

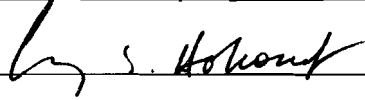
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Roxana Galusca for the Master of Arts Degree

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Title: The Other Side of the Globe: Dystopias and Utopias of Balkan Identity

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Abstract

The Balkans has always been considered the powder keg of Europe, the center of discontent and conflict, a danger for the rest of the world. In Western history, fiction, and journalism, the Balkan nations are depicted as violent, primitive, or, in the best case, romantically exotic, inhabitants of a space reminiscent of the European Middle Ages and full of Draculas. Few of the Western discourses on the Balkans, however, attempt to understand the complex and subtle set of circumstances that gave birth to the Balkan Other and even fewer acknowledge the role that the West played in the “othering” of the region. An analysis of Balkan travel narratives, such as Lady Wortely Montagu’s and Rebecca West’s, reveals a marginal Other Balkan world, situated on the other side of the globe, a space unique through its liminal position between Western modernity and Oriental primitivism. This thesis, while insisting on the postcoloniality of the Balkans, endeavors to show how Western ideology created and reinforced unjustly a negative Balkan Other, without giving the Balkan nations the right to speak back and defend themselves.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GLOBE:  
DYSTOPIAS AND UTOPIAS OF BALKAN IDENTITY

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Department of English

EMPORIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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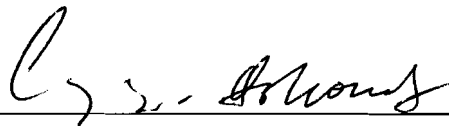
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June 2005

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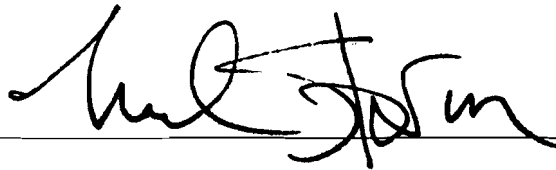
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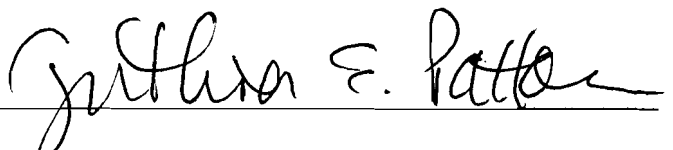
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Approved by Major Advisor



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Approved by Committee Member



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Approved by the Department Chair



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Approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

## Acknowledgements

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I dedicate this thesis to my Balkan people, wherever they might be drifting on their endless journeys.

## Foreword

I started this thesis having in mind not the Balkans (the long mountain range, the countries, the people) but the very action of assigning a name and thus closing off any possibility of re-signifying the people, the nations, and the mountains, known generically as the Balkans. I did not intend to follow the history of the name “Balkan” although I addressed it shortly. I attempted instead to find out to what extent the signified Balkans contains and is contained in the signifier assigned to it. Indirectly, I tried to point at the irremediable divorce between the naming and the concrete reality of the Balkans. Yet, one can’t help noticing the way the very reality of the Balkan space evades its own referents. For what does the Balkans evoke? The mountains, the people, the countries, a group of peasants or of Roma individuals, the Communist sickle, the anti-Balkan discourses, Yugoslavia, Kosovo, or everything of the above? While working on the thesis, I started thinking of René Magritte’s paintings, which endlessly try to evade names and conventional images, and especially of his *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Likewise, a painting of the Balkans would not only evade its colors and form, but one would find necessary to write below it: “This is not the Balkans.”

When I first considered writing about the Balkans, I thought of naming my thesis *This is not the Balkans*. Even if I gave up the name, I kept the attitude. Consequently, this is not the attempt to define or imagine the Balkans better than others have done it, nor is it the approach to the Balkans. This is just one way of perceiving a reality, which is in itself the sum of temporal and spatial issues and realities, and on whose signification scholars still argue. I started writing with the belief that the Balkans does not actually

exist; by the end of my thesis, I knew that it had multiple existences, each of them imbued with different significations and different names.

My approach to the Balkans is sometimes descriptive and informative and sometimes argumentative. In either case, objectivity was not my goal. On the contrary, I tried to be as subjective as possible, and render my own experience of the Balkans and my own response to the writings about the Balkans. I analyzed the Balkans in eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth-century writings, I described the Balkans in politics and mass media, and last but not least, I chose to write about the Balkan experience of the West. Of all my chapters, “The West through the Lens of the East” is the one to which I am most attached because it carries something of my own experience in the Balkans. In this part, I chose to evade the literary scene and write about the concrete, practical, daily Balkan experience of the West. A treatment of the Balkan literature about the West would have been proper, but that in itself would probably constitute the subject of another project.

Of the numerous volumes on the Balkans, I chose to concentrate particularly on two of them: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) and Rebecca West’s *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941). To me they seem essential: the former because it presents the Balkans under the occupancy of the Ottoman Empire and, therefore, two of the world greatest empires, the British and the Ottoman, meet face to face in Montagu’s letters, the latter because it presents the Balkans in a time of torment for Europe, the wake of the First World War. Not haphazardly, the two writers about whom I chose to write are women. This way, I wanted to also illustrate the way the marginalized subjects glance at each other. The Other female subject encounters the

Other Balkan world in the two narratives, both misjudging their places in the world and being misjudged in turn.

Finally, I wanted, through my thesis, to show that no discourse can be trusted and there is no truth as to what the term *Balkan* tries to denote, nor is there any stable reality that can be labeled “the Balkans.” I hope I managed to demonstrate how realities and people alter their meanings once the place of gazing and the means of interpretation change. As Foucault contends, “The death of interpretation is to believe that there are signs, signs that exist primarily, originally, really, as coherent, pertinent, and systematic marks. . . . The life of interpretation, on the contrary, is to believe that there are only interpretations.” As this is not a thesis about the Balkans but about one of the many interpretations of the Balkans, in spite of the sometimes argumentative and almost acrid tone one may find reading it, I would like to envisage my thesis as a series of interrogations on Western European historical and cultural values. Finally, the issue of the Balkans is just one of a long sequence of marginalizations that contributed to the foundation of what Robert C. Young calls “white mythologies.”



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As a Way of Introduction:

A Theoretical Approach to the Balkans

Definitions of the post-colonial, of course, vary widely, but for me the concept proves most useful not when it is used synonymously with a post-independence historical period in once-colonised nations, but rather when it locates a specifically anti- or *post-* colonial *discursive* purchase in culture, one which begins in the moment that the colonizing power inscribes itself onto the body and space of its Others and which continues as an often occluded tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonialist international relations. (Stephen Slemon, “Modernism’s Last Post”)

There could be as many Balkan “truths” as there are tellers, and instead of truth we can more usefully talk about the changing perceptions of truthfulness.

Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*)

Labeled the “powder keg” of Europe and dismissed in politics as immature, the Balkans ended up as the passive pawn in the discursive maneuvers of world politics. Until recently, the Balkan discourse was a one-way rhetoric deployed by the European powers against a group of nationalities, whose geographical identity renders them insignificant and which gain powerful connotations only in political terms. The negative discourses on the Balkan others, however, have lately been counterbalanced by the discursive strategies employed within academia and nourished under the shadow of the continually-encompassing field of postcolonial theory. Advocates of the latter postcolonial discourse on the Balkans have attempted to lighten the darkened Balkan discourse and wipe out the negative aura that has always surrounded the Balkans. The post-colonially redefined and recreated field of Balkanism questions the historical and cultural discourse on the Balkan countries, nurtured by Western academia and initiated by world politics.

It is hard, if not impossible, to make justice to the antagonistic rhetoric employed with reference to the Balkans, mainly because the two terms of the binary opposition, the West and the East, are in themselves shifting symbols of a deliberate political discourse. The idea of justice, in itself an arbitrary and capricious concept, is unsuitable for the dual discourse under discussion here. Hence, I will make no attempts myself to do justice to the Balkans and find the truth, both concepts in which I do not believe. Instead, I intend to analyze the discourse on the Balkans in its full indebtedness to postcolonial theory, despite the fact that many scholars prefer to regard Balkanism as a discourse unconnected or only partially connected to postcolonial theory. In the approach to the Balkans, the postcoloniality of the Balkan discourse is worth discussing, because it will also lead to an

appropriate understanding of the Balkans as such. Much more, denying a postcolonial discourse to the Balkans, as many might be inclined to do, belies the very scope of postcolonial theory.

This ambiguous attitude towards the postcoloniality of Balkanism should not come as a surprise. It is actually at work in the case of many other contemporary discourses. Ever since postcolonialism as a theory, abstract concept, and/or method of rereading grand historical narratives, entered academia, attempts have been made to stretch its practical application and usher in its field of expertise an always-increasing number of “postcolonial” cultures. Despite the criticism that the above accommodating attitude has entailed, one must give credit both to the adherents to a stricter postcolonial discourse and to their more liberal opponents. After all, postcolonialism can refer to the end of the modern, self-oriented grand narratives – in which case it dovetails with Marxism, among others – but it also, in a more specialized sense, attempts to do justice to the previous colonized nations of the world, the formerly-dubbed Third World countries. In either case, postcolonialism is, generally talking, a liberating discourse, even if, like all “-isms,” it runs the risk of having its share in, and indeed being part of, the political ideology of the West. In the same line of thought, the disruption of the Eurocentric rhetoric, which the surge of postcolonial criticism seems to have initiated, leads to the dismantling of what Arif Dirlik and Gyan Prakash call the “foundational historical views and writings” (Dirlik 505). Accordingly, postcolonialism comes to represent, as Prakash affirms, the rejection of the assumption that “history is ultimately founded in and representable through some identity – individual, class, or structure – which resists further decomposition into heterogeneity” (qtd. in Dirlik 505).

Perceived in the above terms, then, postcolonial methods should be accessible to the Balkans as well, despite the impossibility of attaching to the Balkan cultures the “after-colonization” label. After all, the meaning of postcolonialism, like postmodernism, should not be regarded as dependent on the posterity implied by the affix *post-*. At its best, if such an underlining word structure is to be considered, the “post” in post-coloniality should be comprehended in terms of “beyondness,” the idea being that post-coloniality refers to everything that is beyond the homogeneous and self-centered discourse of modernism. The idea of ‘beyond-ness’ could imply, thus, both a spatial and temporal denotation, as opposed to the more concrete temporal meaning of ‘after.’ Hybridity, neither one nor the other, neither inside the Eurocentric historical discourse nor outside it, would all have to be associated with the ‘beyond-ness’ of post-coloniality. As Prakash opines, the postcolonial criticism “formed in this process of the enunciation of discourses of domination occupies a space that is neither inside nor outside the history of Western domination but in a tangential relation to it. This is what Homi Bhabha calls an in-between, hybrid position of practice and negotiation or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms catachresis: “reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding” (qtd. in Prakash 491).

Therefore, the discourse on the Balkans can be justly perceived as postcolonial although arguments can always run back and forth. To make things more challenging, one could add that, in the case of the Balkans, postcoloniality exists as an a priori fact and condition. It exists, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin affirm in a different context, “for a long time, before that particular name was used to describe it,” and it emerges “once the colonised peoples had cause to reflect on and express the tension which ensued from this

problematic and contested, but eventually vibrant and powerful mixture of imperial language and local experience” (qtd. in Dirlik 508). More specifically, in the case of the Balkans, postcoloniality began during and as an aftermath of almost five centuries of Ottoman supremacy, which, as Vesna Goldsworthy wisely points out, “surpassed in its longevity almost any instance of Western colonization” (x). To this one can justly add the ideological “colonization” of the Balkan peoples by both Communism and Churchill’s iron curtain. The result is an ambiguous Balkan Other, shaped by religious, cultural, and geographical factors. A close analysis of Balkan history reveals a region to which the label “postcolonial” should be justly, and sadly so, assigned, for the Balkans has behind them a history of marginalization and ambiguity of identity, of suppression, as well as of historical and geographical misrepresentation and misinterpretation.

Vesna Goldsworthy, trying to piece together the origin of the narrative of colonization in the Balkans, posits that balkanization has its roots in the nineteenth century, “with Byron as its Columbus” (x), adding that “As a ‘colonised’ region, the Balkans offer a mirror image to the more traditional fields of post-colonial inquiry with their focus on textual practices in the framework of physical exploitation of an area of Western Europe” (x). Goldsworthy goes as far as to identify another type of colonization, which she calls “imaginative colonization,” namely the use of the Balkans as source of exotic and entertaining news and stories:

Such ‘imaginative colonization,’ compared to traditional imperialism or economic imperialism, appears to be an innocent process: a cultural great power seizes and exploits the resources of an area, while imposing new frontiers on its mind-map and creating ideas which, reflected back, have

the ability to reshape reality. The level at which this reshaping can take place ranges from the comparatively insignificant attempts of the ‘imaginee’ to create and present a recognizable face to the ‘imager’ for economic benefit – as in the transformation of the Castle Bran in Romania into ‘Dracula’s Castle’ in spite of its tenuous historical link with the historic Count Dracula – to the more important impact of preconceived ideas on the processes of decision-making which determine the extent of foreign loans and investment, the level of military and humanitarian aid, and the speed at which individual Balkan countries are allowed to join ‘Europe,’ NATO or any other international organization or club.

(Goldsworthy 2)

Obviously, the kind of “imaginative colonization,” to which Goldsworthy alludes, originates in the “colonization” of the Balkans by the Ottoman Empire and continues afterwards. As in the case of any of the colonial others, imagination has played an important role in the representation of the Balkans as well. The region has always been a reservoir of novel and exotic imagery, from the depiction of the barbarous Slavic tribes to the representation of the pagan Turks, and, last but not least, to the images of democracy-threatening Communists.

Maria Todorova, approaching the Balkans from a Saidian viewpoint, acknowledges the “semi-colonial, quasi-colonial, but clearly not purely colonial” status of the Balkans (*Imagining* 16). For her, Balkanism – she coins the term in an attempt to show the legitimacy of such a field of study – is an area in itself, not subordinated to Orientalism, and nor entirely under the methodological “umbrella” of postcolonialism.

Her reference to the Balkans as “quasi-colonial” goes back to Du Bois who, in 1945, acknowledged that, “In addition to the some seven hundred and fifty million of disfranchised colonial peoples there are more than half-billion persons in nations and groups who are quasi-colonials and in no sense form free and independent states” (qtd. in Todorova, *Imagining* 16). Moreover, according to Du Bois, an instance of such semi or quasi-colonization is represented by the Balkans where, “[there] are 60,000,000 persons in the ‘free states’ of Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania, and Greece. They form in the mass an ignorant, poor, and sick people, over whom already Europe is planning ‘spheres of influence’” (qtd. in Todorova, *Imagining* 16).

Though Todorova refers back to Said’s *Orientalism* in her study, she acknowledges the special status of Balkanism, which, according to her, cannot be fully associated with Said’s Orientalism. In agreement to Todorova’s rationalization, K.E. Fleming acquiesces in the special-ness of Balkanism and underlines the major features of the Balkan discourse, which sets it apart from the Saidian Orientalism. According to Fleming, then, the special imperialistic attitude of Europe towards the Orient, the perseverant and sustained scholarship on the Orient in the European academia, which is absent in the case of the Balkans, and, last but not least, the existence of the Balkans within Europe, as the “outsider within,” in opposition to the oriental outsider, are only some of the main facts that set Balkanism and Orientalism apart (qtd. in Hammond xiv).

