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The Unexpected Persistence of Stereotypes. On the East-West distinction in Ugrešić and Stefanovski

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Abstract

The old division between Western Europe and its allegedly inferior Eastern counterpart has demonstrated great resilience across Europe, particularly in stereotypical forms. Intellectuals and artists from Eastern Europe have critically addressed this distinction. Rather than automatically praising such critical discourses for their subversive nature, this paper questions their effectiveness in overcoming the stereotypical East-West distinction. This paper analyses the functioning of apparent and hidden stereotypes, and seeks to interpret the simultaneous deconstruction and revitalization of East-West stereotypes. This will be illustrated by a close reading the contemporary writings of Dubravka Ugrešić and Goran Stefanovski. Their work is of particular relevance not only for their status as a famous, international writers, but also for its critical engagement with stereotyping. This critical approach manifests itself in theoretical and narratological sophistication, as well as in the perspective from which they write. Provoked by their migrant/exile exile experiences, Ugrešić's and Stefanovski's texts show a critical awareness of two directional East-West stereotyping. It is from this perspective of an intermediary figure – commenting upon but standing in between the 'East' and 'West' – that Ugrešić and Stefanovski address, criticize and use these stereotypes. My argument is that Stefanovski's and Ugrešić's critical writings and by extension many other cultural representations – despite the sophisticated attempts to subvert the East-West distinction and the concomitant stereotypes – reinforce the very stereotypes they try to deconstruct. In conclusion, this paper sheds new light on the concrete functioning and persistence of stereotypes in texts where these very stereotypes are undermined by critical, anti-essentialist intellectuals. Indeed, precisely there where we would not immediately expect them.

Key words: stereotypes; imagology; resistance; Eastern Europe; writers.

Introduction

Just as Western European (often stereotypical) images of Eastern Europe show great historical continuity and persistence[1], so is the awareness hereof among intellectuals from various regions from Eastern Europe. Profound awareness of stereotypical images about Eastern Europe in Western Europe provokes not only discomfort, disagreement and even sense of humiliation, but also active responses as materialized in essays, speeches or novels. In this paper I focus on such responses from the post 1990s war period as formulated by two international and influential authors from ex-Yugoslavia, respectively from Macedonia and Croatia: Goran Stefanovski and Dubravka Ugrešić. The reasons to focus on these particular authors are manifold. Not only their (relative recent) work deals explicitly with the question of the distinction between East and West and the role of stereotypes, but their texts themselves depend heavily on the usage of stereotypes. Moreover, what makes their

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work especially interesting that they react onto stereotypes as nationally and internationally famous, established, well-known artists who play an important role in production and dissemination of images and stereotypes about the Balkans. In other words, the content of their work is closely related to their contextual position as intermediary figures whose activities revolve around experiencing, addressing, reflecting, reacting, fighting and correcting stereotypical images, often in cross cultural settings.

This particular intermediary perspective as well as the dominant themes of these authors are by no means self-evident. Dubravka Ugrešić was born in 1949 and between the late 1970s to late 1980s established herself as an established literary author in Yugoslavia, winning many of the most prestigious prizes, writing postmodern fiction unrelated to cultural or political identity at all, writing studies on and translating modern Russian prose. She migrated to Amsterdam in the 1990s and has been teaching and lecturing at American universities. From this period onwards, she has written on the relation between writing, politics and identity in novels and essays.[2] Goran Stefanovski is a playwright, essayist and academic, emigrated to England in the 1990s. Most of his plays performed across Europe from this period onwards deal with identity, just as his essays and speeches at international conferences and festivals.[3]

The theoretical and disciplinary framework of the present paper (and the PhD research it is part of) stems from *Imagology*, a branch of comparative literature that examines characterizations and stereotyping of peoples and countries as discursive representations. Imagology differs from adjacent approaches is that it does seeks to connect national characterization as mental images or cultural ideology with the specificity and context of its discursive enactment. In sum, imagology is the "study of literary poetics and sociopolitical ideology"[4].

In what follows, I will discuss several ways in which stereotypes are both countered and reproduced. Given the limited space here, most (not all) of the examples are drawn from Goran Stefanovski's essay 'Tales from the Wild East' (1999) but the ideas and modes presented here are at work in much of other Stefanovski's and Ugrešić's writings. Since their approach to stereotypes is intimately related to the perspective from which they write (and accordingly, the characters they construct), it is instructive to address their perspective which is of one an intermediary figure.

