

## The past in the present: time and narrative of Balkan wars in media industry and international politics

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### ABSTRACT

In this article, we explore various forms of travel writing, media reporting, diplomatic record, policy-making, truth claims and expert accounts in which different narrative perspectives on the Balkan wars, both old (1912–1913) and new (1991–1999), have been most evident. We argue that the ways in which these perspectives are rooted in different temporalities and historicisations and have resulted in the construction of commonplace and time-worn representations. In practical terms, we take issue with several patterns of narratives that have led to the sensationalism of media industry and the essentialisation of collective memory. Taken together as a common feature of contemporary policy and analysis in the dominant international opinion, politics and scholarship, these narrative patterns show that historical knowledge is conveyed in ways that *make present* and *represent* the accounts of another past, and the ways in which beliefs collectively held by actors in international society are constructed as media events and public hegemonic representations. The aim is to show how certain moments of rupture are historicised, and subsequently used and misused to construct an anachronistic representation of Southeast Europe.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 January 2016  
Accepted 16 May 2016




### KEYWORDS

Balkan Wars 1912–1913  
Yugoslav conflicts 1990s  
sensationalism  
essentialism  
anachronism  
Balkanism  
stereotype  
Southeast Europe

### Introduction

The main aim of this article is to approach the dominant narratives of Balkan wars, from the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars to the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, with a critical awareness that can provide a new perspective on the narrative legacies that have plagued Southeast Europe in international representations.<sup>1</sup> Our primary concern is a politics of knowledge that moves beyond narratives of Balkan wars and focuses on the social construction of objective history and the international hegemonic representations of Southeast Europe.

The focus of our analysis is on the knowledge produced about the Balkan wars from the 1910s to the 1990s and the concrete relations between those forms of knowledge and political practices in relation to Southeast Europe as a whole. The sociology of knowledge is not a usual complement to political science and international relations theory. Yet it is clear that particular types of knowledge about the Balkan wars, as argued in the case of the Yugoslavian conflicts,<sup>2</sup> had a decisive and independent influence on the outcomes of the wars as well as on the international representations of Southeast Europe. The task of any

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sociology of knowledge is not to deny the possibility of absolute truth, but as Karl Mannheim insisted, to increase the possibility of objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge. The problem is not how we might arrive at a 'non-perspectivistic picture' of the events, the nature of war and violence, or the ethnicities and religiosities in Southeast Europe, 'but how, by juxtaposing the various points of view, each perspective may be recognized as such and thereby a new level of objectivity attained'.<sup>3</sup>

The past decades have seen a growing interest in the role that the media can play as agents of peacemaking and peacebuilding in their own right, and a small but significant group of people have championed the development of peace journalism. At the same time, war propaganda is a popular research topic within the field of communication studies and receives considerable attention from historians, linguists, political scientists, sociologists and other academics.<sup>4</sup> From the dawn of the era of the mass media to more recent views on the propaganda model for the manufacture of public consent,<sup>5</sup> commentators have pointed out the way the media can be manipulated to create support for genocidal regimes and questionable foreign policies. In addition, we argue that the complex relationship between the media and violent conflict may lead to a certain construction of hegemonic international representations.

In these lines, by taking issue with different narratives of Balkan wars that overstate facts in a quest for sensational stories and essentialist memories, we aim to show the ways in which beliefs collectively held by actors in international society are constructed as media events and public representations. Media events are conceptualised as collective actions in which otherwise isolated individuals and fragmented groups of people are briefly integrated into an 'imagined community' by focusing their attention on one particular event.<sup>6</sup> The body of literature on media events concentrates on those events that express a strong symbolic meaning, which is uniformly shared across a wide variety of social actors, such as the media, the audience, public organisations and political representatives. In this sense, these events hold several properties of contemporary public rituals in the Durkheimian sense of the term.<sup>7</sup> By drawing on certain themes and images, they cyclically perform a sense of collective identity, shared membership and moral beliefs. Periodically celebrating one's solidarity towards vulnerable others by performing suffering in the media, or one's distance from violent others by overstating facts in the narratives, links are re-tied between otherwise merely individual members of a formal rather than an experienced international community.

