

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF A WESTERN DISCOURSE OF THE BALKANS<sup>\*</sup>

Maria Todorova  
Department of History  
University of Florida, Gainesville

UDK 949.7  
Izvorni znanstveni članak  
Primljeno 15. V. 1996.

This article, part of a larger work, attempts to trace the formation of a distinct discourse on the Balkans in the course of several centuries. The notion "Balkanism" is juxtaposed to Said's category "Orientalism" and is treated not as a simple sub-species of Orientalism, but as an independent category with its own specific links to the dominant European discourses.

By the beginning of the twentieth century Europe had added to its repertoire of *Schimpfwörter*, or disparagements, a new one which, although recently coined, turned out to be more persistent over time than others with centuries old tradition. "Balkanization" came to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units into small and presumably non-viable ones from an economic or political standpoint. It also became a synonym for a reversal to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian. In its latest hypostasis it has been completely decontextualized and has been paradigmatically related to a variety of problems, more specifically in American academe.

That the Balkans have been lately described as the "other" of Europe can be, I believe, accepted as something that does not need special proof. What has been emphasized about the Balkans is that its inhabitants do not care to conform to the

---

<sup>\*</sup> This is the text of a paper given to the Croatian Ethnological Society in May 1996. The extended argument is developed in my forthcoming book *Imagining the Balkans*, Oxford University Press.

standards of behavior devised as normative by and for the civilized world. As any generalization, this one is also based on reductionism. But the reductionism and stereotypization of the Balkans has been of such degree and intensity that the discourse merits and requires special analysis. There has appeared now a whole genre dealing with the problem and representation of "otherness". It is a genre across disciplines, from anthropology, through literature and philosophy, to history in general. The whole discussion of orientalism has been, in one of its many hypostases (some of the others being about power and knowledge, imperialism, Islam and Christianity, etc.) also a sub-genre of this concern with otherness. At present, Orientalism has found an important and legitimate place in academia as the critique of a particular discourse which, when formulated by Edward Said as a term, served to denote "the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short Orientalism [can be discussed and analyzed] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1978:3)<sup>1</sup>.

Particularly inspired by Foucault, from whom he not only borrowed the term "discourse" but the central attention devoted to the relation of knowledge to power (Foucault, 1977; 1980), Said exposed the dangers of essentializing the Orient as the Other. He was also strongly and explicitly influenced by Gramsci's distinction between civil and political society and especially the notion of cultural hegemony which invested Orientalism with prodigious durability and strength (Gramsci, 1971)<sup>2</sup>. Predictably, the response to Said's book was quite polarized. It produced detractors as well as followers and epigones<sup>3</sup>. I am not going to be exhaustive in this part but the main elements of the criticism deserve to be mentioned. It involved hefty objections on the part of modernization theorists or from classical liberal quarters<sup>4</sup>. It entailed also serious and subtle epistemological critique, an attempt to smooth off the extremes and go beyond Said, and beyond Orientalism (Lele, 1993)<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Almost two decades later Said reiterated that his objection to Orientalism was grounded in more than just the antiquarian study of Oriental languages, societies and peoples but that "as a system of thought it approaches a heterogeneous, dynamic and complex human reality from an uncritically essentialist standpoint; this suggests both an enduring Oriental reality and an opposing but no less enduring Western essence, which observes the Orient from afar and, so to speak, from above" (Said, 1995:3).

<sup>2</sup> This is quite apart from the question of how exactly Said's thought relates to the general Foucauldian or Gramscian *oeuvre*, a question which some critics did not miss to point out.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example the uneven collection of essays published in Hussain et al. 1984, which contains some good articles alongside outright doctrinaire pieces.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Kopf, 1980. For an early survey of the reception of Said's theory, see Kapp, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> See also the critique of Ernest Gellner on Said's latest book (1992), in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 19 February 1993.

Meanwhile, there has been also important advance in the study of power and representation, which has gone beyond Foucault (Marglin and Marglin, 1990; Clifford, 1988; Mohanty, 1989).

Some of the more pedestrian objections to Said were made on the ground that he was negating and even demonizing the work of generations of honest and well informed orientalists who had made a prominent contribution to human knowledge (Lewis, 1993). Even less distinguished objections to Said's book judged his work on the basis of how it was appropriated in part of the Arab world as a systematic defence of the Arabs and of Islam, and imputed to Said a surreptitious anti-Westernism. Said himself has convincingly rejected this allegation by showing that it was founded on a propensity for essentialism which treats "fundamentals" as ahistorical categories, because "no one finds it easy to live uncomplainingly and fearlessly with the thesis that human reality is constantly being made and unmade, and that anything like a stable essence is constantly under threat" (Said, 1995:3). This however, as Said is well aware, does not solve the larger and general problem of the limits of control over one's text, the new contexts which give it a different life and meaning, and the dubious fairness of intellectual accusations based on retrospective visions of unpremeditated consequences.

