Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia

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> The reputation, name, and appearance, the usual measure and weight of a thing, what it counts for—originally almost always wrong and arbitrary,—all this grows from generation unto generation, merely because people believe in it, until it gradually grows to be a part of the thing and turns into its very body. What at first was appearance becomes in the end, almost invariably, the essence and is effective as such.
>
> Friedreich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, II.58

This paper introduces the notion of "nesting orientalisms" to investigate some of the complexity of the east/west dichotomy which has underlain scholarship on "Orientalism" since the publication of Said's classic polemic,[1] a discourse in which "East," like "West," is much more of a project than a place.[2] While geographical boundaries of the "Orient" shifted throughout history, the concept of "Orient" as "other" has remained more or less unchanged. Moreover, cultures and ideologies tacitly presuppose the valorized dichotomy between east and west, and have incorporated various "essences" into the patterns of representation used to describe them. Implied by this essentialism is that humans and their social or cultural institutions are "governed by determinate natures that inhere in them in the same way that they are supposed to inhere in the entities of the natural world."[3] Thus, eastern Europe has been commonly associated with "backwardness," the Balkans with "violence," India with "idealism" or "mysticism," while the west has identified itself consistently with the "civilized world." But "backwardness," as Larry Wolff shows, has not just been a benign metaphor confined to the first travel diaries of the westerners into the area that the Enlightenment mapped as eastern Europe; it has also been a constitutive metaphor in the social-scientific language of influential philoso-

1. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

2. Cf. Edouard Glissant's remark that "[t]he West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place," quoted in Daniel A. Segal and Richard Handler, "How European is Nationalism?" *Social Analysis* 32 (December 1992): 1–15.

3. Ronald Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 2.

phers and writers of the time, such as Montesquieu, Voltaire and Rousseau.[4]

While there are many overlapping images of "the Orient" or "the East" as "other,"[5] I will focus on that which designates the Balkan lands of Ottoman-ruled Europe. The gradation of "Orients" that I call "nesting orientalisms" is a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised. In this pattern, Asia is more "East" or "other" than eastern Europe; within eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most "eastern"; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies. I argue that the terms of definition of such a dichotomous model eventually establish conditions for its own contradiction.

As concerns the Balkans, Rebecca West may not be alone in admitting that "[v]iolence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans: all I knew of the South Slavs,"[6] for violence in the Balkans has been not only a description of a social condition but considered inherent in the nature of its people. There, grievances "passed down through generations return . . . to encircle the Balkans and hold the area in the grip of violence."[7] As for the notion of "civilized world," self-attributed by the west to its "Selves" during the Enlightenment,[8] it may be noted that it indirectly defined itself in opposition to each of the illustrations above: in respect to the "backwardness" of eastern Europe, there stands the "progress" of the west; in respect to the "violence" of the Balkans, there stands the "civility" of the west; in respect to the "dreamy imagination" of India,[9] there stands "rationality" of the west, and so on. This tendency to essentialize, to isolate features of a group or of a society's thought and practice makes those features seem as unchanging and, more importantly, "as quintessential to the group and especially true

4. See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), especially chaps. v and vi, on "Voltaire's Russia" and "Rousseau's Poland."

5. Inden, 49–51.

6. Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia* (New York: Penguin, 1982 [1941]), 21.

7. Roger Cohen, "A Balkan Gyre of War, Spinning Onto Film," *The New York Times* (12 March 1995): B-1.

8. The notion of "civilization," an eighteenth-century neologism, was itself a product of the Enlightenment, which needed a complementary term to define itself against and found it in the backwardness, even barbarism, of eastern European lands (see Wolff, *Eastern Europe*, 4).

From the Balkan perspective, it was during that same period that "the image of 'enlightened Europe' replaced the hostile image of the 'Latin West' which had designated 'the other' to traditional milieus in the Balkan area," so that what had been for their predecessors the "Catholic" west now became "civilized" Europe. See Alexandru Duţu, "Small Countries and Persistent Stereotypes," *Révue des études sud-est européennes* (Academie Roumaine) xxxi, nos. 1–2 (1993):5–10;

9. Hegel diagnosed India to have only "an Idealism of imagination, without distinct conceptions," in which the philosopher's Absolute Being lives "in the ecstatic state of a dreaming condition." (see G.F.W. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree [New York: Dover, 1956], 139).

of that group in contrast with the other groups."[10] Implicit assumptions about the "primordial qualities" of different peoples, stemming from varied "essences" attached to them, often rationalize the "fate of nations"[11] and have particularly unfortunate implications when interwoven with nationalist ideologies.