In many instances, social actors may concentrate their attention to the same event or crisis like a Balkan war, but without necessarily sharing an interpretative framework. In other words, whether the interpretations of the events by different international actors are relatively uniform needs to be researched as a dependent variable, rather than posited as an a priori characteristic of media events.<sup>8</sup> Hence, not only should we examine the consensual nature of media events, but in the case of the Balkan wars we should also examine how and why they developed into full-fledged media events in the first place. We suggest that narratives of Balkan wars might have served as triggers for a moral 'cosmopolitan vision',<sup>9</sup> which tells us about much more than the cause of dramatic disasters that it attempts to communicate. The narratives may tell us something about the ways in which international actors imagine the world outside themselves, rather than a knowledge about events. The distinction between imagination and knowledge is important for understanding the distortion of representations, as it may uncover, ultimately, a 'soft power of war' that contributes to elaborating a new doctrine of international community, turning international actors into the 'ironic spectators' of other people's wars.<sup>10</sup>

To this aim, we pay special attention to how temporality and historicity are conveyed in ways that *make present* and *represent* the narratives of another past and how historical knowledge is produced in the narrative contexts of the Balkan wars, the result of which has been to inform public representations of Southeast Europe in international society. This perspective can contribute to the growing interest in different forms of historicisation by exploring the ways in which the past is represented, interpreted and manipulated to explain and justify political interests in the present.

The object of modern historiography is defined as the separation of the 'space of experience' (*Erfahrungsraum*) from the 'horizon of expectation' (*Erwartungshorizont*), in other words as a fundamental rupture between past and future.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, in the case of the Balkan wars, narratives of the past are often used as an alternative to history. In this context as in others, collective memory tends to bridge past and future, creating a usable past for a changing present, which brings to light how the past is imagined and represented in temporal terms. Ultimately, this convergence between temporality and historicity recast war and violence in many accounts of the troubles in Southeast Europe as 'secretions of history' so as to explain moments of great ruptures, liberation, nation-building, dissolution and the like. These accounts are appropriated to construct an almost coherent framework for the discovery of sensational events that has been 'used to demarcate historical periods',<sup>12</sup> and to ascertain whether the advances of modernity were stopped in their tracks. In this process, the overdetermined Balkan imageries of socioeconomic and civilisational backwardness, ethno-religious hatred and ferocious aggressiveness worked in reference to beliefs and representations from the past and with exemplary temporal excursions that make it vital for imagining Southeast Europe as a Balkan other in Europe.

In the following sections, after a brief contextualisation of the Balkan wars and Southeast Europe, we explore various narrative legacies in order to better understand the importance of discourse exerted by various ideological and political interests on the construction of the hegemonic international representations of the region. The various narratives of Balkan wars are discussed in terms of sensationalist stories that claim to discover an explanatory model in a so-called immutable 'Balkan nature' that is supposed to remain prone to inter-ethnic genocidal wars, and in terms of essentialist assumptions that have distorted, reified and essentialised as immutable the past and the present reality of Southeast Europe. Whether these narrative factors may operate alone or in consort, their anachronistic arguments can be taken together as a whole from the standpoint of their common feature to act as a discursive instrumentality of vested interests and potentially hidden agendas that affect contemporary policy and analysis in the dominant media industry and international politics on Southeast Europe.

### Imagined Balkan wars

International representations related to the southeastern part of Europe, or the Balkans, are impregnated by the very use of the terms to designate the region. Both types of designation, coming from either geographical or historical classifications, 'Southeast Europe' and 'the Balkans', have been misused and both have had their pejorative component at one time or another. Even the term 'Southeast Europe' might have acquired negative connotations in the past, with long-lasting effects.<sup>13</sup> The labels used in political discourses to denote the southeastern part of Europe have changed over time, and each new label was a kind of

euphemism for the previous term, aimed at eliminating the ideological consequences of stereotypification in international representations.<sup>14</sup> However, the problem lies not in the labels but in the discursive practice of the terms.

