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FULLY KNOWN YET WHOLLY UNKNOWABLE: ORIENTALISING THE BALKANS

Mirela Cufurovic[*]

Abstract: The Balkan region has left scholars perplexed over its origin and definition, to which they have provided different answers. This challenge stems from the region's long history; a history where civilisations met, collided, and even merged leading to a dynamic, multilayered region. However, one civilisation stuck with the Balkans centuries after its demise – the Ottoman Empire. This Ottoman legacy marked the Balkans as "the 'other' within" Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century when scholars and travel writers began to attach political connotations to the name. Being referred to as 'Turkey-in-Europe,' the identity of the Balkans became premised on the dichotomy of East versus West, in which the Balkans represented the East – the Orient – purely because of its Ottoman history. It is for this reason that the Balkans, more than any other geographical appellation, conjure up pejorative connotations. So much so, that many tend to either avoid the term altogether – including the Balkan nation-states – or use an ostensibly neutral term like 'South-east Europe' to refer to the region. And so, the question remains: who are the Balkans?

This paper examines the ground between historical reality and Western imagination regarding the Balkans by focusing on Balkan identity as conflicted between East and West, and explores the extent to which Balkan scholarship has 'Orientalised' the region, whereupon the Balkan nation-states began to disassociate themselves from the Balkan label to appear more 'European.' The paper will argue it is because of this complexity – the divide between East and West – that the Balkan region is, paradoxically, fully known yet wholly unknowable: known to Europe, yet distant from it due to its Oriental past and tendencies.

Keywords: *Balkans*, *Orientalism*, *Europe*, *national identity*, *Islam*

As a name and geographical entity, the origin and definition of the Balkan region[1] has left scholars perplexed over the centuries, to which they have provided different answers.[2] Part

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[1]   While contested, for the purposes of this paper, the Balkan region (also, Balkans) includes Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Croatia, Serbia, Greece, Turkey, Romania, Italy and Slovenia. The first six are entirely within the Balkans, while the following are mostly or partially within the Balkans. Unless otherwise stated, the paper will only draw on a few nation-states.

[2]   See Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Andrew Hammond, "Typologies of the East: On Distinguishing Balkanism and Orientalism," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 29, no. 2-3 (2007): 201-18; Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, "Orientalist Variations of the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics," *Slavic Review* 51, no. 1 (1992):1-

of this stems from its long history; a history where civilisations met, collided, and even merged leading to a dynamic, multilayered region. Considered as the quintessential Balkan space, Bosnia is one such example, as captured by Ivo Andric in his novel *The Bosnian Chronicle*:

> When you make your way through the bazaar, stop by the Jeni mosque … The people know that once, before the arrival of the Turks, this mosque was the Church of St. Catherine … And if you look a little more closely at the stone of that ancient wall, you will see that it comes from Roman ruins and tombstones … you can clearly read the steady, regular Roman letters of a fragmented inscription: 'Marco Flavio… optimo…' And deep beneath that, in the invisible foundations, lie large blocks of red granite, the remains of a far older cult, a former temple of the god Mithras … And who knows what else is hidden in those depths, under those foundations.[3]

While the mosque sits as a metaphor for the unity of cultures within the Balkans throughout history, it also symbolises the success of one civilisation that stuck with the Balkans centuries after its demise – the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, the word 'Balkan' is of Turkish origin, meaning a mountain range, which confirms, even in lexical terms, the Balkans are an Ottoman legacy. Maria Todorova points out this significance, stating "it is the Ottoman elements (often including Byzantine ones) or the ones perceived as such that are mostly invoked in the current stereotype of the Balkans."[4]

This legacy marked the Balkans as "the 'other' within" Europe at the turn of the nineteenth century when scholars and travel writers began to attach political connotations to the name.[5] More explicitly so, the Balkans, before the 1878 Congress of Berlin, were referred to as 'European Turkey' or 'Turkey-in-Europe,' in addition to the Balkan label, emphasising its Ottoman past as well as the process of 'othering' those associated with Turkey and its history.[6] In this way, the usage of *Balkan* indicates the Balkans exists as a region with a certain identity.[7] But what is this identity based on? Having gained widespread acceptance from the beginning of the nineteenth century, this identity was premised on the dichotomy of East versus West, in which the Balkans represented the East – the Orient – purely because of its Ottoman history. However, this began to shift when the Balkans fell prone to three wars, which led to

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15; Dusan I. Bjelic and Obrad Savic, *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalisation and Fragmentation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002); Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000); Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Diana Mishkova, "Symbolic Geographies and Visions of Identity: A Balkan Perspective," *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 2 (2008): 237-56.

[3]   Ivo Andric, *The Bosnian Chronicle*, trans. Celia Hawkesworth and Bogdan Rakic (London: Apollo, 1996), 265. For the original reference, see Ivo Andric, *Travnička Hronika* (Beograd: Države Izdavačke Zavod Jugoslavije, 1945), 281-82.

[4]   See Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 162.

[5]   Maria Todorova, "Is 'the Other' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept? Some Thoughts on its Implications to the Balkan Region," *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 21, no. 2 (1999): 169.

[6]   Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 27.

