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Exploring/Inventing East-European Noir. An Attempt to Modelling Historical Transformation

Abstract: The essay proposes a common spectrum of noir detective fictions emerging in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc. Accordingly, it substantiates the assumption that similar political, social, cultural, economic threats and opportunities contributed to the preservation of a certain air de famille among the genre productions of the countries of the area even after the fall of Communism. The common Communist heritage of genre fiction, cinema, and television is synthesised in three main categories: Cold War "noir" and Socialist "grey", alternative noir, and popular noir. The crime & detection dimensions of the EU phase of the evolution of East-European countries are equally organised in three clusters, called retrospective noir, introspective noir, and prospective noir.

Keywords: East-Europe; Eastern Europe; Central Europe; Central and Eastern Europe; Communist Detective Fiction; Post-Communism; Area Noir.

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1. The Regional Shades of Noir

Over the last decades, the noir genre has proved to be one of the most powerful catalysts of the processes of geo-cultural regionalization. The flagship of this process of drawing or redrawing symbolic fictional charts is epitomized in the global success of the "Nordic Noir" brand. The association of the two terms speaks volumes about the convoluted co-evolution of geographical and fictional imagination. On the one side, the North is a magnet of different symbolisms, from the most archaic, or archetypal, closely associated with the most Wagnerian layers of the European collective imagination (and not only), to the intense suggestions of rational cooperation and physical and moral cleanness that construe the Scandinavian world as one of the main repositories, if not embodiments, of the promises of utopian modernity.[1]

At the same time, it has been assumed and demonstrated through applied research that the emergence of this cultural brand was not purely spontaneous, was not simply a "natural" convergence of social, economic, and imaginary factors, but that

it entailed the expertise and the coordinated funding policies of an organization such as the Nordic Council.[2] A fact which illuminates the complex interplay between different stakes such as identity building/branding; economic cooperation (in the field of creative industries, seminal to what some theoreticians perceive as the rise of a whole new global creative economy[3]); and, last but not least, regional security policies. It is highly relevant that the symbolism of the North exposes a cultural solidarity among the countries in the area that transcends the conventional boundaries of the economic and security international organizations. The label covers both EU (Sweden, Denmark, Finland), and non-EU countries being part of the so-called European Trading Agreement (Norway, Iceland), and both NATO countries like Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, and countries, such as Sweden and Finland, that traditionally presented themselves as neutral until the recent Russian aggression against Ukraine, which determined a dramatic resetting of their options.

But this political-cultural Northern arabesque is itself interspersed with the complex fictional meanings of *noir*. While the multi-layered innuendos and references of the "Nordic" semantic compound has been attentively and competently explored,[4] the equivalent and concomitant complexity of the genre modifier was far less investigated. The *noir* compound encapsulates, not only by means of suggestions, but also by explicit references or direct quotations, a whole history of literary and filmic means of expression, from the French discovery and original reworking of the poetics of American hardboiled novels and films of the 1930s through 1940s, to

the different neo-noir waves of the 1970s, and since – with their strange bland of radical progressivism and radical pessimism concocting an aesthetics of underground anarchy.[5] The new power of absorption of the *noir* modifier does not manifest itself only on the vertical axis of history. The term seems equally well-endowed to congregate suggestions and narrative features that render inoperative the classical distinction between the investigative fiction proper, and the *noir* focused mainly on decadent criminal transgressions.[6] At its end, *Nordic* functions not only as a geographical-thematic, but as an aesthetic-formal modifier such as "neo" or "post," in addressing a flexible network and miscegenation of tendencies, including subgenres such as: "damaged detective" fiction, hardboiled, murder mystery, psychological thriller, crime fiction (and non-fiction), historical murder mystery.

The upsurge of the Nordic noir, with the impression of regional cohesiveness and expressive coherence that it generated, at least from a distance, set in motion a whole range of emulative or challenging responses, the most visible, if not articulate of which is, probably, the "Mediterranean noir". The interesting thing about it is that it didn't originate through the institutional networks and policy and market mechanisms which produced Nordic Noir, but that the notion, and the popular charisma surrounding it, is due to a sort of grassroots emergence. Actually the most articulate expression of a notion of Mediterranean noir comes from an essay of Jean-Claude Izzo, who was at the same time one of the staunchest promoters of French regional crime fiction with detective stories set in the distinct human and geographical

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landscape of Marseille.[7] It is important to note Izzo's subtle oscillation between his literary province of affinity and election, his *terroir*, to use the suited French notion, and a vision of *noir* that would extend not only to other romance languages and authors (Italian and Spanish for the most), but also to Greece, and last but not least to the African coast of the Mediterranean, to the area that the French call Maghreb. It is typical for the emerging notions of area *noir* to bring together a sense of encompassing multiculturalism with the flavours (down to the sensory experience of, say local cuisine) of a very specific "aboriginal" place.[8] Another feature of this Euro-regional resurrection of the *noir*, clearly visible also in its Mediterranean variety, is the symbiotic relation not only between literature and film, which is largely characteristic also of the preceding waves of the genre, but between literature and television, more precisely between the serial crime novel and the television series, and even more specifically by the small, or limited series (as tested also in the case of the work of Izzo, whose *commissaire* Fabio Montale has been impersonated in 2002, in a three episodes miniseries, by Alain Delon).

It is against this background that I will try to weigh the conditions of possibility and the chances of emergence of East-European *noir*. Obviously this area cannot count on the support of integrated funding policies, as it is especially the case of the Scandinavian world, neither on a pre-existent articulated unifying mythology, as it is the case with both its Northern and Southern counterparts. The consistency of an area that was construed as a unit in a negative manner, by means of Soviet occupation and oppression, and that was perceived from the outside as a land of grim hopelessness should be highly disputable. Nevertheless, it seems that precisely this Cold War past overridden with fear, frustration and sombre uncertainties, might become (and even might have been, for all that matters) the hotbed for the emergence of a distinct species of *noir*.

2. The Elusive East-/Eastern Europe

Geographically, Europe is an elusive continent, if a continent at all. You just have to look for it on the map: while all "normal" continents are clearly defined by their water borders, Europe has a massive and rather ambiguous land interface with what we use to call "Asia." Therefore, Europe has always been first of all a cultural concept, not a geographical one, and fluctuated continuously according to the point of view of those who defined it. What is true of Europe as a whole, is even more so of Eastern Europe.

The notion "Eastern Europe" originated in the 18th century, when the Western part of the continent, supposedly humane and enlightened, pitted itself against its indefinite Eastern counterpart, prone to superstition and tyranny. The Romanian historian Constantin Iordachi notes:

> The cold war, with its iron curtain metaphor, has triggered the most recent perceptions of Eastern Europe as different from the rest of the continent. Nevertheless, the history of the otherness of Eastern Europe has been older than the post-World War II order. Responsibility for this continental divide can be traced back to the

thinkers of the French Enlightenment who wrote about Eastern European otherness in their attempts to construct "the modern Western identity."[9]

In time this mental divide became weaker and weaker and by the turn of the 20th century the Western and Eastern parts of Europe seemed to concord in point of institutions and cultural legacy. This process was disrupted by the two world wars, at the end of which a new "Eastern Europe" emerged. This time, the notion designated the European countries dominated by the Soviet Union. This new geo-political design included the Baltic area (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), East-Central Europe (East-Germany, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia), and the South-Eastern Europe (Romania, Bulgaria, and, with a special status, since they were not directly subjected to Soviet military control, Yugoslavia and Albania).

The East-West relations are one of the most obvious areas where the European identity seems to be a clearly unfinished business. Since the massive EU accession of countries from the eastern part of the continent, a sense of divide between the newcomers and the 'old' Europe is being preserved at almost all imaginable levels of interaction (economic, political, social, journalistic, academic etc.). Even the Federal Republic of Germany, where the integration efforts of the former German Democratic Republic have been massive and generously sponsored, society seems not to have turned into a completely functional melting pot.

But generally all these assumptions are grounded in the sentiment that we know what we talk about when we talk about "Eastern Europe". In fact, the mental map of the EU inertially reproduces the pre-1989 geo-political divide between a Western and an Eastern bloc. The notion as such follows the exact contours of Soviet expansion and domination, uncritically sliding from the evidence of their common experience of Communist ideological colonization to the assumption of "natural" cultural affinities and bounds between the involved countries and peoples. This conservative vision is usually countered by the liberal view that the label "Eastern Europe" is an external imposition with which the Europeans from the eastern part of the Union are far from being comfortable since it recalls not only the recent history of Soviet domination, but also a deeper history of subjection to imperial powers.