Intermediary figures

In order to understand how authors Stefanovski and Ugrešić reflect upon the aforementioned problematic, it is crucial to understand their perspective is one of an intermediary figure. Obviously, there is a clear connection between their biography and their textual work. As migrants, international artists and intellectuals, they have travelled extensively and gained knowledge about how various people think about themselves and others, especially the mutual ideas between the "West" and the "East". Acquainted with such ideas, including the fact they have been connected to it in various ways, they produced texts that express a critical awareness of and engagement with such perceptions and discourses.[5] This is reflected not only in the content of their work – Stefanovski and Ugrešić function often as central characters in their essays and speeches, or clearly mirrored by fictional characters in their drama or novels – but also in the context of the text's dissemination: whether in the form of textual genres such as books and interviews, or in performative genres such as interviews, debates, lectures or speeches, the context of production and dissemination thereof is often international and cross cultural. In other words, the notion of intermediacy is biographic, textual-thematic and contextual (in terms of dissemination and/or enactment of the content).

There are two related but analytically separate types of intermediacy. The first type of the intermediary figure has primarily to do with the ways in which the author/narrator is addressed by others, often leading to a situation in which (s)he functions as a *representative* of the "East" to the "West". They are seen as belonging to Eastern Europe and interpellated as such to willingly or unwillingly function as its representative and spokesperson to the "West". As 'locals' or 'natives' they either embody certain regions and groups, or they speak on behalf of it. In the short essay 'Identity', Ugrešić expresses his deep dissatisfaction, or in her terms "allergy", regarding the omnipresent obsession with 'identity' she encounters not only in her native country, but also "globally". The tendency at the national level to not only fight wars legitimized by narratives on national identity but also to force writers such as herself to embody or to identify with national identity, is paralleled at the international stage in cross cultural encounters, including the European or global literary scene. Ugrešić often recounts her experiences with others' expectations and categories: she is not seen as an author but a "Croatian" author[6] or similarly, as a writer from the "Balkans". What reoccurs in their work is the omnipresent obsession with (national/ethnic or regional) identity which forces authors and their work to fit an externally imposed identity: where in the national contexts this implies a certain political stance, abroad this involves an 'Balkanist' stereotypes that seem to inform or even dominate the public discourse, including the dominant framings in the literary field.[7] Next to the theme of interpellation by national and/or international others, many

texts of these authors consist of instances of identification with broad categories such as Eastern Europe or Balkans. Stefanovski's essay 'Tales from the Wild East' (1999) is a case in point here. In the wake of the dramatic and violent political shifts in the 1990s, Eastern Europe, or more precisely ex-Yugoslavia (a distinction that will be discussed in the following pages), struggle with their self-definition. Stefanovski addresses the problematic of Eastern Europe's identity by focusing particularly on the distinctions between "West" and "East"; the persistent presence of Western Europe's mainly negative images of Eastern Europe that constitute the context in which a solution for the identity crisis has to be invented; his individual and artistic self, as well as Eastern European artists; and, the stereotypical nature of (self)characterizations. In this essay, it is clear how the "I" (author) and "the East" stand for one another because the former identifies with the latter: when his friends from an international Hamburg festival suggested him the speech title 'Why the East is not sexy anymore', "I instinctively felt attacked. What? me, not sexy?'' In the next few sentences, "we" is added to the "I" ("When exactly were we sexy?"). What also shows this identification is the frequent usage of words such as "our" and "my" when it comes to characteristics of large entities such as Yugoslavia or Eastern Europe.[8]

The second type of the intermediary figure has to do with the author's perspective and identification, and can be described as an *in-between* position, in between two regions/cultures with which the author does not seem to identify. Both Stefanovski as an individual as well as the social group he mostly identifies with and refers to in his essay, Eastern European artists, are in-between East and West: they find themselves between Eastern European politicians imposing onto them the ideology of "nationalist purity, of searching for the roots" on the one hand, and the Western attitude of disinterestedness and superiority fueled by the notion of economic and political progress. Stefanovski writes that "the Eastern European artists seem to be doomed not only to undignified poverty at home, but also to being hopelessly out of fashion in the West, where they look for salvation. Insult added to injury". As for his individual position, he argues that he is "on the borderline". On the borderline in this case signifies the feeling of being in between two cultural spaces rather than identifying fully with either one. Both people from Skopje (Macedonia) where he lived before the war, and Britain, his current home, "all seem to have strong ideas about who I must be."[9] Moreover, the way in this in-between space is being occupied by Stefanovski is tellingly summarized when he writes about him "sitting on the fence in frustrated stupor and watching how both sides flatly dismiss each other with easy clichés and stereotypes." In the work of Stefanovski and Ugrešić there is a clear parallel between their biographic context and the content, not only thematically – Eastern Europe's identity and the mutual stereotyping between East and West – but also from the perspective of intermediary figures that experience, address and criticize such patterns.[10]