[7]   The term Balkan (*Balkanhalbeilan*) was first used by the German geographer August Zuene (1809) to describe the countries south of the Old Mountain in Bulgaria. See August Zeune, *Goea: Versuch einer wissenschaftlichen Erdbeschreibung* [Goea: An Attempt at a Scientific Geography] (Berlin: Ferdinand Diummler, 1811), 11.

the perception of the Balkans not as the 'other' because of its historical past, but because of its violent nature.[8]

For this reason, the Balkans, more than any other geographical appellation, conjure up pejorative connotations. So much so, that many tend to either avoid the term altogether – including the Balkan nation-states – or use an ostensibly neutral term like 'South-eastern Europe' to refer to the region.[9] This lexical change was the result of ideologically motivated debates among countries of the region about who does and does not belong in the Balkan Peninsula. And so, the question remains: who are the Balkans? This paper examines the ground between historical reality and Western imagination regarding the Balkans by focusing on Balkan identity as conflicted between East and West, and explores the extent to which Balkan scholarship has 'Orientalised' the region.

The first section of the paper will explore the geographical constructs of the Balkans as it is the apparent geographical boundaries of Europe that generate distinctions between one group and another, before political constructs – that is, ideologically motivated constructs put forth by Balkan nation-states and outside actors. It will then tie this with Edward Said's concept of Orientalism to highlight the process of 'othering' (i.e. alterity) on the region, and how scholars have adopted his discussion of Orientalism to examine the Balkans. The second section will use Milica Bakic-Hayden's concept of 'nesting Orientalisms' to argue that it is not just Western imagining that has Orientalised the Balkans, but also within the Balkans, various nation-states have turned to using Orientalist discourse to either emphasise or de-emphasise their 'European' superiority.[10] The final section will draw on these two issues to examine the impact of Orientalist discourse on Balkan identity as various Balkan states have attempted to move away from the pejorative Balkan label to identify themselves with Europe. It is because of this complexity – the divide between East and West – that the Balkan region is, paradoxically, fully known yet wholly unknowable: known to Europe, yet distant from it due to its Oriental past and tendencies.

WEST VERSUS EAST: THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'THE OTHER'

The major legacy of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan region is based on the transformation of the civilisational structure of the Balkans; the disappearance of certain Balkan states was the consequence of the adoption of Islam by various Balkan populations, who then adjusted their ethnic identity to incorporate Islamic culture.[11] It is from this change in

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[8]   The Balkan wars in 1912-3, World War I and the Yugoslav Wars of 1992-1995.

[9]   I will subsequently be using the term Balkans and South-eastern Europe interchangeably.

[10]   The concept of 'nesting orientalisms' refers to a process whereby all ethnic groups, within a region, define the 'other' as the 'East' of them: the 'Occidental' set themselves apart from the more 'Oriental' nation-states, thus defining themselves as the 'West' of that 'other'. See Milica Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (1995): 917-33.

[11]   The example of the Jeni mosque in Andric's novel illustrates how Bosnian identity shifted to incorporate Islamic culture: from being a sacred ground of ancient Roman religion to a church, the mosque now represents the new cultural identity of the Bosnian nation. See Ivo Andric, *The Bosnian Chronicle*, 265. Anatonina Zhelyazkova, "Islamisation in the Balkans as an Historiographical Problem: The Southeast-

the civilisation structure of the Balkans that the 'Eastern Question' emerged, which concerned itself with the status of Islam in Europe. More specifically, it dealt with the problem of what ought to become of the Ottoman Empire.[12] Part of its emergence can be traced to the idea of Europe that developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as *the* progressive, modern civilisation, and to uphold this ideal, it needed to set itself against an 'other.' In the Carnegie Endowment Inquiry of 1913 presented by American diplomat and historian George F. Kennan, the Balkans were described as an aggressive, nationalistic region because of its Ottoman connections. Kennan wrote that the Balkan Wars

> drew on deeper traits of character *inherited*, presumably, from a distant tribal past … What we are up against is the sad fact that developments of those earlier ages, not only those of the Turkish domination but of earlier ones as well, had the effect of thrusting into the south-eastern reaches of the European continent *a salient non-European civilisation* … to preserve many of its non-European characteristics.[13]

Kennan's emphasis on Turkish influence highlights not only how Islam shaped the civilisational structure of some Balkan states, but also how it led to the perception of the Balkans as being the 'other' within Europe – specifically, "a salient non-European civilisation." But such perceptions by the West brought with it, too, the "secular political logic of nationalism that impregnated Balkan politics with violence, suspicion and fear…"[14] The conflict over identity and 'violent nature' of the Balkan region, from this viewpoint, is the consequence of imported Western political thought – namely, theories of nationalism and national identity.

It is against this backdrop that British author J. A. R. Marriot asserted that the Eastern Question is not specifically confined to the Ottoman legacy in the Balkan region, rather it considers also the clash between ideas, habits and preconceptions of the West and East in South-east Europe as well as in Europe generally.[15] Marriot's conception of the Eastern Question as being ideologically bound exemplified what was to become the central argument of Edward Said's *Orientalism*.[16] First published in 1978, Said's *Orientalism* is a book about the cultural representations that form the basis of Orientalism, which Said identified as being the West's patronising representations of 'the East.'[17] It was Said's conception of Orientalism that shaped the outlook on the Balkan region by Balkan scholars.

European Perspective" in *The Ottoman and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, ed. Fikret Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 225.

[12]   Fikret Karcic, "The Eastern Question – A Paradigm for Understanding the Balkan Muslims' History in the 20th Century," *Islamic Studies* 41, no. 4 (2002): 636.

[13]   Emphasis added. International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars, *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict by George F. Kennan* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993), 11, 13.

[14]   Paschalis M. Kitromilides, "'Balkan Mentality': History, Legend, Imagination," *Nations and Nationalism* 2, no. 2 (1996): 186.

[15]   J. A. R. Marriot, *The Eastern Question: An Historical Study in European Diplomacy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1.