An almost comic journalistic example may illustrate this point. *The New York Times*, in an editorial in 1903[12] discussing the assassinations of Serbian King Aleksandar Obrenović and his wife Draga, focused on the fact that they had been thrown from a window of their palace and pointed out to readers (who were presumed to know very little about that part of the world) that

> undoubtedly there is something in the Slavic nature which predisposes those of Slav blood to throw open a window, and in a liberal spirit and with a large gesture invite an enemy to become an angel without further preparation or a flying machine. The reason must be sought in the ancestral habits of Russians, Poles, Servians, Sorbs, Polabians, Croats, Cassules, Wends, Lusatians, and other stripes and variations of the type. They were forest-dwelling tribes living in square-built log houses . . .

The opening of the window and throwing one's enemy out, claims this newspaper, "is a racial characteristic" which is contrasted to those of other Europeans: "As the bold Briton knocks his enemy down with his fists, as the southern Frenchmen lays his foe prostrate with a scientific kick of the savate, as the Italian uses his knife and the German the handy beermug, so the Bohemian and Servian 'chucks' his enemy out of the window." However, since this phenomenon "is not unknown even in England, [there] it may be attributed to a primitive Slavic strain."[13]

It may be worthwhile to note that recent south Asian scholarship indicates that "orientalist" discourse has predominated over other dis-

10. Arjun Appadurai, "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place" *Cultural Anthropology* (February 1988): 40–41.

11. Among the German philosophers, Hegel plays a special role in articulating imperial knowledge of the Orient as Other. He claimed, for example, that "it is necessary fate of Asiatic Empires to be subjected to Europeans," just as it was the fate of "the rotten edifice of the Eastern Empire" to crumble in pieces "before the might of the vigorous Turks" (*Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree [New York: Willey Book Co., 1944], 142, 340).

12. "Out of the Window," *The New York Times* (24 June 1903): 8.

13. Some more recent writings have gone even further in seeing the influence of this "primitive Slavic strain" when claiming that it was actually proximity "to the southern Slavic world," "a breeding ground of ethnic resentments," that taught Hitler how to hate so infectiously. Thus spoke Robert Kaplan, the author of the book with the presumptuous title *Balkan Ghosts* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), xxiii. In a similar mode, ABC network presented a program in November 1993 devoted to the war in the former Yugoslavia, with the TV anchor, Peter Jennings, heroically walking on the map of the war-torn country, depicted in the title of the program as "The Land of Demons."

courses, including nationalist ones, even among south Asians themselves. Thus Indian national and political leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru are now seen to have created a *derivative* type of discourse: even their nationalist ideas are said to have developed within the same epistemology which assumes uncritically the essential and unchanging distinction between "East" and "West." And even when nationalist discourse defensively reverses the hierarchy favoring the west, it nonetheless remains within the same conceptual framework designated as "Orientalism."[14] Analyses such as these, which attempt to correct the epistemological centrism of western scholarship, may bring fresh understanding of the most recent intertwining of nationalist and "orientalist" discourses that we see within the emerging postcommunist societies of eastern Europe, the Balkans and the former Soviet Union in particular.

It has been suggested recently by Maria Todorova that "Balkanism" can be posited as an independent and specific rhetorical paradigm, not "merely a sub-species of orientalism," for the part of Europe that was under Ottoman rule.[15] Todorova shows that balkanism independently developed a rhetorical arsenal of its own via its specific geo-political, religious and cultural position, best epitomized in a travelogue of the late 1920s as a "'wavering form', a composite of Easterner and Westerner . . . no longer Orientals nor yet Europeans."[16] This particular, often derogatory perception of a region and its peoples blurs the categories of "East" and "West," and calls for an approach that addresses the specific issues that stem from such a liminal position.[17] Indeed, many Balkan self-identities have been constructed in direct opposition to an *actual* oriental other, i.e., the Ottoman Turks who conquered the region from the east. On the other hand, as "Byzantine," they have already been perceived by the European countries to the west as European "other."

While it is important to recognize the specific rhetoric of balkanism, however, it would be difficult to understand it outside the overall orientalist context since it shares an underlying logic and rhetoric with orientalism. Balkanism can indeed be viewed as a "variation on the orientalist theme"[18] that distinguishes the Balkans as a part of Europe

14. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1986] 1993); Ronald Inden, *op. cit.*

15. Maria Todorova, "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," *Slavic Review* 53, no 2. (Summer 1994): 454.

16. See Todorova, 476. It is interesting that as early as the thirteenth century the first Serbian Patriarch, St. Sava, expressed the same condition of being in between but not in terms of "*neither* East-*nor* West" but "the East on the West" *and* "the West on the East" (see epigraph to Milica Bakic-Hayden and Robert M. Hayden, "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics," *Slavic Review* 51, no 1 (Spring 1992): 1.