Although Todorova’s introduction of the concept of Balkanism is a major step in the process of creating a Balkan strategic essentialism, one could argue against her reference to the region as “quasi-colonial.” For, the Balkans, I believe, is entitled to be viewed and interrogated in a postcolonial manner and according to a postcolonial



rhetoric. This becomes even more obvious when tackling the issue from the perspective of Bart Moore-Gilbert, who views postcoloniality as a way of thinking and approaching culture and history. Accordingly,

postcolonial criticism can in principle be legitimately applied to any number of different contexts. In my view, postcolonial criticism can still be seen as a more or less distinct set of reading practices, if it is understood as preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relation of domination and subordination – economic, cultural, and political – between (and often within) nations, races, or cultures, which characteristically have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism and which, equally characteristically, continue to be apparent in the present era of neocolonialism. (12)

Thus, postcolonialism, and particularly Balkan postcolonialism, as a cultural and critical approach, can definitely be deployed to analyze the relationship between two different types of cultural and political discourses, the Western and the Balkan, in this case. In addition, in the spirit of postcolonialism, one would have to emphasize the interstitiality of such a relation. Therefore, the postcolonial approach to the Balkans is at its best when it favors neither the Balkans nor Western Europe, but concentrates on the cultural and social hybridity arising from their encounter. Hybridity and difference at the same time are the characteristics of the new discourse on the Balkans.

The Balkans can be discussed in postcolonial terms not only because of its historical legacy, but also because of its contemporary marginal political and economic

position in respect to Western Europe. For one must admit that economic and political “colonization” still continues to a great extent in our developed and “liberal” postmodern world. Poor countries are still rendered poorer by their prosperous counterparts, and third world countries, though the term is officially shunned in a tenuous attempt at “political correctness,” are still insignificant and assigned to the margins of the political sphere. Much more, the American discourse of democracy, the symbol of absolute freedom and equality, is disseminated through means that resemble in ideology those deployed centuries ago by the Conquistadors colonizing Latin America. Roberto Fernández Retamar makes the same argument, hailing 1492, the year when Columbus discovered America, as the date at which European capitalism starts developing and plundering the world. As he explains, “since ‘capitalism and bourgeois society’ are not very beautiful names, some European-born intellectuals, those busy Ariels, stimulated [and simulated, I would add] names of geographical origins, but with the prestige of imperial and ecclesiastical glitter: ‘the West,’ ‘the Western world,’ and ‘Western culture’ are the robes with which capitalism parades itself” (164). Thus, in our postmodern world, which still preserves the narcissistic attitude of modernism, the Balkans is just one of the regions dubbed as Third World and treated accordingly. In such conditions, the Balkan states are today, as they have always been, entitled to the term *postcolonial*.

Edward Said may offer yet another solution to the dilemma of postcolonialism in reference to the Balkans, when making the distinction between *imperialism* and *colonialism*. Hence, according to him, while imperialism means “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory,” colonialism constitutes “a consequence of imperialism ... the implanting of settlements

on distant territory” (9). If one extends Said’s reference to imperial ruling to comprise cultural and ideological control, then perhaps the Balkans can be discoursed in post-imperialistic, if not postcolonial terms. As Said goes on to explain, “In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended; imperialism as we shall see, lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices” (9). And, yet, one might argue that colonialism is not different from imperialism and vice versa, on an ideological level; on the contrary, the two terms mutually contain, signify, and condition each other. One cannot refer to the European colonization without implying the European imperial policy. While historically the two stages may or may not differ and can be regarded as being in a temporal relation, ideologically they reinforce each other, and exist simultaneously, even if this does not mean that they are synonymous.

To go back then to the initial question of a Balkan postcolonial rhetoric, one could find the answer to the post-imperialistic/postcolonial Balkans in the narratives written by Western European emissaries in the Balkans. Much more, one will also have to analyze those literary works about the Balkans, whose authors never set foot in the Balkan Peninsula. By writing about the Balkans without the Balkans, such authors also helped continue a whole negative rhetorical tradition. Although the analysis of such literary works could prove very interesting, my goal in this thesis is to focus on the travelers present in the Balkans, who wrote and created the Balkans and then cultivated the imagination of their longing-for-the-unknown countrymen. The Balkans, singled out in their works as existing outside Europe, and perceived by an Enlightened Europe in the nineteenth century as uncivilized and unrefined, has much in common with the earlier

colonized and the later post-colonized and still *imperialized* world. Tribal, primitive, irrational, the Balkan mentality is seen as tainting the civilized Europe. The Balkan tradition, in the primitive sense of the word, is conceived as emotional, exotic, and childish, but appealing as it represents everything that Europe lost long time ago. It has always been the reservoir of oral stories and folk songs, of mysterious dances and magical chants. It represents the beyond-history Márquez-like territory or the dark, African-like land one would be more likely to find in a Conrad novel. Thus, when Kaplan, the American free-lance journalist, travels through the Balkans the very next days after the Revolution, it shouldn't surprise anyone that he describes the Romanians as a dubious racial mixture:

The atmosphere was wintry, Slavic. Yet the people were dark, almost South American-looking; the language was a Latinate one, in some respects closer to the ancient Roman tongue than modern Italian and Spanish; and the violence, along with the religious rites that surrounded the burial of the victims, bore a theatricality and ghoulishness that revealed a people driven by the need to act out their passions in front of the mirror, over and over again. (84)

It doesn't matter that Kaplan is completely ignorant when it comes to Balkan history, and it seems when it comes to history in general. It carries little significance the fact that Romanian has far less resemblance to Latin than Italian and Spanish. The important fact here is that Kaplan continues a very old discourse on the Balkans, a discourse characterized by the same passion of which he accuses the Balkan people. In his discourse, the Spanish and the Italian peoples become connotative elements for passion

and irrationality, while South America is itself associated with Third World countries. Kaplan is just one representative of the faction of Western journalists who, once in the Balkans, recreate the region according to their own expectations. Hence, the Balkans is recreated every time one more “gifted” Westerner visits the region, with the thought of leaving his/her impressions to eternity.

## The Other Balkan World

There is a rather complex dialectic of reinforcement by which the experiences of readers in reality are determined by what they have read, and this in turn influences writers to take up subjects defined in advance by readers' experiences. A book on how to handle a fierce lion might then cause a series of books to be produced on such subjects as the fierceness of lions, the origins of fierceness, and so forth. Similarly, as the focus of the text centers more narrowly on the subject – no longer lions but their fierceness – we might expect that the ways by which it is recommended that a lion's fierceness be handled will actually *increase* its fierceness, force it to be fierce since that is what it is, and that is what in essence we know or can only know about it. (Edward Said, *Orientalism*)

Robert C. Young, in his *White Mythologies* (1990), reverses Spivak's famous and controversial conclusion that the subaltern cannot speak, and affirms that "It was never the case that the subaltern could not speak, rather that the dominant would not listen" (5). Giving credit to Young's statement and expanding Spivak's definition of the subaltern to encompass the Balkan subjects as well (an expansion that Spivak would probably not approve of), one could affirm that, most of the time, it was not the case that the dominants would not listen but that they continually misheard and misconstrued the discourse of the subalterns. The Balkan subalterns have always talked back, but their answers have been misinterpreted to fit their status of otherness. In the context of this rapport of subordination, the Balkan Other was always there to fill in a narcissistic need for the Western world. Currently, in twenty-first-century academia, where affirmative action is the must of a successful career, the process of Balkan marginalization continues at the same pace. The Balkan subjects have benefited but little from the Western let's-redeem-our-past-injustices attitude. They are still the Other, different and hard to reconcile with the refined West. Once, they were barbarous, illiterate, and violent; now that they have tasted the fruit of Western education, they lack the willingness to redeem their own past injustices and represent an impediment to human rights. One issue gave place to another, and the Other continues to be consigned to its marginal position. Geographical borders have changed, but mental borders have remained the same. The imagined communities are as narrow and self-oriented as ever, while the iron curtain is still there to remind the world that the ideology of the powerful will never change.

The discourse on borders and otherness is as old, ironically, as the ancient demarcation between the civilized Romans in the South and the pagans in the North. Its

reiteration in the world today with reference to the Balkans changes only the object of reference, from North to East, as well as the approach. As Said posits in his study on imperialism, imperialism and colonialism still have a great influence on the world today, while their consequences to some of the world's territories are complex and difficult to define or name, as it involves a two-way influence. The colonial prejudice has acquired traces of cultural and ideological struggles. In Said's words, the struggle "is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, forms, about images and imaginings" (*Culture* 7). The whole process is reduced, according to Said, to the practice of "designating in one's mind a familiar space which is 'ours' and an unfamiliar space beyond 'ours' which is 'theirs'" (*Orientalism* 54). In Said's words, "imaginative geography of the 'our land – barbarian land' variety does not require that the barbarians acknowledge the distinction. It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds; 'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours'" (54).

And yet, when it comes to the relationship between the self and the other, approaches become more complex than postcolonial theory tends to see them sometimes. There is more than a Hegelian relationship between colonizer and colonized, and more than a Saidian Orient/Occident binary opposition. Instead, there is a kind of mutual influence, a "tainting" of the self with the otherness of the Other. Perhaps, this tendency can be traced back to Shelly, who prophesied in 1821, "We are all Greek." More than a hundred years later, Vesna Goldsworthy rightly revises Shelly's statement and declares that "We are all Balkan" (Goldsworthy xi). Hence, the tendency to focus on the interplay between the self and the Other, and the reciprocal discourse created after centuries of



mutual exploration and discovery is increasingly emphasized in postcolonial theory at present. As a consequence, it has become too simplistic nowadays to reduce the postcolonial discourse on identities to a totally distinct Balkan and Western mentality, unless one maliciously plans to do so. Instead, the approach has shifted from a simplistic binary opposition to an analysis of the in-betweenness of the opposition. The attempt in more recent postcolonial theory has been to focus on the borderline that unites and separates at the same time the self and the Other. This in-between space is situated within the much-celebrated Bhabhian liminality, in “the emergence of the interstices,” where “the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (Bhabha 2). It is this new kind of space that should be interrogated and recreated so that it fits the new type of liminal subject, or, as Bhabha argues, the liminal space should be defined by inquiring the formation of the new liminal subject:

How are subjects formed ‘in-between,’ or in excess of, the sum of the ‘parts’ of difference (usually intonated as race/class/gender, etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities, where despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable? (2)

The resulting space is hence a unifying but conflicting area at the same time, a point of convergence and divergence of multiple and different identities.

The issue of Balkan liminality is controversial, but worth pursuing. The Balkans has been perceived and referred to in the last centuries as the borderline between two different worlds. David Norris likens the Balkan borderline identity with that of Azov, referring to the region as “a point of transition where Europe met the Orient, and the whole of Eastern Europe was implicated in this idea of frontier land” (8). Gerard Delanty, on the other hand, posits that, until 1919, the Balkans and the Adriatic Sea represented the division line between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe. According to him, even in antiquity, the Balkans was a borderline region, separating the Greek from Latin Christianity (50). As a consequence of their marginality, the Balkans was never “assimilated by either side” (Delanty 51). Pursuing the same argument of the Balkan frontier, Goldsworthy places a great importance on the clash of conflicting identities in the Balkans, and hence on its borderline existence:

The Eastern and the Western Roman Empires and their Christian successor Churches, the Islamic and the Christian worlds, the Communist and capitalist, all met and clashed in the Balkans. While the Balkans themselves could be represented as a multitude of (sometimes tragically overlapping) peripheries, where the cultural ripples created by the great imperial centers outside the peninsula clash to form interesting patterns even as they subside, individual Balkan identities were shaped over the centuries by the idea of a frontier existence on which they based their own sense of importance. (7)

It is an instance of this ambiguous, borderline existence that makes St. Sava, the founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church, bemoan that “Some of us misunderstood our place in

the clash of currents, so they cried that we belong to neither side, and others that we belong exclusively to one side or the other. But I tell you, Irinej, we are doomed by fate to be the East in the West, and the West in the East, to acknowledge only heavenly Jerusalem beyond us and here on earth – no-one” (qtd. in Goldsworthy 8).

Yet, the view of the Balkans as borderline and meeting point of two different civilizations has always been perceived in historical and geographical terms, and never in terms of Bhabha’s liminal space. In both cases, however, the Balkans exists as border identity, but in the latter case of postcolonial liminality, the process of bordering implies a dynamic of negotiation and active cultural and, indirectly, identity exchanges. The former case of geographical location may or may not include Bhabha’s liminal space, and it exists merely as a static line of demarcation, emphasizing the diversity of the borderline space, instead of supporting its difference. While Bhabha’s space would imply a neither the one-nor the other space, the traditional territorialized borderline region represents an in-between space, where the two antagonistic identities merge and difference is replaced by diversity. In this sense, the Balkans can be revised and reconstructed as a liminal space, starting from its concrete existence at the limit of two different worlds, the Orient and the Occident. Consequently, the Balkan Other is created by the West, at the limit of the West, but in connection with the West as well. Such a mutual relationship presupposes more than a petrified colonizer/colonized relationship. It subliminally alludes to a postcolonial paradigm where the parts involved are dynamic and in a continuous process of formation. In this sense, it is not exaggerated to regard the Balkans as more than an antagonistic image of Europe. In this new approach, the Balkans is perceived as existing in an in-between location, not only because the region represents,

geographically, the borderline between Europe and Orient, and, historically, the limit where the rational European Enlightenment encountered the Romantic Oriental Other, but because its very existence at the limit of Europe led to a hybrid Balkan space. In this sense, the Balkans europeanizes themselves, while Europe, on the other hand, meets the Balkans, explores them, and is balkanized.

The approach of the Balkans in terms of Bhabha's theory of liminality and hybridity would also involve the rejection of colonial, and even postcolonial, discourses of Balkan homogeneity. Todorova debates the validity of talking about the Balkans in terms of one single mentality and one unique national collective memory, and contends that

'Balkan mentality' and 'Balkan memory' are chimerical notions. There are varieties of individuals and group memories in the Balkans, but no single 'Balkan memory.' There are, likewise, instances of collective mentality, and at times one can speak of national mentality. At specific time periods and in specific social groups (like the orthodox clergy in the eighteenth century) one can even find something like a Balkan-wide mentality, but these should be carefully contextualised and historicized. ("Introduction" 9)

That it is hard to speak of a homogeneous Balkan mentality and memory becomes obvious when taking into account the diverse ethnic and religious mix of population in what is called today the Balkan Peninsula. Thus, Slovenes, Croats, Romanians, Serbs, Turks, Bulgarians, and Albanians, among many others, constitute the mosaic of Balkan nations. To this, one could add the Vlachs, Kutsvlachs, Arumanians, or Tsintsars, who

inhabit the mountainous areas of Greece and Albania and speak a Romance language, close to Romanian (Jelavich 15). All these people have different religions, cultural heritages, and traditions, which makes it very difficult to regard them as part of one big Balkan cauldron. Though they were all at the certain point in history part of the Byzantine and later Ottoman Empire, their experiences are so different that it becomes even harder to treat their history uniformly. As Barbara Jelavich posits, “Although this [the Ottoman] system of administration was in effect in the greater part of the peninsula, different conditions existed in certain border provinces and in the lands that fell under Hapsburg control by the beginning of the eighteenth century” (2).