[16]   See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

[17]   Said's discussion of 'the East' includes societies and peoples in North Africa, Asia and the Middle East. This paper will also refer to these areas when talking about the East, but it will include Turkey. Though, the paper will largely focus on 'the East' as a construct, where the geographical boundaries are malleable.

Said argues that Orientalism stands "as a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient," whereupon knowledge of the Orient becomes "synonymous with European domination."[18] Simply put, Orientalism is a discourse constructed by the West toward the East in which the East is grouped together as being similar to one another while fundamentally dissimilar to the West. In other words, the West is positioned as 'superior' than the Eastern 'other.' Placing the Balkans in this context, Maria Todorova asserted that by being

> geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as 'the Other', the Balkans became, in time, the object of a number of externalised political, ideological and cultural frustrations and have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European' and 'the West' has been constructed.[19]

Entering the political discourse at the end of the First World War, the notion of 'Balkanisation' became "synonymous with dehumanisation, de-aestheticisation and the destruction of civilisation."[20] Just like the Orientalism put forth by Said, the term adopted the binarism of 'us' versus 'them,' and effectively placed the Balkans against Europe, where the binary became that of Western Europe versus South-eastern Europe (Balkans). Here, Todorova argued that marked categories (i.e. Balkans) become "different" while unmarked categories become the "standard against which the rest have to position themselves."[21]

However, scholarship on the Balkans and its relationship with Europe and the Orient extends beyond this underlying dichotomy of 'West' versus 'East.' Balkan historians have explored how the dichotomy between Europe and the Orient can be shifted. Terming this shift Balkanism,[22] Todorova argues this concept "evolved to a great extent independently from orientalism and, in certain respects, against or despite it."[23] For Todorova, Balkanism entails an internal effort to understand an ambiguity within the European identity, particularly as the region has been historically shaped and reshaped by various civilisations.[24] She writes that Orientalism is about an "imputed opposition," while Balkanism is about "an imputed ambiguity."[25] Thus, because of its transitory history – moving from being influenced by and adapting to different civilisational ideologies and cultures – the Balkans "are constructed as an

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[18]   Said, *Orientalism*, 3, 197.
[19]   Maria Todorova, "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 455.
[20]   Dimitris Tziovas, "Introduction," in *Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions and Cultural Encounters since the Enlightenment*, ed. Dimitris Tziovas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 2.
[21]   Todorova, "Is 'the Other' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?", 170.
[22]   Dusan I. Bjelic provides an excellent definition of Balkanism put forth by Maria Todorova. He writes, "… the word Balkanism has changeable meanings. Sometimes it refers to the body of knowledge about the Balkans, and sometimes to the critical study of the Balkans without examining the presuppositions upon which this knowledge has been generated. Balkanism in the second sense examines the Balkans in relation to suppositions constitutive of Balkanism in the first sense – that is, as an epistemology." Dusan I. Bjelic, "Introduction: Blowing Up the Bridge," in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalisation and Fragmentation*, ed. Dusan I. Bjelic and Obrad Savic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 4.
[23]   Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 20.
[24]   Ryan Gingeras, "Between the Cracks: Macedonia and the 'Mental Map' of Europe," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 50, no. 3-4 (2008), 344.
[25]   Todorova, "Is 'the Other' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?", 169.

incomplete self."[26] This term not only emphasises the ambiguous status and nature of the Balkan region, it also attempts to ground the Balkans to reality in order to move away from the idea of the Balkans as an abstract concept.

For instance, Macedonia provides insight into the modern reimagining of the ideological and geographic dimension of Europe. This is because Macedonia has long been embedded in the European classical narrative, particularly because it is the birthplace of Alexander the Great. However, despite also being one of the first lands to be considered 'European' during the Hellenic period, the Ottoman conquest of the Balkan region saw Macedonia become irrelevant to the rest of Europe. Ryan Gingeras argues this shift from "prominence to obscurity" was the "by-product of the nineteenth century rethinking of historical, cultural and geographic boundaries on the South-eastern periphery of the 'Great Power' states of Western Europe."[27] This shift emerged from the perception of the Balkans as a violent region. In 1903 Macedonia, an uprising took place called the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising, where Macedonian Christians rebelled against the Ottoman forces to establish independent Macedonia. The uprising did not prove to be a success, however, as the Bulgarian government refused to intervene, with the Turks subsequently crushing the revolt, resulting in a violent massacre of local inhabitants by Ottoman troops.[28] It was during this uprising that Europe reinforced the idea of the Balkans as synonymous with "violence and tribalism in the twentieth century."[29]

This image continued to take place even among Macedonians. In 2001, conflict arose in Macedonia between the Albanian Liberation Army (NLA) and the Macedonian Armed Forces (MAF). For one local, the 2001 conflict reminded him of the 1992-1998 Yugoslav Wars, which prevented the Balkans from moving 'forward.' He stated,

> With so many conflicts we in the Balkans have not been able to go forward like people in the West. In the West there is order, people keep busy with work, have money, travel, create beautiful things in life. Here there is war. First, there was the war in Serbia and Croatia, then Bosnia, and then Kosovo.[30]

He also went on to say that such violence stemmed from the Albanians, where the majority are Muslims. He said, "it seems that Albanians want to bring war here … If we were in the European Union, no problem! There would still be problems with Albanians but we would be like Greece …" Such perceptions in Macedonia are only a microcosm of the violence that emerged in the Balkan region because of the Balkans. Namely, by asserting that Albanians are to blame for the conflict, certain Macedonian individuals use the European ideal as the epitome of peace and solution to the violence in the Balkans. This perception then fuelled Western conceptions of the Balkans as the "dark other of Western civilisation."[31]

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[26]   Ibid.
[27]   Gingeras, "Between the Cracks," 341.
[28]   Milena Mahon, "The Macedonian Question in Bulgaria," *Nations and Nationalism* 4, no. 3 (1998), 393; Gingeras, "Between the Cracks," 348.
[29]   Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 116-9.
[30]   Vasiliki P. Neofotistos, "'The Balkans' Other Within': Imaginings of the West in the Republic of Macedonia," *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (2008): 24.
[31]   Todorova, "The Balkans," 482.

