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(DE)TOURING EUROPE: The Balkan, the Postcolonial and Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe*

Abstract: *This article will interrogate the fictional mobilisation of 'the Balkan' as a trope in Christos Tsiolkas's novel* Dead Europe. *Reversing the conventions of European travel writing, the novel stages a shambolic Grand Tour of vampiric contamination, which exposes the vacuity of Europe's self-professed ideals of progress, rationality and liberalism. Whilst bearing the imprint of a recognisable Balkanist rhetoric which locates the origins of racial prejudice in a Second World War Greek village and the excesses of conspicuous consumption in a contemporary Athens,* Dead Europe *also presents 'the Balkan' as a disruptive medium which jostles the Australian protagonist out of his political complacency and awakens him to his own visceral, if spectral, relation to prejudice. 'The Balkan' in this set-up does not function as a mere backdrop to identify against; rather, it is a site of a radical interrogation of the coherence, boundedness and erasures of the (Australian and European) self--an interrogation that confronts without offering a solution or redemption.*

Keywords: Christos Tsiolkas, *Dead Europe*, Balkan, postcolonial, Europe, spectre

Christos Tsiolkas's controversial novel *Dead Europe* (2005) recounts the trip to Europe of the Greek-Australian photographer Isaac Raftis. Reversing the generic conventions of European travel writing, Tsiolkas transforms antipodean Isaac's trip to his parents' native Greece into a shambolic Grand Tour; Athens, Venice, Prague, Paris and London become the embodiment of European civilisation's insidious underbelly in the age of global capitalism: materialism, exploitation and racism overshadow the monuments of History, the sophistication of Art or the

achievements of Humanity. And whilst the present does not bode well for the future of Europe, the continent is not spared reminders of its troubled past either: stubbornly haunting the protagonist's European adventures, histories of prejudice and violence are invoked in a second narrative strand that in a spectral fashion both troubles and animates the return-journey story. Soon after arriving in Greece, a mysterious, primordial hunger for blood awakens in Isaac – a hunger that escalates with his travels further West. A contemporary Dracula-turned-consumerist sociopath, by the time he arrives in London Isaac has lost control over his desires, voice and identity, succumbing to and even relishing acts of rape, cannibalism and murder. It is only thanks to his mother Reveka and his lover Colin, who come to London and feed his vampiric habit through fresh blood transfusions, that Isaac survives 'Europe' and is able to 'return home' to Australia.

Tsiolkas's unapologetic assault on the idea of Europe – an idea premised on the celebration of individualism, progress, rationality and liberalism – at the same time laments the loss of a particular brand of political idealism as seen in the death of state-supported communism, the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the disappearance of the peasant class (Tsiolkas and Cornelius, 2005: 21). And all these events associated with the passing of a particular kind of politics and the demise of a particular kind of Europe are embodied in the South-Easternmost edges of the continent, from where both narrative strands – the contemporary and the past – start unravelling. At the same time, however, if this 'remote corner of damaged, destroyed Europe' (Tsiolkas, 2005: 399) is unable to shake off a past of xenophobia or the shadow of political illusions, it appears to be sharing something with the contemporary metropolitan centres of London, Paris and Berlin: an Old World Eurocentric perception of grandeur and superiority. As Isaac's Greek-born mother Reveka observes towards the end of the novel, what sustains the affinity between Londoners, Greeks and Europeans in general is their sense of being 'at the centre of the world' (399), a feeling that she, as an Australian, experiences as a 'hunger for *something else*' (400).

Tsiolkas's version of the Balkans, [1] in this sense, is ambivalent. Acting simultaneously as 'a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and the "West" has been constructed' (Todorova, 1997: 188), and as an extension of an amnesiac Europe that has repressed the memory of the internal conflicts endemic to capitalism and neo-liberalism (Žižek, 1993: 200, 209), the Balkans in the novel become the 'medium' for Tsiolkas's project of confronting his readers – European and Australian alike – with the demons of xenophobia, violence and oppression that haunt their seemingly 'civilised' (as in modern, liberal and progressive) worlds.

