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Polyphony and Carnavalesque Laughter in the Subversion of Hollywood Worldview: Emir Kusturica's «Underground»

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I. Polyphony and Carnavalesque Laughter

If, as Mikhail Bakhtin argues in his *Rabelais and His World* (1968), carnivalesque laughter and madness have lost their positive spirit in the Romantic grotesque and if in modern times laughter was cut down to cold humor, irony and sarcasm and ceased to be a joyful and triumphant hilarity (Bakhtin 37), they have been revived in Emir Kusturica's *Underground*. The general spirit of the Medieval comedy described by Bakhtin is definitely present in Kusturica's 1995 which features characters whose exaggerated spontaneity and irrationality resemble the madness of medieval clowns and dwarfs. The film highlights "re-creative" forces of life through music and songs, as it captures the celebratory feature of laughter, and through carnivalesque hilarity subverts dominant social order. As Sean Homer observes, the film is a «critique of Tito's Yugoslavia and the film industry's role in reconstructing history and national mythologies» (7), but the hilarity in the film and the narrative

constructed through polyphony and careful choice of characters subvert not only the social and political order during Tito's time; the film questions the dominant (Hollywood) worldview based on the paradigm of binary oppositions such as good and bad guys and primitive and civilized. *Underground* (1995) is the last film in the history of Yugoslavian movie making made in an attempt to save Yugoslavia from local and international devastation. It is an intricate commentary on the destruction of a state and national identity, and on construction of new "imagined community" as Benedict Anderson would say. The obvious theatricality and exaggerated performances in *Underground* are forms of subversion of the established order and ways of having or gaining agency in a chaotic world driven by different local and global forces. In the complexity of relationships and in the development of repetitive history, community performances such as music at weddings, improvisations and carnivalesque laughter are not only cultural identity makers, but means of survival and resistance amidst rising global insecurities.

The film begins with a local exaggerated Balkan/primitive macho celebration in late hours of the night, followed by documentary clips of different receptions in the morning of the 1941 when "civilized" Germany invaded Maribor and Zagreb and brutally bombed Belgrade. The film ends with a local crazy wedding celebration preceded by scenes in which UN peace keeping and peacemaking "Blue Helmets" are moving refugees in the wars of 1990s and participating in arms trade which fuels the global restructuring. The juxtaposition or intertwining of local and global forces shows that in recent history, as at the beginning of the Second World War, "primitive" Balkan realities persist because "civilized" forces maintain the dichotomy for their own gain. The film not only questions the thinking in terms of binary oppositions but highlights the power of the so called primitive and carnivalesque.

Kostunica's appearance at the end of the film as a character involved in a purchase of arms from Marko, an opportunistic communist turned new capitalist, can be interpreted as the filmmaker's admission of guilt in the destruction of Yugoslavia. "You need me", Marko tells Kusturica, as they set the price for weapons with the UN "Blue Helmets" in the background. Goran Gocić's observation that the space for political cinema in the West was very limited, but «non-Western film-makers or writers could always score points on their liberal (anti-communist, anti-fundamentalist, human rights and so on) engagement» (21) suggests that artists and filmmakers had their art financially supported by patrons which used them in order to provoke changes in the Communist block and gain profits from these changes. Kusturica's earlier film *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985) clearly criticizes the communist intolerance after Yugoslavian secession from the SSSR in 1948. This film, like *Underground*, was awarded Golden Palm at the Cannes Film Festivals in 1985. The double awarding of the same filmmaker for his criticism of Communist practices by such important European institution shows that Kusturica used the language of the establishment to get on the international scene. Yet, he is not an opportunist but a pícaro who adopts the ways of his master and learns from him in order to beat him in his own game. That is how the famous Spanish pícaro Lazarillo de Tormes proceeded when he used the language of the rich and powerful to secure his own survival. Kusturica similarly uses the language of the establishment which he montages and twists in his film in such a way that the establishment is subverted, not only the Communist system but the Western political and cultural hegemony as well. Dina Iordanova rightfully agrees with Andrew Horton that, «Kusturica's versatile background gives him a strong communicative power and provides a wide access to his idiosyncratic Yugoslav stories because he purposefully uses elements that are familiar to domestic viewers, but also cinematographic language which

is familiar to international audience, thus speaking simultaneously to local and international audiences by sending out this little signals in the forms of 'nods' and 'make-overs'» (Iordanova 150). Kusturica not only succeeds in simultaneously "speaking" in local and international languages, but makes statements about global situation from the point of view of local madness and laughter.