The process of othering developed as early as the 1800s from Western travel accounts. Travel writer James Creagh wrote in 1875 that, although the Balkans are of "the continent of Europe," there was "nothing European" about Balkan culture.[32] Writing in 1876, Henry Barkley also made this distinction:

> I found myself placed next to a gentleman-like-looking man, who introduced himself as a Mr Steele, and with whom we made good friends … there was the usual ruck of Jews, Wallacks, Greeks and Russians, talking eighteen to the dozen with both tongues and hands, and at the same time performing … tricks with their knives, which they thrust so far down their throats … In and out they went like lightening, and yet when our party broke up at the end of the three days no one had been killed …[33]

Barkley clearly differentiates between the civilised European (i.e. 'Mr Steele') and the absurd, violent 'ruck' (Jews, Wallacks, Greeks and Russians) who would rather throw knives down their throats than food. His implicit relief that "no one had been killed" at the end of the three days is testimony to the Western assumption of the Balkans as the uncivilised 'other,' regardless of its geographical location within Europe. Such perceptions by the West continued to take place well into the twentieth century, so much so that Rebecca West, upon her travelling with her husband from England to the Balkans in 1937, wrote in her travel account afterwards that "violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans."[34]

This is where Todorova's concept of Balkanism can be contrasted with Said's presentation of Orientalism, in which he argues that Orientalism is a "fictional reality."[35] For Said, Orientalism is not as a concrete historical reality, but an idea and construct.[36] For Todorova, "Balkanism is about a place with a history, whilst Said's Orient is neither."[37] Thus, the Balkans are not just an "orientalist variation on a Balkan theme."[38] Other historians have augmented Todorova's approach. Andrew Hammond asserts, in the Western imagination, the region is an "unstable and unsettling presence loosed from clear identity, an obscure boundary along the European peripheries where categories, oppositions, and essentialised groupings are cast into confusion."[39] David Norris described the Balkans as "the ambivalent lands between … not belonging fully to either world."[40] In this way, the Balkans become fully known yet wholly unknowable to the general West, and more specifically, to Western Europe.

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[32]   James Creagh, *Over the Borders of Christendom and Eslamiah: A Journey through Hungary, Slavonia, Servia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Dalmatia, and Montenegro, to the North of Albania, in the Summer of 1875*, vol. 2 (London: Samuel Tinsley, 1875), 11, 85.

[33]   Henry Berkley, *Between the Danube and Black Sea: Or Five Years in Bulgaria* (London: John Murray, 1876), 303.

[34]   Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 21.

[35]   Said, *Orientalism*, 54.

[36]   Ibid.

[37]   Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 11-2.

[38]   Todorova, "The Balkans," 455. See also Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, "Orientalist Variations of the Theme 'Balkans'," 1-15.

[39]   Hammond, "Typologies of the East," 204.

[40]   David A. Norris, *In the Wake of the Balkan Myth: Questions of Identity and Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 5.

Without a doubt, there are opposing viewpoints on how the Balkans are constructed. While some may argue the Balkans are geographically 'staged' and are thus physically real with a history, others contest the label altogether and see the Balkans as a construct just like Said's presentation of Orientalism. These opposing arguments stem from, according to Todorova, the two types of discourse that deal with alterity: intellectual, "i.e. how scholars from different disciplines, writers, journalists represent 'the Other'"; and instrumental, "how education represents otherness in order to achieve a certain socialisation of the population."[41] While K. E. Fleming exemplified the "limited utility of a Saidian approach to the Balkans" and argued, when it comes to the Balkans, Said's model should be rejected, the next section challenges this viewpoint.[42] It will analyse Bakic-Hayden's concept of 'nesting Orientalisms' to examine how the Balkans have Orientalised each other *as a result of* the dominant discourse on the binary of West versus East presented by Said.

'NESTING ORIENTALISMS': HOW THE BALKANS PERCEIVE THEMSELVES

For Fleming, it was less the form that Balkanism had taken than the circumstances in which it had been constructed. According to her, the Balkans received less attention than the Orient in general, where fascination with the Balkans by the West began relatively late in comparison and thus lacked the authority of the Orientalist canon. Where the Middle East and other Oriental regions instigated interest that led to the development of a specialised academic field, Balkan historiography, in contrast, largely developed and has been influenced by the "populist genres of adventure fictions and travelogue," produced by "non-experts during moments of crises."[43] Put simply, Fleming's argument is premised on the fact Said's presentation of Orientalism bases itself around European imperialism, a factor that has been absent in Balkan history.

However, Todorova's approach to the Balkan region opened new ways of thinking about boundaries and how identity can be subverted because of another, but unlike Fleming, Todorova illustrated how the early discourse on Orientalism does not have to be constricted to a region, or factors presented by Said in his analysis of Orientalism. In fact, Said's *Orientalism* allowed historians and other scholars to think about the Orient as a form of representation – applicable to not just the standard Eastern 'other' (i.e. the Middle East and Asia), but also applicable to other regions (and within those regions) where the process of othering takes place. As Adeeb Khalid argued, *Orientalism* claims the "authority to represent the Orient and the Orientals, not just to 'the West,' but to the Orient itself."[44]

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[41]   Todorova, "Is 'the Other' a Useful Cross-cultural Concept?" 166.
[42]   Her argument will be elaborated in the following section. K. E. Fleming, "Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography," *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 4 (2000): 1220.
[43]   Fleming, "Orientalism," 1225; Hammond, "Typologies of the East," 203.
[44]   Adeeb Khalid, "Russian History and the Debate over Orientalism," *Kritika: Explorations on Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 4 (2000): 693.

