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East European Politics and Societies published online 6 September 2012

DOI: 10.1177/0888325412459310

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Liberalism and Tradition in the Nineteenth-Century Balkans: Toward History and Methodology of Political Transfer

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The article sets off from a discussion of some methodological and theoretical issues pertinent to the study of ideological and institutional transfer between “centre” and “periphery” in nineteenth-century Europe. While taking into account the asymmetry in radiation and reception, it probes into the (Balkan) periphery’s political and cultural agency in reformulating and re-institutionalizing the “western model.” Rather than simply tracing movements, flows and circulation – the conventional concern of the transnational approach – the focus is on studying the transformations which occur in the process. This makes it possible to highlight the dynamics and versatility of ideational and institutional selection, interpretation, adaptation and transformation (or subversion) – in brief, the process of re-signification of ideas and institutions. The article then proceeds by exemplifying this approach in two directions. First, it examines several main channels and agents of transfer to and within the Balkan periphery illuminative of the ways ideas, practices and institutions traveled and mutated in the course of their journey; second, it surveys several characteristic instances of transfer of liberal ideas and institutions in the Balkans focusing on their legitimization and “domestication” which underscore the semantic and functional reinterpretations of modernity and tradition in the process.

Keywords *Balkans, liberalism, transfer, centre-periphery*

It seems plain at this day that however one might envisage the “common history” of modern Europe, it will not be the story of homogenization effected by transposing the Western European historical narratives on the whole continent. Rather, it will be a story evolving around the specific regional and national ways of dealing with modernity. Analyzing the contested models of modernity that the noncore European cultures had developed over the past two centuries brings in focus the multiplicity of contexts and the processes of ideological transmission,

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reception, and subversion. Thinking from the periphery typically implied renegotiation and translation of paradigms originating in Western European environment into radically different social and cultural settings. The study of their reception, transformation, or rejection—in brief, transfer—promises to bring us closer to a more coherent European perspective and “unlock” essential aspects that had remained hidden in the original manifestation of a phenomenon. Instead of reiterating some archetypal European grand narrative, such a perspective would seek to reveal the resourcefulness of local projects and reinstate their political agency. The “Europeanization” of the Balkans entails, for this reason, renegotiating the European self-narration.

With this article I shall, first, try to explicate my methodological and theoretical premises in studying institutional and ideological transfer and then exemplify this approach by examining several main channels and agents of transfer to and within the Balkan periphery and surveying several characteristic instances of transfer of liberal ideas and institutions in the Balkans in the course of the nineteenth century—the constitutive period of modern statehood in the region.

The Concepts

Tradition and modernity have been semantically related in a way that has made their respective meaning inconceivable outside the dichotomist relationship in which they had been conventionally posited. As Alain Touraine has argued, when modernity ceases to oppose tradition we could talk of its termination: “We leave modernity when we stop defining a behavior or a form of social organization by its place on the axis of tradition–modernity or underdevelopment–development . . . [when] we stop explaining the social facts by their place in a history that would make sense, have direction.”¹

Scholars of the Balkans, on the other hand, have often seen the unresolved dualism of tradition and modernity as characteristic of the process of modernization in the region, which, as the Romanian historian Alexandru Duțu maintained, has “put a special imprint on all people living in this area.” These two tendencies “are the ones that set the national energies in motion: to privilege any of them to the point of suppressing the other means to misbalance societies which, ever since the 19th century, live in a constrained but permanent tension.”² “Serbian society in the last two centuries,” observes Latinka Perović, “has been characterized by the clash between two historical tendencies: *patriarchal* and *modern*”—a dichotomy that Serbian historians agree has been “the main feature of Serbia’s development,” even if they evaluate it differently.³ The history of East European modernity generally has, as a matter of fact, often been framed (from otherwise divergent perspectives) in terms of the “eternal debate” of local cultures and imported institutions, Westernism and autochthonism, city and village.

In some recent studies on particular Balkan societies, the antithesis between tradition and modernity has been destabilized in two ways, first by highlighting the active importance of local cultures as components of the modernization process. "Modernization," John Allcock argues in his historical-sociological study of Yugoslavia, "should no longer be conceptualized in terms of the replacement of pre-modern by modern culture, but rather in terms of an encounter with modernity, in which the symbolic resources of pre-modern societies are deployed in order to mediate and even to appropriate elements of modernity." Second, the antithesis has been destabilized by reconsidering the nature and importance of tradition in relation to modernity and the legitimization of change. "Tradition" and "modernity" are not antithetical factors in culture. Tradition can rather be seen as a resource that enables people to adapt to the changing conditions of modernity: "The past provides the material, the symbolic resources, with which people conceptualize themselves in relation to their present (and their imagined future). The acquisition of modern identities, therefore, does not consist in the simple abandonment of traditional identities, but in their reconstitution. . . . Tradition is not displaced by modernity, but subsumed within and articulated in relation to it."⁴ Delving into the history of Romanian literature and culture, Sorin Alexandrescu has scrutinized the multiple ways of "inserting" the traditional into the modern which transcended, thus obfuscating, the opposition between modernism and antimodernism, liberalism and antiliberalism, left and right.⁵ In a recent book on the "use of tradition" in the contemporary political discourses in Serbia, Slobodan Naumović has defined tradition "not as a passive segment of a system which prevents its changing, but as a set of habits, memories, norms and values which, in view of their continuity, play a key role in the self-understanding and identity of a social group." Inasmuch as the continuity in question is not automatic but the result of a value-oriented activity, "tradition functions as a useful medium for legitimization of the real or fictitious intentions of the political actors"; as such its "use depends more on the interests of those who instrumentalize it rather than on its intrinsic properties."⁶ Traditionalism acquires a key role especially in a situation of transition. The dismantling and substitution of the established institutions and rules by new ones raises the critical question about the legitimacy of those that had dominated until then, as well as the question about the grounds of the new elites' claims to power. Transition thus confronts the political actors with the necessity of taking stance toward the coexisting (new and old) social and value models, and this is precisely the sphere where tradition displays its full potential as a symbolic language.⁷

Probing into the tradition-modernity nexus from the perspective of political transfer, on the other hand, aims to draw attention to a neglected aspect in the emergence of political modernity. The approach proposed here sets off from the tradition of cultural transfer,⁸ but seeks to considerably expand and modify it. Conventionally "transfer history"⁹ has been seen as subspecies of the "history beyond the nation."

My view of transfers—and transnational history generally—however does not forsake, but seeks to complement, destabilize, and thus fine-tune the national framework of analysis. Rather than as alternative, the methodologies of transnational history in this vision provide a way of understanding national history differently. The increasing nationalization of politics in the course of the nineteenth century went hand in hand with rising international interaction and “trading” of political models. Remarkably, transfer during that period took place not only between national entities, but these entities themselves took shape and were articulated in cultural-political terms as a result of transfer processes between societies and intellectual “hubs.” It is not, that is to say, that nations were beginning to be “transcended” at some point by “transnational forces,” but that they themselves were the products of those very processes.¹⁰ The transfer perspective thus addresses new questions to an old subject and seeks to add to our comprehension of the mechanisms and agencies shaping national politics, political ideologies, and political innovation.¹¹ In certain cases, though, as I shall try to demonstrate, no clear pattern of transfer can be identified—who is innovating, who is transmitter, and who is receiver—because an international network has developed that has its own rules.¹²

In a more rigorous sense transfer means taking into account not only transnational connectivity and comparison but also the entanglement between the transferred institutions and their new social environment. Unlike “transfer history,” the focus here is not simply on tracing movements, flows, and circulation—the conventional concern of the transnational approach—but on studying the transformations that occur in the process. Indeed, it has been argued that a successful transfer often implies such changes in the original practice that will make its foreign origin invisible.¹³ Obviously, the forms and the operation that these institutions take on depend on the new social environment. The really interesting question, however is, on the one hand, how these institutions and practices changed in the process of their transmission, translation, and “domestication” and, on the other, how the social, political, or mental environment in the receiving society changed as a result of the transfer. Taking stock of the way transferred institutions and practices interact with their new hosting sociopolitical-cultural milieu implies, that is to say, taking stock of transformations emanating from two opposite directions: from society toward institutions, and from institutions toward society.¹⁴

“Core”–“periphery” transfers portend particular challenges and opportunities in this respect. The bulk of comparativist research that the twentieth century bequeathed to us is marked by a strong sense of cultural superiority on the part of the European “great cultures,” commonly describing the process of reception in unilinear terms. Taking on the reverse perspective—from the “periphery” toward the “core”—would allow us, in the first place, to see the European periphery not as a passive recipient of influences emanating from the big core cultures, but as a dynamic critical participant in a process of institutional and cultural selection, exchange, and adaptation. It would thus highlight the multiplicity of configurations Western cultural-political products

could take. Transfers, moreover, did not necessarily happen from center to periphery, nor were they more or less stable “things” following a continuous trajectory. In what follows I shall attempt to intimate the dynamics and versatility of native reinstitutionalizations in terms of selection, interpretation, and contextualization.