All Kusturica's characters have elements of madness or mental retardation, but Blacky is probably the maddest of them all. He is a character straight out of a silent era slapstick comedy, as he forces himself on the stage in the middle of Natalia's performance and ties her to himself with a rope, carrying her off the stage as if it were a part of a play or as he cuts live electricity wire with his bare teeth, or blows himself up in the trunk with a grenade like a Warner Brother's Looney Toons. This apparent cartoon hero is also a typical Serbian trigger-happy nationalist who, however, profoundly loves his country and cares for his family and friends. The audience first laughs at Blacky's mistrust of Germans and foreigners and his blind love for his "kum" or his body Marko, but when his son whom he raised as a single father dies, when his girlfriend leaves him for his best friend, and when his best friend abuses his love for his country and for him for his own gain, he is no longer a cartoon figure but a tragi-comic victim for whom the audience begins to feel pity and begins to see "Serbian nationalism" in a different light. Marko is equally mad when he plays a doctor who rescues Blacky in the trunk. On one level Marko and Blacky are friends who share numerous situations and who help each other when facing a foreign danger, but at the same time, in their madness, Marko is his worst enemy. Yet they are not to be judged from a moral point of view because they are in a situation of survival in which laughter has re-creative qualities and is a way to defy tragedy. Joseph Meeker point out that «Comedy is a celebration, a ritual renewal of biological warfare as it

persists in spite of any reasons there may be for feeling metaphysical despair» (24).

In addition to using known cartoon figures and turning them into tragic fools, Kusturica also uses the classic Hollywood love triangle but instead of telling a romantic love story through the triangle, with exaggeration and wild erotic scenes, his threesome creates a life drama of survival in a complex world of manipulation. Dina Iordanova rightly observes that Kusturica's artistic contribution is not evident in the invention of new techniques but in the unique and energetic combination of the existing cinematographic stock. He begins with a classical love triangle, but in this triangle there is everything as Marko takes advantage of Blacky, and they both take advantage of Natalia, who in her turn uses both men for her own gains. The love triangle is violent and abusive, as the figurines are in the "grotta" Bakhtin describes, because life is full of constant turmoil in which survival implies violent impinging on the territory of the other.

Each character in the film represents a voice, and together, through their relationships more than through their dialogues, they tell a story. As Bakhtin explains, «the important thing is the dialogicality, i.e. the dialogical nature of the total world» (*Problems* 14). As Dostoyevsky's novel «is not constructed as the entirety of a single consciousness which absorbs other consciousnesses as objects, but rather as the entirety of the interaction of several consciousnesses, of which no one fully becomes the object of any other one» (14) in Kusturica's film and in the worldview he advances, polyphony opens up the world by denying the viewer a single and simplistic interpretation. In the film, for example, due to her financial needs and her political and historical circumstances, Natalia has three lovers: Blacky, a good-hearted but irrational nationalist, a foreigner Franz who promises her a better financial future and an opening into the world, and Marko, who is a political opportunist and a skillful player whose cleverness and social position make Natalia tolerate his opportunistic manipulations.

In her relationship with these three lovers, she embodies her region of the world, which is pulled and shaped by the same forces that pull and shape Natalia: irrational nationalism, skillful opportunism, and foreign intervention. Any simplification of this complex interrelation, a reduction to a classic good and bad guy worldview, would lead to misrepresentation. The Western worldview of binary oppositions: civilized/primitive, good/bad, progressive/archaic, love/hate do not hold as Natalia both loves her men and at the same time she "cannot stand them", as she says in her drunken state. The absence of a monolithic worldview is seen also in the fact that Blacky and Marko drink together and indulge in a similar form of madness, but are otherwise two very different Balkan men. Marko is a freebooter who is able to succeed because he exploits Blacky's generosity, his popular appeal, and his readiness to fight for his country in defense of his people. Blacky is, on the one hand, a positive figure that comforts unfortunate people like Natalia's sick brother and the semi-retarded Ivan, but he is also a fool because his unquestioned devotion to his *kum* or his buddy Marko prevents him from seeing that Marko's disregard for law and morality is not the same as his own patriotic defiance.