This article will argue, therefore, that 'the Balkan' in *Dead Europe* assumes a wider significance, beyond its role in the Eurocentric logic of reductive binarisms juxtaposing 'Europe' and its others (within or without). As a site of uneasy contiguities, engendering a discourse 'both of sameness and of difference' (Fleming, 2000: para.5), the Balkan elements in the novel offer moments of epiphany that jostle the Australian protagonist out of his complacency. Contesting the coherence of identity, the consistency of ideological platforms and the promise of New World multiculturalism, the novel traces the peregrinations of a phantom of prejudice that is not coterminous with Europe or the Balkans alone, but haunts the Europes beyond as well – a spectre that Tsiolkas's Australian protagonist is desperate to, but ultimately fails to, exorcise. For the 'hunger' at the core of the Australian self that Reveka identifies ultimately acts as a spectral reminder of the need to disambiguate 'the symbolic annihilation' at the core of 'the Australian legend' (Hodge and Mishra, 1990: xv; cf. Ward, 1958; White, 1981), a legend that has erased the memory of Aboriginal displacement and the uncomfortable truths of 'White Australia' policies. 'The Balkan' in this set-up acts as a catalyst for the radical interrogation of the (Australian) self – of its coherence and erasures, memory and traumas – an interrogation that does not heal or redeem the self, but confirms their spectral relation to a Europe of violence, exclusion and dispossession. Tsiolkas's writing 'the Balkan' in this sense exceeds the mere 'writing back to' or

'rewriting of' Europe from an Australian (or even Balkan) vantage point; whilst careful to delineate the troublesome European heritage Australia and the Balkans share, his novel also implicates both regions into important postcolonial – and even global – debates by questioning the uniformity and universality of Europe, as well as the demise of, and escape from, its pernicious phantoms.

'The Balkan' as a medium: Between Europe and the Postcolonial

A borderland of numerous geopolitical and cultural areas, the Balkans have been a significant imaginary topos for European writers as well as an object for a host of othering metaphors since early modernity. Scholars have argued that the quasi-Orientalist discourse about the region – aptly named Balkanism (Todorova, 1997) – has both reinforced and disturbed the idea of Europe: within white, Christian and civilised Europe, there resides a not-so-white, not-so-Christian and not-so-civilised Self. Not only have the Balkans been represented in fiction and non-fiction as the unfortunate source of international crises such as the First World War and disreputable regimes such as Nazism, but the political setup of this peninsula has been used as a recurrent metaphor for sectarianism, barbarism and self-serving partisanship, as valid for Eastern Europe as for Africa, Asia or Latin America (Kaplan, 1994: xxiii-xxviii). While valuable conclusions have been drawn about Balkanist discourse and its variants in different literary genres and periods (Todorova, 1997; Goldsworthy, 1998; Hammond, 2007a), the critical emphasis has very much stayed with European fiction. With the exception of Andrew Hammond's analysis of US travel writing, there has been no study of how the Balkans feature in literary examples from Europe's former colonial spaces, of what function the Balkan trope performs in postcolonial fictional texts, and how these versions of 'the Balkan' have been affected by the European legacy in postcolonial contexts.

By invoking the postcolonial paradigm I am not proposing that there is a straightforward equivalence between the Balkans and Europe's former colonies. I am, first and foremost, addressing what Hammond has identified as 'a curious instance of intellectual complicity' with

regard to the persistent marginalisation of the Balkans: their erasure from postcolonial critical paradigms due to 'the temporal unsuitability of Soviet hegemony [...] and the spatial unsuitability of Ottoman conquest' (2002: 5, 6) replicates their demonisation (or exoticisation) in Balkanist writing. Add to that the co-optation of 'the Balkan' in discussions about nationalism, immigration and globalisation on all sides of the political spectrum. Early supporters of pan-Africanism and decolonisation saw in 'the Balkan', as embodied in processes of 'balkanisation', a pernicious offshoot of imperialism (Nkrumah, 1961; Langley, 1973; Neuberger, 1976), while Nelson Mandela, in his 1990 address to the Parliament of Canada, referred to the apartheid policies of racial segregation as '[South African] Balkanisation' (1990). At the other end of the political spectrum, there has been right-wing scaremongering about the alleged 'balkanising' threat ethnic groups (as well as indigenous peoples, gay rights activists and feminists) pose to the coherence of North American politics by the likes of Kevin Phillips (1978) and William Frey (1999). 'The Balkan' has thus come stand for anything anywhere: from political assassinations and social disintegration to the entrenchment of economic inequalities and escalating ethnic (gender and sexual) prejudice, so much so that in October 2009 *The Financial Times* qualified EU enlargement in the Western Balkans as a process of 'de-Balkanisation' of the Balkans, whereas *The Guardian* assessed the outcome of Greece's 2012 elections, held amidst a raging Euro and government debt crisis, as a refusal to 'lurch back to a Balkan past'.