There have been, however, also more substantial and subtle critiques of Said's endeavor which were aimed at refining rather than refuting his work. An early one, for example, justly pointed out that "orientalism allows or induces the reader to form in his mind the picture of an age-old relationship between 'East and West' wherein the latter has nearly always, and certainly characteristically, been the aggressive, self-confident party, and usually the stronger, controlling one" (Parker, 1980:6). A look at the earlier period when Islam was the stronger and menacing entity suffices to question this view. This was a critique aimed at the non-historical, essentialist inconsistencies in Said's approach, who was speaking of a generic Orient which could accommodate Aeschylus, Victor Hugo, Dante and Karl Marx. Without invalidating his general position, Said was also criticized for overgeneralizing western attitudes exclusively on the basis of the French and English paradigm. However, French and British, not to speak of German orientalism merited a nuanced approach where many diverse forms of orientalism would appear (Fuchs-Sumiyoshi, 1984:5, 156-159; Lowe, 1991).

Mostly, and justly, Said was criticized for the lack of social and economic contextualization, for situating his critique exclusively in the realm of ideas, for his concentration on textuality and textualism<sup>6</sup>. Said was also attacked for cutting to the heart of the anthropological project by dissolving the subject/object relation altogether. He was criticized that by positing the falseness of the orientalist representation, he did not address the logical consequence "that there has at least to

---

<sup>6</sup> For a summary of critiques of Said from the left, see Turner, 1994:4-8.

be the possibility of representation that is 'true' " (Richardson, 1990:16-19). Finally, Said has been taken to task for his self-representation which, it has to be admitted, has undergone considerable evolution over the last two decades. Despite all distinguished and undistinguished objections, the place of *Orientalism* and of "orientalism" in academic libraries and dictionaries has been secured. The continuing resonance of Said's category is perhaps best explained by the growing awareness of students of society and history "of the role of their academic disciplines in the reproduction of patterns of domination" (Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993:1). What has been recognized, on the basis usually of studies on India (Schwab, 1984/1950; Halbfass, 1988; Suleri, 1989; Inden, 1990) and other colonial cases, "is that the critiques of colonialism have not really led to a reflection on the evolution of knowledge that brings us into the postcolonial (or neocolonial) present" (Breckenridge and van der Veer, 1993:2).

This can be also applied to relations of dominance or dependence outside the colonial context, as is the case with the Balkans. In fact, I will argue that what can be termed as balkanism is not merely a sub-species of Orientalism. Thus, the argument advanced here purports to be more than a mere "orientalist variation on a Balkan theme"<sup>7</sup>. My aim is to position myself vis-à-vis the orientalist discourse and elaborate on a seemingly identical, but actually only similar phenomenon, what I have called *balkanism*. What are, then, if any, the differences between these categories?

In the first place, this is the historical and geographic concreteness of the Balkans as opposed to the intangible nature of the Orient. Said himself admits that Orient and Occident "correspond to no stable reality that exists as a natural fact" (Said, 1995:3). Moreover, East was not always and not necessarily the pejorative component of the opposition. For Byzantium, which was the unrivalled center of the civilized European world for several centuries after the fall of Rome, the West was synonymous with barbarity, crudeness and lack of sophistication. It was only after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the eclipse of the Orthodox church in the Ottoman empire, but especially with the unique economic take off of Western Europe, that East came to be internalized also by the Orthodox world as the less privileged of the opposition pair.

As Larry Wolff has convincingly shown, the conventional division of Europe into East and West which we are so used to, is a comparatively late invention of the eighteenth century *philosophes* who were responsible for the conceptual reorientation of Europe along an East-West axis from the heretofore dominant division of Europe into North versus South (Wolff, 1994). This new division, although also geographical, i.e. spatial, began gradually to acquire also

---

<sup>7</sup> This is a paraphrase of the title of Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden, "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics", 1992.

different overtones, borrowed and adapted from the belief in evolution and progress which flourished during the Enlightenment. Because the geographic east of Europe and the world in general situated to the east vis-à-vis Europe was the one lagging behind Europe primarily in its economic performance, East came to be identified more often, and often exclusively, with industrial backwardness, lack of sophisticated social relations and institutions typical for the developed capitalist West, with irrational and superstitious cultures unmarked by Western Enlightenment. This added an additional vector in the relationship between East and West: time, where the movement from past to future was not merely motion but was understood as evolution from simple to complex, from backward to developed, from primitive to cultivated. This latter element of time (with its developmental aspect) has been an important, and probably nowadays the most important characteristic feature of contemporary perceptions of East and West. Thus, since the ancient Greeks the East, the Orient has always existed as an elastic and ambiguous concept. Everyone has and has had one's own Orient, pertaining to space or to time, or most often to both. The perception of the Orient has been, therefore, relational, depending on the normative value set on the point of observation.

The Balkans, on the other hand, have a very concrete historical existence. If, for the Orient, one can play with the famous *mot* of Derrida: "il n'y a pas de hors-texte", the question whether they exist cannot be even posed for the Balkans. The proper question for the Balkans should be "qu'est-ce qu'il y a de hors texte?" What, then, are the Balkans? In a complex argument which I am not reproducing here, I am surveying the different legacies which shaped the southeast European peninsula, and while acknowledging the important heritage of Ancient Greece, the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and especially the millennium of Byzantium, I posit that in this sequence of historical legacies the most important for my purposes was the one which left its name on the peninsula: the Ottoman. It would not be even exaggerated to say that the Balkans are, in fact, the Ottoman legacy. Moreover, it is the Ottoman elements or the ones perceived as such, that are mostly invoked in the current stereotype of the Balkans (Todorova, 1995).