The dichotomy presented by Said not only shapes the way the West view the Balkans, but also the way the Balkans view themselves. One of the many reasons why the Balkans are placed in orientalist discourse is because of its tendency to engage in, and establish, ethnic conflict and ethnic boundaries. As Said argued, when the world is divided "into 'us' (Westerners) and 'they' (Orientals)", whereupon the former is constructed as "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" and the latter as "irrational, depraved, childlike, 'different'", an ontological template exists "for the 'absolute' division of Europe itself".[45] It is not only a dichotomy of civilisation against barbarism, but a juxtaposition "of one civilisation [those who identify as being European] with another [those who are considered non-European by another]".[46]

Bakic-Hayden has employed the term 'nesting Orientalisms' to explain this process, stating it is a "pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised."[47] What she puts forth is the notion that this dichotomy, presented initially by Said, can establish "conditions for its own contradiction" where Orientalism becomes a "*subjectivational practice* by which all ethnic groups [within the Balkans] define the 'other' as the 'East' of them."[48] In doing so, they not only take part in the process of Orientalising the 'other,' but also Occidentalise themselves as the West of that 'other,' thus establishing a hierarchy within the Balkans.[49]

For example, in the former Yugoslavia, the Croats have taken to Orientalising the Serbs for its history with the Ottomans and being Orthodox (as opposed to Catholic), while the Serbs, in turn, have Orientalised the Bosnians for being Muslims (Bosniaks), and further, the Bosniaks have differentiated themselves from the "ultimate Orientals, non-Europeans" – that is, those in the Middle East and, to some extent, Asia.[50] This process of othering within the Balkans can be traced to the development of nationalism. Todorova asserts that "one's history and national symbols have become what they are precisely because of the accompanying process of constructing 'the Other,'" while Ivaylo Ditchev explained how nations can be torn between two processes.[51] On one hand, "national actors are constantly torn between the need … to fit into the schemes of the geopolitical sponsors [i.e. the West, or Europe]," while on the other, "the need … to differentiate themselves and acquire an existence of their own in the universal imagination of modernity."[52] Linked to this process of othering within the Balkans is the Eastern Question, which survived well until the 1990s, particularly during the Yugoslav War.

The Eastern Question for the Balkan nationalists during this time concerned itself with presenting Islam as an inferior religion on European grounds, where South-eastern Muslims

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[45] Said, *Orientalism*, 45, 40, 300; Hammond, "Typologies of the East," 203.
[46] Agnes Heller, "Europe: An Epilogue?" in *The Idea of Europe: Problems of National and Transnational Identity*, ed. Brian Nelson , David Roberts and Walter Veit (New York: Berg, 1992), 14.
[47] Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms," 918.
[48] Bjelic, "Introduction," 4.
[49] Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms," 918.
[50] Ibid., 922. See also Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, "Orientalist Variations of the Theme 'Balkans'," 1-15.
[51] Todorova, "Is 'the Other' a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?" 167.
[52] Ivaylo Ditchev, "The Eros of Identity," in *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalisation and Fragmentation*, ed. Dusan I. Bjelic and Obrad Savic (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 236.

were seen as foreigners who had to be 'cleansed' from European territory. This manifestation of the Eastern Question was documented in many studies dealing with the process of genocidal policy and sources against the Bosniaks by the Serbs during the Bosnian War in 1992-5.[53] For example, to 'Orientalise' the Bosniaks, the Serbs needed to present them as the 'other' – more specifically in this context, as the perpetrator. Noel Malcolm wrote that an "important part of the psychological operation was to convince the local Serbs that they had to 'defend' themselves against their Muslim neighbours."[54] One Serb woman exclaimed: "Do you see that field? … The Jihad was supposed to begin there. Focha was going to be the new Mecca. There were lists of Serbs who were marked for death …"[55] While no one ever saw such lists, it did not prevent anyone from believing them unquestionably.[56] What is striking about this example is the fact that Serbian Orientalists have attempted to pre-empt feelings of guilt by othering the Bosniaks as 'Muslim fundamentalists.' In this way, they made the genocide conducted *against* the Bosniaks 'intellectually respectable' to the point that even the Serbian Orthodox Church offered amnesty for its perpetrators.[57] Thus, the Serbs are presented as being the progressive 'self,' ironically, while placing the Muslims within the Orient.

The example of 'nesting Orientalisms' is not only confined to the tensions between Bosniaks and Serbs. There has been an attempt by Macedonian locals to Orientalise Albanian Muslims and, in the process, Macedonian locals have tapped into their European identity. In February 2001, a little after the conflict broke out between MAF and the NLA, one Macedonian local told Neofotistos,

> Why should Europe admit us in its structures? Why would it want to take our problems at its back? The West does not want anything to do with countries where criminality, drugs, and prostitution exist. Things would be easier if there were no Albanians or if they were more cultured. Look at what is happening now with the Albanians. And do you see what happened in Bosnia? The Muslims are to blame for all the wars in Yugoslavia![58]

What is apparent here is the view that Albanians are more 'backward' than Macedonians in their practices and, as a result, these practices undermine anything that has the potential to become Western. In this case, Macedonia presents itself as a Western entity within, what is generally assumed as, the non-Western Balkans. It is the Macedonian 'self' that is constructed as being 'superior' to the Albanian 'other' – the 'inferior', the Orient.[59] This perception by the Macedonians is not unusual. Since the 1970s and 1980s, Albanians in Kosovo were seen by the Serbs, too, as 'Muslim fundamentalists,' where they persistently knocked "at the door of

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[53]   Karcic, "The Eastern Question," 640. See also Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: SAQI, 2007); Norman Cigar, *Genocide in Bosnia: The Policy of 'Ethnic Cleansing'* (Texas: A&M University Press, 1995); Mazower, *The Balkans*; Boze Covic, *Izvori Velikosrpske Agresije* [Sources of Serbian Aggression] (Zagreb: Školska Knijga, 1991).

