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Symbolic Geographies and Visions of Identity

A Balkan Perspective

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to interrogate the current mainstream interpretation of the relations between the Balkans and the West by exploring the agencies of the transmission of knowledge through which the Balkans became familiar with the West. Interest is focused on how concepts about 'us' and the 'other', cultural and social self-definitions were historically mediated by concepts of Europe. Issues of cultural transfer form a point of departure, in this sense suggesting that Balkan visions of Europe cannot be understood as simply mirroring the representations of the Western hegemonic discourse about the Balkans. In order to understand these visions, more attention needs to be paid to local and regional dynamics in the production of ideologies and self-narrations.

Key words

■ Balkan studies ■ cultural transfer ■ Europeanism ■ Occidentalism
■ Orientalism ■ symbolic geography

Balkan Studies as 'Oriental' Studies?

Taking up the subject of Balkan perspectives on Europe, I was fully aware of the necessity to think of it in the light of the criteria by which a region is defined, theorized and explained. As long as the available analyses of the relations between Europe and the Balkans have sought to draw upon broader tendencies or theoretical models, these models have had no local origin or purposes. They were designed in other places and for other uses, and as a result, the Balkans have been assessed in terms of their resemblance to or deviation from Western Europe.¹ This is the common drawback of the Balkan application of all theories that had emerged since the end of the eighteenth century under the umbrella of the two great paradigms of (evolutionist) modernization theory and neo-Marxism (drawing upon the opposition between center and periphery). In the last few

years, Orientalist, post-colonial and post-structuralist criticism have succeeded in challenging the very core of these frameworks by shifting the focus to a deconstruction of the conventional Western image of the Balkans. Critical effort has been invested in demystifying the 'Balkan construct', and the hegemonic Western discourse which nourishes it. Although the level of professional sophistication in the application of this criticism varies, there is little doubt that if over the last decades the study of the Balkans has laid claim to the status of a meaningful field of research – that is, if the field has generated knowledge that could affect the methods and categories used by other fields (such as historiography, anthropology, cultural studies) as well as the theoretical (Western) models of exploring 'the Other' – the credit should largely be given to those projects that have involved the field in a direct dialogue with the theoretical and conceptual discussions unfolding in other areas. As far as the Balkan historiography is concerned, most productive in this respect has proved the dialogue with Edward Said's Orientalist approach. The Western 'imagining' of the Balkans clearly shares many generic features with Said's 'Orientalism'. And while 'Balkanism', the analysis of which has become the sign of the new academic status of the historical study of the Balkans, may be sensitive to historical and cultural difference, its links with Said's criticism are evident as is the acknowledgment of the benefits derived from the application of this approach to the 'theorizing' of the Balkans.

The intention of this text is not to confirm or dismiss, as an end in itself, the interpretative potential of the Orientalist approach with regard to the Balkans. It should rather be seen as an attempt to highlight the ability of research on the Balkans to trigger re-consideration, broadening, and revision of this and other theoretical approaches and concepts playing a key role in contemporary social science. Specifically my aim is to interrogate the current mainstream interpretation of the relations between the Balkans and the West, as it has emerged from the mirror reading of the Balkanism paradigm. I share with the late Ellie Scopetea the belief, which she formulated at the height of the Orientalist-paradigm's acclaim, that an attempt to include the Balkans in the Saidian abstract Orient would have changed the whole logic of the Orientalist argument by bringing to the foreground the historical dimensions of the East–West relationship (Scopetea, 1991: 133). This implies taking full account not only of conspicuous incompatibilities such as the absence of Western colonialism or a Western Balkanist tradition. These are truly fundamental deficiencies from the perspective of Said's conception, and any effort to compensate for these absences by recourse to their metaphoric or imaginary versions on the assumption that the latter are identical with the former, will not take us far.² How important these incompatibilities are in terms of the Balkan attitudes to Europe will be discussed further.

Following the critical line of thought, more intriguing to me still is the issue of the Balkans' peculiar position vis-à-vis the 'West' and of the differences in the representation of this peculiar position in different periods of history. Similarly, the dynamics of national self-images – of the way the Balkan societies have described and evaluated themselves – demonstrate a social and ideological functionality that can hardly be understood in terms of a Western hegemony over the

local production of 'autonarratives'. On the level of generalization, the little that can be safely maintained is that modernity has starkly underscored and complicated the Balkans' ambivalent geographic, cultural and civilizational status. It is this geographic and cognitive liminality, at the same time, that makes Balkan studies 'the terrain that is most rich with theoretical possibility', with the potential to 'contribute most to the theoretical frameworks of inquiry used by a broad array of fields and disciplines' (Fleming, 2000: 1223; 1231).

I would like to probe this revisionist potential by keeping an eye on the contributions already made in this direction while, at the same time, seeking to expand and partly rework them. Concretely, I shall attempt to identify a set of fundamental contextual elements, above all those characterizing the spread of knowledge about Europe – the agencies of this transmission in particular – which have been largely ignored in the relevant discussions. To understand this choice, as well as my approach, it is important to emphasize that I see it as an initial attempt at addressing the topic of the Balkan visions of Europe, i.e. of Balkan 'Occidentalism'.³

Geographies and Identities: A Note on Terminology

The notion 'Europe' or the 'West', as I use it here, is stripped of essentialist meaning in the historical, cultural, geographic or any other sense of the term. 'Europe' is understood as a contested concept, a trope conveying contradictory, contextually and historically contingent meanings and images, which have been translated into political, ideological or cultural programmes (Stråth, 2000: 14). As we shall see in the case of the Balkans, it was the entwining of the project of modernity with the notion of 'Europe', in other words, the entanglement of utopian and real meanings, that accounts for the resilience of the term 'Europe' and for the difficulties involved in any attempt to unravel its anatomy. My use of the notion is thus informed by awareness both of the plurality of contents and forms, which the 'idea of Europe' spawned over time, and of the analytical objections to treating '(Western) Europe' as an entity and a coherent unit of analysis.