The question of the differences between the two sides of the European continent (and Union, for that matter), presumed as persistently divided by their different Cold War legacies, doesn't go unchallenged from both the Western and Eastern perspectives. In a 2019 study, Stefan Lehne, a German senior fellow of the Carnegie Europe foundation, states that:

> Many of the claims about the EU's East-West divide do not stand up to closer inspection. Much of the divide exists more in political rhetoric, newspaper columns, and think tank articles than in concrete EU policy. This does not mean that the problem should be taken lightly. Even if the divide is more psychological than substantive, it nonetheless affects the relationship between older and newer member states and has an impact on policy decisions.[10]

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This attitude is, as expected, far more common among scholars with Estern European origins.

Within the same debate organised by Carnegie Europe, the position of Lehne is seconded by the Slovak politician Tomáš Valášek, in robust terms such as the following:

> There is little evidence of a "conservative East" and "liberal West." In reality, attitudes toward religion, divorce, and abortion paint a mixed picture. Latvia and Estonia are among the European nations least defined by religion, while Greece is second only to Poland in opposing abortion (which remains illegal in Malta). [...] This is not to say that generalizations and myths are unique to the relationship between the East and the West. A popular French quip before Spain's accession to the EU held that "Africa starts at the Pyrenees." And disagreements between Europe's North and South during the 2010–2011 euro crisis generated a fair deal of venom, which could easily return if the economic crisis deepens.[11]

At the semantic level, there is also an obvious tendency in producing new, and allegedly more politically correct denominations, such as: Central Europe (mainly with respect to the so-called Visegrad countries), East-Central Europe, East-Europe, eastern European (with an apparently less infamous small "e"), Central and Eastern Europe.[12]

All this foggy imaginary and terminology shows a profound indecision between two perspectives on the notion and collective memory of Eastern Europe. On the one hand, one that sees it as the artificial lumping together, initially through the pressure of Communist imperialism, later on as a consequence of the dismissive arrogance of Western Europe, or the lack of cultural sensitivity of European bureaucracy, of nations or cultural regions quite different from one another.[13] On the other hand, an area knit together by what the Germans call "Ostalgie", Eastalgia, not for Communism, but rather for the popular, alternative, and underground culture that developed in spite of the ideological grip on public life and civil society.[14]

The rejection of the denomination of Eastern Europe has to do with expert analysis of the diverse historical, economic or political analysis of the evolutions in the area.[15] Nevertheless it is strongly connected to the patchwork map of mutual prejudices characteristic of the whole area. With respect to this, noted Polish sociologist Aleksander Gella premonitory reminded, at the very beginning of the epoch of transformations meant to overcome the homogenizing legacy of the Soviet domination:

> There were several instances of growing animosities and negative stereotypes among those nations. Since 1620, when the Czechs lost their in-dependence and their nobility was extinguished, both Hungarian and Polish nobility had treated the Czechs and the Slovaks as only an anonymous mass of peasantry. Hungarians had looked down on all Slavs, including Poles who had their country mined, and lost their independence. Romanians in the eyes of Hungarians and Poles represented an artificially created nation. Czechs, as soon as their middle class became richer than its

counterparts in Poland and Hungary, expressed their contempt for snobism and the tradition of nobility in neighboring countries. Thus, each nation in this region had one or another feeling of contempt for each other.[16]

At the same time, a sense of cultural affinity and/or historical co-evolution, nurtured from the above mentioned memory of a common, overt or covert, subversion of Soviet ideological colonialism, is still perceivable in the impetus behind the emergence of different forms of regional coalescence. The most well-known initiative of this kind is the Visegrád Group, which was founded in 1991 and reunited Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. After the 1993 secession of Slovakia, the group morphed to a quadripartite structure. While it is presumable that the Visegrád Group is as congregational as it is divisive, since it not only enhances regional cooperation, but also implicitly advocates for an advancement in structural development, if not for a form of cultural superiority of "Central Europe," other initiatives, especially on the lines of security and defence policies, stretch much further the limits of regional cooperation. It is the case of multilateral formats such as the Bucharest Nine – B9, the Three-Seas Initiative – 3SI, the Lublin Triangle, or the Poland-Ukraine-UK trialogue.[17]

In the following I propose that the study of the specific forms of manifestation of *noir* fiction in this geographical area could contribute to an evaluation of the extant and the limits of what could be called an East-European symbolic cohesion. I will operate with an extended understanding of fiction, based on the extended understanding of the textual narrative that includes not only literature, but also (and, in this case, mainly) cinematic/televisual forms of expression. The weight of these elements will vary according to the epochs that I survey: cinema and literature will be on the forefront when analysing the origins of the phenomenon in the Communist epoch, while television, and especially television series will reverse the balance when dealing with the post-Communist evolutions of what could be termed as "East-European" *noir*. This shift of balance is due, on the one hand, to the nature of ideological control of Communist regimes, which watched television with an even closer eye than literature and cinema, therefore allowing for the latter a wider liberty in both form and content; and on the other hand, on the huge impact of public and private television after the fall of Communism, a prominence consolidated by the technological and distributional revolutions of VoD platforms of the 2000s.[18]

It should be added that the incursion in East-European territories might also be relevant for illuminating a dimension of the *noir*, central to all its local and regional manifestations, even if not theorized as such. Since its dawn, the noir genre was connected to utopian visions – even if in an oblique and antiphrastic manner. Its structural pessimism combined with its sense of poetic justice both amended the aspiration, and perpetuated the nostalgia of a just society. This theme is clearly perceptible in the Nordic and Mediterranean Noir. Nordic Noir is directly nurtured from the tension between the global perception of Scandinavian welfare state as utopia came through, and the dire pressures and contradictions of the last decades.[19] Mediterranean Noir bears the marks of its origins

in the neo-noir and the neo-polar of the 1970s, born, in most of the Euro-Mediterranean "West" (France, Italy, Spain) from the failure of and nostalgia for the 1968 revolutionary prospects.[20]

The East-European fate of the noir and noir-compatible fiction confirms this twining of the genre with utopianism, but from a totally different angle, unfamiliar to the West-European cast of mind. The noir elements of the Communist era expose a whole spectrum of mediations between ideological orthodoxy (which is to say residual, institutionalized utopianism) and the need for entertainment and of a sense of personal freedom. The emergence of the noir after 1989 tells an opposite story: not of tactical, more often than not cunning adaptation to a hostile utopian environment, but of a large variety of attempts of absorbing in artistic and moral terms of lucidity and plausibility the utopian core of the project of a united Europe.

In the following, I will propose a model of the evolution of noir and noir-compatible forms of popular art that originates within specific conditions of a cultural production subjected to an overall Marxian-Leninist or nationalist-Communist ideological monitoring, and ends up with efforts of adapting to the sophistication of contemporary cultural markets and to the challenges of European integration.

3. Noir in Communist Eastern Europe: What Made It Possible?

Countries with different histories and cultures were brought under the homogenizing pressures of the Soviet model of totalitarianism. Accordingly, across what was then called the "Communist camp," the *noir* genre, in cinema, television, and literature, bore the marks of the same type of ideological control. The manners in which the creators coded and the audiences decoded these genre productions manifested a strong family resemblance everywhere on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain that divided Europe. In this part of the present inquiry, I will explore the antecedents and affinities, in terms of the presence of elements of the *noir* genre, which set the premises for the contemporary East-European Noir. The survey will cover three perspectives on the emergence and evolution of noir-compatible film and television series in pre-1989 Eastern Europe:

COLD WAR "NOIR" AND SOCIALIST "GREY" – discusses the negotiations between the noir genre and the official Communist ideology;

ALTERNATIVE NOIR – exemplifies the ways in which filmmakers engaged in subverting the ideological control over the arts reshuffled elements of the noir genre;

POPULAR NOIR – focuses on the elements of the noir genre that permeated the entertainment industry of the Socialist countries and took roots in the popular cultures of the region.