Briefly, *Underground* is an allegory of a half-century in the life of Communist Yugoslavia, which is portrayed as a manipulated, backward cellar used mainly for producing weapons. The story of the people in the underground cellar is a tragic story, yet it is lived as a performance at a carnival. The film begins with Marko's and Blacky's drunken ride through the red light district of Belgrade, accompanied by Goran Bregović's blasting ethno music piece called *Kalashnikov*. It is played by a *trubači* or Balkan brass orchestra, introduced to the country in the nineteenth century by Austrian military bands, in which a big drum and brass instruments play at a manic tempo. While brass music is popular primarily with elderly people in central Europe, in Serbia *trubače* have a youthful following because of the music's fast beat and loudness.

Carried away by the musical madness, Marko and Blacky fire their pistols in a nonchalant fashion and extravagantly throw money around, introducing an exaggerated Balkan style of life. Their foolishness is primitive and irresponsible, but they are simply having fun. The audience recognizes that the film is not a simple comedy when the Balkan primitive way of life and extravagant joy are sharply contrasted with the documentary footage of the German bombing of Belgrade on April 6, 1941. The unexpected juxtaposition of the "primitive" South and the "civilized" West that bombs Belgrade and leaves Ivan's, the Zookeeper's, animals maimed and confused creates discomfort for the audience and asks them to pay attention to the story which is implied through a careful ordering of events and selection of characters.

Marko and Blacky are presented initially as two irrational primitive macho Balkan men who are more than friends because they are "kumovi" or "compadres". However, while they behave in a similar irrational fashion, they are not the same. Both local and foreign commentators have not sufficiently emphasized the difference between these two Balkan men, yet this difference is very important in the film. Marko is Blacky's buddy, but he is an opportunist who exploits Blacky's generosity and his readiness to fight for his country in defense of his people, while Blacky has a good heart he is guilty of his association with pretenders like Marko who lead him and his people into the cellar where they are exploited for decades. Blacky's and Marko's exaggerated irrational behavior serves to subvert the seriousness of fifty years of communist myth, but more importantly it shows that the people were not harmed as much by communism and Tito as by manipulators and cronies like Marko. Using similar visual effects as in *Forrest Gump*, the acclaimed 1994 American epic comedy-drama romance film based on the 1986 novel of the same name by Winston Groom, Kusturica incorporates Marko into archived footage of Tito's speeches by having him shake Tito's hand at the end of the president's

public performance. He also has him delivering party speeches reminiscent of the political rhetoric of Tito's time in which he glorifies Blacky who supposedly died in defense of communist ideals. The juxtaposition of Marko's celebration of Blacky's supposed heroic death with scenes from the cellar where deceived people and their nationalist leader Blacky produce weapons for Marko's profit questions Tito's time, but the story and questioning do not end there. The film portrays not so much Tito as it does his cronies and opportunists like Marko who, when Tito dies, double their profits by selling arms at the illegal international arms trade overseen by UN troops.

The inclusion of the documentary footage of Tito's funeral in the film, showing presidents and dignitaries from around the world paying tribute to the man who led the Non-Aligned Movement, links the outside world to the local carnival as foreign leaders are seen in the same opportunistic light as Marko. At Tito's funeral, in addition to Leonid Brezhnev and other Eastern European leaders, we see members of the Non-Aligned Movement and leaders of national liberation struggles, such as Yassar Arafat, who benefited from this Movement. The camera focuses on Margaret Thatcher along with members of the British Royal family and the Heads of the major Western powers paying tribute to Tito at his funeral. Like Marko, the West participated in the creation of Yugoslavia because it was beneficial to all of them. But after Tito's and Brezhnev's death the game changed, and they became outspoken critics of the man they praised and honored during the cold war. Marko also criticizes a post-Tito Yugoslavia and departs for the West to return later in a Mercedes, obviously making even greater profits through the new arms trade than he did during Tito's time.

As French philosopher Alain Badiou argues in his *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, in 2001 «[w]e are at the beginning of a new era [...] [which] has been massively marked by the collapse of the USSR - a major historical settling of accounts [une échéance historique majeure] -

and consequently, a new period of American hegemony» (120). In the collapse of the USSR, no country paid as high a price in the "settling of the accounts" as did Yugoslavia. While Germany was the first to prematurely recognize independent Croatia and Slovenia, the US led the way in the recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and intervened in the independence of Kosovo with its bombing of Belgrade which Noam Chomsky called "the new military humanism". The US "humanitarian" military campaign which, according to Chomsky, has become a distinctive feature of US foreign policy in recent years regardless of the fact that there is scant evidence in human history of wars fought out of a sense of compassion, is comparable to Marko's "humanitarian" concern for his friend Blacky and the people whom Marko keeps in the cellar through manipulation.