It is, at the same time, easier to presume that just as the discourse of Balkanism has helped to shape the self-understanding of Europe, so too have Balkan perceptions of Europe shaped local narratives of collective cultural and social identity. Various, contested meanings of Europe have become facets of modern national self-consciousness: the identities of nations are inscribed in the identities of Europe and identities of Europe are inscribed in the identities of nations (Malmberg and Stråth, 2002: 9). In this endeavor, of course, the language of communication was that of the West. Knowledge about the Balkans, including the paradigms and fundamental concepts in which that knowledge was expressed, was not produced in the Balkans itself. Yet this helps us little in addressing the various 'self-constitutive strategies' chosen by the people of the region (and not imposed in a colonial manner) or the 'constitutive result' achieved. That is why in the following account the visions of the national and the European will be partially and analytically isolated from each other but always thought of in relation to each other.

In denying an essentialist understanding of (Western) Europe, we also deny the existence of a would-be monolithic, non-controversial center – or Other – in relation to which the Balkans or parts of it would have defined itself. First, the ideological power of ‘Europe’ was not the result of an ideological control or even interest on the part of the European center – the interest and the initiatives were, as a rule, one way, from the Balkans towards Europe, and indiscriminate. At the same time, on account of a number of cultural commonalities, the culture of the Russian ‘metropolis’ was at least as formative for the Balkan Slavic nations as that of Europe proper. The nature of the Russian civilizational matrix, however, was hybrid and competitive, torn between the Orthodox Slavdom and ‘Europe’ and marked by the rift between cultural uniqueness and cultural inferiority but also by receptiveness to Western models – a ‘metropolis’ projecting a civilizing mission into its own ‘barbarous zone’. The context of nineteenth-century Ottoman rule should also be taken seriously. National historiographies in the region, largely echoing the inherent problems of Europe’s self-narration vis-à-vis ‘Turkey-in-Europe’, have typically tended either to ignore the Ottoman contributions to the progressive changes of the time or to interpret Ottoman rule in a completely negative way, as hindering or delaying genuine assimilation into Europe. In this way, Balkan historiographies continue to replicate the opposition of the Ottoman to the European and, thereby, underestimate the impact of the modernizing reforms of the Ottoman Empire on the existing notions of modernity and Europe.

A historian must be careful not to generalize in this respect about the whole of the Balkan region. It is not possible to chart all the channels that have played a role in the process of transmission. This article should rather be seen as an initial attempt to map the major venues of acquiring informed and encompassing visions about ‘Europe’ and their articulation in the public space during the nineteenth century. Empirical data will be primarily drawn from the case of Bulgaria, even though I believe that some, if not all, of the conditions discussed below are applicable to other Balkan countries.

From Serbia to Bulgaria and, somewhat less conspicuously, Greece to Romania, in the nineteenth century, most of those who took part in nation-building and were disseminating knowledge about Europe acquired that knowledge in the educational institutions in the ‘periphery’ of Europe, not its center. This no doubt facilitated the assimilation of certain ‘lessons’ but also encoded, from the very start, certain formative conceptions as well as frustrations in the make-up of the local national cultures. The (semi-)peripheral transmitting cultures, moreover, were far from monolithic. The various intellectual or political trends they contained usually had varying degrees of interest or capacities to influence ‘smaller’ or ‘inferior’ cultures.

The Greek Mirror

Up 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 (Clarke, 1988: 178). To a large extent, the same was true of the Romanian late Enlightenment and early nationalist figures and sources (Tziovas, 2003: 4–5). Consequently, the Greek threat to Bulgarian and Romanian national identities, typically seen as acculturation into the Greek *ethnie*, is testified by the long-standing struggle against Greek cultural influence. The history of this struggle has been sufficiently well investigated from the point of view of the emergence of Balkan nationalisms. But there were several co-lateral effects of that encounter, which had a decisive impact on the relationship of the incipient Balkan national cultures, of Bulgaria in particular, with the outside world.

The Western discourse about the Balkans was not the only and, as far as its formative phase was concerned, not even the most important ‘symbolic center’ for Bulgarian national self-identity. At the gates of their modernity and before reformulating their ‘barbarity’ in the looking glass of ‘Europe’, Bulgarians were left to cope with a twofold stigma: a social one within the Ottoman hierarchy (coupled with a traumatizing collective memory) and a cultural one vis-à-vis the Greeks. It was not so much Greek cultural supremacy *per se* that annoyed the incipient Bulgarian nationalists, but rather their tendency to transform this supremacy into an essentialist register of ‘formative absences’ (of ‘high culture’, ‘glorious past’, ‘illustrious ancestors’) which later would be re-confirmed when they gazed at themselves in the mirror of Europe. The image of the simple and uncivilized Christian Slav peasant made its appearance in Greek writings at a time when the ethnonym ‘Bulgarian’ was still used in the ‘West’ in the parabolic sense of Voltaire’s *Candide* (Livanios, 2003: 71–7). One cannot fail to register the Western optics, through which the Balkan actors viewed each other: in the creation of Balkan stereotypes, at any rate, the West was not acting alone. What I wish to stress here, however, is that the collective stigma attached to the Bulgarians, the ‘incompleteness’ of a national self, did not primarily originate from an encounter with the West – it was only reconfigured by the West in the course of the Bulgarians’ modern national self-creation. This leads directly to the core of my argument – to the problem of the *agencies spreading knowledge about ‘Europe’*.

