

# **Orientalism, Balkanism and the Western Viewpoint in the Context of Former Yugoslavia**

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## **Abstract**

This research paper examines the role of the Orientalist and Balkanist discourse in the Former Yugoslavia with a particular focus on Albanians. Here, Western Orientalist and Balkanist stereotypes of the Former Yugoslavia are examined arguing that the Orientalism and Balkanism of people living in the Former Yugoslavia is and was viewed differently from the standard by the West and by the people living in the Former Yugoslavia in the way how they perceive each other. The first part of this research paper treats the Orientalism and Balkanism in the context of people living in the Former Yugoslavia, in general.

The second part of this research paper analyzes the case study of the application of the Orientalist and Balkanist theoretical lenses on one of the nations living in the Former Yugoslavia, namely Albanians. Here, some explorations and thoughts are provided on how Albanians define themselves and how they were perceived by the South Slavic majority living in the Former Yugoslavia.

There are three authors and, subsequently, three seminal works that shall serve as pillars of this theoretical analysis: concepts of Edward Said's "Orientalism," Bakic-Hayden's theories on Orientalist variations and nesting Orientalism, and Maria Todorova's ground-breaking analysis of the external practices of Balkans representation. These provide a useful

theoretical framework through which to explore the distribution of the Orientalist and Balkanist discourses in Former Yugoslavia.

**Key Words:** Albanians, Balkanism, Former Yugoslavia, Orientalism, West.

## 1. Introduction

The role of the Orientalist and Balkanist discourses in Former Yugoslavia produced Western stereotypes. The Orientalist and Balkanist expositions of this region also shaped variety of discourses among communities living in the Former Yugoslavia, particularly due to diverse histories and specifics of each nation.

It is shown here that a uniform interpretation of Orientalism and Balkanism in the context of Former Yugoslavia cannot be made. This research paper highlights the multilayered and polyphonic character of Orientalism reflected in how the people living in the Former Yugoslavia viewed themselves, were viewed externally by other people in the Former Yugoslavia, and were viewed by the West. Applying Orientalist and Balkanist theoretical lenses on Albanians living in the Former Yugoslavia, this research paper explores and provides some thoughts on how Albanians defined themselves, how they were perceived by the South Slavic majority within the Former Yugoslavia, and why Albanians considered their nationality as the utmost important to define themselves, unlike the other people living in the Former Yugoslavia who used religion for that purpose.

## 2. Orientalism

Orient is a label that designates the East in contrast to the Occident, which refers to the West, while Orientalism, as a concept, is often used as an analytical term on how the East is seen by the West. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Orientalism has been used as a traditional term for Oriental Studies, even though the Oxford English Dictionary cites only one such usage which originates from the famous poet and traveler, Lord Byron, in 1812 (*Pearsall & Hanks, 2001*). The Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said redefined this term forever in 1978 in his influential and provocative book "Orientalism" (*Said, 1977*). According to Said, Orientalism indicates

several things and it could be argued that all of them are interdependent. Through a philosophical analysis, Said positions the West's insincere perceptions of "the Orient" as "the other," different, unusual, fanatical, violent, religious, and inferior. By analyzing the Western attitudes towards the East, Said considers Orientalism as a powerful European ideological creation, and a way for writers, philosophers, and colonial administrators to deal with the "otherness" of Eastern culture, customs and beliefs (Said, 1977; 149). Said pictures West's tendency to deal with the East through a generalized and systematic vocabulary that is used to describe the Orient as unchanging and uniform and as something that the West should fear. He analyzes European and American observations of the Arab and Islamic culture and general dichotomous attributions these two are trying to ascribe to the East: barbarism vs. civilization, Western progress behind "us" versus "them", or Christianity and civilization vs. primitivism and Islam.

The variations (modalities) of Orientalist discourses that are produced as a result of different histories and events create distinctions in how the Old World (Britain and France) or, lately, the US, view the Orient. For example, Said argues that the difference between Britain and France, on one hand, and the USA, on the other, with respect to Orientalism lies in the fact that Britain and France had colonies in the Orient, which implies their longstanding relationship and imperial roles in places such as India and Algeria, to name just the two, while the USA experienced much less direct contact with the Orient, because there has never been a USA occupation of that part of the world at the time Said wrote "Orientalism." Said argues that the USA has had much more indirect contact with the Orient that is based on abstract sentiments. These sentiments are also very politicized by Israel, as the USA's ally, so much so that it could be said that Israel's rivalry with the Palestinians and Arabs was imported in the USA after the creation of Israel. The modern USA is prone to exaggerating differences between modern Americans and modern Arabs and downplaying its economic interest from certain Arabic countries.

Orientalism also addresses universal clichés of human nature involving power and discourse that resonate beyond the broader "East-West" divisions. By dismantling West's tendency to present itself as rational, developed, humane, and superior while presenting the Orient as underdeveloped, aberrant and inferior, Said maintains that the Orient appeared as "the other" in the Western descriptions for the purpose of its domination. In that, Said maintains that abstracts are always preferred to

direct evidence that Orientals cannot be trusted because “of liberty, they know nothing; of propriety, they have none: force is their god” (*Chateaubriand quoted in Said’s “Orientalism”*).

Said advances three major visions of the Orientalist view:

1. Orientalism served certain political needs although claiming to be neutral, objective and rather mysterious;
2. Orientalism helped define a European, mainly English and French, self-image;
3. Orientalism has produced a false description of the Arabs and the Islamic culture (*Said, 1977; 36*).

Said concludes that in an Orientalist framework of thought, the Orient does not develop, but remains the same. Although this could be understood as a romantic statement, this is one of the main evils of the Orientalist framework of mind, because it creates an image outside of history, something placid and eternal which contradicts the history and creates a sense of the ideal “other” (*Said, 1977; 201, 326*), but condemning it to always remain frozen in time, unchanged, denying it of any progress.