There is a widespread notion that the Balkans began losing their identity once they began to europeanize. That this phrasing implies the difference of the Balkans from a putative Europe is obvious. Far more interesting is the fact that the process known as "europeanization", "westernization", or "modernization" of the Balkans took place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its aspects included the spread of rationalism and secularization in the world of ideas, intensified commercial activities and industrialization, the formation of a bourgeoisie and other new social groups in the economic and social sphere, and above all, the triumph of the bureaucratic nation-state. From that point of view the Balkans were the last residue of an imperial legacy which were becoming European by shedding precisely its imperial character, considered widely an anomaly at the

time, and by assuming (and, of course, emulating) the European nation-state as the normative form of social organization at the time. It may well be that what we are witnessing today is an advanced stage of the end of the Balkans, if it is, as I think it is, the Ottoman period and the Ottoman legacy.

Closely linked to the intangible nature of the Orient, in contrast to the concreteness of the Balkans, was the role that it served as escape from civilization. As Said and many others have shown, the East in general was constructed for the West as an exotic and imaginary realm, the abode of legends, fairy tales, and marvels, it epitomized longing and offered option, as opposed to the prosaic and profane world of the West. The Orient became Utopia, "it represented the past, the future, and the Middle Ages". It was, of course, the admiration of the romantics, which produced Byron's *Child Harold*, the *Ghiaour*, and *The Bride of Abydos*, Goethe's *Westöstlicher Diwan*, Chateaubriand's *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*, Victor Hugo's *Orientales*, Heinrich Heine's *Romanzero*, the poems and works of Pierre Loti, Théophile Gautier, Samuel Coleridge, Thomas Moore, etc. The Orient nourished and enriched the imagination of the romantics, but it became also an escape for liberals and nationalists who felt stifled by the rise of conservatism and reaction after the Napoleonic wars when the Orient "became a symbol of freedom and wealth" (Germaner and Inankur, 1989:21).

The imagined Orient served not only as a refuge from the alienation of a rapidly industrializing West but also as a metaphor for the forbidden. "Confected from Western desire and imagination", the East offered a sumptuous wardrobe and an even more extravagant nudity. There was an explicit relationship between the Orient and the feminine, and it has been argued that oriental discourses involve a theory of sexuality and sensuality in the disguise of a theory of asceticism (Turner, 1994:98). Alongside "eastern cruelty", which was a main theme in orientalist descriptions and painting, came also another component with a strong appeal in Europe, lust:

"Scenes of harems, baths, and slave markets were for many Western artists a pretext by which they were able to cater to the buyer's prurient interest in erotic themes... Such pictures were, of course, presented to Europeans with a "documentary" air and by means of them the Orientalist artist could satisfy the demand for such paintings and at the same time relieve himself of any moral responsibility by emphasizing that these were scenes of a society that was not Christian and had different moral values." (Germaner and Inankur, 1989:42)

The Balkans, on the other hand, with their unimaginative concreteness, and their almost total lack of wealth, induced a straightforward attitude, usually negative, but rarely nuanced. There was some exception at the time of romantic

nationalism in the words and deeds of philhellenes or slavophiles, but these efforts were extremely short-lived, and they usually touched upon the freedom component, totally devoid of the mystery of exoticism. Even the one exception I know, which espoused Balkan romance, was of a distinctly different nature. In 1907 an American, Arthur Douglas Howden Smith, joined a Macedonian cheta (revolutionary band) organized in Bulgaria in order "to see things for myself". He left a lively account which opened with reflections on the prosaic character of modern civilization which had deprived its populations of the picturesqueness and color of days bygone: "It is no wonder, then, that romance has in a measure passed from our lives, leaving a lingering fragrance, all the more cherished because of its rarity". Resolved to pursue his call for adventure in "lonesome corners of the earth, [where] men and women still lead lives of romance" Smith decided to head for the Balkans which had long interested him.

"To those who have not visited them, the Balkans are a shadow-land of mystery; to those who know them, they become even more mysterious... You become, in a sense, a part of the spell, and of the mystery and glamour of the whole. You contract the habit of crouching over your morning coffee in the café and, when you meet a man of your acquaintance, at least half of what you say is whispered, portentiously. Intrigue, plotting, mystery, high courage, and daring deeds--the things that are the soul of true romance are to-day the soul of the Balkans." (Smith, 1908:1-3, 24)

Again, like in the case of the Orient, there is the mystical escape to the Middle Ages but without a whim of the accompanying luridness and overtly sexual overtones of Orientalism. It is a distinctly male appeal: the appeal of medieval knighthood, of arms and plots. In Belgrade one got, wrote Smith, the first feeling of the Balkans: "Intrigue is in the air one breathes. The crowds in the Belgrade cafés have the manner of conspirators. There are soldiers on every hand" (Smith, 1908: 10-11). The one woman who excited his imagination did so because of qualities ostensibly held for masculine despite his insistence that she was "feminine to the core". She was the Bulgarian Tsveta Boyova, who had been born in a Macedonian village, had graduated in medicine from the University of Sofia and, after having lost her husband, father and two brothers in a Turkish raid, had offered her services as nurse and doctor to the Macedonian bands. Smith was enchanted to be served a three-course meal by a woman who, lacking enough silverware, would wash it after each course:

"To a man who had almost forgotten what civilization meant, and who would have been prone, like his companions, to stare in dull amaze at a frock-coat, it was like an essence from the blue, to have coffee in the afternoon at five

o'clock, served by a woman who knew Tolstoy, Gorki, Bebel, Carl (sic!) Marx and the leaders of Socialism, from A to Z, to whom Shakespeare was more than a name, and who had ideas on the drama and modern society, revolutionary, but interesting." (ibid., 315-316)

Describing her as a *sui generis* Joan of Arc, Smith was evidently taken by the indefinable quality of Boyova: "I have never met a man or a woman who was her equal in pluck. There was a quality about her, indefinable in nature, that made her striking" (ibid., 311). Yet, even in the rare exception of Smith, the mystery of the Balkans was incomplete. On arriving in Sofia in 1907, he found the city lighted by electricity, with trolley-cars and telephones and well policed, a situation which might "dissatisfy the tourist who is looking for the picturesque". Yet, the disappointment could be only superficial:

"Sofia has not been entirely civilized as to lose its Old-World charm, its spicy aroma of the East. The veneer of civilization is only skin-deep in some respects, and in others it has not made an appreciable difference. You feel, instinctively, as you step from the corridor train onto the platform of the low, clean, yellow station at Sofia, that Europe is behind you; you stand in the shadow of the Orient." (ibid., 9)

It is, thus, not an innate characteristic of the Balkans which bestows upon it the air of mystery but the reflected light of the Orient. One is almost tempted to coin a new Latin phrase: "*Lux Balcanica est umbra Orientis*". Apart from the above solitary example of romanticizing the Balkans at a comparatively late date -the beginning of the twentieth century- the images that they evoked were for the greatest part quite prosaic. As I have illustrated and analyzed at length elsewhere, these images underwent a slow evolution and coalesced by the end of the nineteenth century in two dominant patterns--the aristocratic and the bourgeois- to be later subsumed in larger classificatory schemes (Todorova, 1994<sup>8</sup>).

Until at least the middle of the nineteenth century, the aristocratic was no doubt the dominant discourse, and even after that was not entirely displaced. The aristocratic lens through which developments in the Ottoman empire and the Balkans were evaluated can be seen clearly in the respect shown for Ottoman might in earlier centuries. One can find it even behind the display of later contempt for the downfall of the empire. This contempt was more regret and even helpless rage at the betrayal of greatness. It was also a deep seated acceptance of empire and authority. Despite the overall anti-Islamic, often righteous fundamentalist Christian rhetoric, for the vast majority of the ruling elites in Europe, even quite apart from

---

<sup>8</sup> The argument is developed at length in three chapters in my forthcoming *Imagining the Balkans*.



considerations of balance of power, it was easier to identify (and they, in fact, did) with the Ottoman rulers, rather than with the Balkan upstarts. It was not only empathy with the rulers but also a sympathetic, yet at the same time condescending attitude toward the subjects which was revealed in this approach. It was the essentially prejudicial but also protective patronizing of the aristocrat toward the peasant.

The second pattern that emerged derived from a completely different set of values, essentially opposed to the aristocratic, but curiously superimposing its idiosyncratic stereotypes on the previously developed prejudicial configuration. It was an entirely nineteenth century phenomenon, based on enlightened linear evolutionary thinking, and on dichotomies like progressive - reactionary, advanced - backward, industrialized - agricultural, urban - rural, rational - irrational, historic - non-historic, etc. This has been summarized by Rebecca West:

"The nineteenth-century English traveller tended to form an unfavourable opinion of the Christian subjects of the Ottoman Empire on the grounds that they were dirty and illiterate and grasping (as poor people, oddly enough, often are) and cringing and inhospitable and ill-mannered (as frightened people, oddly enough, often are). He condemned them as he condemned the inhabitants of the new industrial hells in Lankashire and Yorkshire, who insisted on smelling offensively, drinking gin to excess, and being rough and rude. Even as he felt glad when these unfortunate fellow-countrymen of his were the objects of missionary efforts by philanthropists drawn from the upper and middle classes, he felt glad because the Christian Slavs were in the custody of the Turks, who were exquisite in their personal habits, cultivated, generous, dignified, hospitable, and extremely polite." (West, 1969:1095)

However, where this new approach differed from the aristocratic was in the gradual but finally complete rejection of the Ottomans as a basic hindrance to progress. Indeed, progress had become the key-word at the close of the nineteenth century much like democracy has become the one at the close of ours. What this view shared with the aristocratic approach though, was the general contempt for the peasantry. It was not, however, coupled with the almost benign patronage of the aristocrat. It looked at the peasantry as a social group still to be reckoned with but essentially belonging to a past economic and social order. In the best case, it considered it a class which was retreating from center stage, a curio and repository for archaic customs and beliefs. In its most extreme form, like for example among nineteenth century socialists, it flatly predicted the disappearance of the peasant. In fact, the aristocratic bias against egalitarian peasant societies was translated into the bias of the urban bourgeois rational culture against, what was perceived as, the

superstitious, irrational and backward rural tradition of the Balkans whose sole value lay in providing the open-air *Volksmuseum* of Europe.