3.1. Cold War "Noir" and Socialist "Grey"

Classical Soviet propaganda movies such as Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) closely reminded the film noir. The aesthetics of black and white cinema was seen as instrumental for the Communist vision of history as class struggle.[21] It served to advocate socialist egalitarianism by opposing it to the reversed image of cynical and exploitative capitalism.[22]

After World War II, this filmic language based on sharp contrasts was extended to an Eastern Europe now dominated by the Soviet Union.[23] But irrespective of their ideological commitment, spy fictions trained East European publics in decoding the rhetoric of noir movies. This process is suggested by the following comment of film critic Tudor Caranfil on the Romanian genre movie *The Secret of the Cypher/Secretul cifrului* (1960), based on the novel *A Star Will Fall at Midnight/La miezul nopții va cădea o stea* (1957), by the propaganda author Theodor Constantin, and directed by Lucian Bratu (incidentally or not, an alumnus of the Moscow Unional Institute for Cinematography):

> The mystery is amplified by the chiaroscuro, by the anguishing spots of light that break the darkness even in the innermost of the feudal castle, full of traps and of shadows on the walls skilfully captured by the camera.[24]

This visual language resonates with historical Expressionism, which used powerful contrasts and ingenious lighting techniques in order to codify intense opposite passions. Generally, the epitome of Socialist spy fiction was the Soviet production *Seventeen Moments of Spring/Semnadtsat' mgnoveniy vesny* (1973), based on the novels of the highly controversial journalist Yulian Semionov[25] and directed by Tatyana Lioznova. The series followed the infiltration of a heroic Soviet spy, iconically impersonated by Vyacheslav Tikhonov, into the highest ranks of the Nazi party and the German military.[26] But, in fact, the Soviet production was preceded by the very similar Polish spy series *Stawka*

większa niż życie/More than Life at Stake (14 episodes, 1968-1970).[27] Also Bulgarian fictional counterespionage enjoyed a certain international opening, if not actual success, with Avakoum (or Habakuk, in Western appropriations) Zhakov, the character created by author Andrei Gulyashki in 1959, who even defies and eliminates a James Bond who, in the title of the respective novel, *Avakoum Zakhov vs. 07*, lost the first 0 of his secret indicative 007 because of copyright laws.[28]

The filmic representation of crime as such evolved with great difficulty in the Socialist camp. "Militia" narratives (called so because in Communist countries the bourgeois "police" was replaced with allegedly popular "militias") constantly hit against the problem of alluding to crime-generating circumstances in a society from which, according to the state propaganda, economic exploitation, the quintessential source of moral decay, had been uprooted. After the death of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, this tyrannical idealism was somewhat tailored to everyday reality, and the public acknowledgement of the existence of "non-antagonistic" contradictions inherent to "Socialist reality" made possible the emergence of crime, as different from espionage fiction.[29]

The classic Cold War *noir* evolved into what we could call the Socialist *gris*. The notion of *film gris* was used by Thom Andersen for Hollywood movies of the 1950s with a strong leftist agenda, on account of their "depressing" effect,[30] and the notion could be usefully adapted to what Bulgarian critic Vladimir Trendafilov calls "Sotscrime",[31] the crime narratives of the phase of self-assured national Communist governments in Eastern Europe. In their

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case, "grey" should point to a limited but obvious overcoming of the black and white moral philosophy of Stalinist noir, translated in characters with more complex motivations and psychologies; but also, and in spite of the previous, the preservation of a certain moralistic narrative "greyness."[32]

This is how a population of public force detectives, with barely a personal life, welding parochial common-sense with Socialist official ethos, took over Eastern European television programs.[33] Particularly morose, but uncommonly enduring was the series *Police: Dial 110/Polizeiruf 110*, produced in the German Democratic Republic from 1971 until 1989.[34] On Czeckoslovak television crime fiction was iconically illustrated by the series *30 Cases of Major Zeman/30 případů majora Zemana*, running between 1974 and 1979, produced by the Central Editorial Office of the Army, Security and Defence of the Czechoslovak Television.[35] The series was notorious for presenting the massively persecuted dissent movement that emerged after the 1968 Soviet military crush of the reform experiments known as the "Prague Spring" from the smearing perspective of the official propaganda.[36] More humane, but still strictly confined to the official ideological canon, was the Polish counterpart of Major Zeman – the Captain Tomasz The Owl Sowa, from the 1965 series *Captain Sowa on the Trail/ Kapitan Sowa na tropie*. In later years it was revealed that the series, though intended to run for more than 40 episodes, ended after the first season of eight because the lead actor, Michał Szewczyk, refused to go on with scripts that in his view were completely lacking in credibility and dramatic skills. This appears to be the only recorded case of an East-European thespian to overtly raise moral and aesthetic objections against a filmic or televisual production in which he or she was directly involved.[37]

3.2. Alternative Noir

When pressured to the extreme by the official ideology, East-European literary authors could resort to the *samizdat*. The notion, which in Polish literally means "self-publication," referred to the multiplication and distribution of texts through improvised means considered illegal under the Communist law.[38] But this escape was hardly available to filmmakers, who could not access the necessary infrastructure and resources outside the state-controlled institutional frames. Nevertheless, they attempted to circumvent ideological orthodoxy, both by approaching sensitive topics, and by employing unconventional means of expression. An alternative culture emerge in this way, which articulated an overt or covert discourse of social criticism sometimes employing elements commonly associated with *noir* narratives.[39] Since the sphere of film and television fiction was under a tight scrutiny, it is not surprising that some of the most interesting experiments with these expressive means are to be found in non-fiction, documentary films.

Apparently, the noir universe was closely associated with documentary aesthetics since its very emergence.[40] Considering classical American noir productions such as *He Walked By Night* and *The Naked City*, both made in 1948, Jason Mittell points to a number of striking affinities with true crime non-fiction films contemporary to them: on-location shooting,

urban crime narration, shadowy black-and-white photography, and a commitment to gritty realism.[41]

If Mittell calls the above mentioned variety of *noir* movies "semi-documentaries," the Yugoslav and Polish so-called "Black Waves" of the 1950s and 1960s tended, conversely, to make documentaries "semi-fictional". They progressively integrated epic nuclei, convoluted characters, the off-screen narrative voice, dramatic filmic cuts, and even the "dark" topics of classical noir.[42] In order to have an idea of the approach of the historical Black Wave, let's follow the description made by Norwegian scholar Bjørn Sørenssen of a suggestive fragment of the famous 1957 documentary *Article Zero/Paragraf Zero* by Polish director Włodzimierz Borowik:

> A dramatized scene of the murder of a prostitute follows as an introduction to an explanation of the only way the police can act on prostitutes and pimps – the crime functions as a pretext for a raid on the hotels, cafes, and streets, and the suspects are brought in.[43]

According to Sanja Lazarević Radak, such elements are to be found also in the fiction films of the Yugoslav Black Wave, for instance when approaching the topic – highly sensitive from the perspective of Socialist ideology – of homosexuality.[44] The Serbian film historian rests her case on experimental productions such as *The Rats Woke Up/ Budjenje pacova* (dir. Živojin Pavlović, 1967), *Plastic Jesus* (Lazar Stojanović, 1971), *WR: Mysteries of Organism/ W.R. - Misterije organizma* (dir. Dušan Makavejev, 1971).

The radical neo-realist agenda and language of the "Black Waves" of the 1960s

was rediscovered by the "new waves" of the post-Communist epoch, in Hungary, Romania, or Estonia.[45] The first post-Communist generation of East-European directors recycled expressive and expositive means that directly or indirectly celebrated the heritage of the historical Black Waves film-makers.[46]

3.3. Popular Noir

Even if the level of ideological orthodoxy varied among the ruling Communist parties of Eastern Europe, most of them experimented at some point with limited forms of market economy.

One of the consequences of this pseudo-liberalism was the toleration, if not active promotion, of commercial fiction, cinema, and television. The main supplier of commercial popular culture was, inescapably, the "capitalist" West.[47] The former Yugoslav Federation was especially open to importing Western popular culture (a phenomenon Serbian scholar Radina Vučetić termed "Coca-Cola Socialism"[48]). But Western, and especially US, television series were broadcasted by national public televisions almost all over Eastern Europe.