Said’s “Orientalism” is resistant to time because it also provides valuable information about the ongoing forms of Orientalism.<sup>1</sup> Said accuses the West that it wants to keep the idea of the Islam and the East as a threat to the West, even today. He asserts that the demonization of Islam in the news and popular culture present the today’s tool for further colonization of the Orient. He highlights the role journalists and Hollywood have played in creating an impression that the main purpose of Islam is to threaten and kill the Westerners, and that the main purpose of Arabs is to keep one whole region in a state of perpetual clench.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Said blames the Arabs for allowing themselves to be represented as the objects of Orientalism. The Arab lack of capability to reach a consensus on establishment of information policies to offer a real and different image of them and their world is due to the fact that some Arab countries are

<sup>1</sup> Latest example of modern American Orientalism:

<http://www.bareknakedislam.com/2014/04/27/texas-cair-in-an-uproar-again-over-another-republican-warning-of-stealth-jihad-by-muslims-in-america/> [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

<sup>2</sup> The Hollywood image of Arabs and Arab causes:

<http://1989nineteen99.wordpress.com/2013/04/01/orientalism-in-lawrence-of-arabia/> [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

dictatorships influenced from the West, in one way or another, and are not ready to stand against them.

### **3. Connections between the Orientalism and the Balkanism with the Balkans**

Said's theories on Orientalism are also useful for understanding the importance of how the West imagines the Balkans. According to Said, "often literature and culture are presumed to be politically, even historically innocent" (Said, 1977; 36). However, a scrutiny of the 20<sup>th</sup> century travel journals reveals them to be politically and racially charged: Serbia, with mountains and inaccessible forests, is an ideal refuge for outlaws; and whole regiments may pursue a handful for weeks through pathless tracts in vain. During Turkish times the *hajdutsi* were deemed patriots by the Servians, many of them having been outlawed for insurrectionary acts. There is a large coffee-house in Belgrade dedicated to one of these historical *hajdutsi*. Anyone who spent his life in harassing the Turks had a claim upon their sympathy. But since the political emancipation *hajdutsi* have grown rarer and rarer, and it is a frequent complain that common criminals should usurp the old honoured title. [...] Very often they will salve their consciences by giving money to churches, or by helping their poorer neighbours in the approved Robin Hood fashion (Vivian, 1904; 272).

In the eyes of the writing West, the long period of Ottoman rule unquestionably tainted the Balkan peninsula, thus causing its irrevocable reversion to primitivism. The binary lens through which travelers wrote constantly juxtaposed the culture and the people of the Balkans to the accepted civilized normality of the West (Kelley, 2012; 8). Likewise, Said's theory on the "domination tendencies" (Said, 1977; 25), could be applied to understand Western Europe's tendency to be presented as rational, developed, humane, and superior while presenting those considered "others" as underdeveloped, aberrant, and inferior.

Balkan is not only a geographical term, but a term that entails strong political and ideological connotations. However, in its proper geographic definition, Balkan refers to the peninsula that was formerly ruled almost entirely by the Ottoman Empire (Colin and Sloan, 2014; 115). Building on Said's concept of Orientalism, Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert Hayden consider that the Balkans can be viewed as a variation of the Orientalist

theme that distinguishes this region as a part of Europe which used to be under the Ottoman rule (*M. Bakic-Hayden & R. Hayden 1992*). Milica Bakic-Hayden also uses the term “nesting Orientalism” (1995) and by introducing the idea of “nesting,” she tends to dismantle a likeliness of each region to view the cultures and religions to their East as more conservative and primitive (*M. Bakic-Hayden, 1995; 917*). She argues that identities become fluid and overlapping in the process of nesting, while ethnic, national, religious, or gender identities could shift or become fixed, but are nonetheless changing. In her theory, she also explains how a group that creates the Orientalized “other” can also be the subject of Orientalization by a different group. According to this concept, Asia is more “East” or more “other” than Eastern Europe and, within Eastern Europe, the Balkans are perceived as most “Eastern.” Such hierarchy also exists within the Balkans. For example, Yugoslavs who reside in areas that were formerly the Habsburg monarchy distinguish themselves as more European from the Eastern Orthodox people who also perceive themselves as more European than those who assumed identities of European Muslims and who further distinguish themselves from the ultimate Orientals, non-Europeans (*M. Bakic-Hayden, 1995; 922*).

On the other hand, Maria Todorova, the founding figure of Balkanism,<sup>3</sup> in her historical analysis challenges Bakic-Hayden’s argument and insists that Balkanism is an altogether different discourse and that this part of Europe does not present an Orientalist variation (*Todorova, 1994; 454, 455*). She is convincingly showing historical facts that Balkanism cannot be considered as a sub-species of Orientalism, because the concept evolved independently from Orientalism, and is strongly motivated from aggressive and passionate nationalism, not religion. Even though, Todorova claims that Balkan’s inconsistent (but usually negative) image inside Western culture impacts the paradoxes of cultural reference and its assumptions, still, she argues that the Balkans form a part of Europe, albeit a provincial or peripheral part for the last several centuries. Balkanism, according to Todorova, treats the differences within one type, Europe, rather than the difference between imputed types (the “Occident” and the “Orient”).

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<sup>3</sup> Maria Todorova developed a theory of Balkanism or nesting Balkanisms. She argues that “there is a discourse, which I term Balkanism, that creates a stereotype of the Balkans, and politics is significantly and organically intertwined with this discourse.”

Todorova highlights that the name Balkan was used for the very first time in 1784,<sup>4</sup> earlier than the concept of Orientalism, and that this territory was previously referred to as Haemus, Hellenic, Greek, Illyrian, Roman and Byzantine Peninsula, as well as Thrace and Rumelia. Todorova argues that it is the barbarism and the violence of the Balkans that were reported by all the travelers<sup>5</sup> that provided the negative image of the area. In addition, she reminds that Western Europe did not colonize the Balkans and, thus, the area does not belong under the same Orientalist umbrella with the countries they did colonize. She considers that the Balkan was influenced by political Romanticism<sup>6</sup> and Evolutionism<sup>7</sup> that appeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Todorova traces the genealogy of Balkanism through the travel writings of Western authors to explore how the term Balkan has been negatively constructed over the past three centuries. The long-ruling history of the Ottomans in the Balkans can be seen as a continuation of Orientalism, but it can also be seen as a center of violent home-grown nationalistic clashes, as the West views it.