In this article, we use 'Southeast Europe' as a term much more appropriate than 'the Balkans'. Indeed, as a political term, 'Southeast Europe' must implicitly imply that the southeastern part of Europe is normally an integral part of European history and politics. Accordingly, the problems that have arisen in this part of Europe are European problems and so the solutions to those problems must be European solutions. Arguably, it may well be the case that Southeast Europe, as shown in the case of Albania,<sup>15</sup> instead of being seen as an exception or an unusual and extreme form of quasi-European society, now represents the European norm and needs to be integrated theoretically into how Europe is seen and sees itself. Normally, Southeast Europe is often redefined in these terms, taking as a starting point the cultural and social threads that allow seeing this borderland space as a coherent complex whole of creative history.<sup>16</sup> Yet, in the historical and literary imagination, the region looms large as a somewhat frightening and ill-defined space that is 'consumed by war' from the fall of the Ottoman Empire to the breakup of Yugoslavia.<sup>17</sup>

War and violence in Southeast Europe have become an essential resource and enduring topic of West European concern, both politically and academically. Yet the scholarly literature on the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 has remained incomplete and episodic for a number of reasons, which are interesting to mention briefly in order to better understand some of the distortions that may have fueled the construction of certain international representations of the region rather than others. Often considered to be part of the so-called 'Eastern Question',<sup>18</sup> Balkan issues are discussed in European history in the context of the diplomatic and political problems posed by the increasingly weakened Ottoman Empire. Normally, the Balkan Wars are discussed in works of a certain broad-ranging historiography of the region,<sup>19</sup> even though many such works in local historiography were appropriated by nationalist political forces and used to serve their interests, thus providing a nationalistic bias on facts and events. Often, a selective and partial usage of archival sources was also exacerbated by the fact that they were difficult to access in their entirety due to language barriers. In other cases, the Balkan Wars were eclipsed by a focus on the First World War. Later, with the exception of a few publications by local scholars,<sup>20</sup> many others appear to have glossed over the Balkan Wars as a result of focusing on the ideological division between East and West and the realpolitik of the Cold War.

At the same time, even if it is possible to have a picture of events during the old Balkan Wars based on the early narratives of different fact-finding missions and individual reports,<sup>21</sup> it is difficult to make generalisations about the nature of these wars. Much of the discussion revolving around the Balkan wars, as shown in more detail elsewhere,<sup>22</sup> suggests they were something more than liberationist movements in the case of the first war (October 1912–May 1913), and more than a competition over the creation of national, homogeneous, bounded territories in the case of the second war (June–July 1913).<sup>23</sup>

In spite of what the boom of publications in the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s seems to indicate, there must have been, again, more going on than the supposed unleashing of primordial ethno-religious hatred, easily attributed to old hostilities that are claimed to always repeat themselves in the region. Everything seems to indicate that there may be more than this dynamic and disputed process in a making and remaking of the facts of Balkan wars and the resulting international representations of Southeast

Europe over time. As this paper will aim to suggest, the interest of the Balkan wars to raise understanding of the international representations of the region can bring our attention to this imagined geopolitical space, which seems to be constructed and organised according to broader political and ideological conditions.

The publication of *Imagining the Balkans* established 'Balkanism' as an important concept,<sup>24</sup> which is productively considered in debates on the problematisation of the historical relationships between West and Southeast Europe as well as that of West European discourses through which Southeast European societies are 'Balkanised'. Since then, a series of perceptive and critical interdisciplinary works intended for a specialist readership have demonstrated the growth of a theoretically sophisticated and politically aware scholarship in the field of Southeast European studies.<sup>25</sup> Some of these works relate directly to the issues of the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars.<sup>26</sup> Triggered by the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s and their aftermath, those works drew attention to the existence of a Western culturalist and colonial view of Southeast Europe. Since the late 1990s, this view has become one of the most debated topics in historiography and public discussions. Over the past few decades, an enormous amount of scholarship has been devoted to understanding the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia,<sup>27</sup> and the role of international politics,<sup>28</sup> including the implications that various legal, diplomatic, political and military international interventions in Kosovo,<sup>29</sup> might have had both for international society,<sup>30</sup> and for international relations theory.<sup>31</sup> Most of the works have aimed to expose the hidden internal assumptions and contradictions in previous publications, and subvert their influence on our understanding of the region and *its* wars.<sup>32</sup>

These critical studies are often concerned with the discursive mechanisms through which the Balkans, or Southeast Europe, has been transformed into an 'internal other' within the West European imagination, and the manner in which this otherness has been internalised on the part of Southeast European societies themselves. The interesting result is that these studies are emerging as a sort of subaltern, hybrid field of post-colonial and post-socialist studies,<sup>33</sup> aimed at uncovering 'entangled histories'<sup>34</sup> and 'alternative modernities',<sup>35</sup> in Southeast Europe. In the growing field of critical Southeast European studies, the knowledge produced about the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 and the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s focus in particular on nationalism and the state-building process in Southeast European countries, but also on the international representation of Southeast Europe.