Under the direct influence of the West, the Communist countries also aspired to produce their own version of crime fiction. Popular reception generally mocked the ideological stereotypes meant to sooth the suspicions of the political supervisors, while genuinely enjoying the thrill, mystery, and suspense of such cultural commodities.[49] Accordingly,

> detective films could at once serve state purposes – by demonizing criminality and associating it with the corrupt

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capitalist West – and also undermine the official morality promoted by the socialist state, by depicting an underground world that was not supposed to exist at all under socialism.[50]

In order to reduce the ideological pretext to a minimum, Socialist filmmakers could adopt one of the following strategies:

a) to place the plot in a historical context safely distanced from the Communist takeover. Such examples would be the Czech crime mystery *Dissolved and Let Out/Rozpuštěný a vypuštěný* (1984), set at the turn of the 20th century[51]; or the series of movies displaying the adventures of Commissioner Moldovan, a detective of the pre-Communist Royal Romanian Police, investigating in the early 1940s, at a time when the country was collapsing into Fascism (1972, 1974, 1978, 1981). The character and the period atmosphere of these films were obviously inspired by the American series *The Untouchables* (1959-1963), widely popular in Romania at that time.

b) to place the plot in a Western country.[52] An early example of this is the Romanian 1962 production *The Famous 702/Celebrul 702*, based on a theatre play by Alexandru Mirodan: a dark satire with anticapitalist propaganda overtones with a completely US setting. Another version of this strategy was the parody of Western crime fiction. Let's take, for instance, the 'Hungarian Piedone', which naturalized the character notoriously impersonated by Italian swimmer turned actor Bud Spencer (1980, 1982, 1986). My personal all times favourite of this species is a parody of the cult figure of the New York police detective Theo Kojak in *Kojak in Budapest/ Kojak Budapesten* (1980, dir. Sándor Szalkay),

which "reveals" that the famous character was not Greek-American, but born Hungarian, as "Kócsag János".[53]

There was also the possibility of directly adapting works of crime authors from the Western world. An impressive example of this kind is the long romance between the Czechoslovak television, later on Czech and Slovak televisions, and the work of Patrick Quentin (a collective pen name reuniting four American authors). Between 1968 and 2003 this special relationship resulted in no less than seven TV adaptations, all preserving the American setting of the original novels.[54] Another interesting case is the one of Latvian director Aloizs Brenčs, who "might have been influenced by the genre conventions of the 1930s American crime films" and "popularized the American detective writer James Chase to the Soviet audience with the three-part made-for-TV series *Mirage* (1983) based on Chase's novel *The World in My Pocket* (1959)."[55]

c) to combine the historical setting and the Western system of references, as is the case of the Czech comedy *Adela Hasn't Had Supper Yet/Adéla ještě nevečeřela* (1978), a parody of classical detective fiction placing the American private eye Nick Carter (invented in 1886 by Ormond G. Smith) in the mock-noir context of early 1900s Prague. By the way, the eponymous Adela is not a young lady, but a huge carnivorous (actually men-eating) plant.[56]

True crime TV shows offer another great example of popular culture swallowing and digesting an ideological-pedagogical format. In Czechoslovakia, such programs existed since the early 1960s, and were also introduced in Poland in the 1980s. But the textbook case is the

Hungarian program *Bluelight/Kékfény*, hosted form 1964 through 1989 on the public television by charismatic crime journalist László Szabó. The huge popularity of this monthly show was most certainly due to its detachment from official pedagogical goals. A 1969 article that appeared in the *Radio and TV Guide* of the Hungarian public television contained the following mission statement:

"Real crime is always different from crime borne out of someone's imagination. We, the creators of *Blue Light*, are convinced that there is nothing more exciting and fantasy-filled than real life, even if that life takes place in the underworld".[57]

In other Eastern European countries, true crime programs were introduced only after the radical political turn of 1989. In contemporary Romania, for instance, no domestically produced crime fiction could match in longevity and impact the true crime program *The Investigations of Commissioner Antonescu/Anchetele comisarului Antonescu* (2015-). The show incorporates re-enactments of actual murders closely reminding the classical noir techniques, thereby replicating, consciously or not, the recipe that made the historical success of the Hungarian *Bluelight*.

4. Born Again Noir in East-European Post-Communism

Through the 1980s the Soviet domination over Eastern Europe began to falter. On the one hand, there were the drastic shortage of consumer goods and the Communist monopoly of power. The frustration with these circumstances boiled over, especially in Poland, with the strikes coordinated by the free trade union

Solidarność, "Solidarity." On the other hand, the politics of "restructuration", *Perestroika*, and "transparency", *Glasnost'*, initiated by the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbatchëv, created the perspective of economic and political reforms.

The fall of the Berlin wall on 9 November 1989 marked the beginning of the end for the military and ideological partition of Europe. Soon after, the so-called German Democratic Republic was reunited with the Federal Republic of Germany. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia acceded to the European Union in 2004, followed by Bulgaria and Romania, in 2007. Croatia joined in 2013. But these inspiring evolutions were parallel by tragic ones: the dismemberment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992) caused a decade of ethnic wars (1991-2001) that brought to mind the crimes against humanity of WWII.

As far as noir thrillers and mysteries are concerned, critics in most of the region's countries noted a post-Communist revival of the genre, with its multiple varieties.[58] There were some attempts of advertising an East European noir on the model of the Scandinavian success story, but, to this day, they were rather marginal, and lacked the support of something similar to the Nordic regional cooperation, being almost exclusively focused on Polish examples.[59] However, in the second part of our survey, we will explore the imprint on noir film and television of the conflicting evolutions of the post-Communist era. Our inquiry will take into account the way in which contemporary East-European noir address the three temporal axes, past, present, and future. Accordingly, it could be distilled into:

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RETROSPECTIVE NOIR – fictions that tackle those aspects of the regional history whose exploration, and even mention, was prohibited under the Communist censorship;

INTROSPECTIVE NOIR – fictions that hold a mirror in front of post-Communist societies, exposing their conflicts and failures, while concomitantly aspiring to support their democratic reconstruction;

PROSPECTIVE NOIR – fictions that explore and assert a new, fully European, identity of Eastern Europe.

4.1. Retrospective Noir

Dealing with the ghosts of the past is a main concern for Eastern European cinema and television. Crime formats, as well as neo-noir aesthetics, seem particularly fit to approach the dark side of national and regional memories.[60] Filmmakers realized that the consolidation of the democratic spirit of the post 1989-era called for a serious examination of threats coming not only from the persistence of totalitarian mental habits. The resurrection of an unrepentant pre-Communist extreme nationalism had also to be carefully considered.

The self-aggrandizing rhetoric of Communist propaganda generally presented local Fascisms in quasi-mythological terms, and reduced them to simple reflexes of German Nazism. The official populist and nationalist rhetoric of Communist regimes, on the one hand, and the hardships of everyday life in a regime of repression and radical economic austerity, on the other stimulated Eastern European peoples to see themselves exclusively as victims and martyrs. This more often than not obnubilated a past when the ethnic majorities of the region marginalized and repressed with impunity Jewish or Roma minorities

The rising tide of right- and left-wing extremism in pre-WWII Yugoslavia is rendered, in terms highly relevant for the entire Eastern Europe of that era, in the Serbian crime period series *Balkan Shadows/Senke nad Balkanom* (2017-). Another example of period noir that passes judgements on history valid for the whole regional context is the Hungarian production *Budapest Noir* (2017). Based on the first of the like-titled series of novels by Vilmos Kondor, the film evokes, starting from the fictional 1936 killing of a Jewish young woman, the birth of vicious anti-Semitic fantasies that, far from being restricted to Hungary, were to plague many other parts of Eastern Europe. In a similar vein, the movie *A Grain of Truth* (2015), based on a novel by acclaimed author Zygmunt Miłoszewski, ponders on the effects of the toxic influence of pre-WWII anti-Semitism on Polish contemporary society. But the most complex and notorious Polish example of dealing with a past ridden by ethnic tensions (given its circulation through numerous translations) is offered by the historical crime fiction of Marek Krajewski, hereby presented in a nutshell by Sebastian Chosiński:

> Krajewski made Wrocław the place of action for his novels, or rather - Breslau, because his books tell about the times when the capital of Upper Silesia was within the territorial borders of the Weimar Republic and then the Third Reich. Similar attempts were made with us in the 1980s, but not in

literature, but in film. It is worth mentioning the excellent horror of Jacek Koprowicz "Medium" or the funny series of Paweł Pitera "Na trouble ... Bednarski", whose action was placed in the Free City of Gdansk at a time when the Nazis took over. Was Krajewski inspired by these films? It seems very likely, although it would be rather difficult to find in Eberhard Mock similarities to the inspector Selin from "Medium" played by Władysław Kowalski […]. He is much closer to the heroes of the American black detective story, which, moreover, is difficult to consider as an accusation.[61]

Noir and heist formats are also employed for revealing the sham justice system of the Stalinist 1950s in the Czech movie *In the Shadow* ([2012](#)) and the Romanian-American *Closer to the Moon* (2014). Two other films, the Polish *I'm a Killer/ Jestem morderca* (2016) and the Hungarian *Strangled/A martfűi rém* (2016) deal with the paradoxes of trying to catch serial killers in Socialist states that obstinately refused to acknowledge the very possibility of their existence.