What these rather diverse discourses have in common is the deracination of 'the Balkan' and its transplantation into *any* soil, especially with reference to issues such as difference and its regulation, minority rights and political agency. These undoubtedly fall within the purview of postcolonial studies, and justify a postcolonial engagement with the Balkans – especially with reference to the settler colonies-turned-multicultural societies, where Balkan diasporas occupy a prominent part of the pluri-ethnic mosaic. Moreover, the global circulation of the term 'balkanisation' highlights the continuous implication of the region in heterogeneous

manifestations of power (cf. Chioni Moore, 2001). The (neo)colonial and imperialist stakes in the region are not hard to find: the bridge between East and West, situated on the way to colonial possessions, rival empires and ideological enemies, at the heart of what some have called 'a fault line' of clashing civilisations (Huntington, 2002: 157) and currently the Achilles's heel of an adolescent (or moribund) Euro-zone, the Balkans have always been of strategic significance for the successful exercise of economic, military, political and cultural control in Europe.

While the colonial heritage of the settler-invader societies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand is indisputable, their postcoloniality seems to be as debatable as that of the Balkans (albeit for a different set of reasons). The compromised duality of the settler-invader subject (simultaneously dominant/coloniser of the indigenous people and subaltern/colonised by the imperial centre), the insufficiently anti-colonial stance of Anglo-Celtic cultural articulations and the ongoing colonisation of indigenous peoples (as well as discrimination against other non-dominant groups) are some of the factors that undermine the universal application of the term 'postcolonial' to the settler-invader cultures (Hutcheon 1989; Hodge and Mishra 1991; McClintock 1992; Gandhi 1998). Other scholars have pointed out that the liminality and complicity of what Alan Lawson called the postcolonial 'Second World' are symptomatic of encounters, conflicts and negotiations of difference that characterise postcolonial and postmodern realities (Slemon, 1990; Lawson, 1995). Thus, a certain affinity between the Balkans and the settler-invader societies can be discerned in terms of their liminality and ambiguity, cultural multiplicity and fraught European legacy. Exploring the mutual engagements of (what has been perceived as) European, or for that matter global peripheries in *Dead Europe*, therefore, can offer insights into the cultural and geopolitical connections that characterise today's global interdependencies (Brydon and Tiffin, 1993: 20), as well as reinvigorate the processes of 'provincializing Europe' (Chakrabarty, 2000) and 'balkanising the postcolonial' (Hammond, 2007a: 285).

In this sense, Tsiolkas's fictional return to Europe via the Balkans does not merely 'write back' to a morally defunct Europe from the safe distance of an 'innocent' Australia. Rather, through the interweaving of the semi-realist account of Isaac's trip to contemporary Europe and the quasi-Gothic story of his family's complicity in Second World War anti-Semitism, *Dead Europe* maps out a contamination that the Old / New World and Old / New Europe binaries too easily elide. For the demons fuelling the discriminatory practices against refugees like Isaac's mother Reveka in Australia, the casual racism in the Balkans that Isaac encounters when visiting his relatives, and the numerous instances of past injustice and ongoing oppression that Isaac comes across in the Venice ghetto and Paris banlieues are as intertwined as the protagonist's family is with the spectre of the Jewish boy their ancestors have murdered. What animates Isaac's quest, then, is not a romantic return to pure origins. Rather, it is the excruciatingly visceral encounter with and submission to the undead phantom of prejudice, which has always lurked behind and enchanted the myth of Europe that moved Isaac to embark on the journey in the first place. Not unlike 'the Balkan' mobilised in the media and political discourses referred to earlier, the spectre thus awakened is a reminder of the passing of an idealised Europe, but also a remainder of a violent and corrupt Europe that has never died. Tsiolkas uses 'the Balkan' as a site of spectrality to expose the vacuity of the European idea in its European or Australian guise, but also to map out the carnal and affective ways in which this pernicious idea can infect minds and cross borders.