The difficulty of approaching the Balkans homogeneously becomes even more acute, once the term *Balkan* is analyzed in its complex symbolism. For the term as such possesses political, geographical, and historical connotations, but its arbitrary, slippery meaning makes it hard to grasp. In Derridean fashion, the term becomes a signifier that lacks a static, full signified and it is always ongoing, constantly becoming and never fixed, always submitted to a process of revision and alteration. Thus, the lexical signifier reflects the more concrete, slippery and deferred historical destiny of the Balkan people. For the ambiguity that surrounds the Balkans, not only geographically but also historically, is reflected by and reflects its linguistic aspect. The geographical Balkans fades away, leaving instead the more profound and internationally meaningful symbol of the political Balkans. Moreover, the very ambiguous and uncertain geographical meaning of the Balkans exists in direct contrast with its very definite and symbolically-loaded Third World political meaning. Consequently, if geographically, only a few states can be dubbed as Balkan, politically, some other states outside the Balkan Peninsula are

included. Thus, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Turkey are considered part of the Balkan Peninsula, and have become symbols of Eastern Europe, Third World countries, and Communism, with the obvious exceptions of non-Communist countries like Greece and Cyprus. The process has gone so far that Russia itself seems to be pushed into the Balkan pot, as the Communist other. It is common to hear people referring mistakenly to the Balkans as Eastern Europe and the other way round. Geographically, on the other hand, the Balkans is viewed by some historians as comprising Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, the former Yugoslavian countries, and only the Dobrogea part of Romania and the European part of Turkey. However, there are geographers who consider Romania as Balkan but exclude Turkey (Todorova, *Imagining* 30).

Interestingly enough, in this respect, is the attitude that the Balkan countries themselves have towards their own Balkan-ness. Thus, the Greeks unanimously oppose the idea of belonging to a Balkan bloc. Not only is it undesirable to be associated with the unfortunate, “Third World” Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania, but their ancient legacy makes them violently resent any Balkan connection. Hence, any attempt to place them in the Balkans can become highly offensive. Likewise, Romanians are very resistant to the label “Balkan” as well. Throughout history, the Romanian government led a policy that emphasized the Latin heredity of the Romanians, the stress being on the latinity of the Romanian amidst a Slavic sea. The Croatians themselves insist on their Western legacy and refuse any association with the Eastern bloc. Thus, in an attempt to make the anti-Balkan discourse official, the Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, once affirmed, “The borders of Croatia are the borders of Eastern Europe” (qtd. in Golsworthy 8). In the same

context, Norris also discusses the refusal of some Balkan peoples to recognize their Balkan-ness. Hence, he argues, during the Yugoslav civil war, Slovenia and Croatia have striven to “advertise” their European centrality through their Catholicism, exposing the Serbs, instead, as Byzantine and hence Balkan (13). Consequently, Norris wisely notices that the attempt to efface Balkan-ness is nothing but “another example of the domino effect throughout Eastern Europe since the fall of the Berlin Wall when each state in turn has tried to shift the frontier of where Eastern Europe begins to their border, leaving themselves associated with the West, and their neighbors still outside in the cold of non-European identity” (14). Undeniably, the anti-Balkan discursive policy in the Balkans originates in the Western disdain of and negative approach to everything that is Balkan. The negative discourse on the Balkan Other developed in Western Europe is reinforced by the mass media, who continually tell stories of immigration, poverty, and aggressiveness, all meant to underline the embarrassment of being Balkan.

The historical account of the term *Balkan* is witness to the arbitrariness of the Western approach towards the Balkans. Geographical errors and European political interests gave a false name and constructed fake attributes for the South Eastern region, in which only half of the nations are historically and geographically Balkan. The denomination of the region goes back to the Ottoman Empire and the fall of Constantinople, in 1453, when big portions of what is today known as the Balkan Peninsula came under Ottoman jurisdiction. One hundred years later, the Turks were in control of the whole of the Balkans, which they named ‘Rumelia’ (Norris 5). As Cengiz Orhonlu explains,

The term 'Rumelia' originated with the Byzantines, who called themselves 'romaioi' and their lands 'Romania.' In the Islamic world, the Byzantines were called 'Rum' and the lands of the Eastern Roman Empire 'Bilad-I Rum,' 'Memleket al-rum (Land of Romei). Thus, the ottoman Turks took the term 'Rumelia' from the Byzantine 'Romei.' (qtd. in Norris 6-7)

The mountain range that gave the name to the peninsula is found in geographical atlases until approximately the eighteenth century as 'Haemus' in Ancient Greek and 'Aemus' in Latin (Todorova, *Imagining* 22). Travelers, historians, and geographers accepted the erroneous ancient Greek descriptions of the mountains, which postulated that, after crossing Bulgaria from East to West, the Balkans continued "to the west, separating Serbia from Macedonia, and that, under different names, it stretched between Pontus Euxinus (the Black Sea) and the Adriatic" (22). There is no such long mountain chain, but the information came from the Greeks, from the maps of Ptolemy. As Norris explains, "These maps show a long mountain range dissecting the peninsula from the northern edge of the Black Sea to the southern reaches of the Adriatic Sea, referred to as the Catena Mundi" (9). The German priest Salomon Schweigger leaves his own documentation of the region, during his diplomatic mission on behalf of Emperor Rudolf II to Sultan Murad. His description continues the geographical inadvertency of the region:

[Haemus] is 6,000 feet high, i.e. one and half German miles (Pliny, bk. IV). In the histories one can read that King Philip of Macedonia, the father of the great Alexander, climbed the mountain Haemus in four days and descended in two, in order to see the countryside around the mountain. It



was believed that from the peaks of this mountain one could see the river Danube, the Adriatic Sea, and also Italy and Germany, something which would be a great wonder, since the Venetian or the Adriatic Sea is at more than 100 miles from the said mountain; Germany likewise is more than 100 miles afar. Haemus is known for the silver mines it once had, and the Italians therefore call it the Silver Mountain. The Turks call it Balkan, and the local population call it in the Croatian language Comonitza. (qtd. in Todorova, *Imagining* 23-24)

As Todorova points out, the denomination “Balkan” can be found in documents as early as the fifteenth century, when the Italian humanist and diplomat Filippo Buonaccorsi Callimaco, persecuted by Pope Paul II, settled in Poland. On a visit to the Ottoman capital, he left a description of the mountain range, “quem incolae Bolchanum vocant,” ‘which the inhabitants called the Balkans’ (qtd. in Todorova 22). By the eighteenth century, the Balkans had already acquired romantic features of otherness, many travelers through the region preferring the name of *Haemus* as a reminder of the glorious Ancient Greece. Thus, passing through the region, the Cambridge-educated traveler John Morrith, writes: “We slept at the foot of a mountain, which we crossed the next day, which separates Bulgaria from Romania (the ancient Thrace), and which though debased by the name of Bal. Kan, is no less a personage than the ancient Haemus” (qtd. in Todorova, *Imagining* 22). Thus, as Todorova points out, many travelers and geographers preferred *Haemus* to *Balkan*, when it came to the denomination of the region. The range of mountains was also referred to as *catena mudi* or *catena del mondo*, while, in the histories and geographies of the time, the region also appeared with the

appellations of “Hellenic,” “Illyrian,” “Dardanian,” “Roman,” “Byzantine,” and “Thracian” (Todorova 26-27). In addition, the term “Turkey-in-Europe” was also used in Western discourse (Norris 9). Later on, at the beginning of the twentieth century, cartographers attempted to amend the geographical errors of the former historians and geographers. Hence, the German geographer Theobald Fischer thought that a justified name for the Peninsula would be Südosteuropa. In 1929, the geographer Otto Maull continued in the same tradition and argued for the name of Southeastern Europe, as a politically neutral appellation (Todorova, *Imagining* 28). However, as Todorova points out, during the World War Two, the Germans’ perception of the region as part of their domineering policy in Europe and their use of the name Southeastern Europe loaded the designation with negative connotations. Consequently, the Turkish name “Balkan” was preferred to that of “Southeastern Europe” and has remained in use since then.

Linguistically, the word *Balkan* has become in time one of the best examples of polysemy and has initiated a long line of derivatives. In the online Oxford English Dictionary, *Balkan* is described as “Of or pertaining to the peninsula bounded by the Adriatic, Aegean, and Black Seas, or to the countries or peoples of this region; *spec.* with allusion to the relations (often characterized by threatened hostilities) of the Balkan states to each other or to the rest of Europe; so in the derivatives, Balkanic, ‘Balkanoid *adjs.*,’ Balkanism” (“Balkan”). The term is first mentioned in 1835, and the Oxford English Dictionary exemplifies the later figurative meaning of the word with the 1962 quotation from *The Listener*: “There are all the makings of a ‘Balkan situation’ in west Africa” (“Balkan”). From *Balkan*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* records the verb “balkanize,” first used, according to the dictionary, in 1920 and defined as “to divide (a region) into a

number of smaller and often mutually hostile units, as was done in the Balkan Peninsula in the late 19th and early 20th centuries” (“Balkanize”). Probably, more interesting is the grammatical pattern of the term. Although the term *Balkans* has surpassed its denomination of a mountain range and it is used today to refer to the many different peoples living in the Peninsula, the word always conjugates with the verb in the singular. The case is certainly an example of the homogeneity always associated with the region. For the West, *the Balkans* denotes a region and, more than that, it connotes one type of temperament, uniformly characterized and antithetical to the West. Therefore, it will always be “*this Balkans*” and never “*these Balkans*”; the Balkans will always be *the Other* and never *the Others*. The linguistic characteristics of the word dovetail nicely with the political signification of the region in the eyes of the “big ones” of Europe.

## Mapping Out Balkan Backwardness: Shadows of Separation and Difference

The map of Europe does not actually allow for the free scope of the kaleidoscope in the reshuffling of its shapes. The points of the compass indicate directional alignments on the map, north and south, east and west, and these binary oppositions were invested with cultural significance, structured by patterns of similarity and difference, and presumptions of precedence and hierarchy. The invention of Eastern Europe was an event in intellectual history that occurred as the Enlightenment invested an overwhelming significance in the alignment of Europe according to east and west, while, correlatively, reducing and revising the significance of the Renaissance alignment according to north and south. Eastern Europe, on the map, came to exist in the analytical eye of the enlightened beholder. (Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*)

Symbol of the frontier existence, the Balkans has always been perceived as existing on the edge of history and civilization, on the unsteady margin of human passions, and at the meeting point between Western rationalization and Byzantine mysticism. To cross the line and prove their Western-ness has been the secret goal of the Balkan people. As shown in former chapters, however, geographical locale and Ottoman invasion rendered the region irreversibly Oriental, with all the sensuality and mystery that the Orient has always possessed in Western mentality. Thus, because the region represented the division line between everything that was Occident and the Orient, it came to be perceived as the no man's land, the place which, if not romantically dangerous, is certainly romantically primitive. Gerard Delanty concludes in his *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (1995) that Europe has been constructed mainly on exclusion, and hence it has always been characterized by ambivalence. Moreover as Delanty affirms, "the European idea has been more the product of conflict than of consensus" (2). Accordingly, the Balkans has been produced at the end of a process of exclusion, and the region has come to represent the basis on which the European discourse on self-superiority has been shaped. Recently, scholars have attempted to pursue and comprehend the historical process that turned the Balkans into the Other. Most of their approaches underline the decisive importance of the economic factors in the separation between the two sides of Europe.

Taking into account economic and historical facts, David Norris attributes the Balkan myth of backwardness to the 1054 Great Schism, when the Christian church was divided between the Orthodox and the Catholic. However, according to him, there is more than that involved in the creation of Balkan identity. Mainly, the spread of the

Turks in Europe and their control over the Balkan Peninsula was decisive, Norris contends, in creating a split Europe (4-5). Thus, it is the control of the Ottomans over the Peninsula, Norris believes, that gave birth to a new Europe. This new territorial partition represents “the beginning of the narrative which produces images of extreme negativity” (Norris 5). Moreover, although trade was frequent between Europe and the Adriatic ports, the British traders dealt with the occupying Turks, while the indigenous population became practically unknown, ignored, and indigent (Norris 6). Likewise, John Lampe traces Balkan backwardness not only to Ottoman rule, but also to the Hapsburg Empire. Like Norris, he contends that “Ottoman hegemony has been the principal disadvantage unfairly imposed on the Balkan economies and the main barrier to following the Western path. (178). Following a Marxist analysis, Lampe proceeds to synthesize the Balkan backwardness in economic terms. Hence, according to Lampe, economic development in the Balkans was hampered by bad land and badly-planned agriculture. Accordingly, even before the Ottoman domination in the Balkans, the Balkan economy was rural and underdeveloped, which automatically led to cultural stagnation. Therefore, following a Marxist rationalization, many scholars agree that the lack of economic development is the major factor that rendered the region insignificant and of the Third-World type in Western eyes.

Following the same Marxist analysis, Daniel Chirot considers that as early as the Middle Ages, there were certain geographical, but especially political and administrative aspects that led to economic backwardness. In his view, the absence of Church domination and strong state involvement allowed the flourishing of capitalism in Western countries (4). South Eastern and Balkan countries, on the other hand, were ruled by the

Church, and hence their free economic evolution was impeded. Moreover, Chirot thinks that “differences in agriculture existed very early and were decisive in creating a drastically different potential for economic growth by the late Middle Ages” (5). Consequently, preponderantly pastoral economies rendered the Balkans countries dependent on their more technologically-developed Western counterparts (Chirot 5).

Notwithstanding the importance of economy in the destiny of the Balkan nations, one cannot by any means define the Balkan economies as undeveloped, without committing the sin of uniform rationalization. Moreover, the economic factors do not explain satisfactorily the continuous Western prejudice about Balkan backwardness even in times of economic prosperity, such as Romania’s economic boom during the interwar period. Therefore, I argue that leveling all Balkan states and dubbing them as economically stagnant represents a tactless simplification of a very complex issue. Instead, both historical and economic factors should be given equal attention, avoiding at the same time a homogeneous analysis of the Balkans. Thus, equally important is the fact that the Balkans represented for the West a Turkish province, the idea of Balkan-ness being often associated with that of Orientalism, in general, and Turkish-ness, in particular. Hence, many of the features attributed nowadays to the Balkans were originally attributed by the “civilized” world to the pagan Turks. Todorova points out that only during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the rest of Europe started paying attention to the real inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula, realizing that they were not Turks but Europeans. She believes that three main reasons led to the “frozen” pejorative discourse on the Balkans: “imperfect geographical knowledge,” the saturation of the geographical denomination with social and political overtones, and, last but not least, the

recent departure from the connotation of the Balkans, which resulted in a more intense pejorative meaning (“Balkans” 461). However, even when viewing the Turkish domination as one of the causes of the Balkan otherness, one should not forget that different conditions triggered different outcomes in different Balkan states.

The Communist regime, on the other hand, represented certainly another reason that strengthened the borderline separating West and East, and consequently, the West and the Balkan world. Capitalist leaders once more indulged in accusatory speeches and debasing discourses against the Balkan countries. In 1946, Winston Churchill officially declared an already-existing but never officially-accepted demarcation line separating the West from the East, and Communism from capitalism. Churchill’s “iron curtain” discourse was not original; an iron borderline had always separated the two worlds, but Churchill gave it a new name, a new label for an old wound in the side of Europe. Churchill admitted, nevertheless, one exception, Greece, which, “with its immortal glories” was welcome to the other side of the barricade (qtd. in Wolff 2). And yet, Churchill himself, two years before dooming the Balkans to the iron confinement, had been in Moscow with Stalin, deciding the destiny of some Eastern European states. Thus, it is believed that he negotiated the Balkan territories, offering Stalin a profitable arrangement, but Stalin allegedly refused: “Jotting on a piece of paper, he offered Stalin 90 percent in Romania, 75 percent in Bulgaria, 50 percent in Hungary and Yugoslavia, but only 10 percent in Greece – ‘with its immortal glories.’ Churchill then suggested that they burn the paper, but Stalin told him he could keep it” (Wolff 2).