While *Underground* exaggerates and distorts political reality in Rabelaisian grotesque medieval fashion in order to ridicule political reality and to question the established order, the film also highlights re-creative features in the primitive Balkan makeup such as ethno music, the "bliss of living", and above all the local history of survival. Songs such as "Kalashnikov" and "Mesečina" or "Moonshine" composed by Goran Bregović are not repeated as background music in the film but as an insertion of energy which drives both the characters and the film. Their repetition also brings together and juxtaposes past and present, as well as fictional and historical moments to be viewed in a new light. The words in *Moonshine* describe the general catastrophe looming over characters; the music's crescendo, however, and the attitude of those who sing it defy despair:

There is no more sun,
There is no more moon,
You are no more, I am no more.

There is nothing more... oh
Darkness of war has covered us,
Darkness has covered us... oh.
And I wonder, my dear:
What will happen to us?
Moonshine, moonlight and it is not midnight... oh-oh, oh-oh.
Sun is shining, sun is shining and it is not noon... oh-oh, oh-oh.
From above, light breaks through...
No one knows, no one knows,
No one knows, no one knows,
No one knows what is shining.

As this popular 1990s song suggests, the irrational and mysterious elements in life can defy even the darkest moments of war. Popular songs and ethno music emphasized in the film carry positive, life-giving energy which takes the singing characters out of their horror. To portray the "bliss of living", Kusturica has Blacky, Marko and Natalia spinning around the central axis of the camera accompanied by *trubači* playing at full blast in a faster and faster beat until everything culminates into a happy sounding madness. As Blacky, Marko and Natalia sing *Moonshine* with their heads together, accompanied by a gypsy band which also performs on a spinning wheel, spinning at a faster and faster rate, they create a feeling of togetherness which also helps them to survive the war madness. Their madness is a "festive madness" as Bakhtin would say, a communal madness with re-creative potential which was lost in the nineteenth century, but while it was lost in the written culture, it has survived in folk songs and rituals of local communities which Kusturica recognizes here and incorporates into his highly sophisticated film. The film director is rational and analytical on one the hand, to recognize the seriousness of the situation his characters live in, but at the same time he also recognizes

the irrational, festive side preserved in local culture. Kusturica's affirmation of the joys of life while portraying an awful war leads Goci? to conclude that this makes the filmmaker «stand out as a master of the tragic-comic» (6). As Goci? observes, «The situation [in the former Yugoslavia] at times grew so desperate that often sticking to the simplest pleasures of life and the extreme humor remained the only way out». Other Serbian intellectuals, particularly in Belgrade, have been insulted by the film because, in their view, it reinstates stereotypes and prejudices about the Balkans. «Rejecting the worldwide success of Kusturica's films and Bregovi?'s music is *de rigeur* for many Balkan intellectuals» (Bjelic 15), Dušan Bjeli? writes. Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek believes that *Underground* portrays «a mythical Balkans shot for the Western gaze», adding that «it's a film that internalized the Western notion of a crazy nation, where war is simply our nature» (5). While the portrayal of extravagance and exaggeration could certainly be seen as a reinstatement of Balkan stereotypes, this, I am arguing, is not the primary goal of the film.

There are a number of examples that Kusturica uses to show how hardship and need sharpen the instinct for survival and make people resourceful. When, for example, light is needed for the birth of Blacky's son in the cellar, people ingeniously lift up a bicycle and peddle it in the air to produce electrical energy. They also live as if they were not in a cellar. Jovan grows up normally despite being in the underground, because he is loved and cared for by his father and particularly his grandfather. We see the celebration of his third birthday in the underground. When, during the ceremony, his father Blacky lights a candle to remember his late wife who died at Jovan's birth, he expresses his sorrow through a song, *Stani, stani Ibar vodo* which encapsulates his pain, but in the song he also asks the river Ibar to take him away to a city where a young maiden is waiting for him. As the song transforms pain into hope, the celebration of a child's

birthday also brings joy to the cellar. Local rituals continue to give meaning to their lives in the underground cellar as Jovan grows up and falls in love with a girl from his neighborhood. Their wedding, the next family and community celebration, is again filled with music, singing and drinking. The festive madness in this community finally leads the people out of their cellar and out of the deceptions of Tito's time. It is during the wedding that madness reaches its peak. In the confusion, the monkey fires a cannon which breaks down a wall, opening up the world for them.