These patterns of perception were also shaped by what was increasingly becoming a common outlook of the educated European, sharing in the beliefs and prejudices of the intellectual currents and fashions dominant at different periods: renaissance values, humanism, empiricism, enlightenment ideas, classicism, romanticism, occasionally even socialism, but almost inevitably tainted with what Aijaz Ahmad has called "the usual banalities of nineteenth-century Eurocentrism" (Ahmad, 1992:229). They were transmitted throughout the following periods and perpetuated, sometimes literally, sometimes in a modified form, often intertwined, by consecutive generations.

Practically all descriptions of the Balkans offered as a central characteristic their transitionary status. The West and the Orient are usually presented as incompatible entities, anti-worlds, but completed anti-worlds. Said had described his own work as "a study based on the rethinking of what had for centuries been believed to be an unbridgeable chasm separating East from West" (Said, 1995:6). The Balkans, on the other hand, in contrast to Said's "unbridgeable chasm" have always evoked the image of the bridge. The bridge as a metaphor for the region has been so closely linked to the literary *oeuvre* of Ivo Andrić that one tends to forget that its usage both in outside descriptions, as well as in the self-images of each and every one of the Balkan literatures and everyday speech, borders on the banal. The Balkans are a bridge between East and West, between Europe and Asia. They are also a bridge between stages of growth, and this invokes labels as semi-developed, semi-colonial, semi-civilized, etc. Finally, they are also described as a mixture between races. Already in the previous centuries there was a pervasive theme about the mongrel nature of the Balkans. But the racial approach, which had already seasoned in nineteenth century thinking, was systematically articulated only in the twentieth, and particularly in the interwar period. It began with a more open rendering of the formerly subdued and non-judgemental motif of the racial mixture of the Balkan population. At the beginning of the century, Thessaloniki was still only an uncouth Tower of Babel with sprinklings of civilization from the West: "Bulgarians, Servians, Albanians, Vlachs, Armenians, Anatolians, Circassians, Greeks, Turks, Jews, infidels and heretics of every land and language. Between and among these are sprinkled the races of civilized Europe" (Booth, 1905:147). Some two decades later it produced only feelings of revulsion and impurity. In 1921 two Englishmen contemplated the inevitably "hybrid race" of the inhabitants of Macedonia:

"Being essentially cross-bred, the Macedonian is hardly distinguished for his physique... The Turks are perhaps the best physical specimens of the various Macedonian types, probably, because they have indulged in less cross-

breeding... He has the same kind of dark eyes which are common to all races in the Near East, but he is distinguished by a prominent and, usually acquiline nose. Turkish women, when not interbred to any pronounced extent, are generally attractive, but those of Bulgar or Greek extraction usually have broad and very coarse features of the Slav type. Such features, comprising thick lips, broad flat noses and high cheek-bones scarcely conduce to beauty in a woman. Darkish hair with yellowish brown complexions cause them to resemble the Greek type, which is invariably sallow, with jet black hair and luminous eyes." (Goff and Fawcett, 1921:XIV, 13-16)

It could be disputed whether the "coarse features of the Slav type" were typically delineated or so common among the Greeks but the description of the unprepossessing physique reminds too much of Negroid characteristics usually held at the bottom of the referential scale. The racial impurity went hand in hand with "an immature, unenlightened intellect,... a crafty disposition and a natural tendency towards savagery" (ibid., 10).

Although the Germans were only apprentices of Gobineau and Chamberlain, to mention but a few of the founding-fathers of racism, they certainly overdid the masters. Hermann, Graf von Keyserling, married to a grand-daughter of Bismarck, was an influential figure in the philosophy of self-knowledge and cultural psychology, and had created a school of wisdom (*Schule der Weisheit*) in Darmstadt in the 1920s which aimed at bringing people through creative knowledge to self-attainment. In 1928 he published a book *Das Spektrum Europa* which was an immediate success and was produced in a simultaneous translation as *Europe* in the United States (Keyserling, 1928). Of his twelve chapters, one was devoted to the Balkans:

"What is the significance of the Balkans to us who live in other lands? ... Why is it that the word 'Balkanization' is almost always rightly understood and rightly applied? ... As far as I can see, its symbolic sense may best be apprehended from two starting-points; the first is the generally accepted statement that the Balkans are the powder-magazine of Europe. The second is the fact of a peculiarly elemental and irreconcilable racial enmity." (Keyserling, 1928:319)

Having provided lengthy characteristics of the Greeks, the Romanians and the Turks (the Serbs, Bulgarians and Albanians he deemed "primitive warrior and robber races" not worthy of attention), Keyserling thus summarized the essence of the Balkans:

"The Balkans of today are nothing but a caricature of the Balkans of ancient times. The spirit of the Balkans as such is the spirit of eternal strife. Inhabited as they are by primitive races, they present the primal picture of the primal struggle between the one and the all. In the case of the highly gifted and highly educated nations and individuals, this picture emerges as the spirit of the agon. But the earth-spirit of the Balkans as such is the primal formative power." (ibid., 321-322)

The same year, 1928, saw the American translation of a Swedish book which had appeared in Stockholm in 1927 (Ehrenpreis, 1928). It is an important work which articulated clearly a motif only discreetly present in the writings of the previous century. The author, Marcus Ehrenpreis, traversed the Balkans, Egypt and the Holy Land in quest of "the soul of the East". He spoke with disgust about his co-passengers who "have learnt nothing" and have brought back only "their precious possessions, photographs and big hotel bills" (Ehrenpreis, 1928:208).