The World Turned on Its Head/ Svět pod hlavou (Czech Republic, 2016) looks at the Communist 1980s from a highly unusual angle. The Czech series combines police drama with science-fiction in a remake of the BBC hit *Life on Mars*. The plot of the British series – a young contemporary police detective inexplicably transported to the 1970s – gives the Czech adaptation the opportunity to explore the clash of Communist and the post-Communist mentalities. A similar mixture of detective noir and Sci-Fi is masterfully put to work in

the Polish Netflix series *1983* (2018). This year becomes the landmark of an alternative course of history, in which the Polish Communist system survived to these days through an alliance with the Catholic Church and through economic reforms ironically alluding to what, in our world, we use to call "the Chinese way."

The Romanian series *The Reluctant Detective/Detectiv fără voie* (2001), follows the Kafkaesque intersections of investigative journalist Andrei Mladin with the obscure interests of the secret police, before and after the fall of Communism. The series is written by and based on the novels of George Arion, the most celebrated Romanian author of crime fiction.

Noir formats have also been used for approaching the unification and secession processes that occurred in Eastern Europe soon after the fall of Communism. The unification of Germany was suggestively presented in television productions that joined detective teams from the Western series *Crime Scene/Tatort*, and its East-German counterpart *Dial Police: 110/Polizeiruf 110*.[62] On the segregationist side, the 1993 dissolution of Czechoslovakia inspired films such as the Czech *Red Captain/Rudý kapitán* (2016) and the Slovak *Kidnapping/ Únos* (2017). The consequences of the dismemberment of the Yugoslav Federation on the lives of real people are extensively explored in the Croatian noir series *Rest in Peace/Pocilavi v miru* (2013-2018). Disheartening memories are brought to life by the investigations of a young female journalist into the anonymous graves found in the backyard of a prison put up for demolition.

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4.2. Introspective Noir

Romanian-American political scientist Vladimir Tismaneanu wrapped up the evolutions of post-1989 Eastern Europe under the notion of "the reinvention of politics."[63] What he meant by this is the reassertion of the polis, of the political community and civic solidarity.

After 1989, crime film and television played a role in igniting the debate over values, goals, and means of collective action. The noir genre was particularly relevant in this context, with its historical record of bringing its audience to openly confront painful social conflicts and disfunctionalities. Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli captures the general atmosphere while pointing to a couple of significant achievements of the early East-European noir, interestingly contrasted in point of the representation of class and power relations to concomitant Russian productions, equally sophisticated from the purely artistic point of view:

> Numerous films from Eastern Europe visualize the transition from repressive Socialist systems to unrestrained capitalism. Some of the best examples of the emergence of capitalist criminal culture are Srđan Dragojević's *Rane* (The Wounds, 1998) Luzik's *Okraina* and Goran Paskaljević's *Bure Baruta* (Cabaret Balkan, 1998). Unlike Aleksei Balabanov's *Brat* (1997), which glamorizes violence within a moral framework, or Pavel Lungin's *Oligarkh* (Tycoon, 2002), […] *Rane* and *Bure Baruta* point to the contradiction within such representations. They illustrate how discourses of legitimacy and righteousness collapse

into an economic discourse, and how young Eastern European men, disillusioned with the failure of previous generations and accustomed to violence and corruption, are attracted to, and influenced by, mostly Western icons of machismo, organized crime, and gangsters as symbols of material wealth.[64]

Let's quickly go through some of the hottest issues on the social agenda of East-European noir, picking some telling examples on the way:

• *Unemployment, one of the main problems of the restructuring economies of the region.* The Romanian film *Too Late/Prea târziu* (1996), or the Czech HBO mini-series *Wasteland/Pustyna* (2016) use a crime plot in order to expose the social tragedy of mining areas where mines were abruptly closed.

• *Corruption of the public institutions.* The Estonian series *Alpine Cabin/Alpimaja* (2012) imagines very realistically the implication of the national government in an international scheme of sportsmen doping. *The Closed Circuit/Uklad zamkniety* (Poland 2013) and *Why me?/ De ce eu?* (Romania 2015) are two strikingly similar inquiries into the corruption of the justice system, while the Hungarian *X/eXploited* (2018) looks into the corruption of the police force. The Croatian series *Conspiracy/Urota* (2007) stages an inquiry into the assassination of a fictional Croatian prime-minister, while actually alluding to the real-life assassination of Serbian prime-minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003.

• *The emergence of extreme right hate speech and hate crimes.* The Slovakian *By a Sharp Knife/Ostrým nozom* (2019), and the

Polish *The Hater/ Sala samobójców. Hejter* (2020) treat the topic with fictional means, while the 2013 *Judgement in Hungary* documents the actual judicial proceedings against a criminal neo-Nazi group that targeted victims from the Roma minority.

• *Organized crime*. The major reference on this is the series *Undercover/Pod Prikrtie* (2011-2016) which ran for five seasons on the Bulgarian national television. While attending a remarkable European and global circulation, *Undercover* became, in its country of origin, a real social phenomenon, sparkling a fiery debate on the contacts between the local and international mafia and national politics. The Balkan drug cartels are also the hot spot of Serbian series *Rage/Besa* (2016),[65] but also of films due to directors coming from the apparently much more peaceful and stable Slovenia, as is the case of Damjan Kozole

> in *Spare Parts* (2003), which directly addresses human trafficking and the question of borders in the New Europe, and in *Slovenian Girl*, which tackles the question of prostitution within the setting of the capital, Ljubljana in 2008 (the year of Slovenian presidency over the European Union), with motorcades sweeping through the city and the concentrated presence of international politicians showcasing the glamor of the new Europe.[66]

Organized crime is equally the focus of three series produced by HBO Europe: *Shadows/Umbre* (Romania 2014-2019), *Golden Life/Aranyélet* (Hungary 2015-2018), and *Blinded by the Lights/Ślepnąc od świateł* (Poland 2018). The series *The Pleasure Principle* (2019), co-produced by

Poland, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine, raises the seminal question of regional cooperation (and of the tragic consequences of its absence), in effectively backfiring on the transnational scourge of human trafficking.

• *Civic solidarity – on the bright side*. The Polish series *Ultraviolet* (2017-2019) creatively uses the criminal plots in order to enhance the values of social collaboration. The investigative functions are exercised here neither by a lonely rider, nor by a police squad, but by a group of concerned citizens with perfectly ordinary lives, connected exclusively via internet.

4.3. Prospective Noir

We spoke about how East-Europeans look at their past and present through the lenses of noir fictions. Let's consider now the last temporal perspective left uncovered: the future. How do noir TV series and films partake in creating – and asserting – new East European identities on a continental and global stage?

The process begins with symbolic self-empowerment, with gaining control over one's own image in the public sphere. The European series with greater international prestige are undoubtedly the Western ones. Therefore, the most influent representations of Eastern Europe and Eastern Europeans are those circulated by Western filmmakers.

The role massively attributed to male Eastern Europeans in Western crime fictions is the one of cruel macho perpetrators. As for the feminine stereotype, the powerless and more often than not muted victim of human trafficking usually carries the day.

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The answer of East-European film-makers to West-European stereotyping is three-fold:

• by striving for complete integration through crime productions that would appear as banal-European as possible;

• by attempting to inject West European formats, such as the crime, gangster, or heist movies/series, with a distinctly local content;

• by defying not only the social and ethnic stereotypes of the Western European noir, but also its narrative conventions, in an attempt of creating original forms of quality crime fiction.