Unfortunately, instead of victory and freedom local people exit to find a war of the 1990s which is a civil war again with foreign influences. As characters are separated and the local community is broken, individuals like Ivan find themselves as refugees in Germany and other European countries, unable to function without their extended families. In the larger globalized world there is no place for the «primitive»; their madness is seen as illness and they are placed in mental institutions in which life becomes incredibly painful for them. They become, as Zygmunt Bauman says, «wasted humans». Yet, in his natural habitat Ivan was able to find regenerative powers from the animals he cared for in the zoo and from his extended family.

Natalia's example shows that those who are in tune with the flow of events, with some quick thinking and some courage, gain agency. She is exploited by the two men, but she also exploits them, achieving a sense of balance and justice in their local world. She knows, for example, that Marko is an opportunist, but impressed by his skillfulness she tells him "you lie so beautifully", confirming Marko's thesis that underneath "we are all at least a little liars". Such a statement, and the recognition that manipulation and desire for profit are widespread question the Hollywood notion of good and bad guys. When she learns how unscrupulous Marko is in his exploitation of people in the cellar, she questions Marko if he is "afraid of God". Marko's answer, "have you been lacking anything?"

makes her understand that she and many people like her have been co-participating in his world of corruption, despite the fact that they are basically good people.

Dina Iordanova writes that Western viewers find it difficult to accept Kusturica's «one-dimensional portrayal of women» and his, as Rayns says, «misogyny», evident, for example, at the beginning of *Underground* in the disturbing image in which Marko plants a carnation in the prostitute's fat behind (Rayns 530). Female critics also complain about Kusturica's «reinforcement of a disturbing status quo in gender relations that require critical examination» (Iordanova 32). According to Iordanova, Kusturica's women can be divided into several categories, ranging from the mainstay of domesticity (a housewife who grumbles over her husband's philandering but nonetheless shines his shoes and cooks large breakfasts to cure his hangover), the opportunistic beauty, the blond object of desire (whose top priority is to marry a well-positioned man) and the virginal bride (a static icon with primary visual functions) (Iordanova 32). In *Underground* Blacky's wife is a woman belonging to the first category because when he returns early in the morning from his drunken masculine fun, she scolds him but also makes him eggs and sausages for breakfast and irons his shirt and shines his shoes. The domestic woman, however, plays a minor role in *Underground*, unlike *Do You Remember Dolly Bell* and *When Father Was Away on Business* where this type of a woman plays the major role. In these films Kusturica does not examine critically the traditional female role and he can be criticized for this. Yet, one should recognize that in his examination of the local world he does give domestic women credit for keeping the family together and for preserving life, as Gabriel García Márquez recognizes Ursula in *Hundred Years of Solitude*. In his 1982 Nobel Lecture the Colombian writer complained: «It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the yardstick they use for themselves, forgetting that the ravages of life are not

the same for all, and that the quest for our own identity is just as arduous and bloody for us as it is for them. The interpretation of our reality through patterns not our own serves only to make us more unknown, even less free, even more solitary». Natalia is a woman of the third category, the blond object of desire, whose top priority is to marry a well-positioned man, as Iordanova says. Like women of this type, she gains her agency through her sexuality. However she also uses her intelligence and is by no means passive. She is who she is because the outside pressures are such that, as a poor woman with an invalid brother to care for, she has to use whatever resources she has at her disposal to survive. As mentioned earlier, she embodies the former Yugoslavia pulled and pushed by different forces as Natalia is pulled and pushed by her lovers. At the local level, she is able to deal with the two men, who use physical force to pressure her to marry them. Encouraged by drinking and music at Jovan's wedding, she has enough courage to tell them that she cannot stand to look at them when she is sober. She dances around the tank barrel, clearly a phallic symbol, to publicly shame Marko. She also repeatedly smashes first Marko but also Blacky with a long wooden board as she spins with musicians on the spinning wheel. In the incident before the wedding, when she discovers how corrupt Marko is, her moral superiority is expressed through the position in her and Marko's sexual act. The director has her sitting on Marko's shoulders high above him, while Marko performs oral sex on her. In local culture, in which man's honor is closely linked to sexuality, Natalia is not only in a superior *physical* position, but also a moral one. Kusturica uses the scene of sexual pleasures and madness of a communist official to break the ceiling of the cellar, an event that reveals to the people the communist deception. The system breaks from within and, if left to deal with the new situation by themselves, people like Natalia may have been able to find a solution for themselves. In the local story Natalia finds her ways to stand up to oppressive forces.