17. The frequent perception of impurity in phenomena that blur categories is elaborated by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966).

18. Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 1–15.

that used to be under Ottoman, hence oriental, rule and, as such, different from Europe "proper." The project which Larry Wolff calls "Inventing Eastern Europe" also has points of convergence with both orientalism and balkanism. "One might describe the invention of Eastern Europe," writes Wolff, "as an intellectual project of demi-Orientalization."[19] Indeed, much of the imagery that Wolff and Todorova analyze in the writings of westerners traveling through the European east is used to describe Asian lands. The pervasive images of India, for instance, associate it with female submissiveness, conquerableness, dreamlike or infantile thought, and lack of reason,[20] highly reminiscent of eighteenth-century depictions of eastern Europe (Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau).[21] Whether depicting Bohemia, Poland and Russia, or Hungary, Wallachia, Bulgaria or Serbia, eighteenth-century travelers agreed that these otherwise little known regions were desolate places, engulfed with poverty and misery. They were populated by peoples of "extreme sensibility, unsubdued or ungoverned by reason" some of whom even "resemble Asiatics rather than Europeans," if not in their general appearance then certainly by their serfdom and subjugation.[22] The resemblance of such places to familiar colonial sites did not escape the observant eye of western travelers bent on "objectivity" as an Enlightenment ideal of representation. Accordingly, in his travel account from 1722 Joseph Marshall found the position of Russian peasants to be "near on the same rank as the blacks in our sugar colonies."[23] (Interesting here is not only the comparison itself but one that is lacking: Marshall selectively perceived only the cruelty of Russian despotic rule.)

The division between the western and eastern Christian churches resulted in a bifocal perception of Europe—with western European and Byzantine lenses in the same geographic frame. With the Ottoman expansion, roughly coinciding with the previous Byzantine world, this geography was redefined to distinguish between Europe "proper" from "oriental" Europe. During the first decades of this century, with the dissolution of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, this division might have ceased to apply, but soon a new, secular breach ("western democracies" and "communist East") occurred in Europe after World War II. Almost half a century later it, too, was symbolically erased with the tearing down of the Berlin wall.

An important facet of western scholarship on the east (European or Asian) is that it perpetuates perceptions based on westerners' voluntary presence there, in capacities varying from travelers to colonial/imperial administrators. In sharp contrast, Balkan images of the oriental "other," the Ottoman Turk, result historically from the imposed

19. Wolff, 7.

20. Inden, 1–47.

21. See Wolff, especially the first three chapters on "Entering," "Possessing" and "Imagining Eastern Europe."

22. *Ibid.*, 86–87, 29.

23. Quoted in Wolff, 81.

presence of the latter. By pointing to the legacy of Asian "imperial formations" in southeastern Europe, this particular aspect of balkanism does not pertain to images of the Balkan peoples imposed from outside and may elucidate the changing roles of such identities as "European" in relation to "Asian" and western Europe in relation to the Balkans.[24]

The phenomenon of nesting orientalisms is evident in the former Yugoslavia and its successor states where the designation of "other" has been appropriated and manipulated by those who have themselves been designated as such in orientalist discourse. Thus, while Europe as a whole has disparaged not only the orient "proper" but also the parts of Europe that were under oriental Ottoman rule, Yugoslavs who reside in areas that were formerly the Habsburg monarchy distinguish themselves from those in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, hence "improper." Within the latter area, eastern Orthodox peoples perceive themselves as more European than those who assumed identities of European Muslims and who further distinguish themselves from the ultimate orientals, non-Europeans.

Indeed, former Yugoslavia offers a disquieting example of the implications of the redeployment of old dividing lines and the construction of new political identities. Yugoslav peoples have not only questioned their common-identity-through-common-communist-state but, led by their political and intellectual elites, have also embarked on restoring "original" identities that predated the common state.[25] Essences embedded in the division of Europe predating the constitution of the Yugoslav state in 1918 have thus resurfaced, becoming an integral part of public discourse which has taken place against the background of the prospective unification of Europe. One striking characteristic of this national self-examination and inter-ethnic reexamination has been total disregard for the diachronic dimension of past events. That is, the whole of history of these peoples, whether common or individual, has become simultaneous and idealized. To paraphrase Bakhtin,[26] they have ignored the presentness of the present and

24. The ambiguous image of Europe among many Balkan peoples has been variously addressed. See, for example, Katherine Verdery, "Is Romania in Europe? Interstitial Elites and the Politics of Identity" (paper presented in the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Phoenix, AZ, November 1988); Alexandru Duțu, 5–10; Susan Gal, "Bartok's Funeral: Representations of Europe in Hungarian Political Rhetoric," *American Ethnologist* 18, no. 3 (1991):440–58.