[54]   Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 237.

[55]   Quoted in Misha Glenny, *Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 166.

[56]   Ibid.

[57]   Smail Balie, "A Nation with a Most Irritating Name," *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 13, no. 2 (1992): 387.

[58]   Neofotistos, "'The Balkans' Other Within'," 23-4.

[59]   Ibid., 26.

Kosovo … trying to approach Europe."[60] It becomes clear that 'European' (Serbian) is contrasted to the 'Oriental' (Albanian Muslim), where the Albanians are considered 'less European' than their Serbian counterparts.

The Serbian example illustrates how nationalism can lead to perceptions of superiority to the point of extreme violence (i.e. genocide) against the Muslim 'other' (Bosniaks), while the Macedonian example highlights how the desire to associate oneself (Macedonia) with 'Europe' leads to feelings of superiority and, with it, the Orientalisation of Albanians. Both examples also illustrate the implications of the redistribution of boundaries that results from the construction of new ethnic and political identities. Although referring specifically to the way civilisations collide, Samuel P. Huntington's thesis helps conceptualise the source of the process of othering between West and East as well as different groups within a region. He argues,

> … the fundamental sources of conflict in the new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating sources of conflict will be cultural … the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and the groups of different civilisations.[61]

Here, Huntington highlights how existing boundaries can be shaped and reshaped because of ideological constructs.

This section has argued that Said's *Orientalism* is still applicable to the Balkan region, despite the unique characteristics of Balkanism put forth by Todorova. Bakic-Hayden's concept of 'nesting Orientalisms' highlights how certain groups build their identity against the Oriental portions of their own historical past (the Ottoman times) and their different geographical neighbours (Muslims), trying to prove that Muslims are 'real' foreigners on (South-eastern) European soil.[62] Their place in the Balkans as well as in Europe illustrates how not only European boundaries, but the European image can be subverted.[63] That is, by essentially being the non-European within Europe, regardless of attempts to move away from their past, the idea of who is European becomes blurred. This is illustrated by Serbian writer Milorad Pavic, who stated "Europe would remain lame" without 'civilisation':

> If you do not know exactly which civilisation is in question, remember that its metropolis was Constantinople, the most beautiful city in Europe before the Turkish conquest. It was a civilisation of icons and frescoes … [a] civilization that descends in a straight line from ancient Greek culture, the cradle of European spirituality.[64]

His statement highlights how political constructs of what is Europe can change perceptions of who is civilised and who is not. In this case, being European, and therefore

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[60]   Petar Saric, "Alternativa nasilju," [Alternatives to Violence] *Duga*, August 18, 1990, 67-9.
[61]   Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilisations?" in *Culture and Politics: A Reader*, ed. Lane Crothers and Charles Lockhart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 100.
[62]   Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 20.
[63]   See Andrew Sawyer, "National Museums in Southeast Europe: (En)countering Balkanism?" *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* (2014): 115-27.
[64]   Quoted in Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms," 925.

'civilised,' means to not be Ottoman and 'uncivilised.' In this way, 'European identity' can become blurred. The final section of this paper will examine the implication of the Orientalist discourse on Balkan identity. It will explore how the Balkan states detached themselves from the pejorative Balkan label to appear 'European' (Western), thus challenging Europe's superiority over its 'other.'[65]

IMPLICATIONS OF ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE ON BALKAN IDENTITY

The new identity debate that emerged in the 1990s in the Balkan region was largely dominated by the question of whether to be or not to be Balkan.[66] For the Balkans, to be considered European means to become less Oriental. To become less Oriental, they need distance themselves from the label 'Balkan,' which for them is an appellation that "echoes Islamic legacy."[67] By rejecting the Balkan label and adopting, instead, the nomenclature 'South-east Europe,' the Balkan states stressed their European identity. This process, also, is an attempt to connect to the European Community as well as an attempt to 'de-Balkanise' the region.[68] However, Europeanisation did not prove to be a success for all Balkan states: while Slovenia, for example, easily identified with the West and escaped from the Balkans, Croatia's endeavour to move westwards did not deliver the same results.[69]

In the case of Slovenia, Slovenian intellectuals have long contributed to the debate on the Orient and Eurocentric, preferring to identify Slovenia with the latter discourse. Dimitrij Rupel, a post-Communist statesman as well as a sociologist, consistently aligned Slovenia with central Europe within his works. He noted, when Slovenia declared independence on 25 June 1991, the first few years afterwards saw a "shift from the Balkans to (central) Europe." This shift was grounded on the proposition that

> Slovenes must establish ourselves in the company of the civilized nations … 'The Balkans' is, to be sure, a geographic concept, but even more so the mark of a corrupt and primitive society. With our attainment of independence we ought to rid ourselves of the Balkans in this sense, too.[70]