Just before the walls of the cellar are broken and the local situation becomes a part of a larger world, Natalia gets the upper hand with her men. At Jovan's wedding she settles her accounts with the communist/opportunist Marko and with the nationalist Blacky. She forces Marko to carry her on his back around the workshop, repeating the scene from the first wedding in which Blacky forces Marko to walk on his hands and knees and carry him on his back while braying like a mule. Using local honor culture and her skills, she reaches a South European form of justice, which is awkward but less chaotic and overpowering than when the cellar is broken and people are aimlessly let loose into the outside world. What follows is nothing but destruction, aimlessness and suffering. Ivan, Marko's lame and stuttering brother, who appears at key moments at the beginning and at the end of the film, plays an important role in the rendering of the local story. The international as well as the local audiences feel for this type ordinary man who cares for his animals in the Belgrade zoo. He and people like him are the real casualties of political and economic corruption and foreign interventions. In their local milieu, however, they have a function and the love of their neighbors, which may not be much for the "global elite" but for them it is life with dignity. Ivan also plays an important role when he kills his corrupt brother Marko. His subsequent suicide by hanging in the church and his later reappearance in the film are reminiscent of the death and resurrection of Christ. However, the film does not have religious significance; the idea of resurrection and continuation is emphasized not only through Ivan but in the statement at the end of the film that "This story has no end". The ending of the film takes the audience from the historical level to the mythical one, or to the level of magical realism where life and reality are viewed beyond logic and mimesis. The audience is told that, "This story has no end" because, one concludes from the preceding developments in the film, the local culture has a history of inventive survival and will go on.

Reality is meshed with desire, collective memory that "once upon a time there was a country (Yugoslavia)", and with instinct for survival and enjoyment of life. Consequently, Blacky hears his drowned son's voice and jumps into the Danube river from which all of the characters return, led by a herd of cows. The scene alludes to animals and humans coming out of Noah's ark after the biblical flood. As the characters then continue their celebration of the interrupted Jovan's wedding, this time with his dead mother Vera present, and Natalie again in her red dress, still flirting with Marko and Blacky, while the *trubači* play the same songs at full blast, the local culture endures.

Critics have interpreted the final scene, in which the small piece of land with all of the characters on it breaks off and drifts down the Danube, as a final 'utopian gesture of Yugo-nostalgia», as Sean Homer says. The film does end with a feeling of nostalgia for the country that once was; however, the theme of hope and survival amidst manipulation and destruction is more prominent. As he portrays manipulation and corruption at the local level, as well as alluding to "humanitarian" foreign intervention, Kusturica recognizes local values such as the irrational "bliss of living", the ability to invent or to be flexible, and the ability to care for one's family or a group of friends as life-giving and life sustaining cultural aspects which keep local communities and ordinary people from becoming "human waste". With this Kusturica does not revert back to romanticism, but invites his audience to reflect on values of the "primitive".

Kusturica's directing skills have generally been compared to those of Federico Fellini. While the level of artistic skill in the making of the film is high, and while at the level of the story there is an intricate dialogical relation between characters, at the level of the plot, as in other carnivalesque films such as *Mardi Gras: Made in China*, numerous stories are about raw, startling celebration, where excess and transgression define everyday life. Kusturica's highlighting of a "re-creative" dimension of

carnavalesque exaggeration has been seen by Slavoj Žižek as «the reverse racism which celebrates the exotic authenticity of the Balkan Other, as in the notion of Serbs who, in contrast to inhibited, anemic Western Europeans, still exhibit a prodigious lust for life» (5).

Calling the recognition of elemental energies in life a form of "the reverse racism" is an intellectual attack on the marginalized. The artistic hybridization in Kusturica's film is comparable to the integration and re-articulation of regional myths and African spirits with sophisticated European structural and formal innovations in Picasso's caricaturesque painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* and in the Latin American Boom of the 1960s and 1970s. Like Spanish painter and Latin American Boom writers, Kusturica emphasizes in an exaggerated fashion the so-called primitive empowering energy capable of creating alternate realities. Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical concepts of polyphony and carnivalesque laughter are extremely helpful in presenting this view.

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