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Visegrad Scholarship to Open Society Archives Final Report

Near the end of Viktor Oszkar Nagy and Andras Petrik's 2013 documentary, *Superior Orders (Felsőbb Parancs),* we come across two young Afghan men as they follow train tracks toward the Serbian-Hungarian border. Seemingly alone, and wearing jackets too thin for the cold winter weather, they walk in silence until one remarks to the other: "This is not Europe. Europe is still far from here. This only belongs to Europe geographically." On the surface, the man's comment could be interpreted simply as a reference to Serbia's position outside of the European Union. But the invocation of Europe as a destination that is not *only* territorial begs the question: What is "Europe," and who may belong to it? *Superior Orders* is just one of the films I discovered in the Open Society Archive's film holdings that raises this question. Over the course of my two-month research stay, I watched 37 films at OSA that focused on migration and displacement in post-Cold War Europe, in order to assess the evolving representation of the figural "migrant" and "refugee" in media discourses. Irregular migration to Europe has been occurring for decades; however, the contemporary migrant and refugee "crisis" has drawn sustained global media attention since 2015, when over one million migrants and refugees seeking asylum successfully made their way to the continent and more than 4,000 drowned in the Mediterranean during similar attempts. As the European Union failed to reach consensus on how to respond to the growing number of asylum seekers traveling across the continent, images of dramatic maritime rescues and violent confrontations at border crossings inundated Europe and

the rest of the world. Across digital media, broadcast news reports, and documentary films, Europe is projected as fractured and divided over its future.

When I applied for the Visegrad Scholarship to the Open Society Archives, I planned to do a comparative analysis of media representations of three refugee crises that affected Eastern Europe between the Cold War and the present day: the Hungarian refugee crisis following the 1956 revolution; the Yugoslavian refugee crisis of the 1990s; and the contemporary refugee crisis emblematized by the Syrian Civil War. However, after I began to watch the archive's film holdings, I realized that many of the films provide an opportunity to theorize the Balkan Route as a site of mediation itself, allowing for a more theoretical and non-linear approach to my research questions about the connections between the Cold War and War on Terror. The Balkan Route became one of the most popular routes taken by migrants and refugees seeking to make their way to western Europe in 2015, and comprises a pathway that takes migrants across a number of countries including Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia, and finally into Austria. As I watched various documentaries that followed migrants and refugees in different areas of the Balkan Route, I began to conceptualize the Balkan Route as a site where Europe's borders, and the bodies perceived to be internal and external to them, are continuously shifting and made subject to revision through competing visualities and scalar narratives.[1] Importantly, as

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[1] Nicholas Mirzoeff defines visuality as a means of "visualizing history" which (re)affirms the authority of the visualizer, who is generally understood to be a representative of the sovereign. Mirzoeff, Nicholas. *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality.* Duke University Press, 2011.

According to Anne-Marie Fortier, the 'new' Europe is best conceived as a "scalar narrative" which distinguishes "between the *lived* space of 'new Europe,' the spatial *practices* within Europe and the *represented* space of Europe. These dimensions are 'embroiled in a constant state of dialectical interaction,' through which space is produced, but also through which we are reminded of the incommensurability of scales." Fortier, Anne-Marie. "The Politics of Scaling, Timing and Embodying: Rethinking the 'New Europe.'" *Mobilities*. 1.3 (2006): 315.

migrants and refugees began successfully subverting the exterior border controls of the EU in large numbers, the geographical constitution of Europe, where and how its borders were performed, was variously reshaped in response. These shifting front-lines, which undermined the purported freedom of movement within the Schengen Zone, also served to undermine the perception of a stable inside and outside to the geographic and symbolic imaginary of Europe, while inconsistencies in the application of the Dublin regulations, that require refugees and asylum seekers to register in the first European Union member state they enter, revealed the deeply uneven hierarchies of power within the EU body. Considering this, I would now like to contend that the Balkan Route acts as a site of mediation across and between the Cold War and War on Terror, as it manages the inflows and outflows of migrants and refugees from both the former Soviet sphere and from war-torn countries in Africa and the Middle East currently targeted by the global War on Terror. Analyzing the political and discursive function, as well as the representative evolution, of the figural migrant or refugee who moves through the space of the Balkan Route is necessary for understanding the intimately connected histories of these two ideological wars, as well as for making sense of the rise of far-right populism across Europe.

As part of my project, I aim to chart how the figures of the migrant and the refugee, and the symbolic imaginary of Eastern Europe, have shifted in tandem across different media objects circulated by supra-state institutions, national governments, civil society organizations, artists, activists, and migrants/refugees. During my research stay at the Open Society Archives, I was able to access a number of independent short documentaries that screened as part of the Verzio Film Festival but otherwise lack wide-scale distribution. These include films like *Logbook Serbistan, Document: Hoyerswerda/Frontex, Minor Border, If I Want to Volunteer This is the*

Best Place, and *It's Not Only Trash But Research.* Through watching a variety of short and feature length documentaries about the contemporary migrant and refugee crisis, I was able to identify a number of recurring visual themes across documentary filmmakers' works including: images and aesthetics of surveillance (images captured by night-vision lenses and/or thermal sensing cameras; drone footage; images of border guards watching security camera footage displayed on monitors); images of trash and material waste; and images of decaying buildings and makeshift camps. As I continue forward with my dissertation, I plan to trace how these aesthetics are variously deployed to shape media narratives about the Balkan Route and migration across Eastern Europe toward Western Europe.