25. This emphasis on links between ethnic and cultural nationalisms and precommunist identities directly challenges modernist views of the origins of nationalism in the social and religious reform movements of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. See, for example, Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

26. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, [1981] 1993), 14.

pastness of the past, creating a kind of "primeval present of the *Volk*,"[27] with heroes from remote history either identified or appearing side by side with those of more recent and contemporary history.[28] Whether for Croats and Slovenes the past coincides with the Austro-Hungarian monarchy or earlier, or the time before 1918 when Serbia was an independent kingdom (to say nothing of the "glory" of Serbian pre-Ottoman times), or the advantages of the Ottoman Empire for the Muslims, does not matter. The implication is that the "real" identity of persons or groups is to be found in the pre-Yugoslav past. Another striking feature of this process has been a characterization of the national "other" in, for the most part, reductionist terms and simple conceptions juxtaposed to a complexity of self-characterization. What constitutes "real" identity in this context and is most often invoked, both in domestic debates and foreign reports, are the religious/cultural "essences." Some foreign reporters, for example, have made a distinction between the peoples of (then) officially atheistic and communist Yugoslavia, in which religious affiliation tended to be repressed, now converted into "industrious Roman Catholic Slavs," and those who are either "for the most part Eastern Orthodox" or "Muslim."[29]

These seemingly benign religious designations of the peoples involved subsequently have gained additional significance as an explanation for the country's dramatic disintegration,[30] which has derived much of its dynamism from the prospect of an united Europe. United, indeed, but with whom? Who qualifies as European? The latter question is manifest in the former Yugoslavia as tension between the "cen-

27. See Homi K. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1.

28. This was particularly prominent in the Serbian political scene where the leader of the largest opposition party (Serbian Renewal Party), Vuk Drasković, was often characterized in the official media so as to directly evoke Vuk Branković, a legendary "traitor" of the fourteenth-century battle of Kosovo.

The international recognition of Croatia's independence in January 1992 has been depicted in the popular media as the final restoration of Croatian statehood after the nine-hundred-year curse by King Zvonimir, the first Croatian king recognized by the Papacy (murdered in 1089), and with a special place in national history as "the last Croatian king" (see Ivo Žanić, "The Curse of King Zvonimir and Political Discourse in Embattled Croatia," *East European Politics and Society* 9, no. 1 [Winter 1995]: 90–123).

29. *The New York Times* (6 April 1990):A-8. More recently, an editorial has suggested that the US should appeal "to predominantly Roman Catholic Croatia's longstanding desire to extricate itself from Balkan conflicts and associate itself more closely with the West" ("Balkan Brinkmanship," *The New York Times* [10 March 1995]: A-28).

30. The Romanian scholar Alexandru Dutu notes: "[w]e hear even nowadays that what explains dramatic conflicts, like the one in the former Yugoslavia, is the difference between "catholic" and "orthodox" Europe, as if atrocities were inspired by piety: but who has the patience to study the transformation of religious attitudes into political violence?" ("Small Countries," 7).

On the relationship between religion and nationalism in eastern Europe, see Anthony Ugolnik, "Living at the Borders: Eastern Orthodoxy and World Disorder," *First Things* (June/July 1993):15–23; Elisabeth Prodromou, "Toward an Understanding of Eastern Orthodoxy and Democracy Building in the Post-Cold War Balkans," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 115–38.

ter," or western Europe, and the periphery, which is the remainder of Europe. In the 1980s the geographical proximity to this "center" was perceived as preferable to locations further away and under spheres of influence other than western European. Thus, from the standpoint of the "northern republics,"[31] Slovenia and Croatia, centuries under Hapsburg rule have qualified them to "join Europe" at the present time. Historical circumstances which led to industrial development in western Europe have been appropriated by Slovenes and Croats as the product of their superior qualities, and western-like participation in the cultural circles of Mittel Europa is stressed, without consideration of *how* they participated—as equal actors or otherwise.[32] Participation in the not-yet-unified Europe has not been delineated in current debates; instead, there have merely been proclamations that they belong to Europe. This has strengthened popular perception in the north and west of Yugoslavia that there is a southern, "Balkan burden," which has slowed if not prevented entirely the non-Balkan parts of the country from being what they "really are"—European. Recently, ten members of the Slovenian Parliament from eight different political parties proposed a "Resolution about the Central European Character of Slovenia" which intended to separate Slovenia from the Balkans and enable its faster integration into Europe.[33]

In the current struggle for representation of self and "other," those Yugoslavs who have not scored high on the hegemonic western scale find their own "others," whom they perceive as even lower. Thus Serbs, Montenegrins and, to a lesser extent, Macedonians share an ambiguous identity: they have felt compelled to defend their "other"-Europeaness

31. In the symbolic geography of the former Yugoslavia, "north" and "west" were equally endowed with positive connotations, "south" and "east" with negative ones (see Bakić-Hayden and Hayden).