Such reversal of viewpoint does not connive to undercut the disparity in radiation and reception between the two ends of the cultural interaction. Even when the “center” was not plainly engaged, it was, mimetically or subversively, ever and over-present. A number of asymmetries constrained the non-Western societies’ autonomy of choice: asymmetries of political power, of access to technologies, even of vocabularies of identity.¹⁵ (An extreme case was the coercive “transfer of modernity,” like in Greece during the Bavarian regency.) Paradigms and “models” were being imported then adjusted, sometimes beyond similarity, but always claiming resemblance to the original, thus divesting local cultures of generative capacity. All this hinged on the local actors’ deeply internalized perception of asynchrony between core and periphery whereby notions like “lack,” “lag,” “catching-up,” “backwardness/underdevelopment” (in not solely economic but cultural sense too) became foundational for the modernization projects of all participants in the political debates. Indeed, the sense of asynchrony itself acquired structural characteristics with a *longue durée* effect: it triggered the implementation of specific strategies for change and development, propelled catching-up acceleration and sped changes (with a capitalist or communist finale), and served as a means (and discourse) for social mobilization.¹⁶

This does not mean, on the other hand, to assume a neocolonial perspective suggesting not just asymmetry and (perceived and/or prescribed) asynchrony but lack of agency. The ideologies, political programs, and social theories that the Balkan intellectuals and politicians espoused were not merely imitative and derivative, “transplants” or “copies.” They were intellectually “European” and, at the same time, “Balkan,”¹⁷ as well as “Serbian,” “Bulgarian,” “Romanian,” which entailed ingenious reformulations and reinstitutionalizations of the “Western model.” In the spread of notions about European modernity, furthermore, regional intellectual networks and institutions often were, as we shall see, more crucial than direct contact with or intervention by the West. In other words, what we are confronted with under the headline of model or paradigm transfer has never been a one-way impact (as commonly implied by notions such as “influence,” “import,” “adoption”), but a circulation of ideas where complex trajectories of interaction and modes of involvement of the “recipient” culture occupy center stage.¹⁸

Balkan modernizers associated that model, and the West generally, not so much with a place as with a set of political and cultural values. More often than not “Europe” and the “West” were metageographical notions designating adherence to certain values: their rejection could take place in the geographical West at the same time as “the true West could be found wherever they were seriously advocated and defended.”¹⁹

All of this ultimately revolves around the way one deals with the notion of

modernity. My own take, briefly, concurs with those who argue for, not a multiplicity of modernities, but a singular phenomenon that, however, consists of different historical trajectories. I would therefore keep “modernity” as a normative concept—it is normative for the West too²⁰—but assume different modernizations or histories of modernity concerned with place (or context), time (along with historical legacy), and human cost (thus legitimacy). Hence the question that interests me is not one of how faithfully a Western European original had been assimilated outside its place of origin and in this way resolving the issue of its universal “validity.” The question, the series of questions as a matter of fact, should be: Why certain institutional arrangements became paradigmatic for a variety of “structural cases”: Which were the versions, institutions, and practices selected for local implementation? How did they travel and mutate during their journey? What changes of meaning did they promote or undergo, and what influences did they exert in the new environment? Consequently, what will concern us here is not how genuinely Balkan national liberalism followed a (stylized and idealized) set of original exemplars as contrived by the *grands récits* of “Western liberalism,” but how and why values, ideas, and principles, broadly identified as national-liberal, were understood, reformulated, and applied as indispensable elements of political modernity. All this calls for bigger attention to the mechanisms and the agencies of ideational and institutional selection, adaptation, and transformation (or subversion)—in brief, to the processes of resignification.

Historicizing Transfer

Ideally, any study of cultural or political transfer should implicate several lines of enquiry, each of which, and all of them together, has affected the nature, trajectory, and assimilation of institutional transfer. These include the timing and historical context of transfer (the diachronic dimension); the channels and agents of transmission (the synchronic dimension); the “institutional-cultural legacy” (i.e. relative weight of preexistent institutional arrangements and social values); the semantic and functional transformations that transferred ideas and institutions underwent over time and in discrete national cases; the variety of ideological-political positions from which transfer had been first undertaken (or deterred) and then evaluated; the (diffused) effects of the transferred institutions on society. Along these lines, we can understand transfer as a complex process of socially differentiated (re)constructing the significance, or meanings, of institutions and norms in a different context.

As a beginning, however, it seems reasonable to try to delineate the phases of major structural and ideational shifts that had affected the general climate of cross-national communication and exchange of models. Even if it can be easily extended to include other European areas, the periodization below seeks to highlight the Balkan manifestations of such changes, implicated as they were in a process of rela-

tively early nation-state formation.

The end of the eighteenth century until around the mid-nineteenth century, marked by the emergence of modern Balkan nationalism as a cultural-political project, was a time when faith in the universality of (Western) progress and civilization—a lingering echo of the Enlightenment—held sway over reformers of different political convictions seeking to formulate answer to issues of national self-assertion and the status of “national culture.” Receptivity to European ideas among earlier generations of Balkan intellectuals and political activists was hooked to a critical analysis of the Ottoman society whereby aspirations to social change and political emancipation often took the form of cultural criticism pushing for the adoption of “European” culture and institutions. With varying fervor and consistency such “adoptions” were initiated by the Bavarian regime in the Kingdom of Greece and the quasi-independent princely bureaucracies of Serbia and Romania. In this phase, attitude toward European imports was positive in the main, dominated by the conviction that transfer was the fastest route to modernization, albeit opinions differed as to the speed of certain innovations and their conformity with the “good national traditions.” In a broader European perspective, this period saw the heyday of national Romanticism and national liberalism that was marked by a curious intertwining of the project of modernity with the project of conserving the specificity inherent in national cultures.

The period from the 1860s to World War I coincides with the establishment and the consolidation of the institutions of the nation-state (even if the Balkan states emerged, as fully or semi-independent political entities, at different points in time) and the first serious attempts at modernization from above. That period was marked by an intensive “import” of the institutions of political modernity (legal codes, bureaucracy, armies, political parties, etc.), rapid structural transformation of the political-institutional framework, and the implementing of various state-driven programs of social and cultural reform (mainly in the areas of education, land ownership, transport and communication infrastructure, industry, taxation, etc.). However, it was widely held that the transformation and the adaptation of the Balkan societies and cultures of the time lagged far behind the transformation of their political infrastructure and legal framework. This engendered for the first time unambiguously critical responses to the application of “foreign models” and sharpened the polemics on the paths and the objectives of the national development. Awareness of “small-state” and economic vulnerabilities undermined the hitherto widely professed faith in the feasibility and beneficial effects of revolutionary transformation, invisible-hand capitalism, and forced modernization. The result was a general moving away, notable even in socialist theories, from radical reformism, uncritical institutional import, and liberal universalism toward more distinctly evolutionary models, state protectionism, and “organic” development. (The invention of national traditions as well became historically significant precisely in this period of rapid social change and expansion of mass democracy.)²¹ The threshold between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries signaled this shift from a generally optimistic

and enthusiastic naturalizing of Western institutions toward more sober and ambivalent, if not as yet really gloomy attitudes toward, and prognostications about, the prospects of imported modernization.

Against this backdrop, it is remarkable to see the evolvement, in the course of the century, of certain homogeneity of political models across Europe that facilitated comparisons, transfers, and entanglements both within and beyond the confines of the Balkan region. It rested on the “koiné of constitutionalism”—the constitutional model as the modern paradigm in politics. Until at least the last third of the nineteenth century there survived the enlightenment faith in the existence of certain uniform standards of civilization and development, only mildly affected by specific differences in national context. From around the 1870s, modern constitutionalism grew increasingly premised on the “apparently indispensable precondition” of one united, cultural identity, and a common language, without questioning, however, the liberal constitutional system.²² The noted homogeneity, epitomized by the hegemony of liberal constitutionalism as a kind of universal historical requisite of development, ensured, at the same time, an implicit consensus about the “communicability” of experience and transferability of political models.