There was, at that time or later, little doubt about the key role of Greek schools and ‘sources’ in the spread of new ideas and discoveries of the modern age throughout the Ottoman Empire. Prior to their dissemination throughout the Balkans, however, the ideas and discoveries in question were filtered through ‘Greek’ selection and adaptation. Such transmissions not only influenced the recipient’s agenda. The very visions Bulgarians from the Revival period had of their national identity in the context of European civilization, albeit shaped in competition with the Greek ones, were largely modeled upon the Greek rather than the European pattern. This process of ‘defense through mimicry’, i.e. of mimetic generation of Bulgarian ideas through the appropriation of analogous Greek constructs, appears in a number of guises in the course of the nineteenth century. Most radical among them was Georgi Rakovski’s attempt to reinterpret thoroughly the established perception of center and periphery and ‘to [discredit] Europe as a civilizational super-authority and supermodel to the nations of the Modern Age’ (Nalbantova, 2005).

The Greek channel was likewise decisive in transmitting the earliest totalizing utopia and discourse of Europe as a synonym of rationality, knowledge and universalism. This utopia was predicated on a no doubt benevolent, enlightened-optimistic interpretation of Europe, which stressed the idea that 'Europe' was about becoming rather than being. Europe was thus not an inherited status so much as a something achieved through the spread of learning and reason, and the road to it was opened to any one individual, or any one nation, that could grasp and implement the 'principles of the Enlightenment'

From this perspective, both the model of and the ambiguities accompanying the construction of modern Greek identity acquire a special significance for the Bulgarians. For nineteenth-century Greeks, the most tangible and credible testimony to their cultural continuity was not classical antiquity, which was considered to be 'an alien and incomprehensible fiction', but instead the 'living tradition' of the Orthodox Church. These spiritual and cultural tensions had influence on Greek perceptions of Europe, and the representations of the European Otherness 'developed as a direct reflection of the blurred and contradictory image of Greece itself'. Significantly, the 'discursive opposition between the archetypes of Hellenes and Romans (*Romioi*), is conceptualized as a confrontation between two mutually exclusive modes of existence, and as a conflict between two incompatible normative universes' (Tsoukalas, 2002: 35–40; see also Herzfeld, 1982: 19–21).

This intellectual milieu nurtured – via schooling and printed texts – the first generation of Balkan (not only Bulgarian) 'enlighteners'-cum-nationalists. In the seminal debates of the time, which focused on language, ethnogenesis, and nationalization of the church, the Byzantine legacy and the tradition of Eastern Christianity became key reference points that marked the two ends of a single axis in the self-image and representation of European Otherness.

The spread of Western ideas through Greece had further impact. The prominent role of Russian culture in shaping the self-understanding of Bulgarians came neither from Russian expansionism nor from Western indifference; instead, it was above all the result of conscious, sustained and ultimately successful attempts on behalf of a section of the Bulgarian national leadership 'to debunk the ideology and the outlook of Hellenism' (Iotsov, [1929] 1992: 21) by laying all the stakes on Russian education, Russian support, Russian culture and cultural production. 'The Greek identity' of the emerging modern Bulgarian elite, as well as Greek 'Orientalism' with regard to Bulgarians, was dismantled not by Bulgarians themselves, but by Russian and Habsburg Slavacists: all the ingredients of the national self (medieval past, language, culture, folklore) became known to the world through the eyes of a foreign, benevolent yet controversial 'significant Other'.

Eastern and Western Slavism: 'Occident Express' or 'Slavic Messianism'?

This now takes us to the ambivalent role of Russia as a transmitter and occasionally source of the 'constitutive Gaze'. After 1838, Russia played a pre-eminent

role in the preparation of the Bulgarian revivalist intelligentsia; Russian-educated patriots dominated the movement for modern Bulgarian education and the 'learning' of the Slavo-Bulgarian past. In Russia, on the other hand, Slavophiles (and Pan-Slavs) with financial and organizational resources at their disposal took an intense interest in establishing 'cultural connections' with Russia's 'smaller brothers'; by contrast, Russian liberals remained fairly disinterested in such endeavors (Aretov, 2001: 46–7). Slavophilism and official Russian policy, furthermore, were in fundamental accord in seeking to prevent links between Balkan Christians, Slavs or non-Slavs alike, and the 'West'. These cultural, political and religious policies gave rise in the recipient Slavic cultures to often controversial attitudes towards the West – by themselves an interesting subject of comparative enquiry that still lies ahead of us.

The standard history of the Bulgarian revival, *The Ancient and Present Day Bulgarians in Their Political, Ethnographic, Historical and Religious Relations with the Russians* (1829) by the Ukrainian historian and Habsburg-trained Slavist Yuriy Venelin, illustrates some of the implications of this trajectory. Ever since the founding fathers of Slavic Studies and 'archeologists' of Slavic Europe, coming from Germany, Prague and Vienna, placed philology firmly at the center of the study of racial origins and history, the central problem of Slavic studies has focused on the role of the Cyrillic alphabet and 'Old Bulgarian'. These related subjects gave Bulgaria a key place in the world of European scholarship (Clarke, 1988: 99). But at the hands of the Pan-Slav historians of the nineteenth century, such as Venelin, the obsession with this issue had several regressive effects, such as bringing to Bulgaria the ideology of elected Slavdom. As regards Slavic civilization, Bulgaria became the classical reference point, just as Greece was with respect to European civilization. Through Venelin's exalted Pan-Slavism, Bulgarians first became acquainted with (German) Romanticism and (what happened to be, Bohemian) nationalism.