"This is not the way to visit the Orient! If you would win something of the soul of the east do not approach it as you would a strange country but as if you were returning home - to yourself...Do not go condescending as a bringer of civilization, but as a disciple, humbly and receptively." (ibid., 209)

This spirit, to which the author tried to be true, was conspicuously absent from his first chapter, *Across the New Balkans*. Instead, his opening words already made the crucial distinction between the Balkans and the authentic Orient:

"The Orient is already in evidence at the Masaryk railway station in Prague. Not the real Orient of the Azhar at Cairo or the one of Haifa's street cafes, but that variant of the East known as Levantinism; a something, elusive of definition - the body of the East but without its spirit. It is a crumbling Orient, a traitorous deserter from itself, without fez, without veil, without Koran: it is an artificial, trumpery New Orient which has deliberately broken with its past and renounced its ancient heritage." (ibid., 11)

The description of the inhabitants of this Levant (as contrasted to the true East) is a witness to their racial degeneration:

"There is something eccentric in their conduct, they are overloud, too sudden, too eager... Oddish, incredible individuals appear on all sides - low foreheads, sodden eyes, protruding ears, thick underlips... The Levantine type in the areas between the Balkans and the Mediterranean is, psychologically and socially, truly a "wavering form", a composite of Easterner and Westerner,

multilingual, cunning, superficial, unreliable, materialistic and, above all, without tradition. This absence of tradition seems to account for the low intellectual and, to a certain extent moral, quality of the Levantines...In a spiritual sense these creatures are homeless; they are no longer Orientals nor yet Europeans. They have not freed themselves from the vices of the East nor acquired any of the virtues of the West." (ibid., 12-13)

In both Keyserling's and Ehrenpreis's ideas one can distinguish unmistakably previous overtones but immeasurably more intense. The former dichotomy between gentlemanly overlords and cringing subjects had found here a theoretical rationalization: it was the cultural expression of a fault-line, and the racial and cultural crossbreed was considered to be worse than the purebred oriental Other. For Keyserling and Ehrenpreis, the Balkans were a contemptuous deviation even of the less than flattering abstraction of the Orient. Thus, I would posit that unlike orientalism which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity.

As Mary Douglas has shown elegantly in her study of pollution concepts, that objects or ideas which confuse or contradict cherished classifications provoke in reaction pollution behavior which condemns them, because "dirt is essentially disorder". These confusing or contradicting elements Douglas calls ambiguous, anomalous or indefinable. Drawing on a general consensus that "all our impressions are schematically determined from the start", that "our interests are governed by a pattern-making tendency", she holds that "in a chaos of shifting impressions, each of us constructs a stable world in which objects have recognizable shapes, are located in depth, and have permanence":

"Uncomfortable facts, which refuse to be fitted in, we find ourselves ignoring or distorting so that they do not disturb these established assumptions. By and large anything we take note of is pre-selected and organized in the very act of perceiving. We share with other animals a kind of filtering mechanism which at first only lets in sensations we know how to use." (Douglas, 1970:12, 48-50, 115)

Although Douglas recognizes the difference between anomaly (the element which does not fit a given set or series) and ambiguity (the quality of inducing two interpretations), she concludes that "there is very little advantage in distinguishing between these two terms in their practical application". Thus, ambiguity is, in practice, treated as anomaly. Because of their indefinable character, persons or phenomena in transitional states, like in marginal ones, are considered to be dangerous, both being in danger themselves and emanating danger to others. What one can do, in the face of facts and ideas that cannot be crammed in the pre-existing

*schemata*, or which invite more than a single interpretation, is either blind oneself to the inadequacy of the concepts, or seriously deal with the fact that some realities elude them (ibid., 50, 116, 191-192).

It is this exasperation before complexity that made William Miller exclaim at the end of a paragraph describing the extraordinary medley of races and languages where "the Bulgarian and the Greek, the Albanian and the Serb, the Osmanli, the Spanish Jew and the Romanian, live side by side": "In short, the Balkan peninsula is, broadly speaking, the land of contradictions. Everything is the exact opposite of what it might reasonably be expected to be." (Miller, 1898:XVI) The in-betweenness of the Balkans, their transitional character, could have made them simply an incomplete other (in contrast to the Orient which is constructed as a complete other); instead I maintain that the Balkans are constructed as an incomplete self, the dark side within. Enlarging and refining on van Gennep's groundbreaking concept of liminality, Turner and a number of other sociologists, anthropologists and psychoanalysts have introduced a distinction between liminality, marginality and the lowermost.<sup>9</sup> While liminality presupposes significant changes in the dominant self-image, marginality defines qualities "on the same plane as the dominant ego-image". Finally, the third distinction - lowermost - suggests "the shadow, the structurally despised alter-ego" (Hall, 1991:40-41). The reasons that the Balkans can be treated as an illustration of the "lowermost" case, as an incomplete self, are two: religion and race.