32. When members of these peoples contributed intellectually and otherwise, they were often subsumed under Austrian, Italian or Hungarian rubrics. For example, one of the pioneers of European Indology of the eighteenth century, the missionary Paulinus a Sancto Bartolomaeo, was referred to in German sources as an Austrian and in Italian sources as an Italian or Hungarian, whereas according to church records he was, in fact, the Croat Filip Vezdin. The local church records in Cimovo (Hof am Leithagebirge) in lower Austria show that Vezdin was born of mother Helena Bregunić and father Jurij Vezdin (Ivan Slaming, "Filip Vezdin, Pionir Evropske Indologije," [Zagreb: Rad *JAZU*, 1968], 552). In his work *De antiquate et affinitate linguae zandicae, samsrcdamicae et germanicae dissertatio* (Rome 1798), Vezdin discussed the similarities among Persian, Sanskrit and German, ignoring the Slavic languages which, in fact, have more affinities with both Persian and Sanskrit than does German. Later, in the nineteenth century, Slavic Sanskritists and linguists debated why Paulinus-Vezdin did not discuss Slavic languages in this context. Some suspected that he was germanized and forgot his mother tongue, others that he was embarrassed about it (things *slawisch* often being viewed as *sklawisch* in those days), and a third group denied that he was a Croat in the first place. Recently, however, Croatian scholar Branko Franolić establishes Vezdin's identity in the very first sentence of his monograph: "Filip Vezdin was an Indologist of Croatian nationality" (*Filip Vezdin's Contribution to Indic Studies at the Turn of the 18th Century in Europe* [Paris: Nouvelles Editions Latines, 1991], 3.

33. *Borba* (13–14 August 1994): 7.

by stressing their complementary contributions to the European cultural heritage and the cultural discontinuity created by the Ottoman conquest of their part of Europe. The Yugoslav Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić wrote in his 1924 dissertation that, having fallen to Islam, that part of Europe was prevented from taking part in the "cultural development of Christian Europe, to which ethnographically and geographically it belonged."[34] A little less than seventy years later, and in radically different circumstances, Serbian writer Milorad Pavić, called by some Spanish critics "the last Byzantian," evokes that civilization without which "Europe would remain lame" and unable to move ahead: "If you do not know exactly which civilization is in question, remember that its metropolis was Constantinople, the most beautiful city in Europe before the Turkish conquest. It was a civilization of icons and frescoes . . . [a] civilization that descends in a straight line from ancient Greek culture, the cradle of European spirituality."[35] The negative connotation of terms like "Orthodoxy" and "Byzantine" that has often figured in criticism by the northern republics of the former Yugoslavia[36] has been opposed either by pointing out the grandeur of Byzantine civilization, as Pavić does, or by recalling the defense of European Christendom against the onslaught of Islam. Dragos Kalajic, a Serbian journalist and painter, sums up that view very typically: "The fact of an Islamic onslaught on Western Europe by peaceful means, by means of mass immigrations, threatening to turn European nations into national minorities within their own states, only accentuates the importance of the Serbian struggle for the overall *defense of Europe, European culture and civilization.*"[37] What such statements imply, by projecting the same logic that would exclude the Balkans, is a static Europe, one much less dynamic than it actually has been, with more than one division within European Christendom, centuries of interaction with European Jewry and, finally, centuries of Islamic presence.

The legacy of Islamic culture and the Muslim population left behind after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire presented Europe with the problem of Muslim integration, particularly in those areas that had been under Ottoman rule. With the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, that problem has re-expanded to a wider European context from Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Sandžak region of Serbia, and Kosovo and parts of Macedonia. Yet Islamization did not have the same consequences for all different ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia. While the overwhelming Islamization of the Albanians[38] did not erad-

34. Ivo Andrić, *Development of Spiritual Life in Bosnia under the Influence of Turkish Rule*, eds. and trans. Z.B. Juričić and J.F. Loud (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 17.

35. Milorad Pavic, "Europe and Serbia," *Politika* , no. 172(1991), reproduced in *American Srbobran: Literary Supplement* (September 1993): 1.

36. See Bakic-Hayden and Hayden.

37. *Borba* (6–7 August 1994): xvii-xix, emphasis mine.

