relatively wealthy students from all over the region and many second and third generation migrants who wanted to try ‘coming back’ but were either intimidated by or unable to follow degrees in Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian. At the end of my studies, I stayed to work in the Dubrovnik tourism industry, where I was exposed to both political and affective economies of international tourism. It was a system that opened the world from the small alleyways of Dubrovnik Old Town, in rituals that both rewarded and exploited the many young and old bodies propelling the Croatian tourism machine.

I bring this background in to show you why, when I was applying to study IR at the Central European University (CEU), I wrote in the application letter that I feel ‘the international’ and ‘Europe’ all around me. The date of Croatia’s accession was set shortly after my graduation and the bureaucratic aspects of EU membership were increasingly conflated with Europe and international politics. I was not interested in the bureaucracy of EU membership, but I was curious about how Europe and ‘the international’ live in romantic relationships, decisions about jobs, ways of imagining the future and frameworks through which we understand pasts. Today, I also ask how they live in the methodological and analytical tools we use to study SEE.

It is then not surprising that my PhD research and the ensuing monograph (Kušić, forthcoming) pursued the discursive and material embodiments of international intervention. I studied youth non-formal education and agricultural production in Serbia as sites shaped by Europeanisation, state-building and post-war reconstruction. Through ethnographic research, I hoped to see how these concepts play out in everyday life, but I also wanted to make that everyday life epistemically productive. This was a process of discovery: while I was introduced to postcolonial theory while studying at CEU in Budapest, studying and teaching in the UK exposed me to reverberations of colonial empires: in classrooms where students insisted the railways

in India brought ‘development’, and in conversations with colleagues thinking through colonial wounds in the Americas, South Asia and Palestine. My own conversations with postcolonial and decolonial thought thus led me to ask not only what concepts tell us about everyday life, but how experiences of everyday life force us to rethink concepts – making the Balkans not only a space of gathering ‘data’, but also of building theory.

The Europeanisation of agricultural policy implies the simultaneous transformation of three distinct subjects: the public servants who are expected to transform the state along neoliberal lines; the agricultural workers themselves who are led to become entrepreneurs more responsive to the market; and the civil society that is supposed to participate in and mediate between the two. Specific images of ‘Balkan backwardness’ inspire these programmes – both within contemporary EU approaches and in longer historical developments. Yet their effects are not only representational. They further ‘projectivise’ politics, limiting what is thought as possible in political action and the tools available for getting there; they discriminate against small producers in a way that posits the resulting inequalities as a ‘natural’ order of progress; and they help the brain drain that makes it impossible for the public sector to keep employees from the consultancies of the private sector.

Agriculture also helped me dislocate international intervention, a concept and sub-field of IR where Balkan subjects are over-represented (Kušić, 2021). Following the concerns of my interlocutors led me to the politics of agricultural land. Even though land policy is not directly in the realm of EU accession, the foreign direct investment in land is a particular logic of government that moves alongside Europeanisation. Such an empirical widening also expands the period under inquiry – to understand how agricultural land moves, we need to bring together Ottoman governing systems, socialist experiments in ownership and economic democracy, the violence of post-socialist transition and the EU Common Agricultural Policy and the markets it powerfully shapes. There is a global element to these processes: the notorious investments from the United Arab Emirates, for example, are rightly criticised for their lack of transparency and the poorly investigated effects of privatising and selling huge swathes of agricultural land (Kušić and Lazić, 2022). At the same time, those investments are framed in racialised discourses of ‘Arab arrival’ which foreclose critiques based on the consequences, rather than the origin, of these investments, and further remove from discussion the very domestic processes and actors that drive the unfair concentration of land.

In thinking about Europeanisation and ‘the international’ to which it supposedly leads – as shaping my personal trajectory and an object of my research – the challenge for me has always been to expand postcolonial

understandings of SEE's position in relation to Europe into more global understanding of that position in wider structures of coloniality. And for this, I have the multiple generations of East–South dialogues in and about the Yugoslav space to thank. While I work to think from the minutiae of human experience – first in intervention and now in relation to land and agriculture – my involvements in collaborative projects and networks bring to fore the global and ambivalent entanglements of Yugoslav socialism and capitalism with coloniality and global racial hierarchies.