Which type of intermediacy is activated depends on the individuals texts or fragments therein where they occur alongside each other. Regardless whether the author/narrator/character seems to identify or not with the 'East', what becomes visible regarding the problematic of Eastern European identity and cross cultural stereotyping is the intimate relationship between the *individual* and *collective.* In fact, reflections on one of the two always involves the other side of the individual-collective pair, regardless whether this relationship is a negative one (in cases of distancing) or a positive one (in terms of identification or interpellation). The individual and the collective often serve as inter exchangeable categories sharing the very same challenge (identity crisis and stereotyping). In other words, the personal, artistic, political and cultural intertwine and sometimes stand for one another. Moreover, the intermediate perspective allows them also to address the dynamics between *Self* and *Other*: The identity crisis is closely related to the awareness of the ways others conceive one's region or culture. In varying degrees of explicitness, the problematic of identity, of self-definition of Eastern-Europe, a nation, or one's personal identity has to deal in some way or another with the conceived images others have about you (what Leerssen calls, "meta-images"[11]). Stefanovski and Ugrešić share this awareness and explicitly address the dynamics between images and self-images, both though time and again using themselves as examples, or creating fictional characters that deal with similar issues and address them explicitly. That reflection upon Eastern Europe's identity is always in close relationship to Western Europe's hetero-images, is already explicit in the first paragraph of 'Tales from the Wild East'. It starts with an anecdote about how his friends from an international Hamburg festival suggested him (for a speech he had to give) the title 'Why the East is not sexy anymore'. What this start reveals is not only the divide between east and west where the latter has a negative image of the former, but also that the author reflects upon his own identity as a result of his confrontation with perceptions of people who are not from the region they refer to. Moreover, reflecting upon his friends' suggestion, continues by speculatively addressing the West's hetero-images of "the East".

"Could this mean that the East was sexy when it wasn't sexy? When it was struggling under Stalinist yoke? And that it isn't sexy now that it's trying to become sexy in the Western sense of the word? Was it sexy when it pretended that it was innocent and naive, and stopped being sexy now that it pretends to be sophisticated and experienced? Was it sexy when it was passe and folkloristic and stopped being sexy now that it wants to emulate the West and catch up with the latest "isms"?"

Similarly, when Stefanovski argues that "Eastern Europe is desperately trying to reinvent itself and define its new identity", and accordingly when artists from Eastern Europe unavoidably ask themselves the question "'What do I want to look like? Who am I?'", the dominant cultural repertoire at their disposal to define themselves consists of Western European images of Eastern Europe: "Most of the clothes on offer at the moment come from the fashion houses of the West." From this perspective, Stefanovski's answer to "what to do" should not only be read as answer to the problem of self identity, but also as a emancipatory act towards the Western European take on this identity. In others words, whereas the problem is the East's identity crisis in a context where it is unavoidably confronted with the dominance of Western European images of the East, the solution lies in a particular kind of identity formation, namely a self definition that is not influenced by the Western perceptions: "They [Eastern European artists, which, again, stand for Eastern Europe at large, JK] have to earn their stories [i.e. identity. JK] and make them their own." What the individual-collective and self-other connections show is that the intermediary positions and perspectives – enabling them to experience and address stereotypes – do not constitute a space where they can escape the dynamics they refer to and criticize. As authors/narrators, they are not merely critical observers of stereotyping, but also actively involved in it. Next to them being recipients of stereotypes, as we have seen above, they are also active protagonists in the game of stereotyping, as ones who do it themselves but also as ones to undermine the distinction between East and West as such.

Countering stereotypes

As authors/narrators, they are not merely critical observers of stereotyping, but also actively involved in it. Next to them being recipients of stereotypes, as we have seen above, they are also active protagonists in the game of stereotyping, as ones who do it themselves but also as ones to undermine the distinction between East and West as such. Before discussing several modes through which stereotypes are being reproduced in their writings, we will briefly present several strategies of resistance to the stereotypical East-West distinction.