The interwar period, conversely, was marked by a general disenchantment with the West and a turn toward “native tradition” for inspiration. The critique of the West, now feeding on the perceived crisis of liberal democracy, got considerably radicalized; in the most pessimistic accounts it was seen as decadent and not worth following. Previous, evolutionary conservatism targeting its critique at inorganic import but accommodating the progressivist vision and “communicating” with Western models was overshadowed by the notion of incompatibility and untranslatability, antinomy, rupture, and ontological disjuncture between “East” and “West,” hence cancelling the need for any kind of import. The critique was now not about the asymmetry of exchange but on the very feasibility of and benefits from exchange.

Channels and Agents of Transfer

Direct communication with Western European intellectual circles and cultural-political traditions was in many ways crucial for this symbolic economy: in the spread of nationalism and liberalism in particular, connections to Germany and later England in the case of the Serbs, and France in the case of the Romanians, were prominent. Powerful intellectual and institutional currents, however, often did not evince from selected Western cultures but were exerted via intermediaries. Intellectual or activist networks as well as regional educational centers often played far stronger and more decisive role in the process of transmission and translation than a direct contact with the West.

For the nationalities still under the jurisdiction of the High Porte after the Crimean

War of 1856—the Bulgarians, the Macedonians, the Albanians—experience with judicial transfer from Western law and administration preceded the setting up of modern national statehoods. The *Tanzimat*, or “reorganization,” period (1839–76) was characterized by radical changes in the administrative and legal system of the Ottoman Empire, including the formal recognition of some liberal rights (e.g., equality before the law, guarantee for property, personal safety). Ottoman judicial reform, in particular, consisted of large-scale codification in most legal fields (criminal, social, commercial, etc.), as well as the foundation of a new court system, following mainly French models.²³ The reforms also concerned the educational system, the introduction of financial and public offices, administrative innovations, and transformations in the army. The modernizing Ottoman state thus mediated the adoption of a number of new institutions such as modern courts, schools, railroads, and savings banks. True, few of them were political institutions, but their impact or implications were often emphatically political.²⁴

At the backdrop of this thrust for Westernization it stands as less of a surprise that a significant section of the Constantinople-based Bulgarian community assertively advocated the modernization of the Bulgarian society within the political framework of the Ottoman Empire and the cultural framework of the West.²⁵ (It is also not surprising that the national canons of history in the region have conventionally downplayed the weight of such currents in the respective national movements.) Some of the most “enlightened minds” among the subject nationalities associated the possibility for national “revivals” with the reformist undertakings of the Sultan’s government: “Just like all other peoples in the vast Ottoman state,” wrote a prominent liberal publicist, “our Bulgarian people, under the civilizing inspiration of the [Ottoman] government itself, has begun in recent years to revive for a new life and to cherish the benefits of science and progress.”²⁶ Not by chance, therefore, the evolutionist stream in the Bulgarian national movement hastened to recommend to the Sultan, already in 1867, few months after the proclamation of the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*, the “transfer” of this model to the Ottoman Empire. Until 1876, when the revolutionary stream ultimately got the upper hand on the wave of the rekindled “Eastern Question,” the dualist solution was heatedly debated and repeatedly brought to the attention of the High Porte.²⁷ And although the newly created Bulgarian state hastened to eradicate the vestiges of the Ottoman past, in certain spheres, such as law, this was neither possible nor indeed desirable to accomplish overnight, so that some *Tanzimat* laws, as the penal and the commercial law, for long remained in force.

The work of the Protestant missionaries, of Robert College in Constantinople particularly—yet another channel of transmission of Western models and thinking—was also part of the Ottoman context. The American and British missions possessed the widest foreign educational network ever established in the Empire, and their contribution to the schooling of “modern” Balkan elites is well known. It was via the alumni of the various Protestant institutions, rather than firsthand familiarity or

direct interaction, that Anglo-Saxon political concepts and culture came to interfere with the Balkan—originally imperial and later national—public sphere. Those who fought for and won over a democratically elected administration of the autocephalous Bulgarian Church (set up in 1870) drew on the Protestant model;²⁸ the same was true of the Serbian Church in southern Hungary, for no simple procedural reason because, as the national-liberals argued, the influence of the clergy among its flock was proportionate to its ability to accelerate the nation's advancement—to act as a “patriotic clergy” as the American priesthood was doing. Hence the atypical “anti-clericalism” of the Bulgarian liberal Westernizers entrusting the “enlightened and patriotic clergy” with the key mission to sow light, knowledge, and national consciousness, even science, to open schools and promote freedom.²⁹ In the newly created Greek Kingdom between 1830 and the early 1850s, Protestant missions likewise came to play the role of “midwives” of nationalism and advocate the conception of a state church on a secular initiative.³⁰ The movement for women's rights as well was to a large extent inspired by the Anglo-Saxon Protestant model of the educated woman, disseminated by the missionary schools and women's organizations, which was “re-contextualized to serve the national cause as a narrative of progress and modernity.”³¹ It is noteworthy at that that these and other instances of Protestant transmission took place despite of, in fact often as attempts to counteract, what was generally regarded as the “deadly virus” of proselytism and colonialism.³²

Groups of intermediaries and “mobilizers” operative across the Ottoman and the Habsburg imperial borders round out this picture. Diaspora national communities were one such important channel. The input of the Serbs from the Habsburg province of Voivodina in setting up and staffing the first modern governing institutions in Serbia was crucial. “The Serbs from Austria,” wrote a leading historian of nineteenth-century Serbia, “for the first time in our political life introduced the idea of the law and tried, from still a primitive country with patriarchal notions and haidouk customs, to create a modern state.”³³ Their political culture and ideals for good government drew heavily on the Habsburg cameralist tradition and bureaucratic institutional models—the oligarchic “Constitutionalist regime,” which they instituted between 1842 and 1868, epitomized precisely these Central European values and models. Comparable was the role of the Albanians living in southern Italy for the crystallization of the first notions of modern rule among the Albanians in the empire.

The intellectual and revolutionary networks across the region—a virtual political *République des Lettres* on a regional and cross-imperial scale—also acted as powerful transmitters in this respect. Consequential in institutional-political terms were, for example, the close Bulgarian connections to the Serbian and Romanian nationalists and liberals; or the activities of the strong, culturally, and politically vigorous Albanian communities in Bucharest, Sofia, Cosenza. The Polish post-1830 and the Hungarian post-1848 émigrés to the Ottoman Empire did a lot for the dissemination of the ideology and institutional apparel of liberal nationalism; similar was the role of the Hungarian and Slovak students for the nationalist “education” of the Serbian

liberals. Educational centers such as the Greek schools in Athens and Smyrna, Chios and Andros, as well as the Serbian schools in Belgrade and Novi Sad deserve special mention in this regard: frequented by representatives of different nationalities, they played a major role in the spread of new ideas, concepts, and currents of thought, in particular French liberalism, throughout the Ottoman Empire.