*Maria-Adriana*

To some extent the logic of optimism and progress through learning English and Europeanisation that Katarina describes resonates with me. Having grown up in Sardinia, Italy's insular periphery, the promises of mobility, progress and escape through programmes like Erasmus were particularly seductive for our generation. While other friends had chosen 'cosmopolitan' cities such as Paris or Madrid, I took a somewhat different path, choosing another peripheral destination, Northern Ireland, where I later returned and I am now currently based as a researcher and educator. Thinking about and 'feeling' Europeanisation from Italy's 'backward' and underdeveloped South echoes the developmental narratives of accession used for the enlargement, although privileged through the EU membership afforded to those holding an Italian passport. This claim to Europeanness goes hand in hand with Italy's refusal to acknowledge its own postcolonial condition and history of colonial violence which, lest we forget, was instrumental in cementing Italy's positioning within white, European modernity given the ambiguous, racialised in-betweenness of its southern regions and populations (Pesarini, 2021). Such refusal is mirrored not only in Italy's racist citizenship policies and culture but also in its eager embracement of and complicity in the deadly policing and externalisation of EU external borders.

Currently, I find myself writing about the violence of Europeanisation from Northern Ireland, another peripheral 'problem space' where peace 'failures' and silences about Empire collide with the reverberations and contentions of Brexit that have made critical engagements with EUrope, well, complicated. In this chapter, we write about no alternative but Europeanisation as experienced, felt and theorised in/from/with SEE. Yet, from where I write, the space for thinking critically about EUrope has become narrower as the EU has emerged as the 'sensible' alternative to a Brexit driven by British exceptionalism, nationalism and racism. Just as in the post-Yugoslav region, the mantra of 'no alternative but Europeanisation' looms large from this other semi-periphery where progressive politics and imaginaries are firmly 'stuck' towards EU membership, irrespective of evidence of its deadly and

slow violent effects. This juncture makes a ‘connected sociologies approach built on postcolonial and decolonial critiques’ (Bhambra, 2015), as well as a commitment to thinking between posts, even more urgent to understand these global entanglements and interrogate our complicated investments in Europeanisation and its violence more deeply.

In terms of locating my writing and thinking in relation to SEE, I became interested in the post-Yugoslav region most explicitly through my academic training, as well as through indirect personal histories and attachments that inevitably inflect our research interests. Growing up in in the 1980s, Yugoslavia felt somewhat close to home for us, not necessarily in a strict geographical sense, but more importantly ideologically, through my family’s political attachment to socialist internationalism. Yugoslavia had represented the last bastion of hope, a familial-political utopia that a fairer version of socialism could exist. I now know that watching its dissolution, worriedly yet safely, on our television screens ignited the first glimpses of a feminist curiosity about women in war, whose stories ever so present in the often sensationalist reportages during the Yugoslav wars nevertheless quickly fell from view once the world, we, stopped caring about the Balkans. These are some of personal/political threads that, years later, led me to awkwardly enter and inhabit the discipline we call IR initially with an interest in developing a feminist exploration of the promises of peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina centred around women’s diverse experiences and fragile, yet stubborn, individual/collective imaginations for life and peace otherwise (Deiana, 2018). It is through this research that I became attuned to the cruel promises of resolution through international intervention and to attachments to a Europeanness that for places like Bosnia remains ambivalent and foreclosed. The process also prompted me to interrogate romanticised attachment to socialism and its legacy as political alternative which I had also reproduced.

On one level, my own research trajectory mirrors patterns that have been highlighted in critical literature: of international researchers who flock to sites of armed conflict to conduct fieldwork, write publications as ‘experts’. However self-reflexive, critical of the logics of expertise and attentive to the politics of knowledge production emerging from scholars in/from the region, this ambivalent, fractured imbrication in the neoliberal hierarchies of international academic research remains an inescapable component of my positionality. At the same time, I view my work not in isolation, but rather as an opportunity to engage in collective critical conversations about deepening, widening and transforming dominant analytical frameworks that rely on the construction of BiH and the post-Yugoslav region as a space that fails to live up to normative narratives of success, progress and ultimately modernity. It is precisely this ongoing dialogue, grounded in the multiple

knowledges emerging from the region, that can help us subvert such narratives of the international, revealing violence and toxicity as foundational to seemingly benign normative imaginaries.