The first way in which their critical stance in the capacity of intermediary figures manifests itself in countering stereotypes is the very act of labeling images, ideas, perceptions as "stereotypes" or "clichés".[12] The very usage of these terms can be seen as a theoretically informed mode to at once observe, describe, reveal, and rejected the stereotypical nature of stereotypes, which in their texts boils down to distortion/falsity and repetition. The idea that ideas about the Balkans in Western discourse are more a matter of convention than of empirical reality, is addressed in Ugrešić's essay *Balkans, My Balkans.*[13] Here, she speaks of the "amazingly stubborn stereotypes" accompanying the term Balkan not only by others, but also by artists from the region itself. Some reconcile "with Balkan identity; as a postmodern acceptance of the image." She summarizes this process of images becoming self-images: "if the whole world sees us "Gypsy people" as primitive and wild people, we're going to play that part. And the world takes it as truth." Another instance instance hereof worth mentioning due to its sef;-reflecxive nature, can be bound in afomentioned Stefanovski's essay 'Tales from the Wild East.' Here, his critical stance towards the East-West distinction and the role of stereotypes does only manifests itself in labelling perceptions as "stereotypes" and "clichés", but also in the auto-reflexive fragments. Next to identifying "stereotypes" and "clichés" in both the East as West, he also applies it to himself. In the context where he writes that the West had an cliché image of ex- Yugoslavia summarized by "no good could come from the East" (which in his view did not correspond to the Yugoslav self-image), he adds a comment on his personal compliance in stereotypes in brackets: "(Of course I have these cliches myself. I have always been suspicious of anyone who plays rock and roll and is not white Anglo-Saxon or plays jazz and is not black. So I should not complain when I meet people who are suspicious of Eastern Europeans dabbling with the performing arts.)" However, that is precisely where the majority of this work is about, a battle against stereotypes. In his ows words: "Let me make one thing clear. I am ranting here against the ugly, invisible multitudes who make and maintain a cliche. I am attacking public opinions which are being discussed in bar and pubs." (1999:7).[14]

The second mode of challenging Western European hetero-images of Eastern Europe is to associate the latter with respectable cultural figures expressions, and practices. This strategy boils down to the idea "The West thinks we are a bunch of violent, primitive East Europeans, but actually we were and/or are actually civilized and cultivated for we produce and consume respectable, i.e. high culture." For example, in 'Tales from the Wild East' Stefanovski describes "how [his] friends lost their story" which consists of a transition from participation at the summit of ex-Yugoslav high culture before the war to Western pop culture after the war. More precisely, his first friend was "one of the best actresses of ex-Yugoslavia theatre, film and TV", "the protagonist of our drama and the hero of our stories". However, she "has become one of with the stereotype about Eastern Europeans." The second example follows the same transition. His second friend was not only a "legendary actor in ex-Yugoslavia"; "He was Hamlet." Now, he is casted in Hollywood films "as what? As a

suspicious, Eastern European Mafioso, an unreliable type, verging on the psychopathic." Hamlet has become "an illustration of the cliché about Eastern Europeans."[15] The same discrepancy between Western hetero-images and Stefanovski's auto-image is addressed through the example of the 1990 Eurokaz Theatre Festival in Zagreb where independent producers from Yugoslavia and the West met. In Stefanovski's view, they had a very good story to tell, a story

> "of our time and place and context, a pastiche, a tragi-comic tale of a world spinning between two mighty political grinding wheels […] But the story failed to sell. The Western producers said it was hard to follow, difficult to file, they said it did not match Western horizons of expectation."

Many other examples could have been given here of where Eastern Europe as a whole or individuals from Eastern Europe (author/narrator/character) are associated with artistic or cultural practices widely recognized as sophisticated or at least accepted. For example, before turning to the painful discrepancy between how people perceive her and how did she perceived herself, Ugrešić describes the latter as a woman of international republic of letters where, writing with confidence on Joyce and Proust and being engaged with the cutting edge of literary theory at that time.[16] It should be emphasized that characterizing ex-Yugoslavia in general or themselves as in particular as producers and consumers of 'high' culture – appearing time and again in the essayistic and fictional writings of Ugrešić and Stefanovski – does by no means exclude the characterization of ex-Yugoslavia as unrefined, primitive, or folkloristic. Rather, these characterizations coexist.

The third counter strategy is closely related to the previous one in that it connects 'high' culture to Eastern Europe. However, the difference is that it reinstalls the boundary between East and West rather than blurring it by emphasizing the shared cultural practices. As for this strategy, the point here is not to transcend the East-West dichotomy by pointing out similarities, but to claim a certain originality and even superiority of the East. A case in point is Stefanovski's answer to the question "what to do" as artists, in a context where the West does either not want to see the East, or wants to see it in particular stereotypical, and negative way. Referring to "the Eastern European performing artists", who in Stefanovski's case stand for the Eastern Europe at large, he writes that they

> "will have to snap out of their amnesia and remember that it was their own convoluted society which, in a spasm at the turn of the century, spurted out Chekov, Malevich, Stravinsky, Eisenstein, Nijinsky, Harms, Vvedenski and Bulgakov. The same names which the ever-so-flexible West appropriated as its own. And so it happened that the East which came up with these names became known as the Wild East. And the Wild West, which came up with Wyatt Earp and Calamity Jane, became the suave and cool proprietor and guardian of modernism."