European / Balkan slippages

Tsiolkas's fictional journey through the underworld of Europe starts in Greece – simultaneously European and Balkan, contemporary and ancient, urban and rural. Informed by his father's romanticised memories of political strife in Greece and his mother's anti-Semitic Christian superstitions, Isaac's initial version of 'the Balkan' – even before he arrives there – bears the imprint of a recognisable Balkanist inventory: a site riven by ancient hatreds and a volatile

political atmosphere, with vampiric demons and violent activists. This is reinforced by the rampant consumerism and political indifference of twenty-first century Athenians Isaac encounters upon this second visit to the country of his parents' birth: while there is an overwhelming 'obsession with the accrual of possessions: Prada, Gucci and Versace' (134), the misery of immigrants, beggars and gypsies in the streets is simply ignored if not actively despised by the Greeks. Globalisation, with its concomitant evils of displacement and exploitation, consumerist complacency and ideological blindness, has found its way even in a traditionally politicised society such as the Greek one. On his previous visit to his father's native Thessaloniki, Isaac visited the Jewish History Museum where he took a secret photograph of an old image of Jewish Resistance fighters in an attempt to commemorate some of the city's numerous ghosts that have been displaced from the public imaginary by the force of modern nationalist sentiment. Now his cousin Giulia and her openly anti-Semitic friend Andreas take him to the Greek Civil War Museum where Andreas comments that the Resistance movement was only a performance orchestrated by the Soviet Union. The situation in the countryside – in Agrinion, Megalo Horio or Karpenissi, where Isaac's mother is from – while 'not the Greece of the tourist brochures' (67) is equally disappointing. Dry and barren landscapes alternate with ugly concrete buildings and churlish residents, who are all too willing to perform 'a fairytale Greece' for the foreign tourist's sake. Comparing his impressions with those of his first visit twelve years before, Isaac concludes:

> This was not the Greece I had thought I would find. When I had first travelled here, I had seen the cities and I had toured the islands, playing the tourist. Back then I had found another country. The streets of Athens were dusty, the walls were covered with slogans, and it was I who was the materialist interloper. Now, outside in the square of the Megalo Horio, it was all Prada, Gucci and Versace, and everyone sat drinking, eating, and speaking loudly and ostentatiously on their mobile phones. (80)

In a bid to prove its European belonging, the Greece Isaac rediscovers is desperate to divest itself of its 'Balkan' traits and become the epicentre of globalisation that homogenises cultures, flattens histories, and turns everything into a spectacle of /for consumption. With the realisation that 'Greece is dying … this is Europe now' (135), the protagonist is suddenly deprived of both his ideal of Europe, epitomised by a Greece mythologised as 'the cradle of civilisation', and his image of the counterfoil of Europe, 'the Balkan' Greece. Rather, the Greece/Europe Isaac encounters makes the distinction between 'Europe' and 'the Balkan' inoperative; if the idealised Greece/Europe is dead, so is its presumed negation 'the Balkan'.

However, Isaac's self-righteousness and outrage against the consumerist locals – not unlike his father's persistent derogatory remarks about Australia's lack of history and misconstrued innocence – are challenged. His once politically active cousin Giulia deconstructs the misguided binarism between a Greece that is part of Europe proper and a globalised Greece that is deprived of its European allure. To her, it is Isaac who is unable to relate to a country until recently polarised by extreme political antagonisms and traumatised by the oppressive regime of the Colonels; his hankering for a European authenticity and his debunking of 'the *nouveau riche* trash' (135) mentality of contemporary Greece are, for her, symptomatic of New World posturing. Whilst echoing a familiar colonial rhetoric that frames Australia as immature and naïve, Giulia's resentment of Isaac's disgust with materialist Greece is also driven by what she perceives to be his wilfully romanticised understanding of Greek and European realities, to a large extent coloured by his father's nostalgia and Isaac's embrace of an Australian sense of self defined against Europe. If his departure from Australia is partially driven by the desire to rediscover the life, 'the heart and the blood and the soul' (46) of his photography, the Athenian reality and Giulia's outburst shatter the Australian's vacuous hope in the implicit historical authenticity and political integrity of Europe. If anything, it is Europe's contamination of 'the Balkan' that has deprived Greece of its historical specificity and political commitment.