The “Westernization” coming from the (further) East adds to this starkly polycentric map—and to the symbolic, at the expense of the geographic, category of the “West.” For great many Balkan youths (especially Slavs) in the course of the nineteenth century acquaintance with the European political experience took place not in Western educational institutions but in Russian lyceums and universities through scholarships granted by the Russian government. Typically, the political thought and ideals that they carried away from Odessa, Moscow, and St. Petersburg were not those of orthodoxy and autocracy, but of the French *philosophes*, the English constitutional historians, the German philosophers, and the utopian socialists—above all of Western liberalism and socialism. Occasionally they read those in the original or in Russian translations, but more often in the reinterpretations by Russian thinkers like Pisarev, Chernyshevskii, Khercen, Dobroliubov, Bakunin, Nechaev, Lavrov.³⁴

Significantly, Russia’s “unofficial” transmission role was most conspicuous in disseminating radical political currents and movements which drew on, and at the same time greatly modified and even subverted, Western critical theories such as Marxism. More often than not, Western European romanticism, liberalism, utopian socialism, and nationalism reached the Slav parts of the Balkans in a form “translated” and adapted by the Russian radicals. That version of liberalism, which set the tone of the constitution and the rules of government in the newly established Bulgarian state (1878), was essentially one reared by the dissident currents in the Russian political thought—liberal-populist, radical, *narodnik*, Marxist. (In Russia, some had argued, “great many of the liberal doctrines were marked by fanaticism which distorted them almost beyond recognition.”³⁵) A whole generation of Bulgarian politicians—builders of “modern Bulgaria,” drew their notions about the modern world from the writings of the Russian radicals.³⁶

The extremely powerful Serbian Popular-Radical movement and political party present a specially illuminating instance of the seminal impact of this Russian mediation. In many ways, and not only through the foundational legacy of its forefather, Svetozar Marković, Serbian radicalism kept carrying the imprint of its Russian *narodnik*, populist provenance all the way from its early inception in the 1870s through interwar Yugoslavia. That applied to both ideology and political practice: the Serbian Radicals’ notions of parliamentarism, democracy, freedom, equality, political pluralism, and representation, and their institutionalizations during the Radicals’ long periods in power between the 1880s and 1930s, albeit adapted to the Serbian situation and evolving over time, remained strongly indebted to the populist values and political ethos of Russian radicalism and, occasionally, anti-Westernism.³⁷

No less crucial was the role of “official” Russia, of its armies and “commission-

ers,” in the initial building of the Rumanian and the Bulgarian states. That the Westernized Russian officer corps introduced the French dress and French as the language of polite society during the Russian occupation of the Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia in 1806–12 can be seen as only the veneer of Russia’s self-assumed *mission civilisatrice* in the region. In the first half of the nineteenth century Russian expansionist designs inflicted the Romanian lands in the guise of the universalistic Enlightenment values of humanity, rationality, and civilization: the new political regime, brought along with the Russian troops, set itself the task to free the Romanians from their “barbarity,” “superstition,” and “Oriental despotism” and to plant “the first seeds of Enlightenment” in the principalities.³⁸ The first Serbian Statutes of 1838 curbing monarchic power and setting the framework for the creation of a modern bureaucracy was basically also a Russian document.

Most remarkably in terms of this semi-Orientalist colonial “mission,” Russia supplied its Balkan protégés with liberal institutions Russia would not permit at home. It was during the Russian provisional administration of the two Romanian Principalities that “enlightened constitutionalism” (the Organic Statutes of 1831–32) was for the first time introduced. The same in newly liberated Bulgaria: the provisional Russian administration did nothing to curtail the political radicalism embodied in the stipulations of the Turnovo Constitution of 1879—a document that the first Bulgarian Prince, Alexander Battenberg, considered to be “ridiculously liberal.”³⁹

In light of all this it seems more appropriate to tone down the conventional opposition between a Russian and a Western tendency as regards political impact. We should, however, remain sensitive to the kind of reinterpretation modern ideas and institutions underwent in the course of Russia’s interaction with the West as well as to the (intended and unintended) consequences of such premeditated transmissions.

Before Russia, until the 1830s, the leading Bulgarian “metropolis” was Greece: the roster of Bulgarian alumni of Greek schools reads like a who’s who in the National Revival, and practically all Bulgarian books, Western translations in particular, were translated or compiled from Greek sources.⁴⁰ To a large extent, the same was true of the Romanian late Enlightenment and early nationalist figures and sources.⁴¹ Analogous was the intermediary role that Sofia and Bucharest later played with respect to the “Europeanization” of the Albanian movement. In all these, and many other, cases Western European ideas and innovations were filtered through a “Balkan” selection and adaptation prior to being disseminated further into the region. As a leading historian of modern Bulgarian literature had noted, “From Greece, after having undergone some modifications appropriate to the Greek conditions, [Western influence] was spread among us.”⁴² Such transmissions had not only influenced the recipient’s agenda: indeed, it is well-known that the Bulgarians had fully borrowed the “awakening” and “patriotic” action plan of the Greeks. But the very visions they held, during the Revival period at least, of their national identity in the context of European civilization, albeit shaped in competition with the Greeks, were largely modeled on the Greek rather than some Western pattern.⁴³ Similar to

the Russian transmission, what we are confronted here with is a refracted transfer via other peripheral cultures whereby the new ideas and practices could undergo significant changes in the course of their journey and arrive at their “destination” in an already significantly modified form.

Liberalisms and Traditions: Semantic and Functional Reinterpretations

The case I will use for demonstrating the importance of the existing socioinstitutional order and culture and the dynamics behind the process of resignification is (the transfer of) liberalism. There are two main reasons for this choice. The first is its historical role with respect to Balkan political modernity. (National) liberalism was responsible for the emergence of the earliest concepts of modern rule and of the first modern institutions in Southeastern Europe: indeed, it is to it that the credit for the creation of the Balkan nation-states should go. The second is liberalism’s relevance for the study of political transfer. On the one hand, it presents a transfer that had changed the nature of politics; on the other, it cogently exemplifies the practices of adaptation, reimagination, and in-translation—or what might be called “reconfiguration of tradition” as part and parcel of political innovation. Key notions of the modern political vocabulary, such as “democracy,” “popular sovereignty,” “freedom,” “rule of law,” and so on, can be approached in this way as both semantic and functional translations.

The transfer of liberalism took place simultaneously in all the newly established Balkan states and, unlike in Central Europe, became a dominant ideology of the modernizing elites at a time when political (if not necessarily economic) liberalism still widely prevailed across Europe; it participated directly in, and gave direction to, not only the nation making, but the building of modern states in the region. For this reason nineteenth-century Balkan liberalism became synonymous to the (import of) political and economic modernity, creating a world that was perceived as structurally different from the existent one but indispensable for the survival of the community. The means for its dissemination were, more often than not, international circuits that came into existence in the course of or as a result of transfer. One may speak of a cultural matrix analogous to the one that made possible the diffusion of nationalism. In fact, as far as liberalism’s transfer in Southeastern Europe is concerned, we are actually talking of identical international networks and about that peculiar brand of liberalism that fused the notions of popular sovereignty and citizenship with the ethno-cultural frame of national romanticism and that is more widely known as liberal nationalism. With the following section I hope to bring out the process whereby liberalism, as both political ideology and political format and despite its apparently revolutionary innovativeness, was subjected to reinterpretations and adaptations in the service of traditionalist needs and expectations. Overall, these local “hybridiza-

tions” are an ideal test case for interrogating the purported uniqueness of the Western liberal-democratic experience and the exportability of ideas and structures to societies with very different social and cultural background.

Before the emergence of the liberals as major contenders on the Balkan political scene around the mid-nineteenth century—that is, during the early stages of modern state-building—traditional forms of political rule and organization largely prevailed across the region. The joint monopoly on power of monarchs and (aristocratic or bureaucratic) oligarchies remained unchallenged, and the rivalry between them was the only legitimate form of political contestation. Aspirations to independence and unification, to social or cultural advancement remained subordinated to the conventional, hierarchically structured concept of the nation.

These were the legacies that the first Westernizers—the Balkan liberals, saw themselves forced to act on. At their background, it is quite astonishing to see that, since their appearance on the political scene between the late 1840s and the early 1860s, the “liberal patriots” succeeded to remain there as major political actors, and in Romania and Bulgaria to pull the reins of power, for most of the time until the World War I. The profession of faith of these largely foreign-educated intellectuals was remarkably uniform: their states could progress only if they adopted the liberal political institutions of the “progressive” West. Economic and cultural advancement for them was contingent on the creation of a favorable political environment whose main attributes were national sovereignty, representative government, and civil rights, thus fusing, notably, two distinct phases in liberalism’s Western evolution: liberal theory and the practice of liberal democracy.⁴⁴

How did the liberals deem it possible to make society, first, accept and, then, sustain such alien institutions and make them work? While trying to single out some of the techniques applied, I wish to evoke the contention made at the beginning—that those techniques implied both resignification of the transferred institution *and* transformation of the institutions and society in the process.