Inventing Eastern Europe's identity does not mean here creating something new but to create a sense of identity by establish continuity, by recognizing and claiming those cultural representatives that are claimed by others. This strategy provides not only an answer to the identity crisis through historical awareness and continuity but also reverses the superiority between the East and West, which again, remain to separate entities.

The fourth way to counter negative stereotypes about Eastern Europe is to characterize the 'West' negatively, and in this way problematizing the moral hierarchy between East and West. One of the reoccurring characteristics attributed to the West is imperialism: it is presented to exploit Eastern Europe economically (by introducing "cowboy capitalism") or culturally terms (a combination of cultural superiority and commodification[17] of East's sufferings in war or communism). In 'Tales of the Wild East' Stefanovski does only address the power dimension in East West relations – the West brings "his model of the world…his order" but also presents the West as morally corrupt and corruptive by associating it with the "universal mechanism of greed and consumerism". In the play *Casabalkan* (1997) Stefanovski stages a very critical image of the West, partly represented by the British cynic Mick, who immerses into the Balkans, witnessed by his romantic and criminal relationships with local people. One of them asks him "Are you only fascinated by the banality of evil, or have you become banal and evil yourself?" Here, the West embodied by Mick, is as "evil" as the east. The way the most brutal – a violent, primitive, criminal, misogynic genocidal nationalist – character speaks to Mick is illustrative: "Mick is my biographer and PR adviser. […] He's syphoned off more money to charities and relief agencies than all of the European Union put together. (TO MICK) You think I don't know about your "clean" dealings." Such characterizations of the West complicate the distinction between East and West by undermining West's moral superiority. However, to understand the workings of the East-West distinction and concomitant stereotypes, other modes of their functioning in the very *same* texts should be taken into account as well.

Reproduction of stereotypes

Both at the level of the Stefanovski's and Ugrešić's oeuvres as well as at the level of individual texts, deconstruction and reproduction of the same or similar stereotypes coexists along one another. Within the limited space of this paper, what follows are several modes in which East-West stereotypes are being reinforced. The first mode of reproduction has to do with the very terms used. In 'Tales from the Wild East,' Stefanovski employs terms such as "Eastern Europe", "Balkans", "former Yugoslavia", "Slav", "Byzantium", vis-à-vis "the West", leaving the distinction as such intact. This conceptual distinction is applied here to history, the present, as well as the future and they seem to function interchangeably. A comment on precisely the questionable validity of generalizability – he does not know to what extent his comments on "ex-Yugoslavia" are applicable for "other Eastern European countries" – has no consequences for other parts of this and other essays. Moreover, some of the examples in the text do include references to ex-Yugoslav republics, regions or cities such as, respectively, Serbia, Macedonia, Kosovo, or Skopje. However, neither the presence of references to different geographic entities, nor his comment expressing his doubt about the generalizability from his ex-Yugoslav (formulated somewhere at the beginning of the essay), do complicate the nomenclature employed in other parts of the essay: the category of "Eastern European" is by far the dominant term designating an entity opposed to and different from "the West"/"Western Europe", without problematizing its boundaries its internal diversity and complexity. By internal diversity I do not mean that there are no signs of internal differentiation within the broad category of "Eastern Europe", but rather that the ways in which various geographic, cultural and social entities are evoked suggests their mutual exchangeability, when one stands for another by way of deductive or inductive writing.

The second way in which stereotype are perpetuated involves the "Balkanist" (to use Todororova's term) characterization of Eastern Europe. These characterizations of "Eastern Europe" and/or ex-Yugoslavia" can be evoked through connections to war, nationalist hostility, folk poetry, or music.[18] In 'Tales from the Wild East' Stefanovski juxtaposes two "grand narratives": one represents Eastern Europe's culture, the second the Western one. The first is described as being "full of warriors, historical revenge, unsettled scores, sacred national ideals on the horizon" and characterized as underdeveloped, totalitarian, "intolerant", "undemocratic", "collectivist", "tribal", "irrational", and passionate. The concrete example functioning *pars pro toto* is an extreme on, the case of Serbain history education in Kosovo. In contrast, the Western master narrative is described as containing "No history, no wars, no fixed identities", based on "a global, open, decentralised, civic concept of the world". What follows is the evocation of the same binary distinction between East and West but now both characterized negatively, though in different ways. What is previously described in terms of "master narratives", is now presented as "master narratives in their ugliest, most vulgar forms." The East is now called "Byzantium" and characterized as