Despite the definite link between theoretical Orientalism and the Balkanism, the manipulation of the area's history, geography, and culture

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<sup>4</sup> The term Balkan was used the first time by John Morrith in 1784 when discussing the Dinaric Alps which means that it is used earlier than the term Orientalism that Lord Byron used in 1812.

<sup>5</sup> Todorova in her analysis used the writings of several travelers (*see, Todorova, 94; 462*) of which here are mentioned only three, including: John B. S. Morrith of Rokeby, A Grand Tour. Letters and Journeys 1794-96, ed. G. E. Marindin (London: Century Publishing, 1985), John Burbury Gent, A Relation of a journey of the Right Honourable My Lord Henry Howard, From London to Vienna, and thence to Constantinople; In the Company of his Excellency Count Lesley, Knight of the Order of the Golden Fleece, Councillor of State to his Imperial Majesty, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Romanticism is a 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century art and literature movement that was created as a revolt against the Neoclassicism of the previous centuries. The German poet Friedrich Schlegel, who is given credit for first using the term *romantic* to describe literature, defined it as "literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form." Source of information; Cuddon, J.A. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory. Third Ed. London: Penguin Books, 1991, available at; <http://www.uh.edu/engines/romanticism/introduction.html> [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

<sup>7</sup> Evolutionism was a widely held 19<sup>th</sup> century belief that organisms are intrinsically likely, over time, to increase in complexity through evolution. The belief was extended to include cultural evolution and social evolution. Source of information; ZME Science posts about evolutionism, available at; <http://www.zmescience.com/tag/evolutionism/> [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

are currently experiencing a different phenomenon. While some scholars question the Orientalist approach to Balkans, the accepted Eurocentric perspective continues to color historical interpretation of the area. Todorova sheds a clear light on the main difference between Said's theory of Orientalism and her theory of Balkanism: Geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as "the other," the Balkans became, in time, the object of a number of externalized 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. Balkanism conveniently exempted "the West" from charges of racism, colonialism, Eurocentrism and Christian intolerance: the Balkans, after all, are in Europe, they are caucasian and they are predominantly Christian (*Todorova 1994; 456*).

Todorova also argues that while Orientalism is a "discourse about an imputed opposition," Balkanism is a "discourse about an imputed ambiguity" (*Todorova 2004; 17*). By notifying that the Balkans and Russia were viewed, if not strictly Asian than semi-Asian and "other" Europe even after the 1970s, she concludes that Balkan was always paired in opposition to the "West" and "Europe," whereas Balkanization was viewed as the "dark other" of the Western civilization. Presently, Balkanization has come to signify the general disintegration of viable nation-states and the reversion to "the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian" (*Todorova, 2004; 3*).

The importance of Balkanism as a concept was also emphasized in identity constructions. In the case of the Balkans, the identity constructions involve the dual perception of the Balkans as a part of Europe, but also its opposition and its "darker side." Thus, according to Todorova, Balkanism evolved independently from Orientalism and, in certain aspects, against or despite it, and that, partially, because the Southeastern Europe has been considered geopolitically distinct from the Near or the Middle East (*Todorova, 2004; 20*).

The position of this research paper is that the perception or the treatment of the Balkans as the "other" is also based on the Balkan's proximity to the East and its influence on the region: the territory of Balkans is a borderland between the East and the West, the Occident and the Orient. Similarly to the Orient, Balkans was also viewed critically by the West. Such approach was present since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Todorova

documented the presence of the Western missionaries traveling in the Balkans which was ruled by the Ottoman Empire at that time, with the purpose of forming negative opinions about the Orient and the Balkans, mainly due to religious reasons (*Todorova, 1994; 470*).

As stated previously, although the origins of the modern usage of the term Balkan were simply to signify a geographic place name, Balkan no longer functions as such. Instead, the name of the region has taken on an extremely negative and even racist meaning. Madgearu defines Balkanism as “a permanent state of cold or warm conflict between neighboring countries for territories with mixed populations” (*Madgearu, 2008; 3*). According to Madgearu, although the Balkan Peninsula is often referred to as the “powder keg of Europe,” it would be more accurate to refer to it as the “melting pot of Europe.” With the dissolution of any strong outside force dominating the area, the Balkan states, prompted by political propaganda and nationalist ideologies, used history to support their territorial claims, defend ethnic cleansing, and justify conflicts with other countries (*Madgearu, 2008; 3*). The Balkans, despite its geographical position in Europe, became Europe’s shadow, or the dark side within. These Balkan stereotypes were reinvigorated by the recent wars in the Former Yugoslavia which were often termed Balkan Wars despite the fact they were confined to the former Yugoslav republics and despite the fact that the term has been traditionally used solely to describe the 1912-1913 war between the four Balkan countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro and Serbia) and the Ottoman Empire on the eve of the First World War.

Nevertheless, both Todorova and Bakic-Hayden agree about the Balkan’s perceived “otherness” in the Western eyes, although one argues that it is motivated by aggressive and passionate nationalism (*Todorova, 1994*) while the other stresses that the religion impacted further division between the East (Orthodox churches and Islam) and the West (Catholic and Protestant churches) (*M. Bakic-Hayden & R. Hayden 1992*). Bakic-Hayden insists that, due to their religious backgrounds, even the communities living within this area were perceived by each other as “other” or “European.” When narrowing the focus further to only one part of the Balkans, namely Yugoslavia, it becomes clear that areas populated by majority of inhabitants belonging to the Catholic religion who resided in the former Habsburg monarchy perceived themselves as different or “European” when compared to the other areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire. In addition, Bakic-Hayden analyzed how the Orthodox

community perceived themselves as more European in comparison to those that assumed the identity of European Muslims (Bosnians). After these analyses, Bakic-Hayden concluded that while Slovenes and Croats used their Catholic religion and former affiliation to the Habsburg Empire to reach their European aspirations, the advantages of belonging to the Ottoman Empire did not matter at all, particularly for the Muslims (*M. Bakic-Hayden & R. Hayden, 1992; 923*). The Northwest stresses the European character and apparent advantages of once being a part of the Hapsburg Empire, while their Ottoman heritage is blamed for the ills of the rest of the country.