In my own research, this has entailed troubling the perennial relegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to a contained space wherein the frame of conflict, belatedness and failure irremediably structures how we narrate local histories, agencies and subjectivities. Working at the intersection of EU border politics, security and peace-building, I became interested in unpacking how constructions of Bosnia as a site of endemic failure are intertwined with investments in the elusive and cruel promises<sup>4</sup> of EU futurity, but also with broader anxieties about European identity, borders and security, as well as the future of EU as a peace and security actor.<sup>5</sup> These entanglements became perhaps more visible in 2015 when the region became one of the epicentres of the so-called EU refugee crisis as a route of 'illegal' migration and, again, labelled a threat to EU stability. Both in academic and media discourse, explanations of the intensification of border and security regimes in response to refugee influx, nationalist sentiments and fear of security threats centred around the idea of the EU facing multiple crises, exceptional crisis, besetting its institutions, borders and sense of community. However, taking seriously the complex positionality and historicity of Bosnia, as a space that has long been targeted by the logic and bordering practices of peace-building through Europeanisation, throws in sharp relief the self-referential narrative of exceptionality and crisis.

Rather than an aberration or crisis-response, such forms of violence are foundational to narratives that 'anchor' the EU's identity as political project and security 'actor'. Interrogating EU practices of peace and security from the vantage point of Bosnia and Herzegovina reveals the paralysing effects of investing in the promises of Europeanisation as constant deferral. Producing Bosnia as (perennial) candidate, made to 'patiently wait in the ante-chamber of modernity' (Kušić, Lottholz and Manolova, 2019: 17), the seemingly linear, coherent and progressive cartography of EU b/ordering obscures its complex historicity shaped as much by interlocking postsocialist and post-conflict legacies as by the transnational circuits of violence foundational to EUrope. Crucially, at this juncture we can observe how manifestations of Europeanisation as violence work through differentiated registers against the EU's variously defined 'Others', whether they are framed as racialised threats that might cross EU external borders or 'balkanised' targets in need of civilisation, connectivity and development. Indeed, a continuum exists from the brutality of border police, tear gas, barbed wire and diabolical living conditions experienced by those who attempt, and often tragically fail in, crossing the Balkan route to the curtailing of alternatives and slow violence in the promises of progress through Europeanisation. As Neuman

Stanivuković (this volume) also shows, it is precisely the construction of the SEE region as an abject space trapped and invested in the logic of EU futurity that makes such different, yet interconnected, forms of violence possible. As she powerfully illustrates, seemingly mundane infrastructure projects (i.e. roads, highways, railway) mobilised in the promise of development and connectivity operate as tools that relieve Europe from its responsibility for violence in the region, while also enabling structural violence against migrants.

In a similar vein to Neuman Stanivuković and Musliu (2021), rather than examining the workings of Europeanisation in the institutional domain, I have explored lesser-known sites by focusing on how EU narratives of peace and security entered the 2015 edition of the Sarajevo Film Festival where film makers and festival organisers ‘flirted’ with performances of Europeanness, but also created an opportunity to raise critical questions about EU border politics through the medium of cinema. As echoes of conflict histories and imaginaries of the region and the contemporary militarised spectacle of EU border security reverberated, the festival became a productive entry point to explore, through films from/about the region, what is at stake for communities and spaces perennially constructed through narratives of failure in this marginal, yet often pivotal space for the EU geopolitical imagination.

Focusing on two documentary films presented at the festival that both engaged with histories of conflict and loss, as well as with the ambivalent position of the region, I posited these cinematic imaginaries as powerful epistemological interventions.<sup>6</sup> They cast a critical eye on narratives of crisis and exception mobilised to frame current EU border politics by confronting the viewer with the deadening effects of the seemingly benign logic of EU peace and security, and their duress. Through an aesthetics of disorderly memories and complex border imaginaries the documentaries recentred ‘local’ histories of loss and failure, but also endurance and survival in compromised conditions of existence from the perspective of communities conceived as ‘Other’. Activating peripheral connections between the plight of communities in the post-Yugoslav space and those seeking refuge against the EU militarised border enabled by the political context of their screening, the films offered a source of inspiration in articulating more complicatedly human stories of war, failure and displacement, gesturing to commonalities and fragile solidarities as alternatives that are constantly under erasure in narratives that seek to secure Europe as a singular, coherent and, ultimately, exclusive space.