After 1989, the Communist iron curtain rose. One would expect that, as Wolff posits, “either we will find new associations to mark its [Eastern Europe’s] difference, or



we will rediscover old ones from before the Cold War. Or else we may take the extraordinary revolution of 1989 as an incitement and opportunity to reconsider our mental mapping of Europe” (14). The Balkans however did not surpass its derogatory meaning after the demise of Communism. Instead, it acquired new negative connotations, as a consequence of the immigrants invading the Western countries. Moreover, the Yugoslavian war marked the Balkans once more as the dangerous place of Europe, populated by the most barbarous and immature people. Meanwhile, Europe’s “concern” for its Balkan counterparts resulted in the creation of institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Always prompt to police the European Third World and threaten it with withdrawal of funds, the Bank is far from helping the poor Balkan countries, keeping them instead on the edge of bankruptcy. Thus, after 1989, Europe’s gaze on the Balkans continued the same discourse of marginalization. As Wolff asserts, “The iron curtain is gone, and yet the shadow persists” (3).

The Yugoslavian war represented the climax of the world’s criticism against the Balkans, another warning against the “cauldron of Europe.” War is meant to happen, but when it happens in the troublesome Balkans, it is certainly a consequence of Balkan mentality. Hence, high officials in the developed and civilized world hurried to anticipate the disaster that the Balkan countries would bring on Europe, chided the primitive people, and poured out tons of suggestions on how to restrain the infantile Balkans. None of the great powers, however, cared to involve themselves in the war. After all, there was nothing to gain from it and it was not their war, but the war of a handful of states from which everybody knew by then what to expect. On the same occasion, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace reissued a report on the Balkans from 1913. The new

report, containing no amendments from the initial one, with the exception of a new preface – suggestive of the almost monotonous European view on the Balkans – was entitled *Unfinished Peace: Report of the International Commission on the Balkans* (1996). The report as such, nevertheless, lacked the comprehensive and objective stand that the title seemed to advocate. In the Preface to the report, adopting a rebuking and condescending tone, Leo Tindemans, the chairman of the commission, concludes that “the existing difficulties and the domination *mentality* in the Balkans are a lasting menace to peace, a terrifying example of intolerance, and a shame for Europe” (Tindemans viii) (emphasis mine). Therefore, the Balkan war is a matter of Balkan mentality. Violence is rooted in the Balkan character; hence, according to the commission, one needs much patience and tact to tame the inhabitants. Trying civilized measures such as encouraging cooperation among the Balkan countries and initiating a South Balkan Confederation “would be unlikely to succeed” with such violent and vindictive nations (Tindemans xviii). One cannot help asking what a report on the Gulf War or on the more recent American War in Iraq and Afghanistan would look like. Would such wars be labeled barbarous, immature, and dangerous for the future of civilization as well? Or is barbarity to be assigned only to the Balkans? It is certain that, if one were to analyze objectively the last hundred years of world history, the Balkan area, as Todorova affirms, would not have the “monopoly on barbarity” (“Balkans” 460).

The conclusion reached by the Carnegie commission with reference to the Balkans resembles the discourse on otherness deployed by the White House. Thus, in a speech on the Yugoslavian war, Bill Clinton proceeds to deplore the hatred that has always torn apart the Balkan region and labels the Kosovo War as one of the most terrible

atrocities since Second World War (“Clinton”). In the same bellicose tone, Marten van Heuven, a retired US Foreign Service officer, commenting on the Yugoslavian war and the Balkan situation, questions the capacity of the Balkan nations to “face the future by themselves. Only outside elements – a ‘foreign factor’ – can effectively shape the future,” since, it is no secret that “What has been achieved through truce and diplomatic agreement, however, has been largely due to the efforts of the outsiders and the presence of foreign forces” (van Heuven 42). Not mentioning the 1912 War of Independence fought within the Balkans and by the Balkans and forgetting that anytime foreign forces “helped” the Balkans, they ended up causing much damage, van Heuven creates a whole well-structured plan of “counseling” and rehabilitating the Balkans. Point by point, he enumerates all the measures that should be taken to restrain, tame, and civilize the unruly Balkan countries that dare disturb world peace (40).

Contemporary discourses on the Balkans, such as van Heuven’s and Clinton’s, reiterate the same patterns of exclusion and difference deployed centuries before by the British travelers in the region. The discourse on Balkan backwardness touched the Balkan world long before Winston Churchill decided to historicize the world secession and prior to the Western mordant speeches caused by the War of Kosovo. The shadow of backwardness set over the Balkan states before the Ottoman control over the region, but became embedded ineradicably during Turkish occupation, when the Enlightened European scholastic system decided to reject anything that seemed irrational and uncivilized. The Balkans was hence ushered in at the back door of Europe, in an ambivalence that has since characterized the existence of the Peninsula.

“We are All Greek”:  
Dystopic Narratives of Alterity

I have been of late drawn to the Balkans almost every spring by the fascination of this shifting, many-coloured kaleidoscope of races and peoples. I love the scenery, and the infinite variety of peasant costume, which gives some idea of how Europe looked in the Middle Ages. The people have many faults; but at any rate they are genuine in their emotions, sincere in their hatreds, entrenched in their valorous patriotism.

(Harold Spender, *The Cauldron of Europe*)

If one were to trust Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (1601), then, Illyria, the ancient name for the Balkan Peninsula of today, was equated in Elizabethan England with irrationality, ambiguous identity, passion, and danger. Nevertheless, it is known that Shakespeare was hardly very knowledgeable of world geography and would have scarcely known where Illyria was. After all, as David Norris comments, Shakespeare is famous for having given "Bohemia a coastline in *The Winter's Tale*," while his "Venice, Naples, Malta and Cyprus were not real geographical places" (16). However, "Shakespeare's choice of Illyria is [at] the level of connotation" (Norris 16), revealing an ambiguous space, fraught with negative non-European attributes. When Sebastian decides to sail to Illyria, Antonio, his friend, decides to follow him, for fear that danger might befall him, in such parts which "to a stranger, / Unguided and unfriended, often prove / Rough and inhospitable" (*TN* 3.3.9-11). The Shakespearian characters in *Twelfth Night* act out of passion and are caught in a network of stratagems and masquerades in the land of Illyria, a region that in itself denotes mysterious and perilous adventures.

Almost three centuries later, another British dramatist chooses the Balkan Peninsula as the stage for his *Arms and the Man* (1932). Although Shaw's aim in the play is the scorn of heroism and the allegedly laudable goal of wars, his depiction of Bulgaria is in line with the negative discursive tradition on the Balkans. His choice of Bulgaria, first of all, was based, as Shaw himself recognized, on the need to find a good war:

in the original MS, the names of the places were blank, and the characters were called simply The Father, The Daughter, The Stranger, The Heroic Lover, and so on. The incident of the machine gun bound me to a recent

war: that was all. My own historical information being rather confused, I asked Mr. Sidney Webb to find out a good war for my purpose. He spent about two minutes in a rapid survey of every war that has ever been waged, and then told me that the Servo-Bulgarian was what I wanted. (qtd. in Crompton xiv)

Therefore, the Balkan war clearly represented, in the European mentality, the most savage and violent of all wars. Such an extreme war was suited for Shaw's satire, and his imagination added to it the extreme chauvinism of Serbs and Bulgarians, as well as the atrocity with which they kill one another. The Bulgarians in the play, who, to the British reader, stood for the whole Balkan race, are portrayed as ignorant, primitive, and passionate. Raina, the Bulgarian female protagonist, boasts of her family's wealth and education, which is measured in the interior stairs of the house, a library, "the only one in Bulgaria" (Shaw 21), and the fact that the family goes to Bucharest "every year for the opera season" (21). In addition, washing hands seems to be a matter of gentility for the Bulgarians in Shaw's play. Thus, when Raina attempts to shake hands with the Swiss soldier and he offers to wash his dirty hands first, her retort comes quickly: "That is very nice of you. I see that you are a gentleman" (22). At the amazement of the Swiss, she explains: "You must not think I am surprised. Bulgarians of really good standing – people in our position – wash their hands *nearly every day*. So, you see I can appreciate your delicacy. You may take my hand" (22) (emphasis mine).

Both Shakespeare's and Shaw's comedies are but two of the famous literary exemplifications of the way certain types of rhetoric can be created and reinforced. In both cases, the reference to the Balkan Peninsula is auxiliary and by no means central to

the plays, but the place is imbued with very deep symbolical connotations that readers have always taken for granted. When Shaw wrote the play, he had in mind a fierce war, and once the Balkan war was discovered, the literary theme was automatically enriched with comical peculiarities about the place and its inhabitants, such as the primitiveness and backwardness of the Bulgarians. In the case of Shakespeare, on the other hand, the already-assumed characteristics of the place help create the humor of the play. That the characters in *Twelfth Night* act in confusion and are continually tricked into ambiguous circumstances, seems to be the normal consequence of living in Illyria. Hence, either called Illyria, Turkey-in-Europe, Oriental Europe, or referred to as the Balkan Peninsula, the Balkans carries the same standardized connotations and signals the same type of discourses.

A quick glance at British literature from the Renaissance on, but especially after the Enlightenment, will reveal homogeneous writings on the Balkans, which capture the meeting of the civilized West and the primitive East, a process at the end of which the Balkans is Europeanized and Balkanized at the same time by the West European traveler. The people and the region become Balkan only after and as a consequence of the West European gaze, the term *Balkan* being an empty signifier, going back to an arbitrarily-imposed set of attributes. As in the cases of Shaw and Shakespeare, the Balkans is fictionalized and exists only in relation with and in opposition to the Western world. Its existence is imaginary, based on arbitrary signs, with little relevance to the well-established geographical and historical space. As signifier and signified at the same time, the Balkans contains utopias and dystopias, all homogenized to a singularized, well-defined and easily-recognizable otherness. If before the Enlightenment, the Balkans as

geography existed side by side with the Balkans as idea, nowadays the region is more and more separated from its geographical and historical signification. Attempts to explain the present Balkans through its history are meant only to imply facts that need not be mentioned. The implication is inherent in the construction of the Balkan character, and the famous and frequent phrase “It is all Balkan” represents a discourse in itself. Hence, the Balkans has ceased to represent a geographical place and has turned into an idea, a concept, and a way of living. According to western standards, the Balkan region is certainly of a Third-World type, and, together with African and Arab countries, it stands for the scapegoat of Europe, a way of explaining why wars occur and violence still exists in the world.

Mass media have been an important means of keeping the anti-Balkan discourse alive. Journalists have written extensively on the Balkan atrocities and barbarities, novelists have fictionalized the Balkans in bestsellers, while poets have romanticized it in poetry. At the borderline of fiction and authenticity, travel memoirs have been a very efficient way of spreading the otherness of the Balkans. Always hailed as the “accurate representations” of the other Balkan world, travel narratives have introduced the Balkans to Western readers. Writers like Robert Walsh, Lady Mary Wortely Montagu, Rebecca West, and more recently Robert Kaplan, among others, reinvented the otherness of the Balkans and nurtured Europe’s imagination. According to Todorova, however, travelogues have not always reinforced a negative discourse on the Balkans. On the contrary, many times, Todorova argues, they managed to influence the political discourse on the Balkans in a positive sense, and changed the policy of states towards the region for short time periods (“Balkans” 461). Nevertheless, my goal is not to refer here to the very



few positive narratives on the Balkans but to bring into discussion and draw attention to the more numerous traveling narratives, in which the Balkan Peninsula is marked as ‘the Other.’ Such travelogues start early in the seventeenth century but reach their peak in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the wake of the rational Enlightenment, the Balkans seems more irrational and, hence, the desire to explore, know, and conquer the region becomes greater.

In the eighteenth century, Lord Byron becomes the path opener in the Balkans. Bored with Western art and life, Byron decides to sail East. In June 1809, he describes to his mother his journey plans:

I am about to sail in a few days; probably before this reaches you. Fletcher begged so hard, that I have continued him in my service. If he does not behave well abroad, I will send him back in a *transport*. I have a German servant, (who has been with Mr. Wilbraham in Persia before, and was strongly recommended to me by Dr. Butler of Harrow,) Robert and William; they constitute my whole suite. (qtd. in Moore 88).

Once arrived in Lisbon, Byron feels entrapped by a melancholic mood, and his letters are already imbued with the romantic and adventurous tone that will characterize all his correspondence from the East:

I am very happy here, because I loves oranges, and talk bad Latin to the monks, who understand it, as it is like their own,— and I goes into society (with my pocket-pistols), and I swims in the Tagus all across at once, and I rides on an ass or a mule, and swears Portuguese, and have got a diarrhoea

[sic] and bites from the mosquitoes. But what of that? Comfort must not be expected by folks that go a pleasuring. (qtd. in Moore 91)

In Greece, Byron decides to defend the Greek cause and to take part in the Greek war of independence. Clearly, for Byron, fighting for the independence of such a glorious people as the Greeks was romantically heroic. Neither duty nor an attempt at justice but the spirit of adventure makes him take arms against the Turks, the same adventurous disposition that made him leave England, in the first place. As for the Greeks, his opinion is already settled. In a journal entry, dated September 28, Byron notices that the Greeks are at odds with one another and are so false that “there never was such an incapacity for veracity shown since Eve lived in Paradise” (Marchand 33). Later on, in a letter to Prince Alexander Mavrocordatos, Byron again shows his irascibility with the Greek folk:

Altri mi scrivono pure che molti ufficiali non attendono che un [rap]porto da me per venire a soccorso della Grecia – ma nelle presenti circostanze io stimerei un’inganno colpevole il lusingarsi a venire – dove non solo regna tanta discordia, ma dove pare che si abbia una sì grande gelosia degli Stranieri. Io sarei molto contento, che mi si porgesse l’occasione di fare la di lei pregevolissima conoscenza – e se non gli dispiacesse di scrivermi qualche volta di che e come più gli aggrada io l’avrò sempre per un favore – e mi farò un pregio di rispondergli con quella franca sincerità che mi è conosciuta e che ella tanto merita.<sup>1</sup> (Marchand 37)

Byron’s heroic deeds and poems enticed many Romantics and opened the Peninsula to a whole wave of voyagers and adventurers. Therefore, starting with the nineteenth century, the flow of travelers, journalists, poets, diplomats, or simply,

adventurers from Western Europe, but especially from Britain, became extremely high. Their accounts are very important not only historically but also from a postcolonial point of view, as they continue to reinforce Europe's views on the Balkan Peninsula. Their travel memoirs reinforce a traditional discourse of misnomination of a geographical region and misapprehension of the Balkan people. Few of them account for the real Balkans, in geographical terms, and even fewer permit the Balkan Peninsula to "write" itself. Like Byron, with scientific precision and poetic romanticism, they played their own role in the creation of today's Balkans – the primitive, exotic, violent, and still enticing place at the other end of Europe and, hence, of civilization. The process resembles any colonial act of physical conquest and ideological domination. In Saidian terms, during this process of imagining and constructing otherness, one would have to reinvent the other,

to give it shape, identity, definition with full strategy, and its "natural" role as an appendage to Europe; to dignify all the knowledge collected during colonial occupation with the title "contribution to modern learning" when the natives had neither been consulted nor treated as anything except as pretexts for a text whose usefulness was not to the natives; to feel oneself as a European in command, almost at will, of Oriental history, time, and geography; to institute new areas of specialization; to establish new disciplines; to divide, deploy, schematize, tabulate, index and record everything in sight and (out of sight); to make out of every observable detail a generalization and out of every generalization an immutable law about the Oriental nature, temperament, mentality, custom, or type; and,

above all, to transmute living reality in the stuff of texts. . . . (*Orientalism* 86)

Travelers found in the Balkans enough entertainment and exoticism to quench their thirst for adventure. Some others deplored the passionate chauvinism that the Balkan people allegedly shared. Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Rebecca West regards with condescendence the patriotism of Serbs and Croats, and labels the two nations as infantile. Moreover, like many travelers before and after her, she is certain that the Balkan people are of a singular kind and nature, and totally opposed to civilized Westerners like herself. Consequently, she is convinced that the “Slav quality of passion was there to disconcert the English or American witness, for it existed in a degree which is found among Westerners only in highly imaginative people (West 69). To this, one should add the primitiveness of the Croatian castles West is visiting, which, in spite of their poverty, represent “a state superior to the barbaric origins of Croatian society” (74).