In another work written in 1991 during the time of the break-up of Yugoslavia, Rupel argued there was a "good chance" that Yugoslavia would remain outside of Europe. "Slovenia, which senses that it is Europe or nothing, strives to escape from the Yugoslav bondage which keeps it apart."[71] This notion echoes Taras Kermanuner's assertion that "despite being mired

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[65]   Hammond, "Typologies of the East," 205-6.
[66]   Ditchev, "The Eros of Identity," 235.
[67]   Karcic, "The Eastern Question," 643.
[68]   Sawyer, "National Museums," 116.
[69] See Patrick Hyder Patterson, "On the Edge of Reason: The Boundaries of Balkanism in Slovenian, Austrian, and Italian Discourse," *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (2003): 110-41; Maple Razsa and Nicole Lindstrom, "Balkan is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tudjman's Croatia," *East European Politics and Societies* 18, no. 4 (2004): 628-50.
[70]   Original emphasis. Patterson, "On the Edge of Reason," 116. See also Dimitrij Rupel, "Mojstri, Vendar Ne Naši" [Masters, But Not Now], in *Edinost, Sreča, Sprava* [Unity, Happiness, Reconciliation], ed. Dimitrij Rupel (Ljubljana: Mihelač, 1993), 17-18.
[71]   Dimitrij Rupel, "Slovenia in Post-Modern Europe," *Nationalities Papers* 21, no. 1 (1993): 55.

in the Balkans by virtue of its association with the Yugoslav state, Slovenia had little or nothing to do with Balkan society."[72] For him, Slovene culture was vastly different than that of the Balkan states, as

> … Slovenes are discovering their own history [and discovering] that, as regards their type of culture and civilization, they belong much more to central Europe and western Europe than to the Balkans and the Near East, that is, to the lands of the former Ottoman empire.[73]

This assertion of a European identity was recently voiced by Veljko Rus, a prominent Slovene political figure and intellectual, who argued simply that the Slovenes had "understood their calling to be nothing less than the 'Europeanisation' and 'enlightenment' of the Balkans."[74] What these Slovene intellectuals highlight is the persistent aspiration by Balkan states to move away from the Balkan label, which has been wrought with Oriental connotations.

In the case of Croatia, on the other hand, two factors come into play. First, Croatia felt the brunt of Orientalist discourse as put forth by Todorova. In fact, it was the deployment of Balkan stereotypes that proved to be an effective method of discipline for Croatia who had strong European aspirations. This attitude by the West was based on Croatia's involvement in the Bosnian War of 1992-5. Second, however, it was this very discourse that was used by Croatia, ironically, to propel itself against the Balkan 'other.' In this instance, the Croats presented themselves as "more progressive, prosperous, hard-working, tolerant, democratic, or, in a word, European, in contrast to their primitive, lazy, intolerant, or Balkan, neighbours to the southeast" to emancipate itself from the burden of the Balkans.[75] However, in 1997, the European Union rejected membership talks with Croatia based on the "authoritarian tendencies" and "expansionist Balkan regime" it espoused during the war.[76]

This only reinvigorated Croatian attempts to distance themselves from the Balkans. Boris Buden argues that Balkan discourse in Croatia is an "expression of the deepest frustration caused by the fact that Croatia is never really recognised in the vision of its own European identity."[77] Croatia's president Franjo Tudjman, shortly after the European Union's refusal to conduct membership talks, proclaimed,

> By its geopolitical position, by all of its fourteen-century history, by its civilization and culture, Croatia belongs to the Central European and Mediterranean circles of Europe. Our political links with the Balkans between 1918 and 1990 were just a short episode in Croatian history and we are determined not to repeat that episode again.[78]

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[72]   Patterson, "On the Edge of Reason," 117.

[73]   Ibid. See also Taras Kermauner, "Slovenija Med Srednjo Evropo in Balkanom," [Slovenia between Central Europe and the Balkans] in *Pisma Slovenskemu Prijatelju* [Letters to a Slovenian Friend], ed. Taras Kermauner (Celovec [Klagenfurt], 1989), 215-6.

[74]   Ibid. See also Veljko Rus, "Uvod," [Introduction] in *Slovenija po Letu 1995: Razmisljanja o Prihodnosti* [Slovenia Since 1995: Reflections on the Future], ed. Veljko Rus (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za Družbene Vede, 1995), 9.

[75]   Razsa and Lindstrom, "Balkan is Beautiful," 630.

[76]   Ibid., 632.

[77]   Quoted in ibid., 634.

[78]   Quoted in Nicole Lindstrom, "Between Europe and the Balkans: Mapping Slovenia and Croatia's 'Return to Europe' in the 1990s," *Dialectical Anthropology* 27 (2003): 325.

This exemplifies Todorova's assertion that "outside perceptions of the Balkans has been internalised in the region itself" and any attempts at moving away from such perceptions will prove to be difficult and ultimately lead to frustration.[79] Dalibor Foretic wrote in the Croatian independent daily *Novi List* that there is a constant push by the West to place Croatia "into some kind of Balkan hole" where "we do not belong," asserting that Croatia is determined to be everything but "a Balkan country."[80] The Croatian identity is thus premised on the dichotomy between the Orient (Balkans) and Occident (Europe). The further away Croatia moves from the Balkans, the closer it gets to Europe.[81]

It becomes clear that the appellation 'Balkans' and Balkanism discourse carry pejorative connotations, which places the Balkans on the margins of Europe. Although the Balkans are assigned to the East, as Todorova argues, they represent something that is between the East and West, where they are faced with the prospect of either embracing their Balkan image or acquiring the appropriate 'credentials' (i.e. progressive, modern, civilised) to become 'Western.' As such, "in the view of the collective involvement of the great powers [West] in the undoing of the Ottoman Empire" and the Balkan nations "working to the same end," it became inevitable that they would aim at improvement – that is, becoming part of the Occidental world.[82]