By around the mid-nineteenth century, European Romanticism had reached the Balkan (South) Slavs in a form already 'transformed and assimilated' by Western Slavs and supplied with a 'distinct patriotic tinge' (Penev, 1977: 132). The task of familiarizing the Bulgarians with the foundations of their Slavic and European cultural identity – a task taken up in the earlier period but committed mostly to Russian amateurs – came to be tackled in an authoritative manner by professional Western (Czech, Polish, Slovak and Slovenian) Slavists working within the confines of the Habsburg Empire. The cumulative effect of these developments was the forging of 'a Bulgarian "national philosophy" on a Slavic basis', verging on historical mysticism and 'some kind of Bulgarian messianism' (Iotsov, 1992 [1929]: 29). Very similar was the trajectory of Serbian Romantic Slavophilism taking up its claim 'to resurrect enfeebled humanity, replace the worn-out Latin and incomplete Germanic civilization, and found a great Slav empire of full, humane and ideal civilization' mainly from Czech and Slovak Pan-Slavs (Skerlić, 1925: 140, 8; Čolović, 2002: 90).

The relationship between Slavdom and Orthodoxy as a cultural counteraction to 'Europeanization' can only be broached here. Konstantin Leontiev's well-known

search for a symbiosis between Slavdom and Byzantium as an 'antidote against the illnesses of Europeanization' should not be summarily translated into judgments about the fundamental anti-Westernism of Russian culture. It should be recognized, however, that a considerable number of Bulgarians and Serbs saw Europe as being distinct from, often opposed to, Slavdom-and-Orthodoxy. 'Which sphere of spiritual influence do we belong to – the Slavic, the Russian or the European? And could we overcome this cultural Slavic-European dualism by seeking an organic synthesis?' (Iotsov, 1992 [1929]: 43). In the twentieth century, this question would keep nagging at the minds of Bulgarian and Serbian spiritual leaders, because it continued to be part of (the unresolved issue of) the identity of national culture and consciousness.

One has to be cautious with easy conclusions though: a Russian university diploma was not necessarily a seal of anti-Westernism, nor a Western one – of pro-Westernism. We may also recall the fact that it was during the Russian provisional administration of the two Romanian Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia that French became the language of the local nobility and 'enlightened constitutionalism' was for the first time introduced. My intention is to suggest that we are dealing here with a sort of 'double' peripheral optics, which makes permeability of knowledge between different peripheries much easier but which also ensures that this knowledge arrives in an already adapted, refracted, sometimes anachronistic form.

Slavism as 'Balkanism'

In an Orientalist perspective, the Russian, and more broadly speaking, the East-European Slavistic interest in the Balkans performs an essential yet paradoxical function. It is well known that Orientalism, or the West's discourse on the Orient, draws upon the history and the tradition of Western Oriental Studies. In other words, it rests on a lasting (pre-colonial and pre-modern) scholarly interest, on 'an influential academic tradition' for which 'the Orient is a specific kind of knowledge about specific places, peoples and civilizations' (Said, 1978: 203). A similar tradition of scholarly interest, let alone an influential resource of Western knowledge about the Balkans (or parts of them, with the exception of the peculiar case of Greece), does not exist. The problem of the Bulgarian looking for his image in the European mirror, unlike that of Said's 'Oriental', was that quite simply he was missing there: he was not part of European history, European science was not interested in him, to Europe he was a 'nobody'. That was an identity problem very different from the one that the Orient, distinguished by lengthy accumulation of erudite studies, was faced with. And, beyond any doubt, it was one that strongly affected both the Bulgarians' strategies for situating themselves in the world and their worldviews.

The original, arguably 'Orientalist' interest in the Bulgarians and the Serbs had Slavic rather than Balkan underpinnings and was largely generated by *dilettanti* historians. As for the specialized scholarly study of Slavic, and later of Balkan

cultures, histories and societies, tribute should be paid to the (pan-)Slavicists of 'Central' Europe, from Kollar and Kopitar to Jireček. Later, this line was followed by the first generations of native scholars, educated in Russia, Prague or Western Europe. Throughout the nineteenth century, concentration on the South-Slavic 'peoples and civilizations' in these two cultural centers, the Russian and the Central-European, which were marginal for the West but played a formative role for the Balkan Slavs, prevailed over interest in the Balkans as 'a specific space'. It is no surprise that the Bulgarian, as well as the Serb, should enter Europe with a Slavic cultural visa. From 1830s onwards, with rare exceptions, the source of Bulgarians' symbolic capital and valuable cultural gestures has been their Slavic-Orthodox belonging. This is the source the Bulgarians have tapped into for their productive inscription in the European civilizational matrix, and through it have they filtered their criteria of evaluating what they saw as 'their own' or 'alien'.

The status of 'Slavic Europe' was, of course, fundamental to the nature of this knowledge. According to Larry Wolff, the 'intellectual artifice' and the West's hegemonic discourse of the European East emerged during the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment (Wolff, 1994). In some recent analyses, the methodological premises of this view have been questioned and the temporal focus has been shifted to a much later period (Adamovsky, 2005; Confino, 1994; Dupcsik, 1999; Struck, 2005). What is interesting in this debate for me is whether there was a link between the Slavic Studies in the West and in the European East. In his recently published study on the emergence of the concept of 'Eastern Europe' in France, E. Adamovsky argues that until the 1840s the existence of such a thing as a Slavic world, as distinct from Romano-German Europe, was an abstract issue, occupying the minds of Herder's Romantic adepts, such as Madame de Staël, rather than those of researchers. The very idea of Eastern Europe, i.e. the notion that a Slavic world not only existed but was also Eastern or Oriental, began to gradually take shape around the 1820s but continued to co-exist with rival representations of geographical space. Until the end of the nineteenth century the concept drew on two intellectual contexts for its content – the liberal and the romantic (conservative as well as socialist). Significantly, whether it took on a positive or a pejorative connotation depended mostly on the political configurations, both domestic and international. Before at least the 1860s, in France 'there is nothing vaguely resembling a body of scholarship or 'experts on Eastern Europe'. There, as in the rest of non-Slavic Europe, one cannot speak about any institutionalization of Slavic studies before the second decade of the twentieth century (Adamovsky, 2005: 591–613).