Historian Patrick Hyder Patterson highlighted debates of the Slovene elites, particularly during the Yugoslav breakup between 1980 and 1990. Although these debates were ongoing domestically they, ultimately, aimed at foreign audiences, to highlight Slovenia and its culture as belonging to the “West,” “Central Europe” and “Europe,” but never to the “Balkans” (*Patterson, 2003; 110*). Patterson claims that Slovenia managed to gain a Central European identity quite rapidly in the eyes of its first European neighbors (Austria and Italy). He further explains the ways in which Slovenia frequently portrayed the Balkans as a region sinking in disorder, violence, mismanagement, and authoritarianism, while considering Eastern Europe as a stable, orderly, civilized, and democratic. Patterson highlights it is made clear that while Slovenes clamored for recognition as real Europeans, they expressed their tendency to Orientalize the rest of the Balkans. However, Slovenia, concludes Patterson, managed to affirm an identity granted in traditions and understood to be Europe, not Balkan (*Patterson, 2003; 114*). Even the foremost critic of the Balkanist discourse, Maria Todorova, expressly excludes the Slovenes from her roster of the Balkan people, reasoning that they do not share the “concrete historical existence” common to the Balkans: the Ottoman legacy (*Todorova 2004; 12-13, 31*).

Nevertheless, the Croats are included in her list alongside Albanians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians, Turks, and other former Yugoslavs and that is because of the lengthy Ottoman rule over entire or some of their lands. However, similarly to Slovenia, when Croatia seceded from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, Croats were optimistic that their newfound independence would accomplish two things: Croatia would be recognized as a sovereign state for the first time in its national history, and it would “return” to its rightful place in Europe (*Razsa and*

Lindstrom, 2004; 628, 629). Thus, "returning" to Europe was as important as sovereignty. However, all other Yugoslav nations also wanted to be seen as European as possible. This is why they distanced themselves from "Orientalism" as well as "Balkanism," and are prone to finding their national identity roots in pre-Yugoslav and pre-Ottoman times: Bosnians press on their Bosnian Church and are fiercely proud to have been considered heretics by the mainstream Christianity of the time, while Serbians and Bulgarians seem to be equally proud of gaining independence from the mainstream Orthodox Church which was, at the time, seated in Constantinople which fell under the Ottomans. It is clear that the religious background was used as the most important tool for gaining Western and European identity by most of the people in the Former Yugoslavia. In this, the only exception were Albanians. According to Bakic-Hayden, the religion did not impact Albanian strong sense of national and "non-Slavic" identity (*M. Bakic-Hayden, 1995; 925, 926*).

These processes of inclusion and, particularly, of exclusion are central to the redefinition of Yugoslavia. A great deal of political rhetoric, particularly since the late 1980s revolved around constructions that claimed a privileged "European" status for some groups in the country while condemning others as "Balkan" or "Byzantine," hence non-European and "other." This Orientalist dichotomy is embodied in distinctions between the "Northern" and the "Southern" republics in a delineation that, strangely enough, can also be expressed equivalently as between "Western" and "Eastern" republics. These are not culturally or politically neutral distinctions. They privilege the predominantly Catholic, former Hapsburg territories of Slovenia and Croatia over the predominantly Orthodox or Muslim, former Ottoman territories of the rest of the country (*M. Bakic-Hayden & R. Hayden, 1992*). Hayden emphasizes the difference in historical terminology between the East and West, now in the context of Yugoslavia: Defining the Western parts of Yugoslavia as different from the Southeastern parts: more progressive, prosperous, hard-working, tolerant, democratic... in a word, *European*, compared to the primitive, lazy, intolerant Balkans. Were this characterization to become accepted, it would be clear, first, that Yugoslavia was an impossible union of parts not only disparate, but completely incompatible; and second, that the Northwestern parts of the country were really parts of Europe, artificially separated by their imprisonment in the Balkans (*M. Bakic-Hayden & R. Hayden 1992; 8*). However, several scholars insist to examine critically how a geographically

and historically defined place, the Balkans, has become a symbol imbued with a host of derogatory meanings.<sup>8</sup> There are many rankings connected with this concept that play a significant role in different people's identity building, as well as proclaiming a more prestigious position within a general negatively assessed entity. The idea of "nesting Orientalisms" in Bakic-Hayden (1995) and the related concept of "nesting Balkanism" in Todorova (1997) are still contradictory to each other. The dynamic nature of "Europe" and "the Balkans" is even more relevant when the two are regarded as identity constructions. However, the fact that Bakic-Hayden's concept came out during the time when everything in Yugoslavia was evidently falling apart, had shaped and affected her main argument. It is also evident that the Haydens were against the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the way the independence of states was operationalized. Despite challenges to the "Orientalist" or "Balkanist" discourse of the region, the last 20 years of scholarship on Former Yugoslavia and its successor states have undergone significant shifts, not least of which has been the introduction of new theoretical positions and paradigms.

#### **4. Application of the Orientalist and Balkanist Theoretical Lenses to Albanians in the Former Yugoslavia**

Yugoslavia's ethnic Albanians lived mainly in Kosovo, Macedonia, Southeastern Serbia and Montenegro. Due to the lengthy Ottoman rule over some of the lands they inhabited, Albanians are also included in Maria Todorova's list of the Balkanism where she argues that "it is preposterous to look for an Ottoman legacy in the Balkans. The Balkans are the Ottoman legacy" (Todorova 2004; 83, 161). In addition to Todorova's illustration, the main way in which the Balkanism has been internalized among Albanians living in the Yugoslavia also includes internal differentiation based on imputed Balkan characteristics or that what Bakic-Hayden describes as "nesting Orientalisms".