Thus, Anastasia, the owner of the Athenian gallery where Isaac's photographs are exhibited, comments on the inevitable slippage between Greece, Europe and Australia:

> [W]e meet so many Greeks from Australia. I cannot bear most of them. They are vulgar ignorant and *très* materialistic. They are what we fear we are becoming ... Eurotrash ... Then there are some Australians who are innocents. Young girls who are still worried about their virginity, young men who still practise their Orthodoxy as though the twentieth century had never occurred ... It is as if they have not left the village. We laugh at them but they remind us of the past. And then there are a few who are not like Greeks here, and who are not like the French or the Germans or the English. And, thank God, nothing like the Americans. They are of their own world. (34)

Anastasia situates Greek, European and settler-cultures collective identities within the same global tendencies of migration, exploitation and consumerism, and thus contests rigid identitarianisms that seal off essences from one another in ahistorical vacuums. Her somewhat Occidentalist derogatory dismissal of global powers (European, as well as the US and Australia), however, is accompanied by the recognition that identity is partial, multiple and fractured. Anastasia can discern the different trajectories that inform the composite Greek-Australian self: rapacious globalisation threatening to engulf and homogenise everyone, diasporic nostalgia for an irretrievable past of pastoral simplicity, and modernist ennui triggered by the anxiety of in-betweenness. Speaking back to a Balkanist discourse that tends to ossify the Balkan subject into a cartoon of barbarian ethnocentrism that threatens to undo liberal Europe from within, Anastasia shares her fear of the destructive and homogenising effects of Europe-driven globalisation and materialism, as she simultaneously acknowledges her implication in these processes – a stance that differs from Isaac's desperate attempt to distance himself from the unrecognisable Europeanness of the Balkans. Reiterating Giulia's verdict, Anastasia affirms that it is not 'the Balkan' that has corrupted 'Europe', but that 'Europe' in the guise of amnesia and consumerism

has leaked into Greece and even infiltrated Australia. Isaac's initial encounters with 'the Balkan', thus, awaken him to the vacuity of his idea of Europe, to the ubiquity of the global market nexus and to the oblivion of his own implication in both.

The Balkan stirrings of a European myth

It is at this juncture that Tsiolkas's second narrative starts unfolding, that about 'the curse' brought upon Isaac's family by his grandmother Lucia, who instigates the murder of the Jewish boy Elias – committed by her husband Michaelis – during the Second World War. Lucia's and Michaelis's crime is driven by their almost virulent anti-Semitism, which is in its turn mirrored in the xenophobic attitudes and superstitious practices of their peasant community. Michaelis, whose parents have been verbally and psychologically abused by the villagers as 'the Albanian whore' and 'the idiot Panagis' (18), is himself unable to cast off his Christian prejudice against Jews even during his sojourn in multicultural North America.

In the midst of the ravages of war and the escalating savagery of the German occupying forces, the whole village expresses its hunger, fear, loss and hatred in a feverishly frenzied celebration that bears a distinctively 'Balkan' hallmark:

> Women had thrown back their heads and were laughing into the moon. Men were dancing
> and gesticulating wildly. Children were fighting and grabbing each other. Rosa howled
> her song. The band thrashed their music. The old man Mulan closed his eyes and played.
> The whole of God's earth seemed to be dancing to his delirious, mad tune... There was
> also hunger, raw, piercing hunger that was only muted by the sweet bliss of alcohol…
> With the men's blood not yet dry, the villagers danced on the stone and concrete,
> believing that the spirits of the youths were taking solace from the frenzy. (56)