West’s discourse is continued less than a century later by a free-lance journalist, Robert Kaplan, who, ready to follow in the steps of his idol, Rebecca West, proceeds to unfold the Balkan story of tragedy and misfortune. Kaplan’s theory is straightforward and based on the presumption that all evils come from the Balkans. Convinced that racial discrimination and xenophobia are the main characteristics of the Balkans, he wisely concludes that the only trait that differentiates the Balkans from the Arabs – for him, the world is divided between the West and the homogeneous other, whether Arab, African, or Balkan – is that the former speaks “more honestly than in the Middle East, and therefore more brutally” (Kaplan 60). In this sense, Robert Kaplan’s conclusion is that the Balkan nations have lacked the privilege of Western education, and, unlike the Arabs, were not

taught (by the West, it is implied) “to talk in code, so as not to offend Western sensibilities with their racial hatred” (60). Note should be taken here of the importance that Kaplan’s entire discourse places on Western sensibilities, as the central point of reference around which the world discourse of multiculturalism revolves. In the same line of reasoning, Kaplan proceeds to find fault with the Balkan people not only for the First World War, which would make sense to a certain extent, but also for the Second World War. In his allegedly psychological-historical analysis of the Balkans, he claims with full authority that Nazism can “claim Balkan origins. Among the flophouses of Vienna, a breeding ground of ethnic resentments close to the southern Slavic world, Hitler learnt how to hate so infectiously” (XXVII). Much more, to those specialists still looking for the roots of terrorism, Kaplan offers once more the solution of the Balkans. The first terrorists, according to him, were produced by the Balkans, and even twentieth century history came from the Balkans, where, as an aside, “hostage taking and the wholesale slaughter of innocents were common,” and “politics has been reduced to a level of near anarchy that from time to time in history has flowed up the Danube into central Europe” (XXVII). Not surprisingly, the xenophobic and racist attitude, which Kaplan mentions as being entirely Balkan, is perceptible throughout his book. Much more, Kaplan, like many other commentators on the Balkans, never mentions that racism is the most acute problem in the West today, and not once does he perceive his own violent diatribe against the Balkans as chauvinistic. Perhaps, in keeping with the same habit of finding the scapegoat in the Balkans, Kaplan’s own intolerance and xenophobia should be blamed on his living among the Balkans for a few years.

When the Balkans is not dangerous, corrupt, and xenophobe, it must be, by all means, thrilling, and mysterious. Its darkness and mysteriousness, as well as its political and ethnic ambiguity, have caused travelers and politicians to associate it with the African continent. While it cannot be denied that the Balkans is part of Europe, travel narratives have invariably suggested to European readers that the Peninsula is outside civilized Europe, and mistakenly considered to be in Europe. The Balkans has the status of the Other and, like any Other, it must possess all the features of alterity, or else it is not authentically Other. No wonder then that Rebecca West is disappointed when, in Yugoslavia, she cannot find and feel the flavor of what she believed was the real Balkans: “I felt impatient. I was getting no exhilaration out of being here, such as I had hoped for in coming to Yugoslavia” (48). And, later on, witnessing the dance of a renowned Yugoslavian ballerina, West is upset by the mixture of Western and Balkan features in the former’s dress and dance. Her allusion to the impropriety of the dancer, who dares to cross borders and bring civilized elements into a dance that should be primitive, is significant:

It was a distress not new to me – I have felt it often in America. I have at times felt suddenly sickened when a coloured dancer I have been watching has used a step or gesture that belongs to “white” dancing . . . and I have often experienced the same shock when I have seen white dancers borrowing the idiom of coloured dancers” (94)

Therefore, borders are not supposed to be crossed, at least not in the society before the First World War in which West lives. But borders are not supposed to be crossed at the present time either, even if there seems to be an encouraging attempt at interdisciplinarity

and transculturalism. The encouragement to cross cultural and national frontiers is only theoretical. In practice, borderlines must not be crossed and Greeks should never be identified as Balkans, Croats should not be mistaken for Serbs and, most of all, Western Europe must always remain a separate identity, at the opposite pole of the Balkans. Attempts to create cultural interbreeding should be only theoretical; otherwise they become offensive and are rejected. Constantine, the Yugoslavian character in West's traveling narrative, seems to understand it when he affirms with regard to the ballerina's mixed dance: "The poor little one . . . she should be like an icon . . ." (West 94).

The fear of liminal spaces and the refusal to cross borders produces antagonism, while, simultaneously, the Hegelian need to create the Other brings about the apprehension of contamination. It is partly from this apprehension that the rhetoric of Balkan primitivism and violence springs. The expectation of travelers in the Balkans is full of negativism; it is based on negative imagery, a set of images soon to become historical reality. Therefore, like many travelers through the Balkans before and after her, West has her own expectations about the Balkans. The idea that the Balkan people can behave and act like Westerners seems preposterous, for the former possess the primitive barbarism that makes them beautiful and naïve, dark and mysterious at the same time. Thus, when West describes her three Yugoslavian friends waiting for her at the railway station, her description is touched with the romanticism expected from the region, imbued with nostalgia for primitive and naïve people. Her discourse on the three Yugoslavian friends is reminiscent of a whole imperialistic rhetoric of otherness:

They were waiting in the rain on the platform of the real Zagreb, our three friends . . . Constantine is short and fat, *with a head like the best-known*

*satyr in the Louvre, and an air of vine-leaves around the brow, though he drinks little . . . Nearly all his talk is good, and sometimes it runs along in a coloured shadow show, like Heine's Florentine Nights, and sometimes it crystallizes into a little story the essence of hope or love or regret, like a Heine lyric. . . . Valetta . . . has the strong delicacy and the morning freshness of an archaic statue. . . . Gregorievitch looks like Pluto in the Mickey Mouse films. (41-42) (emphasis mine)*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, around the same time as Rebecca West, E. O. Hoppé travels through Romania and is charmed by the air of mysteriousness and laissez-faire that dominates Romanian life. He does not fail to remark the romanticism and picturesque of the place, emphasizing the primitive tradition and way of life of the Romanian peasants. For Hoppé, there is always something romantic about the place and the people, whether he moves around in the high Romanian society or whether he visits “gypsy camps.” Not only does he decide that “Romania is a land of proverbs” and that “The Tziganes, it may be said, possess that form of ancient epigrammatic wisdom in endless variety” (51), but he also remarks that the “love-making” of the Romanian youth “was beautifully pagan, and gaiety reigned in their hearts” (81).

The same discourse on primitiveness was in vogue more than two centuries earlier when the Italian naturalist Alberto Fortis traveled through the Balkan Peninsula, known at that time as Dalmatia. His trip was that of a naturalist in search of the curiosities of natural science. However, he also recorded now and then the habits of the inhabitants as well as particularities of the places he traveled through. He examined the fauna and flora of the peninsula and sketched some major traits of its inhabitants. The inhabitants of the



Peninsula are poor and ignorant, superstitious and barbarous in their customs, but sometimes friendly and hospitable, according to Fortis. Revenge and violence are common among the inhabitants of Dalmatia and, Fortis adds, in the tradition of the Morlacchi, the Vlachs of today, revenge is very honorable. Consequently, “so deeply is revenge rooted in the minds of this nation, that all the missionaries in the world would not be able to eradicate it” (58). Moreover, Fortis’s narration also underlines the eternal ambiguity of the place: Slavic barbarity and Latin glory and civilization. Hence, traveling through the city of Nona, one of today’s Croatian territories, he is disappointed at finding neither the traces of the Romans nor the barbarous remnants of the Slavs: “I went thither, in hopes of finding something worthy of notice, but was disappointed. Nothing is to be seen that indicates the grandeur of the Roman times; neither are there any remains of barbarous magnificence, to put one in mind of that ages in which the kings of the Croat Slavi, had their residence there” (18). Thus, Latinity, perceived as being at the basis of Western civilization, is always to be equated with glory and progress. Everything else is barbaric.

One would be justified to ask whether the popularity of Balkan travelogues is based on the literary merit of the works or whether well-written book reviews create the aura of success around them. An analysis of the publicity deployed in such cases would certainly reveal a very efficient type of discourse employed by mass media, which construct a whole myth of authenticity and legitimacy around these books. With few exceptions, among which is West’s *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, whose literary merit cannot be contested, most of the travelogues are “imposed” on the readers as “veridical” and “brilliant” by a very aggressive type of publicity. Such travel memoirs are

unconditionally hailed as objective and historically profound in spite of their superficiality and focus on the exotic. Thus, while *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is a very entertaining and well-written book, it is nevertheless far from historically subtle and analytically brilliant. Yet, it has been hailed since its publication as “a masterpiece . . . as astonishing in its range, in the subtlety and power of its judgment, as it is brilliant in expression” (Dust jacket). Much more, in 1930, Clifton Fadimon writes in the *New Yorker* that West’s travel narrative is “A magnificent blend of travel journal, cultural commentary, and historical insight, it probes into the troubled history of the Balkans and the uneasy relationships among its ethnic groups. The landscape and people of Yugoslavia are brilliantly observed as Rebecca West untangles the tensions that rule the country's history as well as its daily life” (Dust jacket). Another example is offered by Robert Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History* (1993). Despite the fact that the book is inaccurate both historically and culturally, it is hailed by the *Pittsburgh Post Magazine* as “A well-documented account of the Balkans’ past and present,” while Kaplan “forcefully illustrates that the irreconcilable differences among Serbs, Croats and Bosnians are only part of the seething ethnic, religious and cultural tensions tearing at a much larger region” (Dust jacket). Not only is Kaplan’s book far from being a masterpiece, but Kaplan himself is far from an insightful writer. And, yet the *San Francisco Examiner* considers him “a striking and evocative writer,” while the Balkans are there to offer him “all the richness of a Garcia Marquez world, where the fantastic is everyday life” (Dust jacket). Maybe it would not be too exaggerated to wonder how a Balkan account on the West, in the tone and language of Kaplan’s travelogue, would be received by the same West that relishes Kaplan’s report on the Balkans.

The colonial and imperialistic discourse, created by writers, encouraged by mass media, and trusted by a large public is too obvious to be denied. Little attention has ever been given to the biased presentation of Kaplan's and West's narrative. What counts is that the Balkans once more has been turned into the Other and has matched the long tradition of the Unknown. The image must be of poverty, exoticism, and mystery. Otherwise, it means a whole generation of writers and readers were mistaken. It means that Byron deceived the European readers, that European and American tourists have been paying their money for a fake Dracula and a fake peasant-like lifestyle. It means, finally, that Europe will have either to find another scapegoat or find fault with itself when it comes to the wars that devastated it. If the powder keg is not in the Balkans, then who is to blame for the fire and explosions of the aftermath?

Notes:

<sup>1</sup>Others write me also that many officers are waiting only for a report from me to come to the aid of Greece, but in the present circumstances I would consider it a culpable trick to entice them to come – where not only does so much discord reign, but where there seems to be such a great jealousy of foreigners. I would be very happy, if the opportunity presented itself to me, to make your most valued acquaintance. And if it would not displease you, to write to me occasionally of whatever and however you most like, I will always consider it a favor – and I will be pleased to reply to you with the frankest sincerity that is known to me and which you so much deserve (transl. Marchand 39).

The Charm of Becoming Balkan:  
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Claim of Balkan-ness

It is certain that the Balkans lost more from contact with all modern empires than they ever gained. They belonged to the sphere of tragedy, and Empire cannot understand the tragic. . . . The nineteenth-century English traveler tended to form an unfavorable 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 Lancashire 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 these Christian Slavs were in the custody of the Turks, who were exquisite in their personal habits, cultivated, generous, dignified, hospitable, and extremely polite.

(Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*)

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Balkans, as well as Eastern Europe, in general, was already open to the great flux of voyagers, who took upon them the task of recording the “authentic” otherness of Europe. Most of them would travel to Vienna and then, through Hungary and Bulgaria, to Constantinople, the heart of the Ottoman Empire, at that time. Mary Montagu, married Wortley, was already a famous figure when, in 1717, she decided to accompany her husband to Constantinople, where he had been appointed Ambassador Extraordinary to the Court of Turkey (Halsband, *The Life* 55). During her journey through the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, she decided to record her impressions either in the form of letters to friends or as journal entries. Her notes and commentaries on the Balkan Peninsula were compiled in *The Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763), a collection of letters of particular interest to both Orientalists and Balkanists. Her attitude towards the Ottoman Balkans is imbued with romanticism and nostalgia, while an attempt to understand and grasp the mysterious essence of the Oriental Other informs all her letters. Yet, the Balkan people, the real inhabitants of the place, interest her but little. She enthusiastically gazes at, observes, and writes about the Turkish conquerors, ignoring, with few exceptions, the real inhabitants of the Balkan space. Moreover, like so many other travelers before and after her, Lady Montagu is thrilled at her encounter with an alien, remote space, frightened at the prospect of the danger that might await her there, and enthusiastic about the poetic and romantic space she is to live in. For her, as for all the other travelers, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, in general, is a construct. Unlike the others before her, however, she is not content with distantly observing it, but she attempts to deconstruct the surface structure and penetrate the underlying discourses that produce what she refers to as the

other “side of the globe” (Halsband, *Complete* 309). Her approach is that of imitating the Other and recreating herself in terms of the Oriental Other, either by wearing Oriental dresses or by learning the language. Perhaps, she is among the few who moves beyond mere observation into interpretation, creating what Said identifies as a “system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later Western empire” (*Orientalism* 203).

In a letter to Wortley, her husband, Lady Montagu declares her enthusiasm at the perspective of visiting countries that have always seemed to her, “an impossibly remote place” (qtd. in Halsband, *Life* 56). However, like every traveler to the East, she is thrilled, almost frightened at the mystery of the unknown, giving the whole journey the connotations of an eternal trip beyond a worldly time and space. In her farewells to friends, she assigns the place an unreal geography, death being brought into discussion many times with regard to her journey to the East. She seems ready to part not with one part of Europe, for a short time, but with the whole world, and proceed into a Stygian space. Joseph Spence, the English anecdotist, describes, in a letter to his mother, Lady Mary’s attitude towards the trip:

Lady Mary, who had always delighted in romances and books of travels, was charmed with the thoughts of going into the East, though those embassies are generally an affair of twenty years, and so ‘twas a sort of dying to her friends and country. But ‘twas travelling; ‘twas going farther than most other people go; ‘twas wandering; ‘twas all whimsical, and charming; and, so she set out with all the pleasure imaginable (qtd. in Halsband, *Life* 56)

Alexander Pope himself writes Lady Montagu, before departure, assuring her of his esteem and appreciation. He also assures Montagu that if “I shou’d not see you again, I would say some things here, which I could not to your Person. For I would not have you dye deceived in me, that is, go to Constantinople without knowing, that I am to some degree of Extravagance, as well as with utmost Reason, Madam . . .” (qtd. in Halsband, *Life* 58).