One of the versions of the East-West dichotomy played itself out in the opposition between Eastern or Greek Orthodoxy and Catholicism. And yet, Orthodoxy, for all the loathing that it evoked among Catholics (and vice versa), was not seen as a transitional faith to Islam; what was usually emphasized was the unbridgeable boundary between Christianity (even in its Orthodox variety) and the Muslim religion. Said's orientalism is very distinctly identified with Islam. But the attitudes toward the Islamic and the Christian East display distinct differences. Whereas the treatment of Islam was based on an unambiguous attitude toward religious otherness (ranging from rejection to enlightened acceptance), there was an ambiguous attitude toward the Ottoman polity which invited a very distinct class attitude of solidarity with the Muslim Ottoman rulers in particular (the aristocratic pattern I have described). This was in stark contrast to the poor and unpolished, but Christian, upstarts, who have been described in a discourse almost identical to the one used to depict the western lower classes, a virtual analogy between the East End of London and the east end of Europe. Even the racial component, although I have insisted at length on its transitional character, is in the final analysis, and despite the important internal hierarchies, treated as positioned on this side of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Arnold van Gennep (1960) introduced the notion of liminality as a term of discourse in 1909. On the application of the concept of the lowermost in society, see Turner, 1969 and 1974.

fundamental opposition: white versus colored, Indo-European or Caucasian versus the rest. As shown by sociological studies on stigma, "difference is an essential part of typification. Put most simply, differences are variations between or within type" (Ainlay and Crosby, 1986:21). It is my thesis that while orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences within one type.

To summarize, Balkanism evolved independently from Orientalism and, in certain aspects, against or despite it. One of the reasons for this was the separate treatment of Southeastern Europe (or the Balkans) as a geopolitical sphere distinct from the Near or the Middle East. Its Christian character, moreover, fed for a long time the crusading potential of Christianity against Islam. Despite many attempts to depict its (Orthodox) Christianity as simply a sub-species of oriental despotism and thus as inherently non-European or non-Western, still the boundary between Islam and Christianity in general continued to be perceived as the principal one. The absence of a colonial legacy (despite the often exploited analogies) is also a significant difference. Another, and possibly more important reason, has to do with the construction of a Balkan self-identity, or rather of several Balkan self-identities, during the nineteenth and twentieth century. They were invariably erected against an "oriental" other. This could be anything from a geographical neighbor and opponent (most often the Ottoman empire and Turkey but also within the region itself as with the nesting of Orientalisms in the former Yugoslavia) to the "orientalizing" of portions of one's own historical past (usually the Ottoman period and the Ottoman legacy).

Balkanism became, in time, a convenient substitute for the emotional discharge that Orientalism provided, exempting the West from the charges of racism, colonialism, Eurocentrism and Christian intolerance against Islam. After all, the Balkans are in Europe; they are white; they are predominantly Christian, and therefore the externalization of frustrations upon them can circumvent the usual racial or religious bias allegations. As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and the "West" has been constructed. By being geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as "the other" within, the Balkans have been able to absorb conveniently and without the allegation of Eurocentrism a number of externalized political, ideological and cultural frustrations stemming from tensions and contradictions inherent to the regions and societies outside the Balkans.

Reflecting on the different features of the European genius, Agnes Heller maintained that "the recognition of the accomplishment of others has always been part and parcel of the European identity", that "the myth of Occident and Orient is not a juxtaposition of civilization with barbarism but rather of one civilization with another", and that "European (Western) cultural identity has been conceived as

both-ethnocentric and anti-ethnocentric" (Heller, 1992:14). If we are to believe, elaborating on this statement, that Europe produced not only racism but also anti-racism, not only misogyny but also feminism, not only anti-Semitism, but also its repudiation, then what can be termed Balkanism has not yet been coupled with its complementing and ennobling anti-particle.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AHMAD, Aijaz: *In Theory. Classes, Nations, Literatures*, Verso, London, New York, 1992.
- AINLAY, Stephen C. and Faye Crosby: Stigma, Justice and the Dilemma of Difference, in: Stephen C. Ainlay, Gaylene Becker and Lerita M. Coleman (eds.), *The Dilemma of Difference. A Multidisciplinary View of Stigma*, Plenum Press, New York and London, 1986.
- BAKIĆ-HAYDEN, Milica and Robert Hayden: Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics, *Slavic Review* 51(1), 1992, pp. 1-15.
- BOOTH, John L. C.: *Trouble in the Balkans*, Hurst and Blackett, London, 1905.
- BRECKENRIDGE, Carol A. and Peter van der Veer: Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament, in: *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1993.
- CLIFFORD, James: On Orientalism, in: *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 255-276.
- DOUGLAS, Mary: *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1970.
- EHRENPREIS, Marcus: *The Soul of the East. Experience and Reflections*, (translated from the Swedish by Alfhild Huebsch), The Viking Press, New York, 1928.
- FOUCAULT, Michel: *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1977.
- FOUCAULT, Michel: *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1980.
- FUCHS-SUMIYOSHI, Andrea: *Orientalismus in der deutschen Literatur. Untersuchungen zu Werken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, von Goethes "West-östlichem Diwan" bis Thomas Manns "Joseph"-Tetralogie*, Germanistische Texte und Studien Bd. 20, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, 1984.
- van GENNEP, Arnold: *The Rites of Passage*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960.