Already, a number of efforts have convincingly demonstrated that the stereotypes and prejudices drawn on to construct the Balkan image of Southeast Europe in hegemonic international representations unabatedly fly in the face of ample empirical evidence. For instance, international representations of the Balkan wars might have changed and the meanings of violence shifted consistently.<sup>36</sup> Nationalism might have also been largely limited by the oscillations between the aggressive behaviour of military and political elites, and the apathy, even hostility, of the peasantry majority towards war.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, information communicated by the various forms of media about events and politics might have been non-stereotypic, ambivalent and, in some cases, even positive.<sup>38</sup> In yet other cases, it seems that the humanity of Southeast European peoples at war might have not been given the attention that it deserved.<sup>39</sup> Such studies have conclusively challenged the reified validity claims of ruthless violence, war atrocities, aggressive nationalism and dirty politics of the Balkan wars, or the 'inhumanity' of Southeast European peoples, during both the 1910s and the 1990s.<sup>40</sup>

Clearly, the extant scholarship on Balkanism has already deconstructed the confinement of Southeast Europe to the margins of Europe. In this analysis, therefore, we cannot merely

catalogue or seek a more correct or more balanced reading of the historical narratives related to the Balkan wars. The drive towards maintaining Southeast Europe as an 'internal other' of Western Europe in public and hegemonic international representations is a topic that intersects with attitudes and interests that are based in the narrative legacies of sensationalist stories and essentialist assumptions. By focusing on their important overlapping attributes, we can see that the narratives reveal different aspects of a single biased idea of permanence that is generated because of and underpinned by ethnocentrism. Such a discursive formation combines anachronistic and ethnocentric ideas with a clear political project of post-colonial and post-socialist management. In this sense, the anachronistic and ethnocentric discourse of all these narratives, which we explore in the following sections, is important not only in describing the Balkan other but also because it justifies particular international attitudes and practices towards them.

### Sensationalist stories

The Balkan Wars were amongst the first military conflicts reported on a high scale by the press. From October 1912 until November 1913, like many war correspondents of major European papers, Leon Trotsky was sent to Southeast Europe to cover the events. His articles and correspondences were published in 1926 as the sixth volume of his uncompleted *Works*, under the title "The Balkans and the Balkan War,"<sup>41</sup> which was also translated into English in 1980 under the caption of *War Correspondence*.<sup>42</sup> While the analytical pieces and impressionistic dispatches or the interviews and political portraits are interesting, apart from being a testimony to the rhetorical and polemical brilliance of such a major figure as Trotsky, their cognitive significance is no more informative than are the dispatches of dozens of others war correspondents.<sup>43</sup>

Trotsky exposed the horrors of war and the atrocities 'that must evoke shudders and nausea in every cultured person, in everyone capable of feeling and thinking.'<sup>44</sup> He further detailed the atrocities, but he did not see the heat of war. As a rule, journalists were not allowed on the front line, and he had to form his 'picture of the life and death of the army on the battlefields through interrogating participants, with the bias this inevitably implies.'<sup>45</sup> Actually, some of his informers were casual acquaintances, but most often, they came from his own social-democratic circles, to whose accounts he gave greater credence.<sup>46</sup> As a result, like in many other cases, one suspects that 'there is a certain degree of voyeurism about violence, garnished with a puritan moralizing and hectoring.'<sup>47</sup>

In August 1913, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace created an International Commission of Inquiry that was sent to Southeast Europe,<sup>48</sup> with a main explicit objective to investigate allegations and collect evidence for 'the causes and conduct of the Balkan Wars.'<sup>49</sup> Predictably, the Carnegie Inquiry mobilised all possible means of attracting public attention. Several press communiqués were given, the press was kept informed of the progress of the Commission whose departure from Paris was released with great publicity, and almost 20,000 copies were distributed of the report published in May and June 1914 in both English and French.<sup>50</sup> Again, the Carnegie Report is often taken to offer a detailed and well-documented description of what happened in the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars.