After what appear eternal adieus, Lady Montagu, her husband, and their four-year old son start their journey from London, sail to Holland, ride to Vienna, and then up north to Prague, Hanover, and back to Vienna again. From there, they travel East of Vienna, through the Turkish territories of Belgrade, Adrianopole, and Sofia, and finally reach Constantinople. Before leaving Vienna, Mary writes to her sister her letter of adieu:

Adieu, Dear Sister. This is the last Account you will have from me of Vienna. If I survive my Journey you shall hear from me again. I can say with great truth in the words of Moneses, I have long learnt to hold my selfe at nothing, but when I think of the fatigue my poor infant must suffer, I have all a mother’s fondness in my Eyes and all her tender passions in my Heart. (Halsband, *Complete* 296)

The same day before leaving Vienna, she writes Alexander Pope, expressing her fears of the places she is to encounter: “I am threaten’d at the same time with being frozen to death, bury’d in the Snow, and taken by the Tartars who ravage that part of Hungary I am to passe” (297). Nevertheless, at her arrival in Petrovaradin, the first borderline of the unknown East and at the time under Austrian domination, she is pleasantly amused at what she realizes were her unfounded fears:



At length (dear Sister) I am safely arriv'd with all my family in good health at Peterwaradin, having suffer'd little from the rigour of the *Season* (against which we were well provided by Furs) and found everywhere (by the care of sending before) such tolerable Accomodation, I can hardly forbear laughing when I recollect all the frightful ideas that were given me of this Journey, which were wholly owing to the tenderness of my Vienna Freinds [sic] and their desire of keeping me with 'em for this Winter.

(297)

As in the case of other travelers East of civilization, Lady Montagu recreates the same “beyond” space, a space beyond civilization and real geography. The “beyond,” as well as the discourse assigned to it, so frequently employed in relation to the Balkans, becomes the discursive nucleus around which her letters revolve. In her desire to touch and know the beyond of civilization, Lady Montagu commits herself to a different kind of discourse, and attempts to identify herself with the world of which she is so afraid and yet by which she feels so attracted. Lady Montagu’s discourse is situated in-between differences, in an attempt to do justice to the Oriental Other. And, yet, she assigns the same discursive patterns to the Orient, which will entitle her, in letters to friends, to differentiate between “this part of the World,” that is the Ottoman Empire (Halsband, *Complete* 315), and “your side of the globe” ( 309), the British Empire. She embraces the Turkish dressing style and habits and transforms herself into the Other, by wearing Turkish clothes, going to the Turkish Bagnio, reading Persian poetry, and, especially, learning Turkish. Perhaps, more than in any other case, Lady Montagu exemplifies the type of the liminal subject, immersed both in the Western self and the Oriental Other,

within one culture and beyond another. However, though striving to understand and identify with the East more than her predecessors, Lady Montagu's gaze commodifies and objectifies the other, making it an object of exhibit and entertainment, as shown in her letter to the Princess of Wales from Adrianopole:

I have now, Madame, past a journey that has not been undertaken by any Christian since the Time of the Greek Emperours, and *I shall not regret all the fatigues I have suffer'd in it if it gives me an oportunity of Amuseing your Royal Highness by an Account of places utterly unknown amongst us.*

. . . (Halsband, *Complete* 310) (emphasis mine)

Despite her objectification of the alien Other, Lady Montagu's attitude toward the Oriental surpasses that of an external gaze, which will be obvious in Rebecca West's case, for example. Moreover, Montagu's gaze is that of the female, who, already objectified by the male gaze, sympathizes with the Other. As such, the gaze of a woman on the Balkans, that is the gaze of the marginalized on the marginalized Other, produces a more complex set of relations with the Balkan world. Her letters create a liminal space, in which identities are renegotiated while the Other and the self converse, using a rhetoric that belongs neither to the one nor to the other. It seems, however, that her appropriation of the Oriental Balkans becomes frustrating for her friends at home, who expect news about "the Anthropophagi [and] men whose heads grow below their shoulders" (Halsband, *Complete* 296).

Yet, it is clear that, in spite of her appropriation of the Other, Lady Montague cannot help perceiving its difference and "beyond-ness." Consequently, she repeatedly asks her friends to inform her about the events that take place "on your side of the globe"

(Halsband, *Complete* 309). Moreover, despite her appreciation of Oriental poetry and music and in spite of her admiration for the beauty of the Turkish women, she has to admit her apartness and, hence, the impossibility of total identification with the Turkish Other. This is rendered in her attempt to translate Persian into English and her acknowledgment that English is not proper “to express such violence of passion, which is very seldom felt among us; and we want those compound words which are very frequent and strong in the Turkish Language” (337). Obviously, the Other is still present through its absence, the only difference being that the absence is filled with a different meaning. Eventually, she admits that “all I see is so new to me, it is like a fresh scene of an opera every day” (309). Hence, objectification is still at work in Montagu’s gaze on the new world. As on a stage, acoustic and visual images pass in front her eyes, while she has the privilege of choosing the ones worth identifying with. No wonder she chooses to ignore the real Balkan inhabitants and talks only about the Oriental “colonizer.” Belonging to another empire, she feels closer to the opulence and repressive power of the Turkish oppressors. Her reference to the real inhabitants of the Eastern countries is reduced to short notes about Hungarians, who live in huts, which “appear at a little distance like odd fashion’d thatch’d Tents. They consist, everyone of them, of one hove above and another under ground; these are their Summer and Winter apartments” (300). The Hungarians are dressed in “very primitive dress,” while, in Bulgaria, the women “are not ugly but of tawny complexions” (320). As noticed, the discourse of superiority is continually employed by Montagu when talking about the inhabitants of these places.

Meanwhile, the Oriental Other is analyzed and discussed in her letters as the only legitimate inhabitant of these territories. Pursuing the tendency of many Western travelers

in the eighteenth century to perceive the Turks as the only inhabitants of the Balkans, David Norris tries to find the reason behind this preference for the occupying Turks. Norris believes that, because the British authorities had no real political or economical interest in the region until late in the nineteenth century, British travelers were well received and treated by influential Turkish authorities, creating, thus, what Norris calls a “modus vivendi” between the British guests and the Turkish hosts. Moreover, Norris posits that

aristocratic British travelers felt that their meetings with the Turks were like the coming together of two imperialistic nations able to appreciate their mutual successes. So, a kind of mutual backslapping between fellow-conquerors ‘was common to British travel literature and later to Western journalistic accounts: while such works often manifest a tension between empathy for the Ottoman rulers and opposition to Islam, the former usually predominates.’ (6)

Likewise, the Orient, in Montagu’s letters, fills in the space of the Balkans and leaves no room for the Balkan Other. The luxurious and enticing mode of life, assigned by Montagu to the Oriental Other, is in contrast to the indigent life of the real Balkan inhabitants. Romanticism surrounds the portraits of the Turkish ladies, pashas, and the sultan, while the Balkan scenery has signification only as long as it is associated with the Oriental colonizer. The space appears to Montagu as ancient, idyllic, and redolent of Homeric lyrics. Her discourse on the Eastern and indirectly Balkan states is characterized through the attempt to recover the Other and pin it down for future generations. Such a

project requires first of all, in Montagu's opinion, an understanding of the Oriental mind and soul, and it also asks for "Indulgence for all oriental Poetry" (Halsband, *Complete* 335). The Balkans is no longer dangerous and unpredictable, but romantic and passionate, making even a rational being like her feel imbued with the passion of the place. Thus, at the completion of her stay in Constantinople and at the end of her journey through the Balkans, she writes to the Abbé Conti from Tunis and exalts "the Pleasure I have found in this voyage through the most agreeable part of the world, where every Scene presents me some poetical Idea" (416). And, later in the same letter, she excuses her repeated inclination for citing verses: "I am certainly infected by the Poetical air I have pass'd through" (416). Therefore, like all travelers before her, Montagu is "infected" by an inauthentic romanticism, which exists a priori, in a whole discursive tradition.

Romanticism blends with eroticism to give the last artistic brushes to the otherness of the place. Along with passion, sensuality seems to be the main feature of the Oriental, the romantic other becoming the erotic and sensual other. Lady Montagu's gaze at the Turkish females is superior and domineering. It becomes the male gaze, a gaze that reifies the Turkish female body. Admiration blends with envy at what she perceives as the Oriental libertinage, while her reports of harems and the Turkish baths she visits are meant to distinguish between the decency of the West and a whole Oriental tradition of sensuality and opulence. Hence, the Oriental female becomes everything that the Western educated female does not dare or is not allowed to be. They embody the Freudian unconscious desire and licentious sexuality. Lady Montagu repeatedly underlines in her letters to friends the alleged great liberty that Turkish women have, as, she believes, the

long muslins with which they are covered make them unrecognizable and hence prone to having illicit affairs. Consequently, “You may easily imagine the number of faithful Wives very small in a country where they have nothing to fear from their Lovers’ Indiscretion, since we see so many that have the courage to expose them selves to that in this World and all the threaten’d Punishment of the next, which is never preach’d to the Turkish Damsels” (Halsband, *Complete* 328-29)

In *Orientalism* (1978), Said briefly discusses the idea of eroticism and fecundity always associated with the Orient. Speaking of the Oriental clichés of “harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys,” he concludes that “the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe,” and gradually, “‘Oriental sex’ was as standard a commodity as any other available in the mass culture, with the result that readers and writers could have it if they wished without necessarily going to the Orient” (190). Likewise, Lady Montagu’s approach to the women of the Ottoman Empire teems with the desire to gaze and appropriate the Oriental sensual Other. Moreover, her descriptions of harems and Turkish baths resemble that of a painter, careful to represent and transform reality into lifeless symbolism. Either gazing at a single female body or at a whole group of naked women in a Turkish Bath, or watching girls dancing, dressing, or braiding their hair, the sexual innuendo is obvious and the resulting tableaux are depictions meant to remind the Western readers of a remote, almost recondite world. The encounter between the Western female and the Oriental “coquette” is meant once more to fully expose the sensational and exotic Other. Actually, West-European readers were so impressed by Montagu’s description of the Turkish women in

her letters that Ingres painted the famous *Le Bain Turc* (1862), having as a model her famous account:

I beleive [sic] in the whole there were 200 Women . . . The first sofas were cover'd with Cushions and rich Carpets, on which sat the Ladys, and on the 2<sup>nd</sup> their slaves behind 'em, but without any distinction of rank by their dress, all being in the state of nature, that is, in plain English, stark naked, without any Beauty or defect conceal'd, yet there was not the least wanton smile or immodest Gesture amongst 'em. They Walk'd and mov'd with the same majestic Grace which Milton describes of our General Mother. There were many amongst them as exactly proportion'd as ever any Goddess was drawn by the pencil of Guido or Titian, and most of their skins shineingly white, only adorn'd by their Beautifull Hair divided into many tresses hanging on their shoulders, braided either with pearl or riband, perfectly represented the figures of the Graces. (Halsband, *Complete* 313-14)

Simultaneously, while striving to bring into play the romantic Oriental, she engages herself in an anti-discursive letter-writing, meant to negate the whole discursive tradition, which represented the Oriental Balkans as the negative, dangerous Other. To her, the Balkans is romantic and sensual. Moreover, like so many travelers before her, she “promotes” her account of the Balkans as authentic. Thus, she considers the Turkish women as being “freer than any Ladys in the universe,” and as the “the only Women in the world that lead a life of uninterrupted pleasure” (Halsband, *Complete* 406), rejecting a whole discourse on the slavery of Muslim women. Moreover, in a letter to a friend in

1717, Lady Montagu warns her of the mistake of believing the lies of authors such as Dumont, who “has writ with equal ignorance and confidence” (368). On April 1, 1717, she writes apologetically to Anne Thislethwayte for presenting the Oriental world in a manner “so different from what you have been entertained with by the common Voyage-writers who are very fond of speaking of what they don’t know” (343). Eventually, however, her account of the Oriental Balkans is as subjective and fallacious as those of the Western travelers before her. The only difference is the romantic approach that Montagu prefers to undertake, unlike her predecessors. The passionate and sensual Oriental replaces, in her writings, the dangerous pagan World, but the Other is still there to remind her British friends that there will always be two sides of the globe.



## A Kind of Justice: Rebecca West's Journey into the Slav Modus Vivendi

I had come to Yugoslavia because I knew that the past has made the present, and I wanted to see how the process works. Let me start now. It is plain that it means an amount of human pain, arranged in an unbroken continuity appalling to any person cradled in the security of the English or American past. Were I to go down into the market-place, armed with the powers of witchcraft, and take a peasant by the shoulders and whisper to him, "In your lifetime, have you known peace?" wait for his answer, shake his shoulders and transform him into his father, and ask him the same question, and transform him in his turn to his father, I would never hear the word "Yes," if I carried my questioning of the dead back for a thousand years. I would always hear, "No, there was fear, there were our enemies without, our rulers within, there was prison, there was torture, there was violent death."

And they had no compensation in their history, for that never once formed a historic legend of any splendid magnitude. (Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*)

In 1934, two centuries later than Montagu's trip to the Balkans, Rebecca West, while recovering from an operation in a hospital in London, heard on the radio the news of the murder of the King of Yugoslavia in Marseille. Alerted by the possibility of another world war, she started meditating on the human character, in general, and on the Slav temperament, in particular. Frightened, she began reminiscing about the Sarajevo *attentat*, which led to World War One, while her childhood memories of the atrocious murders of the Yugoslavian king Alexander and his wife Draga by their own officers prompted her to puzzle over the psychological mould that produced such people as the Slavs. As the radio brought in the news of the murder, she made up her mind to go and see with her own eyes such a land, hear such people talk, and grasp the arcane nature of the whole region:

And now there was another killing. Again it was in the South-East of Europe, where was the source of all the other deaths. That seemed to me strange in 1934, because the Slav problem then seemed to have been satisfactorily settled by the war. . . . But here was another murder, another threat that man was going to deliver himself up to pain, was going to serve death instead of life. (West 14)

Perplexed by the Slav problem and attempting to grasp it, West, once out of the sanatorium, went to watch the film of the King's death. Yet, her puzzlement in the face of such a violent death was greater and her attempts to understand what it appeared as the specifically Slav demeanor in front of death became even more obscured by her ignorance of the Slavs. For, as she herself admits in the prologue to her book, "I knew nothing about the South Slavs, nor had I come across anybody who was acquainted with

them” (19). And later, she acquiesces: “Violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans” (21).