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<sup>8</sup> Other works in this tradition include Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić, *Balkan as Metaphor* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); K. E. Fleming, 'Orientalism, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography,' *American Historical Review* 105:4 (2000): 1218-33; Patrick Hyder Patterson, 'On the Edge of Reason: The Boundaries of Balkanism in Slovene, Austrian, and Italian Discourse,' *Slavic Review* 62:1 (Spring 2003): 110-41; Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

Although most of the people of the former Yugoslavia used their religion as the most important tool to acquire Western and European identities and thus break free from their Ottoman past and from each other, Albanians were exception. According to Bakic-Hayden, the religion did not impact Albanian strong sense of national and “non-Slavic” identity (*M. Bakic-Hayden, 1995; 925, 926*). Therefore, it was Albanian nationalism – based on language, ethnicity and territory, rather than religion – propagated by the Albanian elites which unified ideologically both the country and its other territories.

#### **4.1. How Albanians Defined their Self**

Being perceived as an Orientalist and a Balkanist or as non-Western society, similarly to most other national elites in the Balkans, Albanian nationalist elites also required their community to resemble their Western counterparts that were considered as the source of reference for “modernization” and “progress,” during the processes of modernization in the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century (*Todorova, 1997*). Dukagjin Gorani in his PhD thesis argues that the process of “Westernization” of these societies entailed the simultaneous exercise of their “de-orientalisation.” In other words, one’s “Westernness” could have only been measured through one’s “non-easternness.” He argues that this conforms to the history of ideological narratives that established and shaped the ethnonational identity of Albanians in the Balkans. Specifically, Gorani considers that the analysis of effects of the Orientalist discourse is relevant in studying the epistemological landscape that conditioned the formation of the national identity and ideology in the non-Western societies (*Gorani, 2011, 77*).

As most of the nations in the Balkans, Albanians embarked on a quest for their pre-Christian lineage that, in their case, was constructed as being Illyrian. As a first element towards their “modernization,” thus seeking to “look different” from the other populations in the Balkans and, obviously, “non-Slavic,” Albanians started viewing themselves as descendants of Illyrians. Even nowadays modern Albanians claim Illyrian heritage as part of their shared heritage.<sup>9</sup> Wilkes book “The Illyrians” is one of the few books in English which focuses solely on these ancient people and their province. As such, it carries a lot of weight, but also a lot of problems and

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<sup>9</sup> The theory that Albanians were related to the Illyrians was proposed for the first time by the Swedish historian Johann Erich Thunmann in 1774. The scholars who advocate an Illyrian origin are numerous.

disputed historical conclusions (Wilkes, 1995). There are historians, such as John V.A. Fine who concluded that the Albanians are descendants of populations of the prehistoric Balkans, such as the Illyrians (Fine 1991; 10), whereas studies in genetic anthropology show that the Albanians share the same ancestry as most other European peoples (Belledi, S. Poloni, Casalotti, Conterio, Mikerezi, Tagliavini and Excoffier, 2000).<sup>10</sup> However, very little evidence of pre-Christian Albanian culture survived, although their mythology and folklore are of Paleo-Balkan origin and almost all of their elements are pagan (Bonefoy 1993; 253). The legitimacy of these claims has been contested and has led to a conflict between Balkan ethnic groups over the location of a historical homeland (Kelley, 2012; 7).

Parallel to the enforcement of their claims of Illyrian non-Slavic identity (18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century), during the 1900s and onwards Albanians altered their links with the Ottoman past. Ottoman words were thrown out from the Albanian language dictionaries and those Albanian-born Grand Viziers<sup>11</sup> and other important officials who ruled the Ottoman Empire went unmentioned in the Albanian official historical records. In addition, history textbooks started reading that the Ottoman period of Albanian history was dominated by violence. Heated debates went on recently when the Turkish government requested Albania and Kosovo to make certain interventions and remove inappropriate words that describe the Ottomans. As for instance, in a 12<sup>th</sup> grade history textbook, the phrase “stirred hatred

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<sup>10</sup> Michele Belledi, Estella S. Poloni, Rosa Casalotti, Franco Conterio, Ilia Mikerezi, James Tagliavini and Laurent Excoffier. ‘Maternal and paternal lineages in Albania and the genetic structure of Indo-European populations’. *European Journal of Human Genetics*, July 2000, Volume 8, Number 7, pp. 480-486. ‘Mitochondrial DNA HV1 sequences and Y chromosome haplotypes (DYS19 STR and YAP) were characterized in an Albanian sample and compared with those of several other Indo-European populations from the European continent. No significant difference was observed between Albanians and most other Europeans, despite the fact that Albanians are clearly different from all other Indo-Europeans linguistically. We observe a general lack of genetic structure among Indo-European populations for both maternal and paternal polymorphisms, as well as low levels of correlation between linguistics and genetics, even though slightly more significant for the Y chromosome than for mtDNA. Altogether, our results show that the linguistic structure of continental Indo-European populations is not reflected in the variability of the mitochondrial and Y chromosome markers. This discrepancy could be due to very recent differentiation of Indo-European populations in Europe and/or substantial amounts of gene flow among these populations.’

<sup>11</sup> In the Ottoman Empire, the Grand Vizier was the Prime Minister of the Ottoman Sultan, with absolute power of attorney and, in principle, dismissible only by the Sultan himself.

against the Ottoman rule" from page 48 is suggested to be replaced with "caused dissatisfaction with the Ottoman rule," etc. (Gashi, 2015; 2).

Tirana-based sociologist Enis Sulstarova highlights that, sometimes, due to the tendencies of being positioned as the Illyrians, as well as being listed as one of the "Westernized" nations, many Albanian intellectuals and politicians emphasize Albanian early conversion to Christianity, dubbing it a "true religion of Albanians" or the "religion of forefathers" (Sulstarova, 2012). Sulstarova also justifies this approach by saying that "creating a Western identity was a matter of survival for Albanian elites in the late 19th century" (Sulstarova, 2006; 9). Such history-telling started during the 19th century as part of nation-building process known as the "national revival" which portrayed the Ottomans as enemies of Albanians. But, the practice of considering the legacy of Ottoman Empire as responsible for almost every economic, cultural or political issue that the Albanians encountered throughout their history continued during the entire 20th century to the present.