A common liberal method of “domesticating” that foreign creed in the different countries in the region was the indigenization of the essential attributes of modern civilization, above all Western values and institutions. Liberals across the Balkans sought the endorsement of a modern concept of the state and legitimate government—a concept that they had borrowed from abroad, by extracting its norms from the institutional traditions of the old self-government system and the ancient custom. As an eminent student of nineteenth-century Serbia had observed, the Serbian liberals, having discovered little foundation for “Western-type” modernity in their contemporary society, turned to national history in “search for the rudiments of the western liberal institutions, [presenting] our whole democratic movement as the return of our people to its historical character.”⁴⁵

“The Popular Assembly is one of the most ancient and sacred institutions in the Serbian Principality. It embodies the lawful will of the whole Serbian

People,” read the draft of the Serbian National Assembly Law of 1858.⁴⁶ “The old or the genuine organization of the Serbian state was democratic, that is, it meant that the people governed themselves on the basis of equality before the law and the equal right of all its members,” the Serbian liberals’ leader Vladimir Jovanović argued.

The Serbian national assembly in its traditional form insures the government of the people by the people equally represented, which is essential in a democracy. . . . The traditional municipal institutions of the Serbs are free. In its relations with the State the Serbian Commune—*Obština*, such as tradition knows it, is entirely independent; the sentiment of the national freedom and independence, which is indelibly engraved in the hearts of the Serbs, has led them to perpetuate their fellow-feeling by a peculiar institution, such as *Pobratimstvo*. . . . The enlightenment of the mass, which ought to result from the equality of rights, has always been and still is supported among the Serbs by the traditional institutions of the *Slava* and the *Sabori*. . . . The Serbs are so deeply penetrated by the sentiments of equality and fraternity, as never to be reconciled with any sort of unjust and hereditary distinctions among men. . . . With the equality of rights, so deeply rooted in the public spirit and incorporated into the traditional institutions of the Serbs, corresponds the equality of duties. . . .

Consequently, the liberals’ aspiration was the “free arrangement of our state institutions in a popular and democratic spirit, in accordance with the historical precepts . . . [which] have existed for centuries in the life of our people.”⁴⁷ Constitutionalism and representative government, the thrust for freedom, independence, association, and equality were thus directly distilled from the ancient traditions and institutions of popular democracy, in a testimony of the maturity of the Serbs for modernity.

The key concepts and historical references used by the Bulgarian liberals were remarkably similar. “The Bulgarian people, by its nature and communal institutions, by its customs and recollections of the past, is purely and sincerely democratic; the Bulgarians, more than any other European people, are alien to the spirit of castes and [all kind of social inequality]. . . . Among them there exist no such hierarchies: they are all noble or all estate-less citizens, but first and foremost—they are all equal since all are Bulgarians, the sons of the same fatherland.”⁴⁸ As in Serbia, the obsolescent self-governing commune came to incarnate not only the traditions of solidarity, equality, and fraternity but, remarkably, developed forms of collective *and* individual freedom such as “Europe” was hard trying to attain. “But how surprised our readers will be when we tell them that that for which people are fighting in Europe exists among us whole, complete and ready, awaiting hands and minds to yield the desired fruits of a fast and comprehensive progress. The individual, that is the self- feeling, which has always supplied the Bulgarian with an independent spirit, is so strongly developed among us as to have no match in any other Slavic or foreign race.”⁴⁹ So, stepping on an indigenous liberal model *avant la lettre*, the “late-

comers” could bounce over a few evolutionary “stages” and find themselves ahead of the forerunners.

Such assertions were not mere rhetoric; they had direct bearing on the form and functioning of the transferred institutions in their new environment. The key liberal demands for a unicameral parliament and general manhood enfranchisement—two rare institutional innovations at the time—were directly derived from this kind of reasoning. The strong opposition that the proposal for an upper chamber provoked in the Bulgarian Constitutive Assembly in 1879 drew heavily on, and made much of, the “intrinsic democratism” of the Bulgarians and their traditions of self-rule under the Ottomans. Political freedom and participation, free elections, and a free press were likewise made to rest on the “democratic instincts” of the Bulgarian people and a centuries-long experience in self-government. This, on the other hand, fitted nicely with Mill’s dictum, very popular among Serbian and Bulgarian liberals, that “only freedom is which makes people capable of freedom.” It is at this point that the Serbian and the Bulgarian liberals deviated considerably from the prevailing contemporary versions of European liberalism, strongly susceptible to the threats of the “tyranny of the majority.” It mattered little (or they failed to make that difference) that the “centuries-long experience” at issue was in fact patrimonial, not representative, while the actual people’s “instincts” were egalitarian rather than democratic.

Similar was the logic of the liberals’ rendition of the idea of property. As an attribute of full citizenship it was present in all liberal programs yet its underpinnings in both Serbia and Bulgaria were emphatically leveling. “Equality is materially ensured among the Serbs by respect of property. . . . Instead of a few thousand proprietors, there are many hundred thousand. . . . Wealth is in general equitably distributed among the Serbs, so as to ensure that nobody may be rich enough to purchase another, and nobody so poor as to sell himself. Pauperism is entirely unknown in Serbia. . . . Every Serb delights to be able to prove that ‘All is ours, all is *narodsko*’ [belonging to the whole of the nation].”⁵⁰ During the debates in the Bulgarian Constitutional assembly, the liberals’ championship for the unfettered self-expression of the people against any privileging for the better prepared for the tasks of government was also underpinned by arguments about the classless social structure and ethos of the Bulgarian nation.

This had major consequences for both political discourse and institutional arrangement. By virtue of their democratic habits and traditional socioeconomic structure (a massive “peasant middle class” of sorts), Serbia and Bulgaria were asserted to be organically suited for the norms of political modernity. In a practical institutional sense, this egalitarian patriarchal political culture precluded the need for checks on the “sovereignty” of the Assembly other than the extensive powers of the monarch. For the Bulgarians to achieve “a strong and sound government,” liberals maintained, “the people should be in direct relations to the government.” All conventional arguments of contemporary European constitutionalism in favor of a sec-

ond chamber were one by one disqualified by virtue of the basic credo that

it is insulting for a whole nation to accept the biased judgment of its complete inability and so to say incompetence to deal with the national affairs and to admit as able and competent just a few privileged persons. . . . One of the commonest delusions of the mankind is that everyone should think of oneself as being smarter and better than the others and that the others . . . need his smartness and leadership. . . . Individual leaders, however smart and enlightened they may be, are much more liable to get things wrong than the maturely heeded collective or popular opinion.⁵¹

Not exactly liberal, but clearly populist.⁵² Even so, the Turnovo Constitution, which was to remain in force until after the World War II, came out as a liberal rather than a populist manifesto: it contained a number of radical-liberal provisions, including universal manhood suffrage, a single chamber, prohibition of all titles and of slavery, extensive civil freedoms, and so on, which provided the institutional framework for the exercise of modern government and citizenship.

The same line of reasoning—or, as some might say, the tyranny of the prevailing social values—led the liberal governments in both Serbia and Bulgaria to curb, every now and then, the effects of the market by safeguarding a minimum of peasant property against expropriation for debt,⁵³ while at the same time tolerating the continued fragmentation of land through traditional modes of inheritance. Occasionally this paternalistic attitude led them to advocate the conservation of the purportedly “democratic and communist” agrarian relations against calls for radical reforms. Confronting the Bulgarian socialists’ vindications of social revolution, Zakhari Stoianov accused them of superficial aping of the Western European political vogues:

Why don’t they become better acquainted with Bulgaria and study its situation outside of the books in the “social library?” We are convinced that the economic condition of Bulgaria at the present day will not be attained by Russia, France, England, Ireland, Romania, Germany etc. even after centuries. It will take several revolutions to equal the fate of [their] populations with [that of] the Bulgarian. I beg your pardon, but where else under the sky is there such a heaven as it exists in Bulgaria—especially in the villages? . . . To put it briefly: who owns the natural resources of Bulgaria?—The population, the whole people owns them, brotherly, evenly, primitively, in a communist manner if you wish.⁵⁴

In a situation of underdeveloped capitalism in agriculture, such an “interpretation” was meant to prevent the emergence of a rural proletariat while reproducing equality in poverty. Liberals in both Serbia and Bulgaria were strongly susceptible to the facts of misery and degradation of the poor as the reverse side of free capitalism. For them free market was unacceptable as it threatened with extinction social solidarity, harmony, and equality nurtured by traditional life forms. By virtue of the open

political system they themselves had created, liberal modernizers felt compelled to attune their ambitious program of “progressive reforms” to the egalitarian structures of social organization and to the patrimonial predilections of the “people.”