- GERMANER, Semra and Zeynep Inankur: *Orientalism and Turkey*, The Turkish Cultural Service Foundation, Istanbul, 1989.
- GOFF, A. and Hugh A. Fawcett: *Macedonia. A Plea for the Primitive*, John Lane Company, London and New York, 1921.
- GRAMSCI, Antonio: *Selections from the Prison Notebook*, International Publishers, New York, 1971.
- HALBFASS, Wilhelm: *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1988.
- HALL, James A.: The Watcher at the Gates of Dawn: The Transformation of Self in Liminality and by the Transcendent Function, in: Nathan Schwartz-Salant and Murray Stein (eds.), *Liminality and Transitional Phenomena*, Chiron Publications, Wilmette, Ill., 1991.
- HELLER, Agnes: Europe: An Epilogue?, in: Brian Nelson, David Roberts, and Walter Veit (eds.), *The Idea of Europe. Problems of National and Transnational Identity*, Berg, New York, Oxford, 1992.
- HUSSAIN, Asaf, Robert Olson and Jamil Qureshi: *Orientalism, Islam, and Islamists*, Amana Books, Brattleboro, Vermont, 1984.
- INDEN, Ronald: *Imagining India*, Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, 1990.
- KAPP, Robert A.: Introduction: Review Symposium: Edward Said's Orientalism, *Journal of Asian Studies* 39(3), 1980.
- KEYSERLING, Hermann: *Europe*, (translated by Maurice Samuel), Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York, 1928.
- KOPF, David: Hermeneutics Versus History, *Journal of Asian Studies* 39(3), 1980.
- LELE, Jayant: Orientalism and the Social Sciences, in: *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament. Perspectives on South Asia*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1993, pp. 45-75.
- LEWIS, Bernard: The Question of Orientalism, *Islam and the West*, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1993, pp. 99-118.
- LOWE, Lisa: *Critical Terrains: French and British Orientalisms*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1991.
- MARGLIN, Stephen A. and Frederique Appfel Marglin (eds.): *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture and Resistance*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990.
- MILLER, William: *Travels and Politics in the Near East*, T. Fisher Unwin, London, 1898.
- MOHANTY, S. P.: Us and Them: On the Philosophical Bases of Political Criticism, *Yale Journal of Criticism* 2(2), 1989, pp. 10-31.
- PARKER, J. S. F.: From Aeschylus to Kissinger, *Gazelle Review* I, 1980.
- RICHARDSON, Michael: Enough Said. Reflections on Orientalism, *Anthropology Today* 6(4), August 1990.
- SAID, Edward: *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1978.
- SAID, Edward: *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1992.

- SAID, Edward: East isn't East, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 3 February 1995.
- SCHWAB, Raymond: *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680-1880*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1984 (translation of the French original *La Renaissance Orientale*, Paris, 1950).
- SMITH, Arthur D. Howden: *Fighting the Turks in the Balkans. An American's Adventures with the Macedonian Revolutionaries*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London, 1908.
- SULERI, Sara: *The Rhetoric of English India*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1989.
- TODOROVA, Maria: The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention, *Slavic Review* 53(2), Summer 1994.
- TODOROVA, Maria: The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans, in: L. Carl Brown (ed.), *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint in the Balkans and the Middle East*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1995, pp. 45-77.
- TURNER, Bryan S.: *Orientalism, Postmodernism & Globalism*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994.
- TURNER, Victor: *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*, Aldine, Chicago, 1969.
- TURNER, Victor: *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 1974.
- WEST, Rebecca: *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Penguin Books, New York, 1969.
- WOLFF, Larry: *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1994.

## KONSTRUKCIJA ZAPADNOG DISKURSA O BALKANU

### Sažetak

Zato što je geografski neodvojiv od Europe, a ipak kulturno konstruiran kao "drugi", Balkan je tradicionalno služio kao skladište negativnih osobina nasuprot kojega se stvarala pozitivna i samoslaveća slika "europskoga", čime se izbjegavalo optužbe za eurocentrizam, rasizam, kolonijalizam i sl. Ovaj članak, dio većega rada, nastoji tragati za nastankom posebnog diskursa o Balkanu tijekom nekoliko stoljeća. Pojam "Balkanizam" se su-postavlja Saidovoj kategoriji "Orientalizam" i smatra se ne običnom podvrstom Orientalizma, nego neovisnom kategorijom s vlastitim posebnim odnosom s dominantnim europskim diskursima.