It is in this intoxicatingly sensual abandon of the community that Tsiolkas frames the murder of the Jewish boy Elias, who Lucia and Michaelis have begrudgingly agreed to hide from the

Germans in exchange for a casket of jewels. Driven by her fellow villagers' looks of jealousy and her body's erotic longing during the carnival celebrations, Lucia seduces Elias only to condemn him to death once she falls pregnant with what is most likely his son. Shifting the narrative emphasis on to the bodily, the emotional and the instinctual – traits more 'Balkan' than European – Tsiolkas chooses to examine the carnal and affective dimensions of prejudice: it is Lucia's unearthly beauty that tempts villagers into committing egregious acts of violence, just as it is her lust that overpowers her repulsion of the Jewish boy and her maternal instinct that compels her to betray him. *Dead Europe*, in this sense, does not meditate on the rational justification of prejudice, but immerses the reader in the intricate workings of 'the heart and the blood and the soul' (46), blood relatedness and autochthony, which are associated with land and belonging in Nazi ideology and other xenophobic discourses.

When Isaac returns to his grandmother's village years later, the ghostly image of a boy, 'mocking and malevolent' (157), starts haunting him. His initial dismissal of the blurs in his photographs as '[n]ot a curse, not magic: a technical error' (134) is gradually replaced by an awareness that the boy 'had been there; and … looking straight at me, confidently, triumphantly' (158). The eyes that keep staring back at Isaac, however, resist being bound by the photographic paper or contained by the narrative; soon the 'luminous' 'fierce' and 'triumphant' gaze comes to possess Isaac's body and voice, 'demand[ing] something … and … promis[ing] no forgiveness' (158). In the Venice ghetto the Australian cannot muster up any emotion – compassion, remorse or guilt – whilst photographing murals of the transportation of Jews to the death camps. What moves Isaac are not the 'grotesque' (151) dead representations of the Holocaust Memorial but the living signs of ongoing racism that the tongueless Jewish guide shows him; what elates and empowers the Australian is not the contrition in his photographs, but his first anti-Semitic curse. In postcommunist Prague, as immersed in economic and sexual exploitation as the Greece he has just left, Isaac finds himself indulging in fantasies of rape, and by the time he reaches Berlin he is

utterly contemptuous of the human race: 'all of them shit, refuse. Nothing' (260). The heightened

sensuality and ravenous hunger wrecking Isaac's body climax in his utter nihilism in Amsterdam;

aware of the surrounding suffering and inequality, he is nonetheless content to 'have [his] fill of

bodies, to consume and devour' (302). Permeated by a demonic presence via 'the vampiric

communion with the corporeal solidity of [the] blood' of others (Joseph, 2008: 109), Isaac's

consciousness and body disintegrate completely at the end of his European tour in London.

Tsiolkas's deployment of the Gothic further reinforces the inevitable collapse of

categories such as 'Europe' and 'the Balkan' – a process already initiated by the contestation of

identity categories voiced by Giulia and Anastasia in Greece. Vampirism has been an indelible

feature of Balkanist discourse, with the figure of the vampire more often than not acting as a

repository for certain 'civilisational' anxieties: from the gothic stories of the Romantic and

Victorian eras, simultaneously fascinated with and repulsed by the transgression of

Enlightenment values (Hammond, 2007b: 118), to contemporary media accounts of ethnic

violence in former Yugoslavia, whose emphasis on 'Eastern Europe's seemingly pathological

fixation on the past in fact mirrors the political and cultural struggles of the West …the repressed

origins of Europe, the history the West is trying to forget' (Longinović, 2005: 40; cf. Longinović,

2011). The vampiric presence that Isaac's visit to the Balkans awakens, however, is not

conducive to the further shoring up of European, or for that matter Australian, identities against

'the Balkan'. In an act of reverse colonisation 'by the curse lurking atavistically within him'

(McCann, 2005: 27), the Australian Isaac comes to realise the tenuousness of his supposedly

innocent exteriority to 'the Balkan' and cultural inferiority to 'Europe', but also his own

implication in 'the sprawling network of exchange, violence and desire that have been moulding

the world for at least the past two hundred years' (ibid.: 28). The 'fairytale' of Australian

innocence is exposed when Isaac refuses to help the refugee Sula obtain an Australian visa

because he is unwilling 'to risk [his] security for a stranger' (Tsiolkas, 2005: 273), when his anti-