The Romanian liberals espoused a more qualified version of democracy than their Serbian or Bulgarian compeers in that their ideal was not the self-rule of a nation of free peasantry, but representative government of the best educated and “socially reliable.” Their avowed goal was modernization of the urban sector of the economy through forced industrialization under state protection and encouragement for the urban middle class. These typological distinctions notwithstanding, the Romanian liberals were as eager to identify the fundamental liberal principles not in the Western canon of ideas, from where they were actually taken, but in the traditions and values of the national past. The long-time liberal prime minister Ion C. Brătianu argued in this sense that “the democratic and freedom-loving population of [Roman] Italy” had come to settle in the Romanian lands in their flee from “the stinking air of despotism,” and that it was in the midst of these colonies that “democratic traditions were kept up sacred and pure.” The Romanian nation, thus, “not only has its mind and spirit ready for democracy, it has continuously carried it in its heart and customs.” As to the representative institutions, it should be remembered that “whilst other states had been under the sway of despotism, [in Romania] we had a regime . . . [which was] all too liberal and, one may say, parliamentary.”⁵⁵ Here, again, was a line of argument aimed at indigenizing the exogenous (representative government in particular) and legitimating a modern concept of the state by way of tradition and ancient custom. This tradition, located in antiquity and the middle ages, had nothing to do with the experience bequeathed by the centuries of political decline; it meant the Romanians’ original ethnic essence, on the basis of which the democratic institutions of “medieval Romania” could be built.

All that, on the other hand, did not undermine the normative authority of the “Western model”: references to and comparisons with British, French, or German constitutionalism and parliamentarism were also part and parcel of the methodology of transfer legitimization. Remarkably, still, faithfulness to the norms did not necessarily imply faithfulness to the forms. Apparent—and telling—was the necessity the Balkan liberals felt to interpret the local deviations from the Western “prototypes,” not as betrayal to the “letter” of these institutions, but as their authentic application in accordance with the specific local conditions—as genuine fidelity to their “spirit.”

These are some of the benchmarks of the process of translation, reimagination, and domestication of a “revolutionarising transfer” to its new environment. The liberal solution, the one that was closer than any other to the “Western model,” in all these cases was presented as reactualization of a normative past and a normative “national character.” Following Georges Balandier’s typology, we can speak of “pseudo-traditionalism,” whereby radically new motivations and goals are deliberately reconfigured in the symbolic patterns of tradition so that they can be accepted as legitimate.⁵⁶ The process resembled not so much an invention, but revaluation or

novel combination of existing social forms by endowing them with a new meaning.⁵⁷ For a political program to command plausibility and legitimacy, Quentin Skinner tells us, it should fit in the “prevailing morality” of the society. “However revolutionary the ideologist may be, he will nevertheless be committed, once he has accepted the need to legitimate his behavior, to attempting to show that some of the *existing* range of favorable evaluative-descriptive terms can somehow be applied as apt descriptions of his own apparently untoward actions. Every revolutionary is to this extent obliged to march backward into battle.”⁵⁸

This explains how and why liberal ideas and institutions, on the one hand, and tradition and the state of society, on the other, far from being thought of in opposition, came to reinforce and fuse with each other. The liberals did not seek to reinstall the old patriarchal arrangement, nor were they traditionalists in any accepted meaning of the term. Tradition for them was only the basis, the fundamental texture from which the viable institutions and guiding principles of the nation-states could evolve—not a defense against the modern but a powerful means of buttressing it. The liberal-nationalists’ attempt to attain a synthesis between tradition and modernity ensued, in the final analysis, from their effort to “condense” the historical time needed for the implantation of modern forms of social organization and most of all the nation-state (thence also the fusion of liberal theory and democratic practice in a single nation-building act). In the process their political credo evolved into a remarkable mixture of classical liberal or citizenship precepts (equality of rights, “enlightenment for all,” equal political representation and local self-government or democracy, respect for property, rejection of hereditary privilege, principle of association), the language of nationalism (“fraternal union” marked by “origin, language, and national feeling”; national rights, freedom, independence), and romantic celebration of tradition. The liberal nationalists of the nineteenth-century Southeastern Europe could thus legitimate their project as universal and rational, on the one hand, and local and patrimonial, on the other.⁵⁹

In the constitutive core of Balkan modernity in the nineteenth century—a time when being modern equaled being nationally minded—liberalism and nationalism, much as liberalism and romanticism, formed one inextricable whole. Far from being eroded by the tension between popular sovereignty and individual liberty, it is precisely this association that explains Balkan modernizers’ lure to liberalism and its mobilizational power. Central to it in its Balkan translations, as elsewhere in Europe where the “national question” was an issue, was not the assault on social and political privilege and defense of the natural demands of rehabilitated individuals, even less laissez-faire economics and anticlericalism. Central to it was the projection of the individualistic notion of natural rights onto the body of the national whole—the translation of personal freedom and civil rights into the right of each nationality to its own sovereign state and free development.

The Balkan versions of liberalism were consequently made to rest on the intimate connection between the “internal” and the “external” freedom. Freedom at home—

representative government acting on behalf of the sovereign people, limited monarchic power, and safeguarded personal rights and freedoms—was not simply a value by itself. It was deemed necessary for cultivating a feeling of belonging to a common political home, personal self-identification with the state, and will to participate in its affairs—in brief, for bringing up “nationals.” But it was also typically seen as ensuring the “external” unity and greatness of the nation: “Only a Serbia endowed with free political institutions is capable to draw together all Serbs under foreign rule; only in one such Serbia can be released that spirit of national fervor and sacrifice without which no great battles for national liberation can be fought,” reasoned Vladimir Jovanović.⁶⁰ Specifically that was the connection between civic and irredentist nationalism. Thus conceived, nationalism—nation making and unification—constituted a common articulating principle of Balkan liberalisms all the way from the Romanian 1848ers to the Greek Venizelists in the 1920s.

This principle entailed major adjustments with diffuse effects on society, such as the actively interventionist state: it was the fear lest the incipient Balkan states would not survive the international competition that led the Balkan liberals to that fundamental “betrayal” of the liberal doctrine—supplanting the self-regulating mechanisms of civil society with state-imposed ideological and institutional structures stemming from the Western liberal model (e.g., the import of the Belgian constitution to the Balkans in the nineteenth century) and turning the newly established nation-state into an aggressive instrument of etatist modernization. Similar was the logic of the Balkan liberals’ above mentioned unconventional form of “anticlericalism.” Next to being sociologically and historically “recontextualized,” political democracy was embodied in institutions that were typically seen as antinomic to it.

But the link between inner and outer freedom had a deeper dimension that touched on the paradox inherent in any enforced modernization: how to change and yet remain who you are. Zoran Milutinović has poignantly framed it: “Faced with the threat of being crushed and annihilated by more powerful and already modernized societies, crush and annihilate yourself in order to survive, reinvent yourself in their image in order to be preserved, disappear such as you are in order to live.”⁶¹ The use of tradition from this perspective appears less as a rhetoric than as a means of alleviating the horrendous burden of the dilemma. Balkan liberalism’s responsiveness to peasant-based values, as abundantly attested in the Serbian and the Bulgarian versions, had everything to do with it. And even if the “urban-oriented” Romanian liberal elite was less inclined to make concessions to the rural notions of good government, the village, the peasant, peasant culture, and folklore—or what Alexandru Duțu called “rustic utopia”—were no less crucial in the legitimizing of the modern Romanian state.⁶² Many among the “elitist” Romanian liberals coupled their advocacy for political and economic modernization with appeals for cultural ruralization, thus wreaking a “rupture between state and culture, the political and the cultural” and laying the ground of a “conflict between a modern socio-economic model and

an anachronistic cultural model.”⁶³

The Balkan modernizers’ translation of Western liberalism can be understood only against the backdrop of this dilemma. Was ever a positive solution found out of it? Here is what one of the nonradical among them had to say: “Civilization consists not in the uniform but in the varied development of both the mankind as a whole and the nations in particular. . . . Each nationality will always bear the imprint of its peculiar civilization which, let us say it in passing, is practically the best one provided that it evolves gradually and in accordance with the character and the historical traditions of this nationality.”⁶⁴ “The real civilization,” Michail Kagălniceanu concurred, “is the one that derives from our bosom.” Nationality (and national culture) thus devoured “civilization” and with it the despotism of Western universalism: the Balkan liberals’ ultimate answer to the modernist dilemma was that you could become civilized only by being—remaining—yourself.