The aspiration to banal European-ness is obvious in run-of-the-mill police procedurals that closely follow the format of US, UK, French or German productions.[67] The regional champion of canonical police series seems to be the Czech public television, which, according to film critic Martin Svoboda, "literally pours one after the other, and it must be said that when looking at their viewership, this whirlwind makes sense."[68] An explicit form of will-to-integration is also to be found in the faithful remake of West European series. That would be the case of the Polish *The Crime/ Zdrobina* (2014-2015), which is a remake of the Swedish *The Sandhamn Murders* (2010-2020), or of the Romanian HBO production *The Silent Valley/Valea Mută*, that translated the plot of the Norwegian series *Eyewitness* (2014) to a Transylvanian setting.

The creative absorption of Western formats is obvious in series that begin as remakes, but then decidedly stride away from the model. Even from the first of its three seasons the Hungarian *Golden Life/ Aranyélet* (2015-2018) gave clear signs of creative independence from the Finnish

Easy Living/ Helppo elämä (2009-2011), that it was supposed to emulate. This is also the case of the Romanian *Shadows/Umbre* (2014-2019), which began as a remake of the Australian series *Small Time Gangsters* (2011) but, beginning with its second season, embarked on a totally original narrative, rooted in domestic social realities and popular culture. Significantly enough, there is at least one example of TV format that was imported by foreign producers from an East-European country: the rights for the Ukrainian series *Sniffer/ Nyukhach*, telling the story of a freelance investigator that solves crime mysteries based on his unflinching confidence in his overdeveloped sense of smell, have been sold to 11 other countries, among which France, Japan, Bulgaria, Estonia.[69]

The Polish-Czech-Ukrainian coproduction *The Pleasure Principle* (2019) takes localization to the next level and offers an original dramatization of transnational police cooperation alternative to the state of the art coverage of the topic by the famous Danish-Swedish *The Bridge* (2011-2018). The aspiration of Polish producers of opening up to the world is obvious also in their adaptations of American crime authors. This is the case of the series *Ultraviolet*, based on the non-fiction book *The Skeleton Crew: How Amateur Sleuths Are Solving America's Coldest Cases* (2014) by the American non-fiction author Deborah Halber. Another example is the Polish Netflix series *The Woods/W głębi lasu* (2020), which is an adaptation of a novel by the reputed American author Harlan Coben.

Finally, I will evoke the daring manner in which East European auteur cinema experiments with noir. One of the main representatives of the globally renowned

Romanian New Wave, Cristi Puiu, uses, and at the times intentionally misuses, noir conventions in two of his films: *Stuff and Dough/Marfa și banii* (2001) and *Aurora* (2010). Hungarian experimentalist György Pálfi gives in his 2002 film *Hiccup/Hukkle* a mind-blowing reinterpretation to the notion of "rural noir". Estonian acclaimed director and script writer Kadri Kõusaar employs different shades of noir in her crime dramedy *Mother/Ema* (2016). Internationally famous Polish director Agnieszka Holland directed the highly unusual noir movie *Spoor/Pokot* (2017), based on a novel by the 2018 Nobel laureate for literature Olga Tokarczuk. Bosnian director Denis Tanović, holder of an Academy Award for Best International Feature Film, has tried his hand at the noir genre in the highly original Croatian HBO series *Success/Uspjeh* (2019). Last but not least, I want to mention the visually fascinating Hungarian feature animation *Ruben Brandt, Collector/Ruben Brandt, a gyűjtő* (2018), directed by the Slovenian Milorad Krstić, which weaves an intricate crime plot in the world of international art theft. The mention of this film is the perfect grand finale for our survey of prospective noir: *Ruben Brandt* could be seen as the quintessential aspiration of East-European film-makers to a self-confident and un-inhibited assertion of their cosmopolitan identity.

5. Final Considerations

The noir genre is apparently associated with a depressing mood unsuitable for constructive projects. But since the times of the ancient Greece that tragedy has a significant function in shaping human solidarity. Tragedy confronts us, in the secure space of fiction, not only with identifiable threats, but also with the uncontrollable intrusions of haphazard in all aspects of our lives. The revelation of our individual vulnerability instructs us to value the support and comfort offered by our peers.

Noir formats perpetuate a sense of tragedy which, in spite of its dark atmospherics, also conveys a certain dignity. For East-European filmmakers, producing quality noir is a personal, as well as a collective challenge. Once proven, the capacity of approaching, in complex aesthetic and morals terms, seminal conflicts that can be seen as generally European, and generally human, counts as an irrefutable evidence for the complexity and dignity of East-European societies in general.

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Notes

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20. See, for instance, Lorenzo Marmo, "Italian film noir and the fragmentation of modernity. The any-space-whatevers of postwar melodrama," *Studies in European Cinema*, vol. 17 (3), 2020, p. 218-232.

21. Apart from the fact that the vocabulary of the pioneering Soviet cinema was influenced by both German Expressionism and the Hollywood hardboiled crime movies - Ian Christie, „Down to earth: Aelita relocated", in *Inside the film factory: new approaches to Russian and Soviet cinema*, edited by Ian Christie and Richard Taylor, London, Routledge, 1991; Norbert P. Franz, "Hollywood" and "Moscow", in Franz, *Hollywood – a Challenge for the Soviet Cinema: Four Essays*, Potsdam, Universitätsverlag, 2020, p. 9-30.

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28. Two of his novels were translated in English: *The Zakhov Mission*, translated by Maurice Michael, London, Cassell, 1968 and *Avakoum Zakhov vs. 07*, translator's name not mentioned, Sydney, Australia, Scripts, 1967.

29. Mira Liehm, Antonín J. Liehm, *The Most Important Art: Eastern European Film After 1945*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1977, especially Part III, "Degrees of Dissent", p. 159-272.

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31. Vladimir Trendafilov, "The Sotscrime" [in Bulgarian], *PublicRepublic* August 8, 2010, http://www.public-republic.com/magazine/2010/08/44459.php, accessed 01/15/2020.

32. However, the general picture is not as simple as that, as shown in the following commentary made by Katarina Hall with respect to the GDR crime fiction of the first half of the 1970s: "Crime fiction published in this period can appear surprisingly critical of the regime. Gert Prokop's *Einer muss die Leiche sein* (Someone has to be the corpse, 1976) features an SED Party loyalist who murders his mistress after she threatens to derail his political career. Fielitz's confession at the end of the narrative not only reveals the extreme levels of party loyalty needed to rise through the ranks, but also the advantages of being engaged to the daughter of an important party functionary. It is the fear that the engagement will be broken off, thereby terminating opportunities for travel outside the GDR, that leads Fielitz to kill. The novel was published in the wittily named 'DIE' series, established in 1970 by the Verlag Das Neue Berlin. This acronym, which stands for *Delikte-Indizien-Ermittlungen* (crimes-clues-investigations), indicates a shift in attitude: crime novels are viewed less as political-pedagogical tools and more as an accepted form of entertainment – perhaps one reason why the denouement of *Einer muss die Leiche sein* passed through the publication system uncensored." (Katarina Hall, "Crime Fiction in German: Concepts, Developments and Trends", in *Crime Fiction in German: Der Krimi*, edited by Katharina Hall, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2016, p. 16).

33. The explanation offered by Marek Haltof for the Polish emergence of crime series can be applied to the entire area: "Despite the political obstacles, there were several attempts to make genre cinema – American in form but with "socialist" overtones and messages. For example, the adaptations of "militia novels" resulted in a peculiar version of the detective genre: "militia films," frequently known as "democratic thrillers." These were popular films during the communist period that told stories about the heroes in blue uniforms – representatives of *Milicja Obywatelska* (MO), a civic militia created in 1945 in the Soviet Bloc to replace the prewar police. Several filmmakers attempted to make crime films that both imitated American models and echoed ideological messages." But unfortunately "Politics aside, the malfunctioning Polish economy proved to be another obstacle for the production of local popular genres. The colorless reality produced equally unglamorous, paltry crimes." (Marek Haltof, *Polish Cinema: A History*, the subchapter "Popular Cinema: Crime and

Militia Films", New York – Oxford, Berghahn, 2018, p. 207-210; the quotations are from pages 208, respectively 209).