This seems important in more than one respect. First, it shows that the Western discourse on Eastern Europe and that on the Balkans, without being identical, emerged simultaneously. The 'knowledge of a specific place', Said contends, following in Foucault's footsteps, possesses the power 'to dominate, restructure and exercise control' as long as it is incarnated in social practices and institutions, through which it gains consistency and the capacity to condition our worldviews. In other words, as long as this knowledge is authoritative and institutionalized, i.e. scientific. The fact that in the Bulgarian case the knowledge

in question came from a part of Europe which was itself undergoing a process of 're-evaluation' should be seen as further indication that the emergence of the Bulgarian in the eyes of Europe was not an altogether emancipating act. It was because of its academic authority that the gaze of Slavists and Slavophiles had such a formative yet, as it turned out, also ambiguous significance for the Bulgarians. Before that gaze Bulgarians appeared as, on the one hand, brothers-in-culture, perhaps forefathers, and in this sense fundamentally 'of the same kin'; on the other hand, they were culturally 'unsame', 'anomalously indefinable', semi-European and semi-Oriental, an internal other or incomplete self, as they typically appeared in the lens of Western Balkanism. Those who displayed love, sympathy and scholarly expertise in discovering the South Slavs for Europe, were the same who, by virtue of that same expertise, partook in the empowerment and crystallization of the Balkanist discourse. Evidence of this seemingly unusual combination is the work of Dr. Konstantin Jireček – a Slavist and a widely acknowledged authority on the history of Bulgaria and the Balkans, whose semi-Orientalizing analyses constructed in a most authoritative way the image of the Bulgarians for the rest of the Slavs and for the West (see Mishkova, 2006: 44–6).

The tradition of Slavism – so crucial to 'the discovery' of the Bulgarians by Europe – thus proved paradoxically capable of accommodating a shared, often exalted Slavic messianism and an Orientalist distance undermining the idea of a pan-European cultural belonging. However, both tendencies – romantic pan-Slavism and Slavic Balkanism – bore the marks of their 'East European' origin, either as a manifestation of cultural revenge on or as an act of identification with the liberal, not just epistemological (ethnocentric or Enlightenment) map of modernity.⁴ The reality of 'Slavic-European dualism' and the longing for 'an organic synthesis' between the Slavic and the European, both of which B. Yotsov defines as underlying Bulgarian culture in the twentieth century, are indications of the indelible imprint that the contradictions of this discovery have left on the Bulgarians' patterns of European self-identification and reception.

It should be clear by now that major elements of both the positive, often mimetic and hypertrophied, and the negative, 'Balkanized' Bulgarian (and Serbian) self-perception had been imported by foreign intellectuals, whose perspective was not that of the European center but that of the European periphery. The original symptoms and the 'sublimation' of cultural deficiency were evoked by the non-West. The latter's projections, drawing upon specialized knowledge, anticipated and later participated in the formation of the local perceptions of the West. Along with everything else, this comes to show that no unified 'Euro-Orientalism' – a homogeneous Western discourse on the Balkan East – existed. Nor did a single Balkan Occidentalism either.

Pro-Ottoman Europhilia

However paradoxical – again! – it might seem at first glance, the most ardent and unequivocally pro-Western patriots proved to be . . . the Turkophiles (the Uniates

came second). The case is worth noting, since it points to one more unusual medium for acquiring and spreading knowledge about the West. The *Turtsia* newspaper, a major forum of the Constantinople-based Bulgarian community, fervently advocated the modernization of Bulgarian society within the political framework of the Ottoman Empire and the cultural framework of the West.

Science and letters shine nowhere but in the West . . . Civilization is to be found nowhere but in Western Europe . . . Let us therefore turn to the light, let us walk to our civilizational salvation that will breathe new life in us and let us leave aside the dormant East that will bury us in its grave. (*Turtsia* 1869)

It is remarkable that this concept of the East as the polar opposite of the West entirely excluded the Ottoman Empire (but not Russia). It should be stressed, at the same time, that the 'Turcophiles' did not speak on behalf of an anti-nationalist 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.

This raises the broader issue of the Ottoman channels of access to and reception of 'Europe' – an issue generally overlooked by the national historiographies in the region. The neglect is no doubt functional in nationalist terms. From a non-national position, however, it is obvious how broad the zone of common key *topoi* between the Ottoman reformers and the Balkan nationalists was with their shared faith in progress, science and technology, education and knowledge. The generally professed belief that a 'new age' was dawning, an age of 'constant improvement and advancement', was first articulated by and became the underlying refrain of the official propaganda of the Ottoman *Tanzimat* reforms. Even those who did not identify this 'new age' with the benevolence and enlightenment of the Turkish sultan, were acculturated into the same *Zeitgeist*, marked by the *Tanzimat* Ottoman language about Europe and modernity.