Therefore, West decided to travel to Yugoslavia in the hope to understand better the Balkan enigma. She began her trip to the Balkan Peninsula in the spring of 1936, when asked to go to Yugoslavia to give some lectures. Falling ill in Greece, at the end of her trip to the Balkans, West traveled back to Vienna, where meeting her husband, she enthusiastically summed up to him the gist of her trip to Yugoslavia: “‘Really, we are not as rich in the West as we think we are. Or, rather, there is much we have not got which the people in the Balkans have got in quantity. To look at them you would think they had nothing’” (West 23). Her decision to go back to Yugoslavia the following year for Easter materialized two years later, in 1938, when, accompanied by her husband, she traveled extensively throughout Yugoslavia. Having returned to England, she felt spiritually and intellectually transformed:

This return [to England] meant, for me, going into retreat. Nothing in my life had affected me more deeply than this journey through Yugoslavia. This was in part because there is a coincidence between the natural forms and colours of the western and southern parts of Yugoslavia and the innate colours of my imagination. Macedonia is the country I have always seen between sleeping and waking; from childhood, when I was weary of the place where I was, I wished it would turn into a town like Yaitse or Mostar, Bitolj or Ochrid. But my journey moved me also because it was like picking up a strand of wool that would lead me out of a labyrinth in which, to my surprise, I had found myself immured. It might be that when

I followed the thread to its end I would find myself faced by locked gates, and this labyrinth was my sole portion on this earth. But at least I now knew its twists and turns, and what corridor led into what vaulted chamber, and nothing in my life before I went to Yugoslavia had even made plain these mysteries. (West 1089)

For West, therefore, the Balkans represents a lesson of life and death. Her book, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), which relates her trip to Yugoslavia in 1938, becomes more than a travelogue through the Balkans. It is first of all a philosophical statement on human destiny, a political declaration of Europe and Europe-ness and, last but not least, a personal account of spiritual awakening and self-discovery. The name of the book represents the central theme and symbol of West's narrative and it originates from her witnessing the sacrificial ritual at Cowherd's Rock, in Macedonia, where a black lamb is sacrificed on a rock on St George's Day. Later on, on the field of Kosovo, where the Serbian king Lazarus was defeated by the Turks, in 1389, she hears a poem relating the appearance of the Prophet Elijah in the form of a grey falcon, before the decisive battle between the Serbs and the Turks. According to the legend, the prophet asked King Lazarus whether he wanted to build a heavenly or earthly kingdom. Lazarus chose a heavenly kingdom and spent his energy building a church, instead of preparing for the battle. Hence, he was defeated by the Turks and his people killed. Starting from the symbolic images of the black lamb and the grey falcon, West proceeds, throughout her book, to condemn the Christian belief in sacrifice and in death as the way to salvation. The Serb poem and the Macedonian ritual make her understand the failure of

the Serbs, in particular, and of the Christians, in general, who see self-sacrifice as the way to heavenly salvation:

The black lamb and the grey falcon had worked together here. In this crime, as in nearly all historic crimes and most personal crimes, they had been accomplices. This I had learned in Yugoslavia, which writes things plain, which furnishes symbols for what the intellect has not yet formulated. On the Sheep's Field I had seen sacrifice in its filth and falsehood, and in its astonishing power over imagination. There I had learned how infinitely disgusting in its practice was the belief that by shedding the blood of an animal one will be granted increase; that by making a gift to death one will receive a gift of life. . . . None of us, my kind as little as any others, could resist the temptation of accepting this sacrifice as a valid symbol. We believed in our heart of hearts that life was simply this and nothing more, a man cutting the throat of a lamb on a rock to please God and obtain happiness. . . . We thereby set up a principle that doom was honorable for innocent things, and conceded that if we spoke of kindness and recommended peace it was fitting that afterwards the knife should be passed across our throats. (West 914-15)

West's travelogue is therefore to be perceived as philosophical history and historical philosophy at the same time, as well as a fatalist meditation on the historical damnation of cultures and nations. The Slav experience seems to offer West the necessary resources to comprehend not only the Balkan issue, but humanity as well. Her encounter with Yugoslavia makes her also pass judgments on the behavior of the great

European powers toward the Balkan nations, and therefore “become doubtful of empires” (West 1089). Vesna Goldsworthy, in her brief analysis of West’s travel narrative, perceives the book as being a moral parable and a warning against West’s marginalizing policy: “The key questions West attempts to answer in her book on Yugoslavia are therefore not so much historical and concrete as ethical and timeless. The Serbs and Macedonians are characters in a parable addressed to West’s British and American readership, the message of which is that each citizen of these countries has a moral duty to fight Nazi Germany even if he or she is not personally under attack” (182). Undeniably, one cannot totally ignore the message Goldsworthy reads in West’s narrative. It is, however, far from being the central focus of the book. West seems to denounce the Western powers for having exploited the Balkans, and such a message is conveyed especially in the long epilogue to the book. Yet, she is herself the subject of an Empire and seems to view British colonization of India or Africa as no more than educational and necessary for the colonized. Therefore, her own identification with the Balkans is superficial and springs mainly from her perception of the united Yugoslavia before the First World War as the paradisiacal “times of yore,” long lost in the West, which might help her understand the essence of humanity.

As opposed to Montagu, who, two centuries previously had voyaged to the Balkans unwillingly and found herself relishing the Turkish conquerors, West traveled to the Balkans voluntarily, determined to understand history and finally life through the Serb experience. And yet, although her final judgments on human nature and history might be valuable, one cannot overlook the idealized images of a united Yugoslavia depicted throughout her book. Like Montagu, who takes the Turks as her new “pets,”

West herself embraces the Serbs as her newly adopted poor “orphans.” In this sense, West is guilty of the same partiality to one Balkan nation to the detriment of another, of which she accuses Edith Durham and other former travelers to the Balkans:

English persons, therefore, of humanitarian and reformist disposition constantly went out to the Balkan Peninsula to see in fact who was ill-treating whom, and, being by the very nature of their perfectionist faith unable to accept the horrid hypothesis that everybody was ill-treating everybody else, all came back with a pet Balkan people established in their hearts as suffering and innocent, eternally the massacre and never the massacrer. (West 20)

By the time of her departure from Yugoslavia, West already establishes the Serbs as her own Balkan pet. Hence, she greatly appreciates and praises throughout her book the attempt of the Serb to create a unified Yugoslavia, while criticizing the Croats and Bosnians who do not understand the importance of staying united.

To her, too, as to Montagu and the other travelers before her, Yugoslavia and especially Serb history represent the resource of the endless human innocence and the answer to Europe’s modern problems. Going to Yugoslavia signifies going back in time to solve the impasse brought about by decadent European modernity. Her epiphany is the result of a long Manichean analysis of a corrupted West and an idyllic East. In Dalmatia, she muses over the primitive and simple life of its inhabitants, opposing them to the “cityish,” bespectacled Western Europeans or the “high-nosed young man,” whom she believes superficial and not educated enough to understand human nature. Instead, she

cannot help exulting over what she perceives as the purely human naïveté of the Dalmatians:

I understand why we [the English] cannot build, why we cannot govern, why we bear ourselves without pride in our international relations. It is not that all Englishmen are like that, but that too many of them are like that in our most favoured classes.

It is strange, it is heartrending, to stray into a world where men are still men and women still women. I felt apprehensive many times in Korchula, since I can see no indications that the culture of Dalmatia is going to sweep over the Western world, and I can see many reasons to fear that Western culture will in the long run overwhelm Dalmatia. (208-09)

Much more, while in Zagreb, she appreciates the mixture of urbanization and provincialism which is reflected in the little-village gossip in the streets and which represents, according to her, “a lovely spiritual victory over urbanization” (47). By the end of her stay in Zagreb, West is assured that “There lingers here a survival of an old attitude towards status that the whole world held, in days which were perhaps happier” (46). As in the case of Montagu’s account of the Balkans, in West’s Yugoslavia, too, time seems to have stopped, while the clocks of history keep on ticking in Western Europe. She enjoys the simple world she visits, which is not tainted by the plague of industrialization and technology. This simplicity and illiteracy is what renders, in West’s eyes, the Slavs almost beast-like in their passions and devotions, and hence closer to their Adamic prototype. While departing from the island of Korchula, in Dalmatia, she ponders over the nature of the islanders, who appear to her instinctively cruel. And, yet,



she finds pleasure in their illiteracy and ignorance, which render them closer to animals, and implicitly, at the opposite pole of Western civilization:

Against what I should lack on this island I could count great pleasure at seeing human beings move about with the propriety of animals, with their muscular ease and their lack of compunction. There was to be included in the propriety the gift, found in the lovelier animals, of keeping clean the pelt and the lair. . . . But not animal was the tranquility of these people. They had found some way to moderate the flow of life so that it did not run to waste, and there was neither excess nor famine, but a prolongation of delight. (228)

Romantic touches frame her descriptions of places in Yugoslavia, such as the one on the island of Korchula, with a woman “sitting between her flowers on the doorstep,” and people “far gone in years,” but with “no staleness in them” (228). Some other times, she blatantly admits that “This is really an undeveloped country, one cannot come and go yet as one chooses” (296).

Throughout her accounts, one can feel the superiority caused by her innate feeling of belonging to a great empire. Even if she admits towards the end of her trip that she lost faith in empires, it is hard not to notice her superior look, always exploring, but never entering a mutual relationship of interrogation with the Balkan Other. Unlike Montagu, who tries to get into the atmosphere of the place and emulate otherness, West plays the role of the external, patriarchal gazer and observer, who watches, listens, and writes down, in order to solve the equation of human history. In her narrative, geographical descriptions of places interweave with historical accounts, rendering her prose much

more credible than in the case of Montagu. However, she reverts to the same stereotypical approach to the Balkans, stressing the tormented history of the region as the central justification for Balkan identity. Sometimes, her clichéd historical interpretations of Balkanness become ridiculous for a modern reader, long-accustomed to the same discursive patterns. Hence, after witnessing a Slav, in a restaurant in the little town of Senj, shouting furiously over his cold soup, West once more takes the source of his anger back to thousands years of exploitation:

But he was not shouting at the soup. He was shouting at the Turks, at the Venetians, at the Austrians, at the French, and at the Serbs (if he was a Croat) or at the Croats (if he was a Serb). It was good that he shouted. I respected him for it. In a world where during all time giants had clustered to cheat his race out of all their goods, his forefathers had survived because they had the power to shout, to reject cold soup, death, sentence to piracy, exile on far mountain slopes. (128)

Later on, on the isle of Rab, she explicates the islanders' laziness on account of their past. On the same island, West once more muses on the tragic destiny of the inhabitants, who, this time, are not only victimized but also turned into the saviors of Europe, as they "gave the bread of their mouth to save us of Western Europe from Islam" (West 136).

Many critics have perceived West's narrative on the Balkans as objective and as a reversal of "the traditional position of British travel writers in the Balkans who usually, before the 1930s, encountered passionate but childish creatures with little understanding of the outside world" (Goldsworthy 180). But West is as guilty of continuing a discourse of balkanization as many travelers before and after her. Her prose is populated with

immature Serbs, Croats, Bosnians, and Montenegrins. Even when she meets educated Slavs, like Constantine, her best friend and the omnipresent personage of the book, she depicts them as lacking the maturity, refinement, and elegance of the British subjects. Constantine is very knowledgeable and a great poet, West informs her readers, but he is too much immersed into the Slav passion for violent arguments and too instinctual in his endless adoration for Yugoslavia. West herself seems to be drawn into the dream of a grand and united Yugoslavia; yet she cannot help making Constantine's nationalism look funny, childish, and almost ridiculous. The people she meets are either romantic sketches of Tolstoyan or Dostoyevskian characters or pleasantly ignorant and fit only for heavy labors. In Dalmatia, she finds the people there "lacking in Latin facility" (West 131). Instead, they appear to have "that flat, unfeigned, obstinate look about the cheekbones, which is the mark of the Slav," while their bodies look "unpliable" (131). Much more, all these people are, according to West, although dressed in modern clothes, "set apart for ever from the rest of the world by the arcane of language and thoughts they learned to share while they scurried for generations close-pressed through the darkness" (138). In Bosnia, watching an officer mourn over a grave, she concludes:

*This was a Slav, this is what it is to be a Slav. He was offering himself wholly to his sorrow, he was learning the meaning of death and he was not refusing any part of the knowledge; for he knew that experience is the cross man must take up and carry. Not for anything would he have chosen to feel one shade less pain; and if it had been joy he was feeling, he would have permitted himself to feel all possible delight. (379) (emphasis mine)*

It would be unfair, however, to judge West's narrative on the Balkans too harshly. Certainly, she tries harder than some other travelers before and after her to give merit to the Slav peoples and understand the history of the place. Her historicist approach does not always help her and hence clichés abound in her book as well. It is hard nevertheless, for West, born and raised as the subject of an Empire, to surpass her prejudices and judge the Balkans objectively. She is outraged at the Western prejudice against the Balkans, but unwillingly she herself replaces the cliché of Balkan repugnance with its stereotypical counterpart of romanticism. She looks down on Gerda, Constantine's German wife, for her failure to like the Slavs, but she herself cannot help at times but pass judgment on the people of Yugoslavia with the superiority of the civilized West. Less judgmental than other travelers through the Balkans, Rebecca West does not let the Balkans create itself but forces it into the historical and cultural patterns she has inherited and carried over into her Balkan journey.

## West through the Lens of the East

The revolution of 1989 in Eastern Europe has largely invalidated the perspective of half a century, compelling the reconsideration of Europe as whole. The maps on the wall have always showed a continent of many colors, the puzzle pieces of many states; the dark line of the iron curtain, supplying the light and shadow in front and behind, was drawn on the maps in the mind. Those maps must be adjusted, adapted, reconceived, but their structures are deeply rooted and powerfully compelling. In the 1990s Italians are worriedly deporting Albanian refugees: *Albanesi, no grazie!* Reads the graffiti on the wall. Germans are greeting visitors from Poland with thuggish violence and neo-Nazi demonstrations, while tourists from Eastern Europe are being arbitrarily stopped and searched in Paris shops, under suspicion of shoplifting. Statesmen, who once enthusiastically anticipated the unity of Europe, are looking away from the siege of Sarajevo, wishing perhaps that it were happening on some other continent. Alienation is in part a matter of economic disparity, the wealth of Western Europe facing the poverty of Eastern Europe, but such disparity is inevitably clothed in the windings of cultural prejudice. The iron curtain is gone, and yet the shadow persists.

(Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: the Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*)

Critical and historical works on the Balkans have mainly focused on the binary opposition between the two parts of Europe, with the West as the gazer and the East as the object of the gazing process. The focus has always been on the imperialistic approach to the Balkans by the West, and less on the way the East “writes” and imagines itself under the continuously condescending gaze of the West. This work itself has been mostly concerned with the stereotypes assigned to a part of the European East, the Balkans. It would be unjust, nonetheless, to neglect totally the other side of the coin – that is the Balkan Other, itself the beholder of its privileged neighbors in the West. Therefore, equal attention should be given to the way the West has been imagined, created, discussed, written, tamed, and lured by the Balkan states. The relation between the two sides of Europe surpasses the simple binary opposition and builds itself out of mutual interrogations, negations, and recognitions. Much more, the context in which such an exchange occurs is also extremely important. For, as Fatos Lubonja asserts, “truth is always contextual, and, as Oscar Wilde has put it, ‘never simple’” (127). Looking at both sides of the matter would certainly not reveal the truth, for the truth, to the extent to which it exists, it can’t be revealed or defined; yet, such an analysis would allow one to understand better the political discourse at play in this case, and, perhaps, predict the direction that such a discourse is going to take.