34. See: Andrea Guder, "Genosse Hauptmann auf Verbrecherjagd. Die DDR-Krimi-Reihe ›Polizeiruf 110‹", *Rundfunk und Geschichte* 26/2000, p. 21-28; Ingrid Brücki, Andrea Guder, Reinhold Viehoff, Karin Wehn, *Der deutsche Fernsehkrimi. Eine Programm- und Produktionsgeschichte von den Anfängen bis heute*, Stuttgart –Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2003, the chapter "Der Krimi im Staatsfernsehen der DDR", p.15-93; Sascha Gerhards, "Tracing the STASI in the Televised German Krimi: *Tatort* and *Polizeiruf 110* Episodes as Precursors to the Post-Reunification Stasi Debate", *German Studies Review*, Volume 40, Number 3, October 2017, pp. 567-586. The convoluted strategies of finding on a weekly basis subjects that could meet both the needs of a crime series and the pedagogical impositions of the official ideology are exposed, through interviews with the creators of the DDR *Polizeiruf 110*, in two documentaries: *Lawbreakers and Comrades/Gesetzesbrecher und Genossen* (Ostdeutscher Rundfunk Brandenburg ORB, 1994) and *Polizeiruf 110 - Die Krimidokumentation* (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk MDR, 2021). It should be mentioned that the series continues to this day, produced alternatively by the televisions of the federal states in the East, each with a different team of investigators, on the model of the West-German chain of regional series *Tatort/Crime Scene*.

35. Steffen Retzlaff, *Major Zeman als Fernsehserie und in Erzählungen J. Procházkas*, München, GRIN Verlag, 2008; Petr A. Bílek, 2013, "The 30 Cases of Major Zeman: Domestication and Ideological Conversion of a James Bond Narrative in the Czech TV Serial Context of the 1970s", in *National Mythologies in Central European TV Series: How J.R. Won the Cold War*, edited by Jan Čulík, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, p. 48-67. Veronika Pehe, "Retro Reappropriations: Responses to "The Thirty Cases of Major Zeman" in the Czech Republic", *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* 3 (5), 2014, p. 100-107.

36. The same connection between crime TV shows and ministries of internal affairs existed in the USSR. Alexander Prokhorov and Iryna Prokhorova note that "important for the genre was the rise to power of Leonid Brezhnev's close associate Nikolai Shchelokov, the Minister of Internal Affairs (MVD), whom Brezhnev viewed as a counterbalance to Iurii Andropov's all-powerful KGB. Shchelokov established close relations with, and financially supported, many writers and filmmakers of crime fiction and cinema" (see the chapter "The Socialist Television Police Procedural of the 1970s and 80s: Teaching Soviet Citizens How to Behave," in their study *Film and Television Genres of the Late Soviet Era*, New York-London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017 – above quotation, at page 104). Apparently, Shchelokov was instrumental for the success of the most longlived police procedural on Soviet television, *The Investigation is Conducted by Experts* (1974-1991), whose original title is based on a pun involving the family names of police investigators: Znamenskii, Tomin, and Kibrit, which, once playfully subjected to the famous Soviet tradition of institutional acronyms, give ZnaToKi, which literally means "experts" (see Prokhorov and Prokhorova, *op. cit.*, p. 107). The same pattern of collaboration was identified by Doru Pop with respect to the immensely popular action movies of Romanian director Sergiu Nicolaescu: "According to Aurel Rogojan, a former general of the Romanian Securitate (Secret Police), Nicolaescu became an instrument not only for the ideology of the "July thesis," which radically reoriented the Romanian cinema, but also for the Securitate. Apparently the director had an agreement with the Securitate to create positive communist heroes, using popular detective movies and other similar cinematic narratives (quoted by Tiu 2013). In this respect, the Securitate would provide all the help Nicolaescu needed, so that he would create movies where communist militiamen (like the commissioner with extraordinary virtues, Mihai Roman) would represent the "positive values" of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. Thus, Nicolaescu created one of most popular action hero films of the epoch, with a combination of socialist realism and Hollywood fictionalization." (Doru Pop, *Romanian New Wave Cinema*, Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland, 2014, p. 185).

37. "Polish actor strongly about the well-known series from the times of the Polish People's Republic", *Fakt*, June 16, 2016, https://www.fakt.pl/plotki/polski-aktor-mocno-o-znanym-serialu-z-czasow-prl/zshzz84, accessed 08/25/2022.

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38. H. Gordon Skilling, *Samizdat and an independent society in Central and Eastern Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke-London, 1989.

39. Mikołaj Kunicki, Nevena Daković, Dominic Leppla, "Cultural Opposition and Filmmakingin Communist East Central Europe: Lessons from Poland and the Former Yugoslavia", in Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, Sándor Horváth (eds.), *The Handbook of COURAGE: Cultural Opposition and Its Heritage in Eastern Europe*, Budapest: Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2018, p. 267-287.

40. J. P. Telotte, *Voices in the Dark: The Narrative Patterns of Film Noir*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1989.

41. Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture*. New York-London, Routledge, 2004, p. 129.

42. Karolina Kosinska, "Style and attitude: Social(ist) realism in the Polish Black Series and British Free Cinema", *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 2:2, 2011, p. 193-209; Peter Hames, "The Czechoslovak New Wave Revisited", in Christina Gerhardt and Sara Saljoughi (eds.), *1968 and Global Cinema*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2018, p. 77-94.

43. Bjørn Sørenssen. "The Polish Black Series Documentary and the British Free Cinema Movement", in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, edited by Anikó Imre, Malden-Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, p. 189.

44. Sanja Lazarević Radak, "Non-Aligned Yugoslavia and 'In-between' Subjects: Filming Homosexuality in the Yugoslav Black Wave (1967-1971)", *East-European Film Bulletin*, vol. 78 (October 2017), https://eefb.org/retrospectives/filming-homosexuality-in-the-yugoslav-black-wave-1967-1971/, accessed 08/10/2020. See also Greg DeCuir Jr., "Black Wave polemics: rhetoric as aesthetic", *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 1:1, 2010, p. 85-96.

45. Anna Batori, *Space in Romanian and Hungarian Cinema*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018; Vesi Vuković, "Violated sex: rape, nation and representation of female characters in Yugoslav new film and black wave cinema", in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 9:2, 2018, p. 132-147; Eva Näripea & Dirk Hoyer, "Tales of a lost decade: Estonian film noir in the 1990s", in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, vol. 9 (2), 2018, pp. 163-178.

46. Petra Hanáková and Kevin B. Johnson (eds.), *Visegrad Cinema: Points of Contact from the New Waves to the Present*, Prague, Nakladatelství Casablanca, 2010.

47. Paulina Bren & Mary Neuburger (eds.), *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2012; Timothy Havens, Anikó Imre, and Katalin Lustyik (eds.), Popular Television in Eastern Europe During and Since Socialism, Abingdon: Routledge, 2013.

48. Radina Vučetić, *Coca-Cola Socialism. Americanization of Yugoslav Culture in the Sixties*, translated by John K. Cox, Budapest-New York, Central European University Press, 2018.

49. Bílek, Petr A., "The 30 Cases of Major Zeman: Domestication and Ideological Conversion of a James Bond Narrative in the Czech tv Serial Context of the 1970s", in *National Mythologies in Central European TV Series: How J.R. Won the Cold War*, ed. Jan Čulík, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2013, p. 45-59.

50. Larson Powell, "Crime and culture in eastern European film," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, vol. 7(3), 2016, p. 297.

51. For the Czech case, the significant examples could be multiplied, as Martin Šrajer actually does when invoking "the heroes of *Hříšní lidé města pražského* (The Sinful People of Prague) who eventually appeared in four films – *Partie krásného dragouna* (The Game of the Beautiful Dragon 1970), *Pěnička a Paraplíčko* (Penicka and Umbrella, 1970), *Smrt černého krále* (The Death of Black King, 1971), *Vražda v hotelu Excelsior* (Murder at the Excelsior Hotel, 1971). This tetralogy is characteristic of the normalization crime film production by taking place during the First Czechoslovak Republic, where criminal activities were presented by the official Party's ideology as being a much more common part of life (not only) in the capital. Set in the past is also *Tajemství*

zlatého Buddhy (1973) taking place in the 19th century or *Výstřely v Mariánských Lázních* (Shots in Mariánské Lázně, 1973) investigating a murder committed just before Hitler's rise to power" (Martin Šrajer, "Murders: the Czech Way. Czechoslovak detective films (II)", 2017, https://www.filmovyprehled.cz/en/revue/detail/murders-the-czech-way-czechoslovak-detective-films-ii, accessed 07/21/2020).