38. However, not even common Islamic heritage is so homogenous as it may ap-

icate their strong sense of identity as Albanians in spite of their adaptation to Islamic mores, for example, their linguistic and cultural isolation from the other peoples of Yugoslavia resulted in their own perception of themselves as "a non-Slavic people trapped in a South Slavic state."[39] From Serbian perspectives of the 1970s and 1980s, the Albanians from Kosovo were experiencing an Islamic revival. Due to lack of space, I will merely illustrate this perspective by citing the popular media in Serbia:

> [. . .] the truth about Kosovo and Metohia has not changed much over time, so that even today Muslim fundamentalism, persistently knocking at the door of Kosovo and Metohia, is trying to approach Europe. It is hard to believe that Europe is not aware of this. Even those in Europe who do not hold Serbia close to their hearts know very well that this old Balkan state represents the last barrier to the ongoing onslaught and aggression of Islam.[40]

This type of rhetoric not only follows the familiar orientalist pattern of "unchanging truths" but exhibits a curious mixture of culture and politics in discussions of such topics as the "transform[ation of] the ancient Nemanjić lands into a pseudo-oriental *spahiluk* of the neo-Bolshevik type,"[41] opposed to which the Serbian government sees it necessary to establish "European rule of law." Similarly, on another front, the Serbian minister of the environment recently referred to the problem of waste disposal sites in Serbia in terms of an "Albanization of communal hygiene."[42] It is clear that "European," i.e., Serbian, is contrasted to "oriental," i.e., Muslim, not only implying that they are less European but also more politically conservative (and a Serbian "nesting parallel" to a Slovenian reference to "the [Serbian] political forces of the crypto-Orthodox-Christian origin"[43]). The symbolic association of a group or a region with a negative feature of social or cultural life instigates terminological alienation which affects both referents and the speakers.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina such "nesting phenomena" display even more complexity because they involve peoples with three distinct cul-

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pear. Albanian Islamic religious activity has long been influenced by the numerous Sufi orders and intertwined with practices derived from Albanian national custom and, as such, is quite different from the more orthodox, "pure" Islamic tradition of Slavic Muslims (Steven Berg, "The Political Integration of Yugoslavia's Muslims: Determinants of Success and Failure," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 203 [1983]: 52–59).

39. Berg, 56.

40. Petar Saric, "Alternativa nasilju," *Duga* (18 August 1990): 67–69.

41. Branislav Matic, "Zelene age i crveni begovi," *Duga* (18–31 August 1990): 15. "*Spahiluk*" means an area ruled by a *spahija*, a Turkish local lord. The article deals with the Serbian protest after the election campaign of the Muslim party of Democratic Action in Novi Pazar, Serbia.

42. "Garbage: Responsibility of State and Citizens," *Borba* (25 August 1994): 15.

43. See Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 10.

tural backgrounds. In the words of the prominent Bosnian Muslim intellectual, Muhamed Filipović, "Muslims as a nation are a specific, unique phenomenon in European history in that they came into existence in their full ethnic and national capacity, on the basis of so-called religious initiation. . . ."[44] While a shared language with Serbs and Croats, as well as other common cultural elements, has offered the Slavic Muslims of former Yugoslavia better prospects than the Albanians for integration,[45] despite or perhaps because of close affinities, Slavic Muslims consider it necessary to define what they perceive to be a distinct cultural identity.[46] At different times and historical circumstances, however, Muslims have been included, or volunteered their inclusion,[47] among either Croats or Serbs; at other times they have been excluded by those groups. The political inclusion of Muslims into the "national corpus of Croatian people," notes Filipović, is

> based on a tutorial, patronage relationship towards Muslims and Islam and is merely a way of their negation. Only those who recognize a cultural entity in its full historical, cultural and political capacity relate to it normally; those who subsume it in another cultural, historical, political and national identity—such as did Dr. Franjo Tudjman when he said that Muslims belong to the national corpus of Croatian people—express nationalism of tutorial character."[48]

The Serbian attitude toward Muslims is more ambiguous due to what I call a "betrayal syndrome." A somewhat simplified example of this condition occurs when Serbs treat Muslims as that part of themselves which betrayed the "faith of their forefathers." Conversion to Islam has always been a sensitive issue, widely exploited in literature, particularly in epic poetry. The work of the early nineteenth-century Montenegrin poet and bishop Petar Petrović Njegoš, for example, has been influential in this regard . His depictions of converts as traitors whose weakness and opportunism deprived them of the religious and cultural identity bequeathed to them by their forefathers in Kosovo are re-

44. Muhamed Filipovic, "Fundamentalisti, to smo mi" [an extended interview], *Borba* (3–11 May 1990); this quote is from 5–6 May (1990): 14. The ellipsis is in the original.