However, the Carnegie Inquiry was based on problematic fieldwork. Time for preparation had been short and the commission immediately encountered problems and was stopped and delayed several times.<sup>51</sup> Thus, Serbian officials protested that one of members was

anti-Serbian and pro-Bulgarian and expelled them all, while Greeks officials allowed them to stay but offered them no assistance and again they formally declined to receive one of them, who was also expelled from the hotel.<sup>52</sup> Another member arrived after the group had left, and instead of sending a telegram to ask where they were, he gave up and retraced his steps.<sup>53</sup> Due to various issues, and to great disappointment, the commission was reduced to four members on the ground and only two of them could understand some Slavic languages.<sup>54</sup> There was even a question whether the commission should persist in the inquiry at all. It was decided to continue the work, but to separate. When the members met in Sofia, their reception could not have been more useful than in Serbia and Greece, since Bulgarian officials prepared all documents and witness testimony for them.<sup>55</sup>

In addition, the report required considerable rewriting and editing. Many of the chapters were problematic in multiple ways, especially as it was deeply unwise for the member who had done the least field research to end up with most of the writing. Most of the members never concealed their openly pro-Bulgarian positions or anti-Serbian and anti-Greek opinions, which obviously limited the credibility of their writing and the facts they reported, or even discredited the content of some aspects of the report and allowed government officials of participating countries to use their unsubstantiated comments and one-sided opinions to protest.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the report was neither adequately substantiated nor impartial, and it cannot reasonably be considered a credible and valuable source on the Balkan Wars.

In all these early accounts, violence was 'the leitmotif of the Balkans wars', and 100 years ago, there was clearly a thoroughly negative estimation of Southeast Europe.<sup>57</sup> Inflated assessments of violence perpetrated in these wars as non-civilised and non-European atrocities and genocide spurred a display of the 'combats of extermination marked by inhuman rage' in Southeast Europe.<sup>58</sup> The blame was then translated in various accounts of the time as a narrative of civilisation. About the region, it was stated that 'a large section of the population is undoubtedly semi-barbarous',<sup>59</sup> and must 'be reclaimed from their semi-civilization'.<sup>60</sup> Also, that 'the effect of this deplorable exhibition on the moral relations between the Western and the Near-Eastern peoples has been lamentable and will be lasting'.<sup>61</sup> A single phrase in an acclaimed travel book illustrates the Western stereotype that developed of the timeless image of the Southeast European propensity for war and extreme violence: 'Violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans',<sup>62</sup> from which it can be inferred that Southeast Europe had to aspire to and attain Western 'standards of civilization',<sup>63</sup> to enjoy equal status in the European society of states.

In the 1990s, during the troubles in Yugoslavia, there seems to have been a resurgence of interest in the old Balkan wars. In particular, the 1913 Carnegie Inquiry suddenly re-emerged to become the single most often-cited source, which was mistaken 'naively as a historical source',<sup>64</sup> on wars in Southeast Europe.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, *The War Correspondence of Leon Trotsky* was reprinted in 1993 to great acclaim as a rare primary source on Southeast Europe, at the height of the wars for the Yugoslav succession, in order to find confirmation of often completely opposing political preferences or prejudices.<sup>66</sup>

To explain the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, many commentators repeatedly overemphasised parallels between the barbarisms of the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars and the so-called 'Other Balkan Wars'.<sup>67</sup> The violence reported in 1913 re-emerged as a compelling factor in arguments in many books and reports, inspiring a sort of selective 'memory boom',<sup>68</sup> and parading uncritically the brutalities of past Balkan wars before a watching world. From the 1910s to the 1990s, one self-styled authoritative report after another illustrated

how the narratives of violence in the region became part of history,<sup>69</sup> thus paving the way once again for important political and ideological implications resulting in the otherisation of Southeast Europe. Actually, after Yugoslavia crumbled in the 1990s, the casual reader of the international press, as represented for instance by the journalism of the North American and West European diplomatic and political establishment, was left in little doubt that ethno-religious hatred, wars, violence and atrocities in Southeast Europe were endemic and primordial.<sup>70</sup> Most of these accounts have continually renewed the message of the early twentieth century, according to which Southeast European peoples live in another time and a barbaric land, making it necessary to contain them and fence them off from the rest of Western Europe.