The reciprocal exchanges between the West and the Balkans originate from and are reinforced by political discourses of separateness and difference. In spite of the manifest contemporary tendency of globalization, borders are imagined, created, and reinforced, nowadays perhaps more than ever. Hence, after 1989, nothing really changed in the European policy of demarcation. The fall of Communism made one curtain fall but

raised another. Borders were not erased but replaced. One change was certainly obvious: the possibility to explore, compare, and interrogate the Other freely. The Balkan people, freed from the tight Communist ideology were free to observe with their own eyes the other West, which they had mythologized and towards which they had aspired for such a long time. Fatos Lubonja uses the metaphor of Plato's cave and world of ideas to describe the blurry image that the Balkan people had of the West during Communism. For him, the ice curtain represented literally a screen of ice through which the East was allowed to see the shadows of the West, but was never capable of discerning the full reality beyond:

In my metaphor, I imagine the place from where Eastern Europeans have viewed the West to be covered by an uncommonly thick layer of ice, and what we perceived of the West to be the murky images of the penumbra which started becoming clearer and clearer after the thaw began. . . . The transformation in perception that occurred between viewing through layers of ice and viewing them through the transparency of air I would define as the passage from idealisation or myth to reality (if we avoid going deeper into philosophy and defining 'reality' as invariably a form of mythologisation). (Lubonja 127)

Lubonja focuses mainly on Albania, his native country, and on the way Western Europe was idealized by Albanians during Communism and, for a short time, after its demise. But, the metaphor can safely be extended to comprise the whole Balkan bloc. After the fall of the Communist regimes, Romania and Bulgaria also exulted over the prospect of an open Occident, while Croatia and Serbia were prompt to acknowledge themselves as belonging to the West, and, by mistake, situated on the Eastern flank.

Nevertheless, Albania, considered at the limit of Balkan-ness, and hence the margins of marginality, was one of the few Balkan countries that had to strive harder than its Balkan counterparts to occupy the position of the civilized European country. Against it, as many Balkanists have shown, the prejudice was even greater and the attempt to reconcile it with the West was harder. Part of the reason for this, as Lubonja and Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers comment, is the total isolation of Communist Albania under President Enver Hoxha. The myth created by Communism in Albania, and for that matter in many Communist countries, was that of national centrality which led, for a period, to the total marginalization of the Western world. As Schwandner-Sievers posits, relying on Lubonja's narrative,

under Enver Hoxha's isolated, totalitarian regime Albanians were raised to believe themselves 'the navel of the world', a paradise amidst demonic others. Lubonja recalls, for example, that when he was a political prisoner and the news filtered through that President Bush and Gorbachev were meeting for the first time, the inmates believed the two world leaders had convened solely for the purpose of deciding what to do with Albania. Both to be at the center of world attention and to exhibit paranoia about the ambitions of that outside world were integral features of ideological socialization. (113)

Such narcissistic mentality existed in most Communist countries for a while, and, one has to admit, it was nothing but a counter effect of the equally egotistical self-perception of the West itself. Both attitudes were the outcome of the Cold War policy, which distorted Westerners' views on the East and vice versa. A corrupt and dehumanized West was the



representation prevailing in most Balkan Communist countries during the fifties, while the discourse on the poor and freedom-ridden East was at its best in Western Europe.

Therefore, Communism managed to become the idol for a short time-period in the Balkan countries. While in some cases, as in Yugoslavia and Romania, there was a clear attempt to distance and separate Communist policy from the politics led in Moscow, Communism was the “big thing” until the 1950s and, in some cases, until the late seventies. In Romania, the myth of Communism started disintegrating from the mid sixties. At the beginning of the sixties, Ceausescu’s regime had to impose restrictions on the input of Western cultural products to keep the Communist dream going. As Alex Drace-Francis postulates, “The approximate scholarly consensus is that, following a relative thaw from the mid 1960s, the Romanian Communist leadership under Nicolae Ceausescu attempted to exercise increasingly repressive methods of symbolic control through a stronger nationalist discourse from the early 1970s, and entered a phase of extreme isolation from the rest of the world during the 1980s” (73). It is hard, however, to establish a certain date at which Communism fell from its ideological pedestal. It is certain, nonetheless, that Communism was successful in the Balkans for a while, and that the lack of freedom as well as the alleged dictatorial myth extensively discussed in the West emerged only later. It is also true that the iron curtain was not that impenetrable until later in the twentieth century. Thus, the Romanian leader Nicolae Ceausescu traveled extensively throughout the West during his first years of investment, his travels comprising places as various as the United States, Africa, Asia, and Western Europe. Moreover, in Zaire, Ceausescu was awarded the National Order of the Leopard, and, while in Luxembourg, the Order of the Golden Lion of Nassau was conferred upon him

(Drace-Francis 75). In 1969, Nixon visited Romania and, as consequence of Ceausescu's criticism of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, Romania was granted in 1975 most-favored-nation trading status. Much more, as Drace-Francis points out, "Examinations of several of these accounts [accounts of travels to Western Europe] suggest that the pronounced development of a strong national ideology under Ceausescu was not necessarily incompatible with writing extensively about Western Europe or even with the production of a pro-European discourse, often by the same writers" (69).

Therefore, it is obvious that the Cold War was not that "frozen" as Western political leaders and the mass media were ready to portray it. The Cold War served more as a pretext to vindicate Western democracy and policies, on the one hand, and Eastern politics, on the other. The Iron curtain did not produce the binary oppositions; it reinforced the old antagonism and created new bounds in the old West-versus-East discourse. To put it differently, the Cold War was the only ideological way to secure power both in the West and in the East. Sometimes, as in the case of Nixon's visit to Romania, these bounds could be crossed for the sake of showing to the principal foil of democracy, Russia, that not all countries in the Communist bloc were faithfully dedicated to Communism. As Andrew Hammond argues, for the West, "the evocation of a communist adversary inspired loyalty to the military and political structures that opposed that adversary, structures which, not uncoincidentally, were undoing massive expansion in the period. It was during the Cold War that security services, bureaucracies, policing networks, military institutions and media systems began to subject mass society to ever-increasing forms of physical and psychological control" (55). Thus, the Cold War managed to create in both Western and Eastern societies obedience and respect for the

State, producing “a symbiotic alliance by which both East and West exaggerated the threat of the other in order to regulate and coerce their respective populations” (Hammond 55). The same need to reinforce American democracy as opposed to the dictatorial Other vindicated paradoxically and ironically the tacit acceptance of McCarthy’s unconstitutional actions against alleged Communist supporters.

In the Balkan countries, during Communism, the perception of the West oscillated between dark images of exploitation and acerbic materialism, on the one hand, and idealizations of the capitalist world, on the other. Certainly, these antagonistic images coexisted for a very short period. It is probably more realistic to say, though maybe risky, that at a certain time the fiendish West was replaced by the utopic Western space. It is nonetheless difficult to point to a specific time when the West underwent this metamorphosis. Obviously, as Fatos Lubonja points out, the moment Communism became a disappointment for more and more people, the West started turning into the ideal other. Hence, soon after the seventies, in the Communist Balkans, the West represented the dream that one day was to become true. People were making plans to cross borders, were secretly listening to Western radio stations, while waiting for the Western miracle to make their dreams come true. Western Europe, and somehow later the United States, became the norm of economic prosperity and flourishing culture. Galia I. Valtchinova, referring to her native Bulgaria, analyzes this phenomenon of the idealized Europe and concludes:

The normative power of Western Europe is especially strong in the realm of culture: as elsewhere in the Balkans, the Bulgarian concept of ‘culture’, of ‘having culture’ and ‘of being cultivated’ are correlative to modernity

and to a closeness to 'European' models. These are explicitly opposed to the 'Turkish' or Ottoman (Muslim) Orient, which is assimilated to primitivism and backwardness. (137-8)

Likewise, Fatos Lubonja proceeds to examine the idealization of the west in Albania. In a structuralist manner, he classifies and names the main forms of idealization of the West by Albanians, especially in the first years after Communism. Hence, in his analysis, the West is identified with the Promised Land, the Savior, and as a whole, with the monolithic God. Lubonja relates two events that seem to support his belief in the mystical adoration of the Albanians for the West. One of them is the opening scene of a documentary on the exodus of Albanians heading to Italy immediately after the fall of the Communist regime. Lubonja remembers how the cameras show a man cradling his baby daughter in his arms who, finally arrived in the port of Bari, shouts in front of the Italian cameras, "Finally, I am free, my family is free, my daughter is free!" (Lubonja 132). The other moment, which Lubonja remembers, much more incredible than the former, is the visit of the U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker, in May 1991, in Tirana. Lubonja is amazed at the great number of people gathered to meet Baker. The view reminds Lubonja of a "gathering of believers at Mecca, with some people kissing Baker's car and others wounded by the pressing crowd" (132).

These almost grotesque images of fanatical adoration would probably be easily catalogued by a Westerner as typically "Balkan." However, one should see them in the context of years of Communism, when, in spite of the iron curtain, which Churchill so threateningly proclaimed, the West kept on secretly bombarding the Eastern public with idealized images about the freedom and economic development of capitalism. Every

evening, Western radio stations would broadcast the same negative images of Communism (which in the last twenty years of the regime were unnecessary), while continuously airing stories of success and prosperity in the West. People listened to them at first out of curiosity and, later on, to alleviate the chagrin caused by the last decades of severe Communism. Listening to such radio programs was the only way of getting in touch with a world they were not allowed to see, and it represented a means of rebellion against the regime. That this was the case is proven by the Romanian example. In the Communist Romania of the sixties and mid-seventies, there still existed the possibility of traveling to the West, though not to a great extent, while the rather great number of foreigners, especially German tourists, filling the Black Sea littoral, rendered the West less desirous. The West was there and represented a curiosity, but it had never reached the status of the dream to be dreamt and fought for at all costs. As a matter of fact, professors and gymnasts who traveled beyond the Communist space before the late eighties always came back. However, once Ceausescu, in the eighties, blocked any possibility of exchange abroad, people began to yearn for the Western Other. After all, Nadia Comaneci, the famous Romanian gymnast, decided not to come back to Romania only in the late eighties, despite the fact that she had traveled abroad extensively before. And so did many other Romanian intellectuals.

The West thus became for the Balkan people the newly imagined and constructed space and the counterpart of their lack of expression. Prohibited foreign radio stations were the source of numerous imagined stories about ideal places and people. The process was slow and deliberately contrived to infuse an ideal fake image about the West, while creating fissures in the Communist system. At the end of the process, the ideal West was

the spiritual food of every Balkan, the Promised Land and the Savior to which Lubonja refers. Rikka Kuusisto's theorization on the way Western foreign policy creates stories which idealize some states while disparage others can be appropriated to express the way the Communist people were tricked into "fairy-tales" about the perfect West:

As foreign policy matters often concern distant countries, little known cultures and abstract values, only very few in the audience will normally be able to base their opinions on immediate observations and personal experience. Instead, on many important questions, each one of us will have to rely on the labels and narratives of (prominent, trustworthy, like-minded, well-informed) 'experts' and on the interpretations we have earlier accepted in similar situations. Even at the turn of the twenty-first century, foreign policy representations can have awesome power (they can make people believe in crazed Iraqis routinely throwing babies out of incubators or in sick strangers flying airplanes into buildings without any rationale, motivation or strategic objectives), but being powerful does not mean being random in form and content. Certain elements and designs have greater appeal than others, and certain plots are imposed in new circumstances again and again. (170)

Thus, the same foreign policy representations were used this time not to belittle the other in the Western eyes, but to glorify the West in Communist countries. No wonder that, once Communism was over, the West, as the nurtured dream that could finally come true, became the idol that could be touched, seen, and experienced. The result, nevertheless, of

the concrete encounter with the West proved disappointing and disconcerting for the newly-freed Balkans.

Stressing the intangibility of the West, so close and yet so far, Bulgarian scholar Galia Valtchinova relates the disappointing encounter of the Bulgarians in the town of Trun with the American “idol” in the summer of 1998. While the whole town was looking forward to the coming of the US troops, as part of the joint American-Bulgarian training operation, “Cornerstone,” their actual arrival proved dismaying for the enthusiast Bulgarians. As Valtchinova comments, for the people in Trun the arrival of the Americans seemed to promise economic boom, better roads and conditions, “as if ‘America herself’ would be appearing in the town” (Valtchinova 148). Moreover, Valtchinova remembers that statements like ‘While Bulgaria struggles to enter Europe, we are already in America,’ could be heard everywhere (148). Yet, the celebratory attitude soon waned once the American soldiers came:

*Perhaps this ‘arrival’ of the otherwise untouchable and unattainable West made the discrepancy between expectation and reality all the more obvious. The feverish expectations which local people developed about the Americans were soon cooled by the lack of ‘contact.’ The US Army’s careful regulation of the soldiers’ everyday life made it extremely improbable that the locals would ever get close enough to ‘touch’ them. Every morning the soldiers would come to the worksite on buses, and every evening the same buses took them back to the dormitories. . . . Local people could observe them only through the bus windows, or indeed behind cameras, as often all there was to see was a concentration of*

flashes. . . . They [the American soldiers] were not allowed to circulate freely in the town (an understandable measure in the opinion of my interlocutors who felt the restriction was due to the numerous Roma children who would otherwise ‘surround them to mendicate’). Less popular were the measures against buying from local merchants and consuming at local cafés, a cause of bitter disappointment for those who imagined that the Western presence would create jobs. (148-49) (emphasis mine)

Valtchinova’s story is very suggestive of the passive idealization of the West by the Balkan countries during Communism and after its demise. Immediately following 1989, the general attitude in the Balkans was one of anticipation, based on the belief that the West could show up one day and recognize the value of the much-ignored former Communist countries. There was, therefore, a state of passive waiting and anxious expectations for the West (the United States included) to come, woo, and appropriate its poor neighbors. The disillusionment came as people became to realize not only that the Western powers had little or no interest in the area, but that, when present in the Balkans, the West was as intangible as it had always been. As Valtchinova’s narrative proves, the East wanted to experience fully and tangibly and “feel” the West, while the always-far-yet-never-near West proved obscure and intangible, and, even when touchable, hard to master. The disappointment of the Balkan people, I would argue, in the first years of massive immigrations to the West, was not so much with the West, but with the dream of the West, and eventually with themselves as nurturers of such dreams. The naiveté of the



beginning was slowly but surely being replaced by the self-consciousness of being marked as “Balkan” and “former Communist” by the outer world.

The dismantling of the “Promised Land” dream occurred over a long time span, and it was accelerated by Europe’s refusal to accept the always-growing groups of Eastern immigrants. Consequently, the Schengen space, as Valtchinova also argues, was quickly invented to vindicate Western Europe’s discriminations and restrictions against its Eastern counterpart. It was meant, at the same time, as a subtle reminder to the Balkan Other (and to the whole of Eastern Europe) that geography and politics go hand in hand, and that, although one iron curtain had fallen, another one was rising. The Schengen space carries within it identity issues and once more reinforces the existence of the (one would think obsolete) binary opposition privileged / unprivileged. One either belongs or does not belong to the privileged space, while geographical space is once more “colonized” to fit the ideology of the powerful colonizer.

Today, as the game of being or not being European is played with seriousness by all officials in the European countries, the tables have turned and the Balkans is wooing Europe with the same intensity with which, at the beginning, it expected to be courted. The Balkans has migrated West as more and more waves of immigrants are heading towards the Promised Land. The issue is no longer whether the Balkans is in Europe, but whether they should be permitted to get to the heart of Europe. As borders are crossed more and more, and, paradoxically, increasingly enforced, antagonistic identity paradigms are reiterated and reinvented, while stereotypes about both sides of Europe are negotiated and reconciled to fit the emergent postcolonial and post-imperialistic attitudes.

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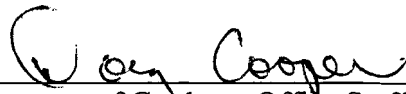
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