It is position of this research paper that there are also other reasons that impacted the survival of tendency to dismiss the legacy of the Ottoman past. First, people might find it easier to blame the Ottomans for today's problems by appealing "if the Ottomans did not invade us, we would have been a developed Western nation today." This could also be considered as a sort of nesting Balkanism of Albanians vis-à-vis the Ottomans. Second, there is a fact that political elites that ruled Albania after the First and Second World Wars, King Ahmet Zogu (1928-1939) and Communist leader Enver Hoxha (1945-1985), were brought to power with the initial agreement and blessing of Serbia. Thus, these Albanian rulers needed someone to blame, surely not Serbia, for the fact that their political agreements with the "real enemy" made Albania one of the few states in Europe that left half of its nation out of its borders (Hetemi, 2012). Another reason that should be considered as an important factor that caused these anti-Ottoman approaches toward history and national mentality, especially during the Communism which in itself has a revisionist character, was simply that the official ideology dictated that any reality created by a foreign rule must always be considered as dark and hated. Even though the communication between Albania and Yugoslavia was difficult, also for Albanians, still ethnic Albanians living in Yugoslavia were very much impacted by Albania's approach toward national, historical and, identity definitions and approaches. It is mainly because the impact that the Albanian language

literature produced and shaped in Albania had in the other Albanians who were living outside of its borders.

However, there are ongoing debates in the Albanian society about the necessity to re-interpret, change or improve historic materials from which the Albanian pupils and students learn history in schools and at the universities (*Hetemi, March 2013*). Dritan Ego, Ottoman era historian at Albania's Institute of History in Tirana, highlights for the Balkan Insight journal that this "softening" towards the Ottomans is a result of a more sophisticated approach to social sciences combined with a renewed general curiosity about the period.<sup>12</sup> All these circumstances and tendencies to hide or ignore four centuries of history lead us toward the reasonable enthusiasm to believe that, so far, the history was a lesson Albanians were taught the wrong way (*Hetemi, Sep 2013*). Other intellectuals also agree that Albanian historical records were influenced by nationalistic propaganda during the 19<sup>th</sup> century "national revival" and the Communist regime during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (*Zimeri & Sadiku 2014*). As such, there is an immediate need to redesign these schoolbooks with proper unbiased historical approaches, based on clear historical research.

Another element that made Albanians "look different" from the others living in the Former Yugoslavia was their religious diversity and a strong sense of national identity. As opposed to all other nations living in Yugoslavia who used the religion as one of the most important identification tools, this was not the case among Albanians. It is necessary to highlight that I am trying to imply that the religion-based national identity of South Slavs was not as strong as the national identity of the Albanians. Especially knowing that the nation is not something that objectively exists, it makes us of other cultural and political resources, religion being one of them, but also language, territory, history. However in the case of Albanians the national identity was rather constructed based on elements, such; language, territory, history and culture.

As Gorani puts it "the nation retained the position of a genuine religion of Albanians" (*Gorani 2012; 279*). Bakic-Hayden also highlights that the religion did not impact Albanians' strong sense of national and "non-Slavic" identity (*M. Bakic-Hayden 1995; 926*). However, Isa Blumi theorizes

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<sup>12</sup> Dritan Ego's interview is available here:

<http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/albanians-question-negative-view-of-ottomans> [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

that such an identity was politically mobilized and that it was culturally opaque and ideologically fluid prior to the 1912 Balkan Wars. In relation to the competition among various state and power structures, be it in the shape of a great power intervention or attempts at building new national identities, Blumi shows that Ottoman reforms were successful in encouraging most subjects of the Empire to commingle local interests with the fate of the Empire, meaning that parochial concern for the survival of the immediate community, as it transformed over time, was directly linked to the survival of the Ottoman state (*Blumi, 2011*).

Giving priority to the Albanian - linguistic and ethnic - identity presented a reasonable approach, knowing that Albanians were one of the communities with the large religious diversity within their nation in the Balkans. This research paper supposes that another reason which considerably pushed toward giving special emphasis to national, rather than religious identity, is the fact that Albanian Muslims were regarded by other communities living within Yugoslavia as "Turks," Albanian Orthodox were regarded as "Greeks," and Albanian Catholics as "Latins" until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to the oral sources heard from the older generations who lived during the Yugoslav era. Trying to abolish this anxiety, unify and strengthen the national identity, Albanian elites choose to replace the religious differences with the common national identity that was neither Turk, Greek nor Latin.

#### **4.2. Former Yugoslavia South Slavic Majority's Perception of Albanians**

As stated earlier, the multilayered and polyphonic character of Orientalism also reflected in how the people living in the Former Yugoslavia were viewed by other people in the Former Yugoslavia. Due to the conceptions of origins and historical reasons, Albanians were also portrayed negatively within Yugoslavia, particularly by the Serbs. Yugoslavia's ethnic Albanians lived mainly in Kosovo, Macedonia, Southeastern Serbia and Montenegro. Despite the fact that 1.7 million ethnic Albanians were accounted for in the 1981 census (*Stankovic, 1982*) and that they exceeded the number of Macedonians and Montenegrins in the then-Yugoslavia, they were not recognized as one of the "nationalities" under the 1974 Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia<sup>13</sup> because, according to the Yugoslav government, their traditional homeland was outside Yugoslavia.

Under the First and the Second Yugoslavia or almost until the 1970s, Albanians were one of the most discriminated and backward nation with high illiteracy rates in the Former Yugoslavia. As such, they enjoyed no voice in local administration, had no schools and no publications in their language. For example, despite the fact that Kosovo Albanians outnumbered them, the Serbs and Montenegrins dominated the administration of Kosovo. The Albanian people remained the most discriminated population and in dealing with them Miranda Vickers blames the regime for extreme measures which, at times, differed just a little from those used by the occupation forces during the wars (*Vickers 1998; 148*). In addition, Noel Malcolm highlights that the ethnic conflict in Kosovo is less a battle over bloodlines and religion than it is one over differing conceptions of national origins and history (*Malcolm, 1998*). From Serbian perspective, the Albanians from Kosovo were experiencing an Islamic revival, as illustrated by the popular media in Serbia:

[...] the truth about Kosovo and Metohia has not changed much over time, so that even today Muslim fundamentalism, persistently knocking at the door of Kosovo and Metohia, is trying to approach Europe. It is hard to believe that Europe is not aware of this. Even those in Europe who do not hold Serbia close to their hearts know very well that this old Balkan state represents the last barrier to the ongoing onslaught and aggression of Islam (*Saric 1990; 67-69*).

