



# Images of the Balkans

The 'Balkans' in Western Thought

Analysis of the stereotypical constructions referring to the term

The 'Balkans' as a unity in the European Imaginary

Second Lesson

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# Stereotypical constructions regarding the Balkans

- Who created those stereotypes? Why?
- Are some of those constructions referring also to Greece?
- **Period of interest:** From the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the modern times
- Main historical phases- *Independence from the Ottoman Empire, Balkan Wars, Socialist Balkans, The Fall of Communism*
- Each of these periods brought corresponding images and stereotypes

# The 'Balkans' in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Travel Literature- The search for new and interesting landscapes

The narration as a construction and the reader's interesting

Narrations emphasizing danger

The Balkans and the connection with violence- A construction or a reality?

# The Balkans in the Western culture (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century)

- Intense ethnic diversity
- Isolation/ deep ethnic differences
- Violence, ignorance and superstitions
- The gradual creation of the '**Balkan myth**'- an ideologically charged discourse
- The Balkans as '**terra incognita**' in the 17<sup>th</sup> century
- The discovery of the Balkans and the emergence of stereotypic discourses
- These constructions led to the separation of the Balkans from Western Europe (at an imaginary and not only level)

# The Balkans in the Western culture (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century)

- The Balkan myth was associated with specific constructions, such as hostility and intrigue
- Negative connotations of the Term- primitivism, brutality, belief in superstitions, religiosity, harsh Nationalism, savagery
- **Which was the results of such stereotypical constructions?**
- These connotations formed a specific frame of reference to the South-Eastern Europe
- They also created the picture of the '**European Other**' (inside the European territory, but confused elements of identity)

# The Balkans in the Western culture (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century)



*Le Vampire. Lithographie de R. de Moraine, tirée des Étrangers secrets.*



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# The Balkans in the Western culture (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century)

- The depictions of the Balkans in the Western description of the Balkans in Western culture has not been only negative
- Vital elements: the **romantic depiction of the irredentist movements** of the 19th century (the Western traveler enters a world of "*romantic and patriotic heroes*")
- The Western travelers' curiosity about **exotic tribes** with unusual costumes led **to the idealization of the bandit and poor way of life in the Balkans**
- **The admiration for heroism and the need for freedom** are familiar literary themes in European literary or travel texts of the period.
- Within these, movements such as philhellenism arose
- **These representations might have a similar result to the European phantasy as the negative ones—Why?**



# The Balkans in the Western culture (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century)





# The Balkan Wars and Europe

- Balkans and the notion of 'de facto' **violence**
- The Balkan Wars as '**the first step of War World I**'
- Connecting the Peninsula with **instability** and **fragmentation**
- The term '*Balkanization*'



# The modern era- The communist Balkans

- The establishment of the **communist regimes**
- The **isolationism from the West** and the image of the '**Dark Other**'
- The **European periphery** and Communism
- Constructing the '**Communist Other**'
- Old stereotypes re-emerge in contemporary forms
- Balkans, **barbarism**, **Western intervention**, need for **modernization** and the '**bridge linking East and West**'
- The Balkans have gradually, over the last two centuries at least, been *discovered* and *established* as the 'Other' within European borders
- At the same time they have often served as **the mirror of civilized Europe**
- **The image of the Balkans as the 'younger self of the West'**

# The modern era- The communist Balkans

- The establishment **in the Western imagination as the periphery of the European space**, which without the sincere interest of the West 'can achieve nothing'.
- The region became synonymous with **backwardness**
- These **neologisms** (such as balkanization) were steps towards a further **isolation** of the Balkans
- How did Communism act?: the creation of the Communism Other
- The image of Greece as 'the only western country in the West'
- The creation of a **new East** (Poland, Soviet Union and the Communist Balkans)

# The communist regimes



# The post-communist Balkans

- Former *Yugoslavia* and the emerged states
- The **Civil War** between the Serbs and the Croats
- The seek for **modernization** in Romania, Albania and Bulgaria
- The role of the **European Union**
- The international community and the '**different**' Balkans: *violence, war, primitivism, nationalism, political and economic instability*
- The Balkans once again in the historical scene
- **The readers' interesting**
- *Journalistic descriptions, articles, memoirs, travel literature, novels, academic and historical researches*



# The post-communist Balkans

- Stereotypes about the Balkans in the contemporary era
- **Are the Balkans European states?**
- **European integration** as the only solution towards democratization
- Political stability, economic stability and the E.U.- A pattern to analyze

# The West Word over the Balkans

It is only when **they go abroad for their education, don black coats and a thin veneer of progress**, that they invite criticism. They are not **ripe for the blessings of democracy** (such as they are), and much ***painful experience*** will be necessary to prepare them. I do not say they cannot undergo the preparation, but I **do not wish to see them in the process**. I prefer to remember them as I have known them—**admirable survivors of the age of chivalry**

Herbert Vivian

# The West Word over the Balkans: savagery, ethnic diversity and racial purity

It is an **intolerable affront to human and political nature** that these **wretched and unhappy little countries** in the Balkan peninsula can, and do, **have quarrels that cause world wars**. Some hundred and fifty thousand young Americans died because of an event in 1914 in a **mud-caked primitive village**, Sarajevo. Loathsome and almost obscene snarls in Balkan politics, hardly intelligible to a Western reader, are still vital to the peace of Europe, and perhaps the world

John Gunther, *Inside Europe*

Being **essentially cross-bred, the Macedonian is hardly distinguished for his physique**. . . . The Turks are perhaps the best physical specimens of the various Macedonian types, probably because they have **indulged in less cross-breeding**. . . . Turkish women, when not interbred to any pronounced extent, are generally attractive, but those **of Bulgar or Greek extraction usually have broad and very coarse features of the Slav type**. Such features, **comprising thick lips, broad flat noses and high cheek-bones, scarcely conduce to beauty in a woman**. Darkish hair with yellowish brown complexions cause them to resemble the Greek type, which is invariably sallow, **with jet black hair and luminous eyes**.

Text of British Travelers through the Balkan Peninsula, 1921



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