Yet when weighed against the stridently propagated political positions of the prevailing radical currents of the national movement, this 'unnatural' symbiosis of 'Turkey' with the West must have done more harm than good to the latter's reputation. Uncritical or excessive Westernism, now largely equated with Turcophiles and Uniates, became an attribute of the opportunists, traitors, anti-nationals for those who wanted to see the destruction of the empire.

The Ottoman 'channel' looms large in yet another sense. The most important connection of the Balkans with general Western development was the one going through the Ottoman Empire, particularly via its disintegration – that is, through the *Eastern question*. It is well known that the Eastern question was as much Western as it was Eastern – not only in geopolitical terms, but also in terms of defining the forms of communication with the West and the channels of Western intervention thus fostering nationalism and modernity. However, its complexity unveils a rather ambiguous 'understanding of the West'. We can safely assume that the central interest of the West as regards the rest of the world was the interest of capitalism. But until the nineteenth century, capitalism was not a universal European phenomenon, but instead one firmly established in the westernmost

part only; moreover, not all great powers belonged to *that* West; yet even Russia was Western in relation to the Ottoman Empire. At any rate, capitalism is linked to rationalism while diplomacy, particularly that of the Eastern Question, is not necessarily so. The 'West' that emerged out of the amalgam of the Eastern Question, far from being an abstraction, was tangible and incoherent: one made up of individual actors as well as components that rarely agreed among themselves (Scopetea, 1991: 136–7).

The West of the Baptizers

It is difficult to exaggerate the scale and intensity of Catholic and Protestant missionary labor, which unfolded on the battlefield of school, text-book production and translations of holy texts – in short, in the fields of education and publication – across European Turkey, especially from the 1850s. As Cyrus Hamlin, the chief of the Methodist Board and founder of Robert College in Constantinople noted in 1856, 'The greatest contest which Protestantism has had with Rome since the era of the Reformation will doubtless be in Turkey' (Hall, 1938: 21).

Before the opening of the French lyceum in Galata-Saray in 1868, only two schools in the Ottoman Empire – the Protestant missionary Robert College and the Catholic missionary Bebek College – granted a secondary education recognized by the major European universities. Their attraction for the children of the most 'elevated' Balkan strata was also sustained by the well-known fact that none of the schools of the Christian subjects could offer a comparably systematic and creditable education. If we calculate the remarkable proportion of these schools' graduates among the Balkan intelligentsia and their even more remarkable share in Bulgarian leadership, we can understand why it is necessary to consider the implications of this 'West-informing' education.

The contribution of Protestant, American and British, missions in the preparation of 'modern' Balkan elites is well known. The translation of the Bible and many Anglo-Saxon textbooks into the 'modern Balkan vernaculars' (Greek, Armenian, Bulgarian), the beginnings of the 'modern' Balkan journalism, especially education and the supply of literature in 'modern disciplines' – all these major inputs of missionary work have long been recognized by protagonists and scholars alike. The Protestants possessed the widest foreign educational network ever established in the empire. Yet, we still know very little about the kind of 'modern' influence the Protestant missionaries and their institutions exercised, in particular of the kind of knowledge of the West, of Western values and institutions, they spread. Protestant missionary societies, much like the British Bible Societies, saw their work in the Balkans as a three-fold one: literary, educational and evangelistic. Yet, as William W. Hall has argued in his *Puritans in the Balkans*:

It should be borne in mind that publication and schools were both agencies of evangelism; and that publication and preaching were as much instruments of education as the operation of schools. The three aspects of missionary activity overlap and merge into one another. (1938: 6)

Eugene Weber 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 (Weber, 1976: 397). There is little doubt that the Protestant missionary Holy Cross traveled along with – if not exactly the American Dollar and Flag – at least American accessories, gadgets and inventions. 'The missionaries came to Bulgaria with their Bibles and sewing machines. Crowds of women, Bulgarian and Turkish, came to watch. Eventually, these machines were sold locally' (Clarke, 1988: 314). The amazingly syncretic way Protestants themselves looked on their 'missionary imperialism' is best expressed in the words of a contemporary enthusiast in 1881:

No contact with Western Civilization has ever roused the Oriental from his apathy, but when his heart is warmed into life by Gospel truth, his mind awakens, and he wants a clock, a book, a glass window, and a flour mill. Almost every steamer that leaves New York for the Levant brings sewing machines, watches, carpenter's tools, cabinet organs or other appliances of Christian civilization in response to native orders that never would have been sent but for the open Bible. (Clarke, 1988: 314–15)

The equation drawn between high technological standards, open-mindedness, religious freedom, civilization in general, on the one hand, and Protestantism, on the other, was no doubt a major part of the message that Protestant missionaries brought to the Balkans.

Where does this missionary story leave us? 'We don't know what to think', a leading Bulgarian revivalist wrote in unusual confusion: 'these same men who are supposed to have the last word about the moral and physical freedom of man' were preaching Evangelical ideas and sowed delusions instead of freeing the human mind and 'show[ing] us the true road that leads each nation to its happiness and betterment . . . Is it time now to preach scholastic dogmas . . . ?' (Karavelov, 1967: 117–18). A problem must have indeed existed: those to whom it fell to acquaint the East with the secular Western culture represented a stage in the Western cultural development, which in the West itself had been long and irreversibly lost (Scopetea, 1991: 137). So, the West but without rationalism?

America among the Bulgarians: Teachers, Students and Lessons

In many respects, the Protestant transmission brings into focus some contradictions and ambiguities similar to the ones already discussed which characterized the knowledge prevailing in the Bulgarian public milieu about the European and American 'West'. At the same time, since this transmission, unlike the Greek or the Slavic one, played a mostly indirect role in the formation of national identity, its closer examination could take us straight to answering the central question that concerns us here: from whom and what did Bulgarians know about 'the West' in the nineteenth century? In order to proceed with our quest for the answer, it seems imperative to make an important distinction: between the real, often unpremeditated effect of Protestant presence and innovations on the life of

Bulgarians, on the one hand, and the representations, often premeditated, of England and America, of English-ness (or European-ness) and American-ness in the public milieu.