Prishtina based academic Pajazit Nushi states in his book "Truths on Kosova" that the genocide of the Serbian authorities against Albanians living in Yugoslavia was led with the aim of the Serbian regime toward Albanian territories. After the First World War, the Serbian government made repeated attempts to colonize Kosovo with the families of its officer corps. According to Nushi, the genocide toward the Albanians originates in Serbian historical treatises "Načertanije" which document experiences of the Serbian army in 1878, 1913, 1937, 1945, the works of Serbian scientists and writers (Jovan Cvijić, Vasa Čubrilović, Ivo Andrić, etc), and the activities of Serbian cultural and scientist institutions (Serbian Cultural

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<sup>13</sup> The Constitution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, 21 February 1974, is available at the archive of Yugoslavia online:

[http://www.arhivyu.gov.rs/active/en/home/glavna\\_navigacija/leksikon\\_jugoslavije/konstitutivni\\_akti\\_jugoslavije/ustav\\_sfrj\\_1974.html](http://www.arhivyu.gov.rs/active/en/home/glavna_navigacija/leksikon_jugoslavije/konstitutivni_akti_jugoslavije/ustav_sfrj_1974.html) [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

Club, Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Associations of Writers of Serbia, Serbian Orthodox Church) (*Stavileci & Nushi, 2000; 136*). It is worth mentioning that during the decades preceding the Serbian war against Kosovo, even the state media played and deployed negative and revisionist energy of the said works through hate speeches.

However, Đorđe Stefanović, in his reaction entitled "Seeing the Albanians through Serbian Eyes," also highlights that the rise of the modern national states in the post-Ottoman Balkans was accompanied by coercive assimilation, deportation and even extermination of ethnic minorities, especially the local Muslims who were seen as former oppressors. Stefanović concludes that ethnic Albanians were repeatedly subjected to most exclusionary and discriminatory policies in the formative periods of the Serbian state and Former Yugoslavia. While these actions of the Serbian elite were guided by the geopolitical security pressures and the coercive utopia of homogeneous nation-state, Serbian policy makers were also influenced by a strong intellectual tradition of intolerance towards Muslim Albanians. Hence, some members of the Serbian elite were planning and implementing repression and expulsion of Albanians (*Stefanović, 2005*). Also, various sources estimate that, during the period between 1944 and 1946, over 36,000 and maybe as many as 47,000 Albanians were the victims of systematic mass executions by Communists during the days of revolutionary fervor and, later, through "search and destroy missions," "pacification," "disarming," and "rehabilitation programs," police torture and epidemics of typhoid fever affecting military units.<sup>14</sup> All these discriminatory measures that lasted for decades, obviously caused backwardness of the local Kosovo Albanian population: four waves of immigration from Kosovo took place only since 1960s and onwards<sup>15</sup> which obviously strengthened Kosovo diaspora, but weakened

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<sup>14</sup> These sources include: S. Repishti, "Human Rights and the Albanian Nationality in Yugoslavia," in Oskar Gruenwald and Karen Rosenblum-Cale (eds), *Human Rights in Yugoslavia*, New York, 1986, p. 238. Several Albanians who had been participants in the signing of the Bujan Resolution in 1944 paid with their lives for the ideal of the unification of Kosovo and Albania. Rifat Berisha died fighting in the hills of Drenica in 1948 and Xheladin Hana was murdered by the UDBA (Yugoslav State Security Service) in 1948. Rusinow, *The Yugoslav Experiment, 1948- 1974*, p. 25.

<sup>15</sup> Literature on Kosovo migration (Riinvest 2007; Vathi & Black, 2007; ESI, 2006; IOM, 2004) distinguishes four emigration waves in Kosovo since 1960s and onwards: 1. Late 1960s - early 1970s: Unskilled young men with little education from rural Kosovo emigrate to Germany and Switzerland as guest workers. 2. Begining of 1989 - 1997: Kosovo's autonomy

local population.<sup>16</sup> However, it's worth highlighting that the discriminatory politics are one reason for migration, but also more banal socio-economic reasons played a role.

These continuous violations of human rights against Albanians living in the Former Yugoslavia and its backlash consisting in significant brain drain from Kosovo were only stopped with the Western political and, finally, military intervention. The interest of Western powers (mainly USA) toward the Albanians living in the Former Yugoslavia increased particularly when inter-ethnic tensions continued to worsen in Yugoslavia throughout the 1980s (*Rogel, 2003; 167*). Long lasting ethnic tensions between Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb populations left Kosovo ethnically divided, resulting in inter-ethnic violence, including the Kosovo War of 1999 (*Albrecht 2001; 20*).

Ibrahim Rugova (1944-2006), Kosovo Albanian political leader, scholar, and a writer was a figure who most contributed toward the factorization of Albanians of Yugoslavia in the West. Through building strong relations with the USA, in particular, as well as some of the most powerful European countries, he managed to gain the sympathy of the Western powers as well as increase their attention to the Albanians living in the Former Yugoslavia.