To a certain extent, the press initiated the inquiries, but despite the proliferation of media accounts, the information reported by the press appeared fragmentary, distorted and contradictory. From the 1910s to the 1990s, the vast majority of the narratives of Balkan wars were produced not by academic scholars in the strictest sense of the term, but by a freelance, extra-academic or pseudo-academic cottage industry. Many journalists, travellers and correspondents suddenly became Balkan 'experts' because they had the tendency to generalise from the particular – in other words, to present their stories as representative of the grand scheme of things. Actually, they simply fly over the war zones for a few days or weeks, drawing on old stories to compile and report the same stories. They come prepared to 'witness rather than to analyze'.<sup>71</sup> The very nature of their trade in search of sensations means that such narrators do not focus on a subject until it becomes a hot topic.

With the publication of *A Witness to Genocide*, the highbrow international press found evidence for the 'horrors of ethnic cleansing' and 'the virus of aggressive nationalism' in Balkan social life, and reported that 'long-suppressed forces have been unleashed once more in the present'.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, according to some other commentator, this 'mad war' could only be grasped if one turned back the clock and keep on going towards the past, as if what had happened in the past causally determined or inescapably motivated people in the present to kill and 'die for what their great-grandparents once did'.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in various sensational narratives, we were told how the 'fragile peace shatters as Balkan hatred overflows' in the perpetual struggle of 'rival ethnic groups' killing each other 'for imagined national spaces'.<sup>74</sup> In these narratives, Benedict Anderson's persuasive argument is conspicuous by its absence, namely that this ethnic animosity is also the defining characteristic of other wars that have shaped the modern European nations.<sup>75</sup> Instead, in this narrative of the unreal, the ghosts of ethnic feuding revive exclusively in Southeast Europe, the characteristics of which are presented and generalised unceremoniously: 'The Serbs hate the Albanians, who are not very keen on the Macedonians, who in turn have a mighty grudge against the Bulgarians, who are not very fond of the Turks, who are not exactly enamoured of the Greeks'.<sup>76</sup>

The work of this group of self-styled Balkan specialists and 'parachute journalists' targets mainly a non-specialist, non-academic audience, and purports to explain and unravel the intricacies of Southeast European history and politics for lay readers. Many books published in this genre on Southeast Europe have achieved commercial success.<sup>77</sup> These accounts may vary notoriously in quality and utility, but they all convey a very distinct and clearly defined perception of the region in international representations. In these representations, Southeast Europe is nevertheless imagined as a loosely defined but contentious, dangerous, and violence-prone area, given that Balkan war has long been reified as the exception to the international norm and continues to be such.



Many of these writings consciously or unconsciously perpetuated the idea that at the end just as at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Southeast European peoples were geographically very close to mainstream Europe and yet culturally very distant, relegated to the 'margins of Europe',<sup>78</sup> to recall a phrase coined for Greece.<sup>79</sup> As has been shown elsewhere in the case of writings on Albania in the early twentieth century, especially by Austrian and German travelers,<sup>80</sup> the impression was always given that people's life in the region was one of barbarism and nothing else. The aim of these writings, typical of the travelogue genre, was not to provide information or conduct scholarly work, but to make sensational discoveries to satisfy the author's insatiable desire to acquire some sense of prestige, not unlike what is known today as network ratings.

Similarly, by the end of the twentieth century, regardless of the fact that the target of the narratives was initially the area of the conflicts following the dissolution of former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the association of the extraordinary characteristics of the Yugoslav situation with the situation of the Balkan Wars in 1912–1913 has taken a high degree of significance in international public opinion, especially when it is extended to apply to Southeast Europe as a whole, completely without justification. Thus the high-flown rhetoric of sensationalist media coverage, countless policy-driven surveys and sellers' case studies hawked the whole of Southeast Europe to the political class and to the general public who imagined it as 'Balkan'.<sup>81</sup>

Even nowadays, the quest for sensations in Southeast Europe is still alive. When the so-called Western Balkans are at peace, we are reminded that some of its inhabitants go abroad to look for war:

Orthodox Christian Serbs are joining pro-Russian rebels in Ukraine while Catholic Croats fight on Ukraine's side. Muslim Albanians, Bosniaks and Muslims from Sandzak have also gone to fight in Iraq and Syria... For Serbs and Croats, this war is a replay of their own conflict in the 1990s as much as an adventure or crusade.<sup>82</sup>

What is a striking conclusion, however, is 'the degree to which, apart from their religions, most Balkan fighters are so broadly united against liberalism and the West'.<sup>83</sup> Oddly enough, not only the empirical evidence on religious everyday life, which is provided elsewhere for current Albania and other Southeast European contexts, including Greece, Macedonia, Kosovo and Serbia,<sup>84</sup> but even their own raw data offers no deterrent to the purveyors of such views. In fact, if we look at the number they themselves provide of jihadists as a percentage of each country, 'Kosovo comes 14th between Germany and Spain, Bosnia is 11th and Albania 20th, [whereas] the top nine countries are West European'.<sup>85</sup>

Similarly, the confrontation between Serbian fans and Albanian players during last year's football match between Serbian and Albanian national teams in the context of qualifying competition for UEFA Euro 2016 is tagged with 'Belgrade chaos fed off centuries of rivalry between Serbia and Albania'.<sup>86</sup> In this way, international highbrow press encouraged everyone to know that in the Balkans 'mingling football hooliganism with ultra-nationalist politics' is business carried on as usual, whereas the last event should be seen simply as 'the latest skirmish in the Serbian-Albanian territorial struggle'.<sup>87</sup> A single stock phrase provided proof to readers: 'in the Balkans, more than anywhere else, football is the continuation of war by other means'.<sup>88</sup> Many observers endorsed clearly the difficulties of defining the match by emphatic affirmations of 'Serbia-Albania brawl impossible to believe', as 'in years of covering football at home and abroad, nothing had come close to this'.<sup>89</sup>

By all accounts, the timeless Orientalising and Balkanising images from selected and reported narratives interwove the past and the present by singling out specific acts of war and

violence. The result is the erasure of any sense of historical distance from more recent events, and hence any sense that the present can be different from the past. In this way, Southeast European populations are doomed forever by history. These narratives have enabled the construction of a primordial, timeless and unchanging ethno-religious hatred that is, paradoxically, connected in a clear and immediate way to the ever-changing present. We suggest that this construction, made sensational by the political and media discourses, underlies the association of the label 'Balkan' with Balkanisation and the representation of a complicated and irresolvable political situation that is often assumed to be based on complex and variegated division, fratricidal hatred and longstanding ethnic and religious grievances.

### Essentialist assumptions

Sensationalist non-academic writings might have developed complex relations with reputedly more serious accounts, to the extent that at times the authors of these two types of literature have seemed to call for mutual consideration. This, of course, undermined the validity of the scholarly research, in respect of objectivity and quality of analysis. The result easily seems as though academic writers were simply not concerned about understanding the Yugoslav wars of the early 1990s. The excessive consideration of past wars, stretching back centuries while looking to the past to find answers to problems of the present, seems to have engendered a quest for a cultural inventory of collective memories. Indeed, much of the scholarly research seemed to hold the view that from a historical perspective, 'the Balkan proclivity for ethno-religiously based violence [as] an explosion of intercommunal hatred and savagery was not at all surprising.'<sup>90</sup> Many believed that 'there is no ideology in the Balkans [that] matches nationalism's profound effect upon individuals and groups; simply because 'this accursed land was always prone to tectonic collisions, and those who have reignited the ethnoreligious hatreds have hurled entire nations into the inferno.'<sup>91</sup> Similarly, others have observed more specifically how the 'struggle between Serbs and non-Serbs lies at the heart of the instability for which Yugoslavia was famous.'<sup>92</sup>

Once released, this cultural inventory seems to have inspired and encouraged the need to develop an ethno-culturalist approach, which often lapses into primordial essentialism. Remarkably, such an approach is adopted by both Western and local researchers on Southeast Europe. As shown elsewhere in more detail, regarding either German-speaking *Albanologie*,<sup>93</sup> or native Albanian studies,<sup>94</sup> a strong tradition of scholarship has aimed to emphasise the essential and immutable character of a people's culture and history. In particular, most local scholarship and politics in Southeast European countries have contributed, albeit inadvertently, to such an outré reading of events because their frameworks for thought remain narrowly nationalistic.