The move to the Occidental and away from the Oriental is also a result of nation-states relying on transnational links with institutions such as the EU to assert their European identity.[83] This process is most apparent in Kosovo. As a relatively new nation-state, Kosovo began to distance itself from its Albanian and Serbian national history to "appear 'European' and place Kosovo under international sovereignty."[84] This reaction was driven by Kosovar historians and locals, who asserted their Albanian history makes them appear "not very advanced."[85] To break from this Oriental past, Kosovo needed to "adopt the good things from Western European culture."[86] Soon enough, in 2008, the new Kosovo flag emerged, resembling the flag of the EU. By having "a map of Kosovo set against the backdrop of European blue with six yellow stars," the flag became a symbol of a new beginning: a Europeanised identity.[87] Thomas Risse argued, by incorporating a European identity through its flag, Kosovo then becomes, or appears to be, Europeanised.[88] The example of Kosovo also aligns itself with both

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[79]   Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 39.
[80]   Quoted in Lindstrom, "Between Europe and the Balkans," 320.
[81]   As of 2011, Croatia is a member of the European Union.
[82]   Ellie Scopetea, "The Balkans and the Notion of the 'Crossroads between East and West,'" in *Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions and Cultural Encounters since the Enlightenment*, ed. Dimitris Tziovas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 175.
[83]   Mirela Kadric, "Legitimising National Identity through 'Transnational Existences': Post-war Kosovo and its Relationship with the European Union, 1998-2008," *Chicago Journal of History* 7 (2016): 111.
[84]   Ibid., 114.
[85]   Ruth Seifert, "Nationalism and Beyond: Memory and Identity in Post-war Kosovo/Kosova," in *After Civil War: Division, Reconstruction, and Reconciliation in Contemporary Europe*, ed. Bill Kissane (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 234.
[86]   Scopetea, "The Balkans and the Notion of the 'Crossroads between East and West,'" 175.
[87]   Kadric, "Legitimising National Identity through 'Transnational Existences,'" 115.
[88]   Thomas Risse, *A Community of Europeans? Transnational Identities and Public Spheres* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 38.

processes of identity formation as presented by Ditchev: attempting to fit into Europe, while at the same time, acquiring an existence within their own perception of modernity.[89]

The example of Kosovo highlights the way the Balkans continues to be shaped and reshaped in accordance with Western trajectories and notions of identity. Ellie Scopetea writes the notion of a 'Western identity' can still "be granted or withheld from the Balkans or from selected parts of it."[90] The current mistrust of the West toward Turkey exemplifies the Ottoman legacy within Orientalist discourse: "mistrust, dislike and fear of modern-day Turkey … is symbolised by the EU initial rejection of Turkey's application for admission in 1998."[91] Turkey's relationship with the EU is premised on doubts over Turkey's European identity; but since an answer cannot be raised, the EU explains its rejection of Turkey on political grounds: failure to uphold Western principles of law, democracy and human rights.[92] This rejection of Turkey is despite the profound role of Europe in the construction of Turkish identity. While Turkish history is constantly torn between Western-oriented discourse on one hand and Islamic on the other, the modernisation of Turkey that emerged under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) in 1923 was a process of Europeanisation. Revered by the Turkish people as "the founder of the modern Turkish state after the Ottoman Empire," Ataturk proclaimed:

> [t]he West has always been prejudiced against the Turks but we Turks have always consistently moved towards the West. In order to be a civilised nation, there is no other alternative.[93]

Further talks for ascension into the EU emerged in November 2006, but just as before, the same concerns arose regarding the viability of Turkey's application. As such, the position of the Balkans vis-à-vis the West, it seems, will remain within Said's trajectory of Orientalism until a breakthrough.

CONCLUSION

Since the nineteenth century, when the idea of the Orient began to occupy Western imagination, the Balkan region became labelled as the 'other' of Western civilisation. This process of othering the Balkans stemmed from its Ottoman history and Western conceptions of 'superiority' against the rest, exemplified largely through Western travel accounts. Moving beyond the general dichotomy of East versus West, the Balkans have taken to Orientalising itself by placing itself against, what was argued in this paper, its Muslim counterparts, with the exception of Slovenia. As a result, the Balkans fed into the Western scholarship on the Orient as being the 'uncivilised other' upon the emergence of the Bosnian War. This conception of the Balkans as the 'Eastern other' was developed from Said's presentation of Orientalism in

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[89]   Ditchev, "The Eros of Identity," 236.
[90]   Scopetea, "The Balkans and the Notion of the 'Crossroads between East and West,'" 175.
[91]   Donald Quateart, *Ottoman Empire 1700-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 198.
[92]   Meltem Muftuler-Bac, "The Never-ending Story: Turkey and the European Union," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 4 (1998): 240.
[93]   Stergos Kaloudis, "Why Europe Cannot Ignore Turkey," *International Journal on World Peace* 24, no. 2 (2007): 38-9.

which the East was inherently inferior to the West. This dichotomy saw Balkan states increasingly identify with European ideals – an identity synonymous with modernity and progress – to break free from the pejorative connotations associated with the Balkan appellation. This led to the double process of the West conditioning the Balkans (i.e. determining who was European), while at the same time, certain Balkan states used this Western ideal to define themselves against an internal 'Orient.' Balkan iconography evokes the image of a bridge that represents the East and West in which the Balkan region is presented as being both fully known yet wholly unknowable.

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