"a closed society, vertical, patriarchal, macho, rural, only one person at the top knows anything – it is a closely knit society, where you can never be lonely, but can never be left alone either. Social position is fixed; everyone has a nickname – your past, future and present are all a given thing. There is no democracy, no tolerance, no logical space for homosexuals – or women, for that matter. Individualisation comes at a deadly price. This is a world of ethnic fundamentalism. On one side, brothers in eternal embrace, on the other – traitors and outsiders. This narrative is black and white and is only concerned with the collectivist tribal issues. It allows primarily for a big National Theatre, casts of thousands, operatic reckonings. The Eastern European story is a tale of one lock and one key."

At this point we should recall the aforementioned counter strategy which involves associating high culture with ex-Yugoslavia. It should be noted that that the reproduction of West's negative hetero-image of the Balkans in the work of Stefanovski and Ugrešić applies primarily for the period of post-Yugoslavia. Though there are some references to conflicts, nationalism, intolerance within pre-war Yugoslavia, the dominant tendency is to associate Yugoslavia with peaceful multi or monoculturalism where negative aspects such as intolerance, and inter-ethnic hostility were not present. As Stefanovski writes about the Yugoslav times, "we had a good story. Then, in 1991, the Yugoslav civil war started." This is not to say that there is not overlap between the ways in which the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav periods are characterized. Where in some instances Yugoslavia is associated with high and/or international culture, this self-image is also criticized for not allowing to see its true backward cultural substratum: Stefanovski writes that Yugoslavs, "we", had thought that we were "sophisticated", but "under the veneer of Europeanism, it [Belgrade/Yugoslav experience, JK] kept its Byzantine narrative intact." Despite some ambivalence in their depictions of pre-war Yugoslavia, the dominant tendency in Stefanovski's and Ugrešić's writings is to characterize the Yugoslav period more positively than the post-Yugoslav period. The whole range of negative stereotypes about the Eastern Europe are repeated by projecting them especially on the period of post-war ex-Yugoslavia. In fact, the positive image of Yugoslavia reinforces precisely the highly political and controversial stance held by both the Yugoslav regime before the war and the anti-separatist agents from the war onwards.[19]

Reproduction of stereotypes in the work of Stefanovski and Ugrešić manifest itself not only through

terminology and direct characterizations of Eastern Europe, but also through characterizations of the West. Within texts that revolve around the relationship between East and West, anything that is attributed to the one, has consequences for the characterization of the other part of the pair. Interestingly, negative characterizations of the West implicitly produce the very same characterization as the aforementioned positive ones.[20] For instance, in 'Tales of the Wild East', Stefanovski juxtaposes the aforementioned "Byzantium" (consisting of negative characterizations of Eastern Europe), a negative characterization of the "West". Not presenting it as a continuum or as an analytic category, but rather "On the very opposite" stands, what he metaphorically and ironically calls the "world of Donald Duck". This world is characterized as, what he previously called "post-modern": "urban, fast, global, consumerist, post-industrial society" with "no mother, no father, no wife, no children." Donald Duck, standing for the West as a whole, ...

> "sees his girlfriend from time to time, but then they go to their separate homes in their separate cars. Donald Duck doesn't belong to anything larger than himself. He is an individual par excellence. A loner in pursuit of happiness […] His narrative has no geography or history. It is splintered, fragmented, dispersed. Donald Duck is the bastion of political sterility and metaphysical failure."

Despite the critical effort, the negative characterizations of the West do not necessarily undermine the current stereotypes about the "East", the "West" and their relationship. First, the distinction as such is still at work. Second, though the evaluation may differ, the characterization – boiling down to the more fundamental opposition between modern and premodern – does not alter. In the case of the image of the West as being individualistic – not only in its positive but also in its negative manifestation – reinforces the aforementioned stereotype of Eastern Europe as collectivist and tribal. Third, by connecting processes such as global capitalism to the category of the West, it separates the East, and suggesting that the "East" is different (as quoted above, Stefanovski does not only speak of political or economic systems as such but also about cultural and collective characteristics). This chain of images dispersed across 'Tales from the Wild East' and formulated in varying degrees of explicitness produce an image of the East as different from the nihilism, uprooted individualism and capitalist imperialism attributed to the West. Depicting the West as West in these ways evokes notions of backwardness (exemplified by "tribalism", "collectivism", etc) of the East, though in a positive sense here. Whether "Western" individualism is evaluated negatively or positively, it is opposed to Eastern collectivism, regardless the evaluation thereof. As we have seen, negative characterizations of the West do problematize the East-West distinction in that they undermine West's moral superiority. However, they reproduce the very stereotypes they seek to undermine in an indirect manner because the negative characteristic of the West are informed by the same underlying modern-backwardness opposition.