One research question I plan to expand upon after completing my research stay at OSA is to consider how the Balkan Route is framed through the aesthetics of waste and disposability. Through a relational analysis of media representations of Yugoslav refugees in the 1990s and contemporary media representations of refugees crossing the Balkan Route, I aim to trace the evolution of the figural refugee as living waste—construed and deployed in political and popular media discourses as an invasive figure and potential terrorist threat that must be contained and disposed of before reaching the West. I also intend to consider how migrants/refugees speak back and resist total erasure by examining how the material waste they leave behind is appropriated in works of art. Films like *Afghan Jungle* appropriate the visual aesthetics of waste to draw attention to how migrants and refugees are dehumanized and abused by various state powers, and to attempt to create empathy between viewers and the subjects depicted in the film. By tracing the aesthetics of waste in documentary media, I aim to make visible how the Balkan Route mediates Eastern Europe and the greater Middle East's respective relationships to Euro-

American imperialism and European values, and how these values and relationships are contested and re-mediated again through the visual representation of material waste found along the Balkan Route.

Another exciting object that I gained access to during my research stay was OSA's new archival research tool, *Refugee DocsMap.* This tool is still in the process of being built; however, in its current form, it allows users to search OSA's film holdings for films focusing on migration and displacement via an interactive map. *Refugee DocsMap* not only allows users to quickly search through OSA's film holdings and access relevant catalog information and film trailers (where available), it also allows users to enter Google's "street view" in various locations. This makes the archival search tool an interesting object of study, as it holds to potential to evolve into a kind of interactive documentary itself.

My project ultimately aims to track how the Balkan Route becomes a site of mediation for, and is itself produced through, the contemporary migrant/refugee crisis. Centering the Balkan Route as a site of mediation for various competing visualities and scalar narratives is necessary in order to better understand the parallels and tensions between postsocialist and postcolonial subjects both marked as ideologically threatening and unassimilable to western societies by the Cold War and the War on Terror. If, as Lisa Parks argues, "mediation involves demonstrating, putting forward, or bringing to life as much as it involves representing or depicting something that has already occurred,"[2] assessing the Balkan Route's role in mediating "Europe" and its self-proclaimed values, such as liberal humanism, democracy, and secular

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[2] *ibid.,* 11.

modernity, is vital to making sense of not only the unfolding refugee crisis, but also the relationship between the Cold War, Europe's post-1989 transition, and the global War on Terror.

Appendix of Sources Consulted:

Name	Call Number
Gone, Syria, Gone (dir. Jazra Khaleed, 2016)	FL 4283
In Absentia (dir. Beate Hecher, 2012)	FL 2995
In Europe's Shadow (dir. Florian Schnell, 2016)	FL 4292
In My Eyes (dir. Raphael Schanz, 2016)	FL 4126
Non Assistance (dir. Frederic Choffat, 2016)	FL 4332
Four Passports (dir. Mihajlo Jevtic, 2016)	FL 4273
It's Not Only Trash But Research (dir. David Kresalek, 2015)	FL 4300
My Own Private War (Lidija Zelovic, 2015)	FL 4133
Croatia E(n)d-en On Earth (dir. Oliver Sertic, 2006)	FL 1286
Leaving Greece (dir. Ana Brass, 2013)	FL 3570
Island 36 (dir. Asli Osarslan, 2014)	FL 3491
Superior Orders (dir. Viktor Oszkar Nagy and Andras Petrik, 2013)	FL 3197
Those (dir. Krisztina Meggyes, 2015)	FL 3926
Those Who Feel The Fire Burning (dir. Morgan Knibbe, 2014)	FL 3927
Afghan Jungle (dir. Tolnai Szabolcs, 2015)	FL 3876
Minor Border (dir. Lisbeth Kovacic, 2014)	FL 3906
A Kosovo Fairytale (dir. Mark Middlewick, 2009)	FL 2480
Respire (dir. Harun Farocki, 2007)	FL 1536
Caught Between Two Worlds (Viktor Oszkar Nagy, 2010)	FL 2682
Houses (dir. Ferenc Szanto, 1996)	FL 0497

Name	Call Number
If I Want to Volunteer, This is the Best Place (dir. David Kresalek, 2015)	FL 4291
Presencing - Belehelyezkedni az Ottletbe (dir. Hanna Eichner, 2015)	FL 4029
Ghetto 59 (dir. Ines Tanovic, 2014)	FL 3397
The Eye of the Needle (dir. Jonas Soderqvist, 2005)	FL 1167
War Kids (dir. Todd Waller, 1999)	FL 1621
Iron (dir. Benjamin Kahlmeyer, 2015)	FL 4297
Fearful Arrival (dir. Pary El-Qalqili, 2008)	FL 2116
A Minister Backtracks (dir. Ulrick Holmstrup, 2000)	FL 0936
Bunkers (dir. Anne-Claire Adet, 2015)	FL 4118
Document: Hoyerswerda / Frontex (dir. Thomas Kaske, 2014)	FL 3883
Gzim Rewind (dir. Knutte Wester, 2012)	FL 3243
Model House (dir. Goran Radovanovic, 2001)	FL 2503
My Promised Land (dir. Jonas Soderqvis and Oskar Sjodin, 2008)	FL 2045
The Zagreb Fair (dir. Nenad Puhovski, 2002)	FL 0866
Fortress Europe (Zelimir Zilnik, 2001)	FL 2609
Logbook Serbistan (Zelimir Zilnik, 2015)	FL 3903