52. Pondering on the Polish case, Sebastian Chosiński notes that "Whoever did not want to praise the Polish law enforcement officers could easily transfer the action of his novels to, for example, England, which was even done by the famous Shakespeologist Maciej Słomczyński, publishing several excellent detective stories under the pseudonym Joe Alex" – "Armageddon on the streets of Breslau", *Esensja*, March 2007, https://esensja.pl/ksiazka/recenzje/tekst.html?id=3982, last accessed 09/14/2022.

53. Mortar Canon, "Kojak in Budapest" (1980), transfesser.blog.hu/2012/03/03/kojak_budapesten_1980, 2012, accessed 08/10/2020.

54. But sometimes the fascination with Western classic detective movies could go beyond the simple adaptation, to forms of more subtle localization, such as "Petr Schulhoff's *Po stopách krve/ Traces of Blood* (Czechoslovakia, 1970), starring Rudolf Hrusíský. Hrusíský was a popular cult figure as the laconic, beer-drinking Major Kalas in several films, including *Vrah skrývá tvár/The Murderer Hides His Face* (1966) and *Diagnóza smrti/Diagnosis of Death* (1979), both also directed by Schulhoff. The films are set in the provinces and show the influence of the Edgar Wallace detective films; they are unusual for being a crime serial in eastern Europe, and given the popularity of Edgar Wallace in Germany, it is interesting that both Schulhoff and Hrusinský were born there," Larson Powell, "Crime and culture in eastern European film", in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, vol. 7(3), 2016, p. 297.

55. Irina Novikova, "Nation, Gender, and History in Latvian Genre Cinema", in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, edited by Anikó Imre, Malden-Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012: 366-384, p. 379.

56. Peter Hames, *Czech and Slovak Cinema. Theme and Tradition*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 50.

57. Quoted in Anikó Imre, *TV Socialism*, Durham-London, Duke University Press. 2016, p. 75.

58. András Zoltán Bán, "Auf den Spuren des Ungarischen Krimis", translated by Peter Schmidt, Febriaru 2011, https://www.goethe.de/ins/hu/de/kul/mag/20604287.html, last accessed 09/14/2022; Pavel Mandys, "New Czech authors of crime fiction", 2016, https://www.czechlit.cz/en/feature/new-czech-authors-of-crime-fiction/, last accessed 09/14/2022; Linda Jew, "9 Mystery-Crime Dramas from the Czech Republic You Might Have Missed", April 9, 2020, https://theeurotvplace.com/2020/04/9-mystery-crime-dramas-from-czech-republic-you-might-have-missed/, last accessed 09/14/2022; Thomas Rose-Masters, "Peeking From Behind The Curtain – New Tendencies In Contemporary Serbian Crime Fiction", 2016, https://www.crimetime.co.uk/Peeking-From-Behind-The-Curtain-New-Tendencies-In-Contemporary-Serbian-Crime-Fiction/, accessed 09/14/2022; Paul French, "Crime and the City: Bucharest. From Decades of Hardline Dictatorship, Romanian Crime Fiction Emerges", March 25, 2019, https://crimereads.com/crime-and-the-city-bucharest/, l.a. 09/14/2022; Mihai Iovănel „Literatura polițistă în România" (Detection Literature in Romania), in Eugen Simion (ed.), *Dicționarul general al literaturii române* (The General Dictionary of Romanian Literature), vol. IV, Bucharest, Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2017, p. 777-781.

59. Michael Stein, "Central European Crime Wave Sweeps Publishing In Europe", February 16, 2012, https://publishingperspectives.com/2012/02/central-european-crime-wave-sweeps-publishing/, last accessed 09/14/2022; Ginanne Brownell, "Move Over Scandinavian Noir, Here Comes the Polish Gumshoe", March 19, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/20/arts/international/move-over-scandinavian-noir-here-comes-the-polish-gumshoe.html l.a. 09/14/2022; Bartosz Staszczyszyn, "The New Crimewave Taking TV and Film By Force", 2014, https://culture.pl/en/article/the-new-crimewave-taking-tv-and-film-by-force, and "Staszczyszyn, Binge-Worthy: Polish TV Goes Global", 2018, https://culture.pl/en/article/binge-worthy-polish-tv-goes-global, l.a.

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09/14/2022; Marek Kepa, Trend Watch: Polish Crime Cinema on the Rise, 2017, https://culture. pl/en/article/trend-watch-polish-crime-cinema-on-the-rise, l.a. 09/14/2022

60. But, it has to be said, they also raise questions about the limits of bending historical facts to the rules of noir and detective suspense, as problematized, based on a case studies of fictions that presented the controversial 1943 death of anti-Nazi general Władysław Sikorski, in Mirosław Przylipiak, "Exploring *Assassination in Gibraltar* by Anna Jadowska in the context of dominant tendencies in contemporary Polish cinema", in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 1:2, 2010, p. 139-52.

61. Chosiński, as quoted above, note 52.

62. The involvement of German film culture, including crime genres, with the still recent past and unhealed wounds of the Cold War era was more closely investigated. Such attempts were even collected under the label of a potential subgenre: "the historical drama of transition" (see Ib Bondebjerg, "Coming to terms with the past: post-1989 strategies in German film culture", in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 1:1, 2010, p. 29-42, especially p. 33-35.

63. Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1992.

64. Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli, "Laughing into an Abyss: Cinema and Balkanization", in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, p. 87. The overtake of crime formats by a discourse of social criticism and justice is also problematized by László Strausz, based on the example of a Romanian genre feature: "During the last few years, some filmmakers have started to experiment with the crime genre formats. Marian Crișan's *Orizont* (2015) takes the viewer to a secluded resort in the Carpathian Mountains, where the protagonist and his family try their luck reopening a hotel which was abandoned under suspicious circumstances some time earlier. Each element of the story plays on thriller and horror conventions, and the viewer is perfectly aware of the fact that the quiet, restrained protagonist Lucian will lose it at some point and go on a revenge rampage. Although Crișan's film is very predictable, and fails to make use of leading actor András Hatházi's silent, looming presence, the idea of deploying thriller conventions in the expression of the class conflict between the wealthy criminal and the lonely, middle-class hero whom the impotent authorities are unable to help is effective." László Strausz, *Hesitant Histories on the Romanian Screen*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 244.

65. Advertised as the first Serbian series (and one of the few in the region) purchased for a foreign remake – by Lebanese corporation Eagle films, see Zoran Janković, Popular Serbian TV Series *Besa* Gets International Remake, 2020, https://www.filmneweurope.com/news/serbia-news/ item/119495-popular-serbian-tv-series-besa-gets-international-remake?highlight=WyJjcmltZSIs ImNyaW1lcyIsIidjcmltZXMiLCJjcmltZSdzIiwic2VyaWVzIiwic2VyaWVzJyIsInNlcmllIiwic2Vy aXMiLCJcdTAxNjFlcnlzIiwic2VyaSIsInNlcmllcydiZXZlcmdlbSciLCJzZXJpZXMncyIsImNya W1lIHNlcmllcyJd, last accessed 09/14/2022.

66. Meta Mazaj and Shekhar Deshpande, "Cinema Beyond Borders: Slovenian Cinema in a World Context", in *A Companion to Eastern European Cinemas*, p. 158.

67. This process is not perceived in positive terms by East-European film critics. A typical pattern of reaction against this (real or apparent) homogenization of the representational strategies followed, among other genres, by police procedurals can be severely judged as "self-colonization". See, for instance, Gábor Gelencsér, "Back and Forth. De-Europeanization as self-colonization in Hungarian film after 1989," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, vol. 9 (1), 2018, p. 63-75.

68. Martin Svoboda, Review: "*Mordparta* and Jiří Bartoška have nothing in common with the criminals of ČT. For better or worse", 2016, https://magazin.aktualne.cz/televize/recenze-mordparta-s-jirim-bartoskou-si-v-nicem-nezada-s-krim/r~2a70deca742311e6a3e5002590604f2e/, accessed 09/02/2021.

69. Sergii Rusakov, "The Ukrainian Dimension of Mass Culture: Philosophy and Culture Studies Analysis", in *Studia Warmińskie* 54, 2017, p. 127.