All of the above-mentioned contributions of the Protestant missions in the sphere of (modern, including women's) education, literature, translation and publishing (especially for the needs of schools), served as a catalyst for the processes of modernization of Bulgarian society and laid the foundations of the positive reception of two Western cultures: the English and the American. Until then such reception was practically non-existent. The direct practical and institutional help that the missionaries provided for the Bulgarian national movement was recognized and praised by all 'awakeners of the nation'; it was this support that mostly accounted for the respect that Bulgarians felt for the Protestants.

Most highly esteemed among the Protestant institutions, which not only fostered affection for Anglo-Saxon intellectual and political culture but also promoted national self-awareness and a sense of national mission among its disciples, were Robert College and, for a shorter spell, the girls' teacher-training school in Stara Zagora. The disproportionately large participation of these schools' alumni, especially those of Robert College, in the politics, diplomacy, administration and culture of the young Bulgarian state is a well-known fact. What distinguished and brought to the fore this relatively small group of alumni of the various Protestant institutions was their corporatist spirit and their confidence that they were tailored differently, that they thought differently, behaved differently, that they were the elite.

Not all contributions, however, were deliberately pursued. The democratic provisions underlying the Statute of the newly founded Bulgarian Exarchate (1870) were considered, then and later, as being affected by the liberal-Protestant views. Even more telling are the constructive manifestations of 'defense through mimicry' which the Protestants inspired. Examples in point are the girls' teacher-training school, which the Bulgarian municipality in Stara Zagora opened in 1863 in response to the Protestant one, or the Women's Association – the first public organization fighting for equal access of women to education. It would not be an overstatement to say that, on the whole, the movement for women's rights was inspired by the Anglo-Saxon Protestant model of the educated woman which was 're-contextualized to serve the national cause as a narrative of progress and modernity' (Reeves-Ellington, 2004: 165–6). On many other occasions of contact of Anglo-Saxon models with the local environment appropriations underwent similar 're-contextualizations' and re-definitions.

There were finally some sides to the missionaries' activity which repelled the Bulgarians. Most discouraging and insurmountable proved the incompatibility of the Reform with the principles of ethnicity: 'How could you be at the same time a Protestant and a Bulgarian to them [the Bulgarians] seems inconceivable', one missionary bitterly concluded in 1870 (Angelova, 2004: 105). Fears of the 'deadly virus' of proselytism were interwoven with the insult to a fragile cultural self-esteem: the Protestants preached, one teacher wrote, 'as if Bulgarians were downright savage and primitive like their African slaves' (Stefanov, 2004: 41).

The association of missionary propaganda with the colonizing of the 'savage slaves' proved enduring and invariably caused resentment.

On the other hand, on the level of representations one can distinguish between two general attitudes. One was intentionally didactic, often mentoring, and utopian. It pursued, so to speak, a constructive national goal: it was not the plausible description or the true dimensions of American experience that mattered in this case. What mattered was the ability of that experience to generate models and utopias which were deemed fundamental to the moral and civic education of Bulgarians as well as to their instruction in the virtues of national statehood. This accounted for the numerous translations and editions of Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* with its utilitarian moral recipe for success in life. This also accounted for the abiding interest in the American system – political, social, educational, and religious – of many eminent Bulgarian revolutionaries or reformers. The possibility they saw in the American model to verify the applicability of 'the most progressive', 'the most democratic' and 'the most righteous' principles, served to illustrate their own utopias of a harmonious society. It was not so much the familiarity with American life, but rather the fixation on a particular social perspective and the desire to focus all social energies on it, that triggered the vision of the American ideal. But along with the utopian there was also another type of representations of America – pragmatic, detached, at times critical – which was often the product of the same national ideologues. Here the didactic principle was retained but in inverted form. The moral hierarchy was at times fully reshuffled: universal, humane and noble values were associated with the 'wild Americans', whereas the 'tame Europeans' were identified with aggression, greed, moral deficiency and inhumanity. (Gaida, 1865).

What brings these seemingly conflicting images together is the conspicuously 'self-mirroring' nature of local, not only Bulgarian, national cultures: the harnessing of foreign ideas and facts for the illustration of native realities in pursuit of immediate aspirations and fears, for the sake of one specific objective or another. This politics of representation makes the reception functional, but also distorts beyond recognition the image of the foreign cultural import.

Conclusion

I will now try to summarize the part of my research presented here. By and large, few would question the constitutive significance of 'the gaze of the Other' for any small culture seeking its identity. But of course, there is a heuristic deficiency to such sweeping generalizations. Because in actuality there exist many different gazes and many different (smaller and larger) Others, which often are in conflict with one another. Presupposing that there was one unified Orientalist vision and Balkanist discourse would be as unfounded as the hypothesis of a single Balkan Occidentalism. On the contrary, the multi-faceted and controversial Western intervention led to constructing – already at its entrance – distorted and incoherent images through which the West became familiar in the Balkans. Rather than

witnessing a direct impact of 'the centers of the spiritual vanguard' upon the 'territories of cultural vacuum' (Genchev, 2003: I, 559) or, conversely, of an increasingly hardening Balkanist discourse as 'a Western style of dominating, restructuring and having authority' over the Balkans (Said, 1978: 3; Todorova, 1997: 7–20, *passim*), we can discern a number of different, often conflicting but certainly formative re-translations of the images of Europe. Later on, these images came to be further re-shaped and re-modeled by local agents and by the socio-cultural dynamics of the local environment.