45. As Berg notes, both secular Bosnian Muslim politicians and intellectuals, and the official religious Islamic leadership had not been very sympathetic to the kind of nationalism present among Albanians in Yugoslavia (56). *Cf.* also Muhamed Filipovic's remark on the Yugoslav constitution of 1974 which opened the possibility for "Albanians to create a kind of national state of their own on the territory of the Serbian national state, which is in itself contradictory" (*Borba* [11 May 1990]: 5).

46. On the political affirmation and the development of self-consciousness of a Muslim nation in Yugoslavia, see Dennison Rusinow, "Yugoslavia's Muslim Nation," *UFSI Reports*, no. 8. (1982).

47. For example, during World War II Bosnia and Herzegovina became part of the nazi puppet state of Croatia, which appropriated Muslims as brothers and allies of the Croats. In this regard, the Independent State of Croatia was imitating the Habsburg policy of an earlier date (see Rusinow, 3).

48. Filipovic, 14.

flected in popular—if tacit—perception of Muslims among many Serbs and Montenegrins to this day.[49]

Some Muslim intellectuals have tried to address the issue of conversion by reversing it. Muhamed Filipović has said that such assumptions belong to "the arsenal of national political ideologisms which seek to deny the process of acculturation, presenting it as a sort of betrayal of the faith of one's forefathers. But the same may be retrospectively projected on those who make such allegations, for they too betrayed the ancient Slavic faith of their forefathers, with their acceptance of Christianity."[50] While a religious historian might find the latter remark questionable, it is interesting because it reveals the importance of rhetoric in the construction of identities. When Muslims refer to conversion as "acculturation" their emphasis is on the acceptance of the institutions introduced, not the context in which they were introduced.[51] Serbian emphasis on preservation of the "faith of forefathers," on the other hand, emphasizes that conversion to Islam was imposed during Ottoman rule. This difference in emphasis not only has created a symbolic boundary between those who preserved one religious identity and those who assumed another, but also shows the ambiguity of the word "conversion" and thus of that boundary itself.

Changes in social and political contexts affect whether these boundaries are negotiated, managed, or contested and revised. For instance, in the late 1970s, with socialism well established within Yugoslavia and with non-alignment as its foreign policy, the journalist and painter Dragoš Kalajić found modern European attitudes toward Islam to be "a good example of perverted academic optics" and, given "well known global confrontation lines," submitted that "Islamic culture represents a natural and complementary ally of the orthodox socialist forces to resist capitalist imperialism."[52] In 1994, however, the same journalist advised the public that "one should finally face Muslim irreconcilability with and enmity toward all non-Islamic social and cultural norms and systems," because of which "any Serbian confidence in Muslims'

49. For example,

> How can a traitor be better than a knight?
> What is this talk of "sword" and "Kosovo"?
> Weren't we both on the field of Kosovo?
> I fought then and I am still fighting now,
> and you have been a traitor then and now,
> You've dishonored yourself before the world
> blasphemed the faith of your own ancestors.
> You have enslaved yourself to foreigners!

P. P. Njegoš, *The Mountain Wreath*, trans. and ed. Vasa D. Mihailovich (Beograd: Vajat, 1989), 377–84. Cf., Tomislav Longinović, "Visions of Identity: 'Others' in Literature," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the AAASS, Honolulu, November 1993.

50. *Borba* (7 May 1990): 5.

51. For more on "acculturation" from a Muslim perspective, see Milovan Djilas and Nadežda Gaće, *Bošnjak Adil Zulfikarpašić* (Zürich: Bošnjački Institut, 1994).

52. Dragoš Kalajić quoted in *Borba* (6–7 August 1994): xvii-xix.

willingness for lasting, peaceful co-existence in a common state based on equality, is mistaken self-delusion."[53] Similarly, during the Muslim-Croat confrontation in Bosnia in 1993, a Bosnian Croat official warned that it is necessary "to distinguish the essentially different mental make-up and value system of the writer of the Islamic declaration [an allusion to Bosnian President Alija Izetbegović] and his followers from those of European-oriented Christians, even if the latter are on the margins of civilization" [an allusion to Orthodox Serbs].[54]

That rhetoric changes with political reality is widely acknowledged, but the mechanisms by which political reality is affected by rhetoric, especially that which is charged with the intellectual and emotional force of valorized oppositions of categories such as Europe/Balkans or Christian/Muslim, are far from being understood in all their complexity. When nationalist ideologies framed by rhetorics derived from religion and culture result in a war of the kind raging in the successor states of socialist Yugoslavia, i.e., in a region ("the Balkans") already labeled as "violent" ("the powder keg of Europe"), even some scholarly explanations resort to an appeal to a concept of irrationality. While such "explanations" are not exclusively reserved for Yugoslavia and Balkans,[55] they are generally applied to the peoples living "to the east of western Europe."[56] One could argue, however, that such explanations are themselves as irrational as they are uninformed and ignore the rationalism that is integral to nationalism. Thus, the explanatory slogan "ancient hatreds" of the south Slavic peoples, so often referred to in the western media, is but a rhetorical screen obscuring the modernity of conflict based on contested notions of state, nation, national identity and sovreignity. Consistent with that, the official media throughout former Yugoslavia have not had to invoke the "antiquity" of mutual hatreds.[57] Their "modernity" tied to the two world wars in this century has sufficed.[58] That tragic past has been rekindled in a