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is abolished, and a mass dismissal of Kosovan Albanians from their jobs follows. More skilled and better educated young men from both rural and urban areas migrate to Western European countries to find jobs and escape the Yugoslav military service; 3. Latest war in Kosovo during 1998-1999 when nearly a million of Kosovan Albanians are forcefully displaced from Kosovo during the conflict. This trend reverses immediately after the conflict when a massive return of displaced population occurs; 4. Post 1999: As political stability is established in Kosovo, the immigration policies in (especially) Western European countries are straitened towards Kosovans. The emigration wave mainly consists of: a) migration for family reunification purposes; b) illegal migration of unskilled and undereducated youth and c) (temporary) legal migration of highly skilled and highly educated individuals through study or work arrangements. Source of information; KOSOVO REMITTANCE STUDY 2012, July 2012, available at;

[http://www.ks.undp.org/content/dam/kosovo/docs/Remittances/KRS2012\\_English\\_858929.pdf](http://www.ks.undp.org/content/dam/kosovo/docs/Remittances/KRS2012_English_858929.pdf) [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

<sup>16</sup> The ethnic Albanians had Yugoslavia's lowest literacy rate: 68.5% individuals over the age of ten were able to read in 1979. In 1981 only 178,000 of 1.5 million Albanians in Kosovo were employed; one in four of those held nominal bureaucratic positions. Meanwhile, the student population of 470,000 was a constant source of political unrest and potentially higher unemployment upon graduation. (Sources: The Library of Congress Country Studies; CIA World Factbook - Data as of December 1990:

[http://www.photius.com/countries/yugoslavia\\_former/society/yugoslavia\\_former\\_society\\_albanians.html](http://www.photius.com/countries/yugoslavia_former/society/yugoslavia_former_society_albanians.html)) [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

The West's commitment to stabilize the Albanian situation ended with a NATO military intervention.<sup>17</sup> With the Western powers support, Kosovo Parliament declared independence on 17 February 2008 and has since gained diplomatic recognition as a sovereign state by 109 UN member states.<sup>18</sup> The creation of the state of Kosovo is entirely being attributed to the Western powers, mainly US, which supported this process throughout.

The Preshevo Valley, which is situated in Southern Serbia and bordering with Macedonia and Kosovo, is home to Serbia's Albanian minority that remained in Serbia.<sup>19</sup> Following the end of the Kosovo War in 1999, the Preshevo Valley gained international attention mostly due to the Albanian revolt from the year 2000 which was also a key factor of destabilization of Macedonia in 2001 due to the uprisings of the Albanians living in this former Yugoslav republic. Although the situation in the Preshevo Valley has been calm in the last few years and the resurgence of armed conflict is presently unlikely, the situation is still fragile and continues to pose a potential security threat for the wider region (*Huszka, 2007*). Western powers also intervened to calm the conflict raised between February and August 2001 between the Government of Macedonia and ethnic Albanians living in this country. This war ended with the intervention of a NATO ceasefire monitoring force. Under the terms of the Ohrid Agreement, the government agreed to devolve greater political power and cultural recognition to the Albanian minority (*Brunnbauer, 2002*).

Beside these signed agreements and interventions mainly by the Westerners, Pettifer and Vickers consider that the Albanian question is not yet resolved in the countries that arose from the Former Yugoslavia (*Pettifer, Vickers 2009*). However, the changes occurring in Former Yugoslav

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<sup>17</sup> NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) website is accessible at:  
<http://www.nato.int/> [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

<sup>18</sup> List of the states that recognized the independence of Kosovo:  
<http://kosova.org/post/Lista-e-shteteve-qe-kan-pranuar-pavaresine-e-Kosoves>[Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

<sup>19</sup> An estimate of 60,000-80,000 Albanians live in Serbia out of whom majority live in the municipalities of Preševo (Albanian: Preshevë), Bujanovac (Albanian: Bujanoc), and part of the municipality of Medveđa (Albanian: Medvegjë). According to the results of the 2002 Census, there are 61,467 Albanians in Serbia. However, in 2011, most Albanians boycotted the Census, which resulted in records of 5,809 Albanians living in Serbia. Source of information: Article on Balkans Insight entitled "South Serbia Albanians Seek Community of Municipalities": <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/south-serbia-albanians-request-community-of-municipalities> [Last accessed on 07/05/2015]

republics can be considered positive in terms of granting ethnic Albanians better political rights and representation.

## 5. Instead of Conclusions

It has been shown in the first part of this paper that the Orientalism and Balkanism discourses in the context of the Former Yugoslavia produced Western stereotypes. They are particularly noticed in the lenses travelers chose to wear while presenting the Balkans which became “the other,” insecure, plagued by old hatreds, and inferior, as compared to Western Europe which was presented as in position to enlighten, advise, and provide reason. It is only natural the Former Yugoslavs would not want to be associated with anything negative and considered their Western counterparts as the source of reference for “modernization” and “progress.” As a result, each Former Yugoslav people’s national elites in the Balkans underestimated their own value and required their communities to resemble the West during the processes of modernization in the 18th and 19th century. This process of “Westernization” involved the immediate exercise of their subjects’ “de-orientalisation,” as each people’s “Westernness” could only have been measured through its “non-easternness.” Thus, all the peoples living in Former Yugoslavia constantly tried to distance themselves from “Orientalism” as well as “Balkanism,” and tried to be seen as European as possible. These tendencies produced tensions among the populations living within Former Yugoslavia, which were mainly provoked due to their competitiveness to present themselves as less Oriental and more Western.

This included Albanians, case study group addressed in this paper. Albanians willingly decided to accept the submission to the image others have of them as a price to pay for an image of a civilized and pro-Western nation that has to do nothing with the East. Tending to refer to their pre-Christian lineages and building Illyrian identity based on mythological sources, they ignored the first handwritten historical sources and altered their links with the Ottoman past. Politically, Albanian Western orientation helped them gain the Western powers’ attention and sympathy. They benefited a lot from this support, particularly during the last two decades, because it led to granting ethnic Albanians better political rights and representation in the region and facilitated Kosovo Albanians to gain independent state. Culturally, Albanians became victims of lessons of the

wrong history and lived pretending to be “more Catholics than the Pope” because they willingly denied a long and important segment of their history.

This research paper shall conclude that, particularly during the last two centuries, the Balkans continues to be the region of political and ideological experiments and a place of memory for the failures of local and international attempts to build societies according to civic paradigms. This is so because the Balkans, place that has no history of original political thought, place that never cleared up its present day opinion on its Ottoman and Yugoslavian past, has never been given chance to give its own definition of civility, neighborly relations and socially accepted, like the West.

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