This is why, instead of accepting 'the concept of Europe' as a legitimate category of analysis, we had better ask ourselves who has resorted to this concept, when, for what purposes and with what results. To conceive of the existence of an invariable symbolic map of Europe and its 'Orient' from the Enlightenment to this day, would be an entertaining but a-historical intellectual endeavor. To ignore the differences in socio-cultural contexts, in the key interests, the national, class and religious identity of those who forged the Balkan images of Europe can hardly help us in our quest to understand their dynamics and changes. 'Euro-Orientalisms' can undoubtedly help us to untangle the civilizational coordinates of the map of Europe, but manipulations with that map are often subject to local conditions and objectives, often not linked to the relations with the West.

An objection might be made that, however faithful this anatomy of the conception of Europe, it cannot explain the need for and the self-perpetuation of a normative, utopian or dystopian, notion of Europe. Indeed, it seems to be one thing to interrogate 'empirical' knowledges about Europe yielding a variety of images but quite another to assume 'Europe' as an ideology producing its own normative images. From my perspective, however, this question makes little sense. Theoretically so, in the first place, considering the actual dependence of ideology on knowledge. On the level of communication, *various meanings* of Europe have served to inform and legitimate elite discourse about the organization of society and set the agenda for debate. In view of this role, they come to be appropriated by different social groups and used as a weapon in their opposing one other. It would not be hard to imagine, for instance, how in the first half of the 1980s one could have written a well-documented book on how the West invented an aggressive and menacing Eastern Europe rather than a backward and traumatized one (Dupcsik, 1999: 13–14). As Wendy Bracewell puts it in her study on the Balkan travel writings on Europe:

The point is that the Occidentalisms generated in the West and in the Balkans' have been comparable, in terms of the range and diversity of form and of value attributed to the notion of 'the West' as much as in terms of the content of the idea. What is at stake may differ – authority over others at home, rather than colonial or imperialist power? – but in the end, what is important in determining their shape is the particular political context that these representations are embedded in. (Bracewell, 2005)

On the level of normative ideology, on the other hand, for the last three centuries the meaning of 'Europe' has been coextensive with modernity – with the *idea of Europe* as a symbol of cultural superiority and power; on this level of abstraction,

and on it alone, 'Europe' proved capable of assimilating and withstanding the sweeping changes of the modern era. This has at least two important consequences. First, we have to acknowledge the inherent controversy between these two levels in order to be able to account for the constant revision, renegotiation and reformulation of the episteme of 'Europe', both in the 'West' and in the 'East'. Second, and more importantly, it invites us to return to the question of the origin of the constituting power of these (self-)representations after we have already named the processes and the agents that have made such 'empowerment' possible.

Hence my interest is focused on how concepts about 'us' and the 'other', our cultural and social visions were historically mediated by concepts of Europe. Issues of cultural transfer form only a point of departure in terms of my on-going quest in this direction. My long-term purpose has been to indicate that Balkan visions of Europe cannot be understood as simply mirroring the imagination of the Western hegemonic discourse about the Balkans. In order to understand these visions, more attention needs to be paid to local dynamics in the production of ideologies and self-narrations. This means that one must also come to an historical understanding of the regional discourses of identity. That would, by the same token, reinstate the Balkans as a legitimate field of study and reveal its theoretical potential. My aim therefore is to decouple Western representations from the local production of ideologies and images. Interaction between them was no doubt long-standing and intensive yet it implied more than internalizing and resisting Western hegemonic discourse and superior power. In this process the normative, symbolic, encoded – in short, the ideological – function of *Europe* is significant and evident, however, only as a metaphor of modernity rather than by virtue of an ideological semantics of its own. Thus reframed, the central question moves us away from the study of stigmatic Balkanist self-images towards comparative historical reconstruction of the projects of modernization in the Balkans and of the diverse intellectual responses given to them.

In terms of access to knowledge of Europe, the case of the Bulgarians was perhaps extreme since direct contact was limited. An extreme case, yes, but not at all exceptional: for the rest of the Balkans, for most of the century, access to Europe was also largely mediated, each Balkan country having its Greeks, Russians, and Protestants; its well-trained Slavists as well. My survey of the 'agents of transmission' has been no doubt partial in terms of range and selective in terms of national cases. The deeper implications of each of these 'refractions' still await further careful investigation. My goal here was to suggest a perspective and indicate some of its ramifications, rather than to apply it in any comprehensive way – in the hope, however, that, with appropriate adjustments, it can be found to be applicable to other cases in the Balkans and beyond.

Notes

- 1 For a critical reading of the so-called 'mental maps' of the Balkans, see more specifically, Bracewell and Drace-Francis (1999); Todorova (2002; 2005).
- 2 An example of such trivializing identification of 'real' with 'literary' colonization comes in Goldsworthy (1998).
- 3 My understanding of 'Occidentalism' is broader than that of Ian Buruma and Avishay Margalit (Buruma and Margalit, 2004) for whom it represents 'a set of views, prejudiced opinions, hostility and misconceptions of Western civilization on the part of non-Western nations'. Ideally, I would seek to explore the Balkan perspective on the West and its civilization not (only) in the sense of stereotyped perceptions and applications, but above all as a contextualized debate on modernity and society; a debate that would take into account pragmatic and empirical as well as utopian and anti-utopian components.
- 4 On the adoption of an Orientalist discourse on the Romanian principalities on behalf of imperial Russia which itself was the object of a semi-Orientalistic discourse of Eastern Europe, see Taki (2005).

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