53. *Ibid.*

54. Slobodan Lovrenovic in *Danas* (11 August 1993): 22.

55. See, for example, Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988).

56. This is John Plamenatz's phrase used to describe the "Eastern type" of nationalism, the type found among the Slavs as well as in Africa, Asia and Latin America. See his "Two Types of Nationalism," in *Nationalism, The Nature and Evolution of an Idea*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York: St. Martin Press, 1976), 23.

57. See Ranko Bugarski, *Jezik od mira do rata* (Beograd: Beogradski krug, 1994); Ivan Čolovic, *Bordel ratnika* (Beograd: Biblioteka XX vek, 1994); and Robert M. Hayden, "Politics and Media," *Radio Free Europe Report on Eastern Europe* 2, no. 49 (6 December 1991): 17–26.

58. See Bette Denich, "Dismembering Yugoslavia: Nationalist Ideologies and the Symbolic Revival of Genocide," *American Ethnologist* (1994); and Robert Hayden, "Recounting the Dead: The Rediscovery and Redefinition of Wartime Massacres in Late- and Post-Communist Yugoslavia," in Rubie S. Watson, ed., *Memory, History and Opposition under State Socialism* (Sante Fe: School of American Research, 1994).

degrading register in public communications in which all Serbs are identified with *Chetnik*s, all Croats with *Ustasha*s and all Muslims with Islamic fundamentalists or *balija*s, fascist collaborators. By evoking one of the lowest aspects of their historical association and ignoring the significance of their other interactions and integrations (most notably 45 years of post-World War II experience), each group perpetuates not only disparaging rhetoric but destructive modes of association.

In their efforts to shift the "essence" of "otherness" to different peoples, cultures and religions, the actors in the Yugoslav drama have demonstrated that the construction of "essences" is ultimately motivated by political (or other) power and only obscured by symbolism of some other, "higher" purpose. Consequently, nothing has proved to be less stable than the "essences" themselves. For example, the symbolic power of "Europe" to represent the "civilized," "enlightened" or "progressive" in Yugoslav debates created a standard against which peripheral European countries could judge their multiple selves in competition against each other. While homogenizing one people against the other ("northern republics" versus "southerners" in former Yugoslavia), the same criterion eventually becomes the cause of "nesting divisions" within the same group. Thus, Serbian opposition parties, initially presented in official media as pro-western or pro-European, and thus in opposition to the national interest, with the sudden shift in the politics of Slobodan Milošević found themselves branded by the same media as anti-western and hence, again, opposed to Serbian national interest.[59] In Croatia, which has been generally immune to this type of polarization, since it is supposedly (and self-proclaimed) solidly pro-European and pro-western, "Europeanists" and "anti-Europeanists" were identified in regard to the mandate of UNPROFOR in Croatia. Those who agreed with the major European powers on this issue, i.e., that the UN protection force should stay, were accused of betraying Croatian interests. Anti-Europeanists voiced the position that Croatia does not need foreign investment and need not give in to European pressure. They, in turn, were portrayed as trying to "provoke Europe to shut its door on Croatia once again" by their "refusal to accept what Europe represents."[60]

In the end, it is not just the question of representations, but their persuasiveness that calls for explanation; hence, my discussion has reflected critically on the force that cultural constructions have in directing human action. As a political entity, the former Yugoslavia encompassed traditional dichotomies such as east/west and their nesting

59. It may be worth noting that characterizations of the "contact group" (US, Germany, France, Britain and Russia) and its plan have themselves shown interesting patterns in symbolic geography, with divisions being seen at some times between "the West" and Russia, and at other times between the European powers, including Russia, and the US. Again, "essences" depend on political interests of the moment.

60. Jelena Lovrić, "Praćkom na medvede," *Borba* (reprint from *Feral Tribune*) (5 August 1994): 14.

variants (Europe/Asia, Europe/Balkans, Christian/Muslim), largely neutralizing their usual valorization. With the destruction of this neutralizing framework, the revalorization of these categories, now oppositions rather than simply differences, has resulted in the destruction of the living communities that had transcended them. By virtue of their geographical position and historical circumstances encompassing the boundaries of different religions, cultures and civilizations, those communities are particularly vulnerable to changes in their (re)definition.