Conclusion

As shown above, the East-West distinction and stereotypes occur both as a theme and a textual strategy. As a theme, it is addressed polemically and critically from the perspective of intermediary authors/narrators. As a textual strategy, it is employed through the concept of "stereotype" of "cliché", or, with the purpose of blurring or inverting it, by for example, evoking a different moral hierarchy between the East and the West (by characterizing the former positively and the latter negatively). Another employment of stereotypical the East-West distinction involves irony, sarcasm or other forms of playfulness.

Ironically, the same texts that often revolve around criticizing stereotypes both explicitly and implicitly, keep revitalizing them time and again in different ways. Revitalization is inherent to strategies such as irony or direct criticism in that they cannot function without rendering the stereotypes present.[21] Other possible understandings of the simultaneous deconstruction and reproduction of stereotypes could be sought in the authors' and texts' contexts: from a pragmatic-communicative standpoint, it can be argued that the texts need to relate to the audience's horizon of expectations to be effective and understandable and therefore necessarily tend to reproduce the stereotypes. The reproduction of stereotypes is operative not only at the level of specific characterizations, but is also at a more fundamental level: first, the East-West distinction is being reinforced as such, and second, the "Balkanist" discourse that is to be criticized is not undermined but merely inverted or complemented by characterizations that sometimes even share similar if not the same assumptions. In short, these texts complicate (by inverting and supplementing) rather fundamentally undermine the East-West distinction and its constitutive stereotypes.

To explain the omnipresence of stereotypes even among critical and authors, textual strategies, genre conventions[22], or pragmatic considerations of relating to one's audiences, seem insufficient. Within the scope of

this paper I cannot discuss elaborately the exact nature of the modes in which the East-West distinction or stereotypes more generally are being reproduced in various genres, but I do want to point out a possible direction, for which Riffaterre's distinction regarding stereotypes employment might be instructive here. He differentiates between stereotypes which can be seen as "as an object of expression…as a reality exterior to the author's writing" or as "a constitutive element of the author's writing"[23]It should be should be emphasized that this should not lead to the understandably appealing search for the author's 'true' stance beneath or beyond concrete actualized textual strategies. Perhaps to understand in which ways and why certain terms, characterizations and stereotypes are employed, we need further to investigate the connections between text, context and intertext. Hence, the intellectual challenge would be to interpret the functioning of stereotypes in texts which cannot be labeled naïve in any sense, without, for example, automatically praising them for their critical potential, or, without assuming the author's 'true' underlying intention. Accordingly, the political and moral challenge revolves around the question whether resistance to stereotypes is possible without reinforcing them.

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[1] The best known concept of this tradition is coined by Todorova (1997), as "Balkanism". Todorova, M. (1997) *Imagining the Balkans*. New York: Oxford University Press

[2] Novels such as *Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998)/*Muzej bezuvjetne predaje* (2001), or *Ministry of Pain* (2005), or in colelctions of essays, for example *My American Fictionary* (1993),which is translated in Dutch as *Nationaliteti: geen* (1993), or *Nikog nema doma* (2005)/*Nobody's Home* (2007). On Ugresic's early work (1978-1988), see Hawkesworth, (1990) 'Dubravka Ugrešić: The Insider's Story', *The Slavonic and East European Review,* 6 (3), pp. 436-446

[3] Plays *Sarajevo* (1993), *Casabalkan* (1997), *Tales of a City* (1998), *Euralien* (1998) and *Hotel Europa* (2000), as well as essays his essays and essays that can be found on http://goranstefanovski.co.uk/category/essays/.