Semitic lover Colin admits that he has permanently 'exiled' himself from the Jews (254), when the gruesome reality of the abuse Isaac's mother Reveka has experienced as a Greek immigrant to Australia is revealed (305-28). Tsiolkas, thus, questions 'some of the more benign platitudes of multiculturalism' (Gelder and Salzman, 2009: 223; cf. Huggan, 2007) by building a continuity between a racialised Europe, of which 'the Balkan' is as much a symptom as a projection, and an Australia under John Howard.

Isaac's demonic possession is premised on a primitive economy of 'blood and land' (Tsiolkas, 2005: 7): born out of Lucia's blood libel, the spectre haunts her descendants even in Australia and possesses her grandson's body once he is back into the Balkans. A liminal location that has captivated the imagination of many a vampire story writer (Gelder, 1994: 24-42), the Balkans feature in *Dead Europe* as a site of infectious and viscerally experienced xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism, as well as a spectral landscape of violently obliterated histories. The otherwise liberal photographer, who used to laugh at his mother's anti-Semitic Christian legends in Australia, finds himself under the spell of anti-Semitism when he is forbidden by the Jewish curator in the Jewish History Museum of Thessaloniki to take pictures – 'I wanted to say, Fuck off, you paranoid Jew, I have nothing to do with this history' (90). Foreshadowing Isaac's eventual revulsion with, and corruption by, Europe, the visit to the Thessaloniki museum awakens in him a primordial hatred, a feeling that clashes with his intellectual cast, but one that echoes Lucia's and her fellow villagers' carnal economy of prejudice. At the same time, Isaac's overwhelming anti-Semitism is experienced bodily in a Balkan city of spectral Jewish history; if seemingly a landscape of historical continuity, Thessaloniki is also a place torn by cataclysms, fractures and erasures that have left few traces behind and revenants abroad (Tsiolkas, 2005: 87-8; cf. Mazower, 2004: 10-12). Tsiolkas's conjunction of the carnal and the spectral in his rendition of the vampire offers a somewhat revised understanding of 'the Balkan': the demonic presence stirring within Isaac not only raises questions about his purchase on the self-

congratulatory humanism, liberalism and multiculturalism of Europe and Australia, but also foregrounds the potency of the embodied, affective and lived experience of prejudice, which implicates him in the same repressed histories of oppression and injustice. Not unlike the xenophobia of Lucia's village community, Isaac's descent into contemporary Europe's underworld of 'ancient and damaged and broken' bodies (336) is propelled by an inscrutable bodily urge, an excruciating and insatiable hunger, a sexual appetite, a murderous instinct. Tsiolkas's emphasis on affective experiences, which transcend the boundaries of self, historical period and geographical location, does not so much conceptualise xenophobia as an intuitive or universal experience, but highlights the non-cognitive investment in ideologies of exclusion and marginalisation.

Dead Europe, in the final account, does not put this Balkan ghost to rest; the ghoul not only emigrates with Reveka to Australia, but even after she restores the jewels unjustly obtained by her family for sheltering Elias, the demonic presence promises to stay with her forever. Offering no redemption, Tsiolkas's novel constructs an image of 'the Balkan' that refuses to be frozen into a demonised or exoticised counterfoil to the 'European', 'Australian' or 'civilised' self. A conduit to the interrogation of the self, 'the Balkan' permeates and is permeated by 'Europe', challenges and ossifies available identity categories, and makes us confront our possession by phantoms of xenophobia, oppression and forgetfulness.

Notes

[1] Even though Greece is not always seen as part of 'the imaginary Balkans' due to its classical heritage, civilisational claims and British philhellenism, amongst other things (Hammond, 2007a: 1-21), most scholars include representations of Greece within the discourse of Balkanism (Fleming, 2000; Goldsworthy, 1998; Todorova, 1997). Since Tsiolkas's imaginary Greece alludes to recognisable Balkanist tropes, the article will follow the approach of these latter writers.

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