Both contemporaries and latter-day analysts have tended to subsume the diverse viewpoints on this issue into two major, monolithic counterpositions variously defined as modernists versus traditionalists, Westernizers versus autochthonists, pro-Europeanists versus nationalists. Over time, and often teleologically, such broad ideological counterpositions have become overlaid by artificially polarized political divisions between progressivists, liberals, and forward-looking leftists, on the one hand, and reactionaries, conservatives, and traditionalist rightists, on the other hand. We should be advised to keep in mind, however, that dichotomies such as these tend to replicate the protagonists’ self-interpretation and interpretations of the other rather than render a historically meaningful reconstruction of the diverse, often mingled and ambiguous, positions.⁶⁵ Liberal modernizers and pro-Europeanists were not necessarily in favor of reckless imports or Westernization, nor was their attitude to the West clear-cut or unchangeable; anti-Westernists were often as zealous modernizers as their pro-European opponents; and so on. As the liberals’ “uses of tradition” alert us, instead of imposing artificial homogeneity on an array of dissimilar standpoints, it is more appropriate to present the debates at issue as a continuum of positions, marked by synchronic as well as diachronic dynamics, where the extreme cases of wholesale uncritical emulation or complete cultural and political autarchy were the exception and remained marginal.

In fact, it is precisely in the peculiar, sometimes paradoxical combination of normatively incompatible positions and ideological hybrids that the originality and creativity of the Balkan responses to the “transfer of modernity” become visible, thus teaching us something about the nature of modernity itself.

Notes

1. A. Touraine, *Critique de la modernité* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), 208.
2. A. Duțu, “Geopolitica și valorile culturale,” *Sud-Estul și contextul european* 6 (1996): 16.
3. L. Perović, *Između anarhije i autokratije. Srpsko društvo na prelazima vekova (XIX–XXI)*

(Belgrade: Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2006), 18, 55–56.

4. J. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst, 2000), 18–19.

5. S. Alexandrescu, “Modernism și antimodernism. Din nou, cazul românesc, in *Modernism și antimodernism: noi perspective interdisciplinare*, coord. S. Antoși (Bucarest: Cuvântul, 2008), 103–159.

6. S. Naumović, *Upotreba tradicije u političkom i javnom životu Srbije na kraju dvadesetog i početkom dvadeset prvog veka* (Belgrade: IP Filip Višnić, 2009), 13–14.

7. Ibid., 23–24; G. Balandier, *Sens et puissance* (Paris: P.U.F., 1981); G. Balandier, *Anthropologie politique* (Paris: P.U.F., 1984), 202–17.

8. M. Espagne and M. Werner, *Transferts. Les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand (XVIIIe et XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988); M. Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: P.U.F., 1999).

9. H. Kaelble and J. Schriewer, eds., *Vergleich und Transfer: Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2003); M. Middell, “Von der Wechselseitigkeit der Kulturen im Austausch: das Konzept des Kulturtransfers in verschiedenen Forschungskontexten,” in *Metropolen und Kulturtransfer im 15./16. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001), 15–51; H. Kaelble, *Der historische Vergleich: eine Einführung zum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1999); J. Paulmann, “Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998): 649–85.

10. C. Bayly et al., “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 1449.

11. This preoccupation resonates with that of cultural mobility studies as promoted by Stephen Greenblatt in his search to formulate “new ways to understand the vitally important dialectic of cultural persistence and change”—S. Greenblatt, ed., *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–2.

12. M. Werner and B. Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der *Histoire croisée* und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002): 607–36.

13. H. te Velde, “Political Transfer: An Introduction,” *European Review of History* 12 (2005): 205–21, 208.

14. On legal transfer in this sense, see J. Kirov, “Foreign Law between ‘Grand Hazard’ and Great Irritation: The Bulgarian Experience after 1878,” *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 10 (2009): 703.

15. W. Bracewell, “The Limits of Europe in East European Travel Writing,” in *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*, ed. W. Bracewell and A. Drace-Francis, vol. 2 (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 66.

16. For a different reading, see M. Todorova, “The Trap of Backwardness: Modernity, Temporality, and the Study of Eastern European Nationalism,” *Slavic Review* 64 (2005): 140–64.

17. Meaning here the existence of considerable regional synchronicity and comparability between the modernization problems encountered and the policies tried for solving them—or, to put it in more dramatic terms, the region’s enduring situation of multiple marginality.

18. For further elaboration on this position, see D. Mishkova, “Towards a Framework for Studying the Politics of National Peculiarity in the 19th Century,” in *We the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, ed. D. Mishkova (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009), 1–43.

19. Both nineteenth-century Balkan liberal nationalists, such as Michail Kogălniceanu or Liuben Karavelov, and turn-of-the-century post-Romantic modernists (e.g., Jovan Skerlić) had left numerous testimonies of such value-based vision of the West and Europe. See in particular Z. Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe: The Construction of Europe in Serbian Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 71. The territorialized and mostly negative vision, on the other hand, was typically preserved for the “great European powers,” individually or collectively.

20. Just as it is true that “all the familiar ‘isms’ of modernization were resisted by important elements of the establishment in Western Europe . . . all have proven both incomplete and contingent, even in the

West." See M. Lewis and K. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 101 (cited in Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe*, 21).

21. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 13.

22. P. Pombeni, "Political Models and Political Transfer in the Shaping of Europe," *European Review of History* 12 (2005): 223-38.

23. A. Rubin, "Legal Borrowing and Its Impact on Ottoman Legal Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Continuity and Change* 22 (2007): 279-303. The actual application of transferred law required additional sustained effort, and the various administrative measures meant to apply modern standards of judicial praxis began in serious only from the late 1870s, after the secession of another major part of the Balkan Christians—the majority of the Bulgarians—from the Ottoman Empire.

24. See, for example, M. Saracoglu, "Sitting Together: Local Councils of Vidin County as Domains of Hybridization" (CAS Working Paper Series 2, Centre for Advanced Study, Sofia, 2009), accessed 22 January 2012, http://www.cas.bg/en/working_paper_series/roles-identities-and-hybrids-171.html.

25. It should be stressed that the well-off "Turcophiles" did not speak on behalf of an antinationalist agenda: on the contrary, they firmly championed "national rights" and the "principle of nationality," which meant independence for the Bulgarian church and modern utilitarian education. Politically their option was intended to safeguard the integrity of the Bulgarian ethnos in the Empire instead of risking its fragmentation in the wake of a premature secession.

26. M. Balabanov, "Obshtestvenite opasnosti," *Vek* 13, 29 March 1875.

27. G. Pletnov and I. Stoianov, eds., *Planove i programi v natsionalnoosvoboditelnoto dvizhenie prez Vuzrazhdaneto* (Veliko Turnovo: Universitetsko izdatelstvo Sv. sv. Kiril i Metodii, 1994), 37-39. The persistence and seriousness with which the transferability of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise was discussed in the Bulgarian press contravenes the view that "this system was never taken for a model, or even a case study by way of reference" on account of the fact that "the Habsburg solution did not sound 'modern'" (P. Pombeni, "Political Models," 229).

28. "The American clergy and the church administration in that distant land should always be in front of the eyes of our future Bulgarian Synod"—L. Karavelov, *Subrani suchinenia v devet toma*, vol. 7 (Sofia: Bălgarski pisatel, 1967), 258.

29. *Ibid.*, 188, 221-22, 256-60; *Makedonia* 5 (1871): 1.

30. E. Gazi, "Revisiting Religion and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Greece," in *The Making of Modern Greece*, ed. R. Beaton and D. Ricks (London: Ashgate, 2009), 100-101.

31. B. Reeves-Ellington, "A Vision of Mount Holyoke in the Ottoman Balkans: American Cultural Transfer, Bulgarian Nation-Building and Women's Educational Reform, 1858-1870," *Gender & History* 16 (2004): 165-66. Eugene Weber must have had something similar in mind when listing the Protestants, next to the public schools, among the "recognized agents of modernity" in late nineteenth-century Catholic France—E. Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976), 397.

32. D. Mishkova, "Symbolic Geographies and Visions of Identity: A Balkan Perspective," *European Journal of Social Theory* 11 (2008): 237-56, 249-51.