At the time of conducting this research in 2015, the peripheral connections activated at the Sarajevo Film Festival and through the films’ imaginaries mirrored solidarity movements led by citizens in support of those on the move along the Balkan route. Since then, however, such fragile solidarities

have been severely compromised by both the intensification of the EU security regime that increasingly sees the region as the violent buffer zone for policing its borders with the complicity of local elites, and overt forms of racism in the region that target refugee communities in spite of a 'shared' experience of marginalisation. As we point out earlier, it is indeed crucial to interrogate the region not simply as a 'victim' of the failed promises of Europeanisation, but as deeply entangled in its foundational logics of racialised b/order violence.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, we sought to highlight the epistemic potential of the post-Yugoslav space for thinking about the many facets of Europeanisation as violence. We have illustrated how, from this vantage point, Europeanisation engenders a complex set of affective registers and material effects that 'entrap' the region in a never-ending transition towards the cruel promises of Europeanisation. Whether through investing in the alluring promises of agricultural modernisation, or in the performances of Europeanness in the region's most famous film festival, we have termed this affective/material impasse as slow violence. Echoing other chapters in this volume, attending to Europeanisation as slow violence is particularly productive to capture the region's ambivalent positioning as both the Balkan other in need of EU intervention, supervision, connectivity and containment, and its accomplice in racialised logics of spectacular and everyday violence at the core of the European project and its b/ordering.

At the same time, through the rich intellectual dialogues that underpin scholarship radiating from it, we spotlight the post-Yugoslav space as a site of critical imaginaries and alternative solidarities, mobilised through creative interventions in the aesthetics and politics of the region, through social movements that challenge the violence of Europeanisation. We have argued that, situating the region in wider epistemological frames shaped by intersecting postcolonial, postsocialist and post-conflict legacies, these critical dialogues enable us to complicate dominant parameters that, particularly in IR, continue to frame the post-Yugoslav space as an object of intervention. The long-standing engagement of scholars studying how this space has been imagined and intervened in provides a wide range of tools, expertise and experiences useful for thinking about the global entanglements of Europe. While this broad literature might have blind spots and limitations, many of which have been criticised in the past decade, it also provides a productive basis for developing both conceptual analyses and political solidarities with peripheries North and South that are sites of Europeanisation as violence.



As we think about this ongoing conceptual and methodological endeavour, our task is to broaden our frameworks in ways that do not limit our focus to the Balkans' relations with the EU but conceptualise the region through its global entanglements with the politics of race and Empire. Crucially this entails an effort to move beyond considering the region as an innocent victim or bystander, to explore the reproduction of modernity's violent logics within the Balkans. Doing so will not only sharpen our attention to local hierarchies (including race, class and gender) that are often obscured by the focus on Balkan–EU relations, but it can also help explore the political potential of Souths and Easts as method more fully. In conversation with the other contributors to this volume, we see our research as part of collective efforts to interrogate of Europeanisation as violence from multiple positionings, activating alliances across seemingly unrelated histories and struggles.

### Notes

- 1 For example, the group helped fund the 2017 Belgrade workshop 'Dialoguing "between the posts:" Post-socialist and post-/decolonial perspectives on domination, hierarchy and resistance in South-Eastern Europe' (see Karkov et al., 2017).
- 2 The curators were also aware of the trappings of 'Yugo' as a category. In discussing the series with the editors, Vjosa Musliu described how this category, when experienced from the *inside*, 'is bound to alienate, silence and limit subjects and subjectivities' (Hozić, Subotić and Vučetić, 2020). In translation, there were not many 'Albanians, Jews, Roma, Slovenians, Macedonians' in the list of authors, an absence that reflects Balkan politics and Yugoslavia's contradictory history (Hozić, Subotić and Vučetić, 2020). It should also be noted that an earlier effort to bring together the 'post-Yugoslav academic diaspora' was published in the journal *Reč* (Jović, 2003).
- 3 It is based on a panel organised by Katarina Kušić and Elena Stavrevska at BISA 2021 conference. Stavrevska, E. Kušić, K., Kaczmarska, K. and Piersma, M. 2021. 'Within / Without: Strategies and possibilities for cultivating knowledge with the Global East [Roundtable]'. *BISA 2021 conference – Forget International Studies?* London (online), 21–23 June 2021.
- 4 I use this term here with reference to Berlant's *Cruel Optimism* (2011) as a way of capturing both the affective mechanisms that binds the region to ideas of Europeanness (whiteness and progress), as well as the material consequences that investing in this (im)possible promise engenders.
- 5 To do so I interweaved post-colonial and decolonial analyses of the region with another theoretical approach that has long been concerned with failure: queer scholarship (Deiana, 2020).
- 6 Jasmila Žbanić's *One Day in Sarajevo* (2015) and Vladimir Tomic's *Flotel Europa* (2015).

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