[4] J. Leerssen (1991) "Mimesis and stereotype", p. 175, in: *Yearbook of European Studies*, 4, 165-175. For imagology, see Leerssen and Beller (2007) . J. Leerssen & M. Beller (Eds.), *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

[5] Responding to the question the Western discourse on the Balkans means to her, Ugresic says: "one does not know whether one belongs to the Balkans [*da si Balkanac*] and how they classify you, until you go abroad. It is only then, one becomes aware of what it means." At Subversive Forum – The Future of Europe, Zagreb, 19. 5. 2012 (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbWvV3lkNo0, 16 min). Stefanivski writes on his site that he is "actively involved in research in the theory and practice of scriptwriting, as well as in issues of cultural identity and politics." http://goranstefanovski.co.uk/

[6] *Nema nikog doma* (2005) Beograd: Frabrika Knjiga, p.76-78

[7] 'Sto je evropsko u evropskim knjizevnosti,' in: *Nema nikog doma* (2005), pp.179-192

[8] Ugresic also often speaks of "ours", "us", "my" ex-country.

[9] Ugresic writes in similar vain "ik bevind me tussen twee symbolen, tussen twee culturen.", in *Nationaliteit: geen* (1993) Amsterdam: Van Ditmar, p.130. See also p.20, 145, 150. Nigh

[10] A similar point is made by Amossy (2001) in her discussion of the notion of 'ethos'. Amossy, R. (2001) 'Ethos at the Crossroads of Disciplines: Rhetoric, Pragmatics, Sociology', *Poetics Today,* 22 (1), pp. 1-23

[11] Leerssen (2007), p.344.

[12] For a similarpoint, see Schweinitz (2001), p.35. Schweinitz, J. (2011) *Film and Stereotype. A challenge for Cinema and Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press

[13] See also the short essay 'Stereotypes', in *Nema nikog doma* (2005), p.25-28. Another example of this mechanism I will explore in more detail in my PhD thesis has to do with a decision made by Ugresic's Dutch translator not to include extensive quotes of Krleza in the original by arguing supposedly, that this does not fit the expectations of the Dutch readership.

[14] For example Ugresic writes to her friend: "Wat jouw essays betreft, ik hoop dat je in staat zult zijn de stereotypen waarvoor je altijd zo beducht bent te vermijden.: (in Nationaliteit: geen, p.59).

[15] For another example, see the character of Zora in Stefanovski's play Casabalkan (1997).

[16] 'Što je evropsko u evropskoj književnosti?', nema kigon Doma (2005) Beograd: Fabrika Knjiga, p.181

[17] Another example of commodification with moral implications is evoked by Ugrešić' where the suffering of people on the Balkans is not much more than spectacle in the global media (*Nationaliteit: geen*, p.32).

[18] In Ugrešić's 'Balkan Blues' for example, folklore (gusle, ganga, kolo) is associated with Yugoslavia (both in supra national and nationalist discourse) which reaffirms the old and deeply ingrained idea that South East Europe's cultural expression par excellence is folklore, where the aforementioned characterological traits are implied.

[19] Ugresic writes about the United States in terms of extreme organization, opposed to chaos of the native region (*Nationaliteit: geen*, p. 24). Others can be found in the essay called 'Shrink' where she recounts the conversations between herself and her psychiatrist, which boil down to her describing her native country by reproducing stereotypes, encountering a lack of understanding on the part of the psychiatrist. For example, by way of a ephemeral remark, she says: "I come from a phallic country, a masculine culture, a culture of sticks, bets and knives, depending on the needs of the moment." (p.37). Similarly, on the next page Ugresic continues her description by providing an extended list of her extended list of mainly negative characterizations, amongst others being "barbarism", "primitivism and illiteracy", "drunkenness", "cult of the knife" etc.

[20] The positive one is, for example: "The historical rhythms of Eastern Europe have been asynchronic with the West. Particularly in the places which were under Ottoman rule. These societies never saw the Renaissance, Classicism or the Enlightenment, they never saw the Industrial Revolution, the Napoleonic Code or the social contract of Jean- Jacques Rousseau." ('Tales of the Wild East')

[21] Mitchell makes a similar point: "If stereotypes were just powerful, deadly, mistaken images, we could simply ban them, and replace them by with benign, politically correct, positive images….however, this sort of straightforward strategy of critical iconoclasm generally succeeds only in pumping more life and power into the despised image." (Mitchell, quoted n Schweinitz 2011: 13).

[22] For genre stereotypes in film, see Schweinitz, J. (2011) *Film and Stereotype. A challenge for Cinema and Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press. For national stereotypes in neo-Aristotelian poetics in the 17th century, see Leerssen (2007) 'The poetics and anthropology of national character (1500-2000)'. In J.T. Leerssen & M. Beller (Eds.), *Imagology: The cultural construction and literary representation of national characters. A critical survey* (pp. 6-75). Amsterdam: Rodopi, especially pp.65-67

[23] Rifattere, quoted in Schweinitz (2011), p.17