33. S. Jovanović, *Političke i pravne rasprave*, vol. 2 (Belgrade: G. Kon, 1932), 141-42.

34. C. Black, "Russia and the Modernization of the Balkans," in *The Balkans in Transition: Essays on the Development of Balkan Life and Politics since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Charles and Barbara Jelavich (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1974), 145-83; C. Black, "The Influence of Western Political Thought in Bulgaria, 1850-1885," *American Historical Review* 48 (1943): 507-20.

35. C. Black, *The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Bulgaria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943), 50-51.

36. Typical representatives of this generation, which came of age in the 1860s and 1870s, were prime ministers Petko Karavelov and Stefan Stambolov. Their outlook presented a characteristic blend of Western liberalism and Russian radicalism. They began their political careers as radicals and nihilists, but

after the liberation they counted among the most influential statesmen who drew political inspiration from the West.

37. The critical reinterpretation of Serbian socialism and political radicalism in the nineteenth to early twentieth centuries has rendered over the past two decades several excellent works, almost all of them in Serbian. See, among others, L. Perović, *Srpski socijalisti 19. veka. Prilog istoriji socijalističke misli*, vols. 1-3 (Belgrade: Izdavačka radna organizacija "Rad," 1985, 1995); D. Stojanović, *Srbija i demokratija 1903-1914* (Belgrade: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2003). See also D. Mishkova, *Prisposobjavane na svobodata. Modernost-legitimnost v Sărbija i Rumănija prez XIX vek* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2001), 161-92; D. Mishkova, "The Uses of Tradition and National Identity in the Balkans," in *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory*, ed. Maria Todorova (London: Hurst, 2004), 283-89.

38. V. Taki, "Moldavia and Wallachia in the Eyes of Russian Observers in the First Half of the 19th Century," *East Central Europe* 32 (2005): 99-123.

39. The explanation was above all Russia's intention to win over the benevolence of its protégés and thus strengthened its prestige and influence in the newly emerging Balkan states. In the case of the Bulgarian constitution, Russian authorities were concerned lest the constitutions of the neighboring countries might turn out to be more liberal. A special "challenge" was presented by the Organic Statutes for Eastern Rumelia (a province with considerable Bulgarian population handed back to the Sublime Porte by the Treaty of Berlin of 1878), the drawing up of which was entrusted to a European commission—see I. Kozmenko, "Peterburgskii proekt Tarnovskoi konstitutsii 1879 goda," *Istoricheskii arhiv* 4 (1949): 227-29.

40. J. Clarke, "The Bulgarian Renaissance," in *The Pen and the Sword: Studies in Bulgarian History* by James F. Clarke, ed. Dennis Hupchik (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1988), 178.

41. D. Tziouvas, ed., *Greece and the Balkans: Identities, Perceptions and Cultural Encounters since the Enlightenment* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), 4-5.

42. B. Penev, *Istoria na novata bulgarska literatura*, vol. 3 (1934; repr., Sofia: Bulgarski pisatel, 1977), 66.

43. For more on the diffuse impact of the "Greek transmission" of modernity on Bulgarian nationalism and European identity, see Mishkova, "Symbolic Geographies," 240-42.

44. As David Held has suggested, we should distinguish between the liberalism of Hobbes and Lock preoccupied with the protection of the individual rights and inviolability of property—or liberal theory, on the one hand, and the practice of liberal democracy based on the responsibility of government before the citizens as promoted by Bentham and Mill, which gradually came into effect in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—D. Held, "Central Perspectives on the Modern State," in *Political Theory and the Modern State*, ed. D. Held (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 11-55.

45. S. Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića*, vol. 1 (Belgrade: G. Kon, 1934), 44.

46. J. Miličević, "Prilog poznavanju porekla srbijanskog parlamentarizma," *Zbornik filozofskog fakulteta* 9 (1970): 614-15.

47. V. Jovanović, *Osnovi snage i veličine srpske* (Novi Sad: n.p., 1870), 50; V. Yovanovitch, *The Emancipation and Unity of the Serbian Nation: Or the Regeneration of Eastern Europe by the Reconstitution of the Nationalities* (Geneva: H. Georg, 1871), 103-21; M. Subotić, *Sricanje slobode* (Niš: Gradina, 1992), 91. The liberal theory of Serbian history has been most fully developed by Vladimir Jovanović, *The Serbian Nation and the Eastern Question* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1863).

48. *Narodnost* 2, no. 14, 23 February 1869.

49. P. R. Slaveikov, "Gradovete i selata edni za drugi" (1869), in P. R. Slaveikov, *Suchinenia v osem toma*, vol. 6 (Sofia: Bulgarski pisatel, 1980), 336.

50. Yovanovitch, *Emancipation and Unity*, 103-21.

51. *Protokolite na Uchreditelnoto Bulgarsko Narodno Subranie v Turnovo* (Plovdiv-Sofia-Ruschuk: Knizharnitsa Khr. G. Danov, 1879), 265-66. "Leave the people alone to seek the cures for the ailments which they feel, and rest assured that they will waste no time in finding them and applying them" (P. R. Slaveikov).

52. These contentions may well be seen as characteristic of the underlying philosophy of that populist version of liberal nationalism that was to prevail among the Bulgarian liberals after the establishment of the state. Egalitarian democracy was the political tool by which the Bulgarian liberals sought to appropriate the underlying source of modern legitimacy—the people.

53. In Serbia, for example, four laws were passed—in 1836, 1861, 1897, and 1898—that increased the size of the existential (protected) minimum of land from 1.15 ha (in 1860s) to 3.45 ha (in 1890s); the latter remained in force until the 1930s—M.-Ž. Čalić, *Socijalna istorija Srbije 1815–1941* (Belgrade: Clio, 2004), 70.

54. Z. Stoianov, “Sotsializmut v Bulgaria” (1887), in *Suchinenia v tri toma*, vol. 3 (Sofia: Bulgarski pisatel, 1966), 215–17.

55. I. C. Brătianu, *Acte și cuvîntare*, vol. 1 (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 1938), 21–22; vol. 8 (București: Editura Cartea Românească, 1941), 178.

56. G. Balandier, *Anthropologies politiques* (Paris: P.U.F., 1984).

57. “Pseudo-traditionalism” in this sense presents a case of instrumentalization of tradition meaning “a political strategy of separating certain elements of the tradition of a group from their original context and their utilization for purposes not immanent to them” (Naumović, *Upotreba tradicije*, 19).

58. Q. Skinner, “Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action,” *Political Theory* 2 (1974): 295–96.

59. For a more detailed analysis of Serbian, Bulgarian, and Romanian national liberalisms along these lines, see D. Mishkova, “The Interesting Anomaly of Balkan Liberalism,” in *Liberty and the Search for Identity: Liberal Nationalism and the Legacy of Empire*, ed. Ivan Z. Denes (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006), 399–456.

60. Cited in S. Jovanović, *Druga vlada Miloša i Mihaila, 1858–1868* (Belgrade: G. Kon, 1923), 282. The Bulgarian liberals were likewise convinced that the freedoms and good government “will make of the small Bulgarian principality a point of attraction and unification for the torn-off parts of the common Bulgarian fatherland,” a “Piedmont among the other parts of Bulgaria in the Balkan peninsula.” V. Nikolova and D. Sazdov, eds., *Programi, programni dokumenti i ustavi na buržoaznite partii v Bulgaria 1879–1918* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1992), 22; S. Balamezov, “Deloto na nashite uchrediteli v svetlinata na dneshnoto vreme,” *Rodina* 1, no. 4 (1938–39): 98, 109.

61. Milutinović, *Getting Over Europe*, 75.

62. A. Dușu, *Ideea de Europa și evoluția conștiinței europene* (București: ALL, 1999), 188.

63. S. Alexandrescu, *La modernité à l'Est* (Pitești: Paralela 45, 1999), 25.

64. M. Balaboanov, “Klimatut i choveshkiat napreduk,” *Chitalishte* 5 (1 December 1870): 138–39.

65. The same dichotomy has been found to characterize post-1989 Romanian historiography, for example. See C. Iordachi and B. Trencsényi, “In Search of a Usable Past: The Question of National Identity in Romanian Studies, 1990–2000,” *East European Politics and Societies* 17 (2003): 415–53.

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