This may also explain why most local scholars regarded the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 as liberationist wars of independence against the Ottoman Empire, the ultimate result of which was the creation of national, homogeneous, bounded territories of the Southeast European states at the price of much suffering, which is still blamed on mutual perfidy and atrocities.<sup>95</sup> Ottoman historiography also regarded the disaster of the Balkan Wars as the point at which Ottomanism ended, and much intellectual self-examination and reassessment of the world prompted the 'search for a nation's soul', which made of Turkism the dominant national ideology in modern Turkey.<sup>96</sup>

The dissolution of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s also attracted much scientific and extra-scientific attention, especially within the 'scholarship' that promoted a parochial

understanding of the role of the social sciences as nationally constitutive. Many recent accounts are held captive by their authors' national affiliations or personal convictions. Some betray their predilection for predictions that are avidly consumed by US policymakers,<sup>97</sup> or their eyewitness accounts are coloured by their own liberal humanitarian positions.<sup>98</sup> However understandable or even commendable their predispositions may be, scholarly objectivity in these instances has made no progress and can be considered to be biased, instant history, superfluous and dictated by immediate conditions.<sup>99</sup>

To varying degrees, this is the case when some render their genesis of Yugoslavia with a Croatian slant,<sup>100</sup> or they are likely to see the conflict as a Serbian aggression, sometimes even refined by rational choice as an explanation of Serbian behaviour and Serbian national character.<sup>101</sup> Others make no bones about their Serbian loyalties,<sup>102</sup> especially when they stress the global dimensions of the conflicts and the role of the international community, basically regarded as an international conspiracy against the Serbian people.<sup>103</sup> Some of these accounts may even supersede spontaneous bias and prejudice. While supposedly dispassionate and grounded in the rhetoric of social science, objectivity and neutrality, many academic analyses are often denounced as blatant cases of abuse of the social scientific approach.

A case in point is provided in the forceful debate published in successive issues of *Anthropological Theory*, following the publication of an analysis of conceptual practices of power related to 'Anthropology and Genocide in the Balkans',<sup>104</sup> which offered a critique of moral and historical relativism in the social analysis of Yugoslav conflicts.<sup>105</sup> From an anthropological perspective, cultural relativism argues against cultural superiority and for cultural toleration, but anthropologists are very critical of the ways in which cultural analysis can lead to a kind of moral relativism which argues that moral judgments or affirmations of universal cultural values are not possible. In particular, some narrative accounts of the Yugoslavian conflicts are seen as examples of the relationship between this kind of relativistic thinking as an independent cultural force and a certain political ideology that affected the interpretation of concrete historical events in former Yugoslavia, as well as some concrete international policies of western political elites. The interpretive strategy of these accounts, while seemingly grounded in a welter of rhetorical commitments to the Weberian tradition of *Verstehen* and *Wertfreiheit*, are not especially detached or value-free in relation to the actual conflicts. Relativism, for all of its pretensions, is not value-free, nor is any social-scientific knowledge, which remains 'always for someone and for some purpose',<sup>106</sup> and always laden with political positions and consequences.<sup>107</sup>

Researchers are often in the grip of ideologies that seek to establish identity boundaries and cultural hegemony, by glorifying the past as a means to gain ascendancy and legitimacy in the present. In pursuing this ideological path, they often use and misuse collective memories of the past that promote the grand narrative of the nationalist interests. Quite often, they do not concern themselves with people's ways of life or with what was happening before and after historically traumatic events. Rather, their discourse seems to be born of cultural insecurity, in which conflicting national claims to moral superiority and contingent victimisations are used to aggressively promote several rationalisations of the root causes of the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 or the Yugoslav crisis in the 1990s.

So far, a critical interrogation of the trend towards relativism and equivocation is all the more important since the hallmark of the Balkan wars is the prominence of equivocal or relativist positions and reinterpretations. Such a trend also persisted between 2012 and 2013 with a proliferation of celebrations and exhibitions to commemorate the centenary of the

1912–1913 Balkan Wars in all participant countries, which also included many reprints and new publications, especially memoirs and other witness accounts, interviews with historians, literary scholars and politicians. The press and the web are particularly rich sources of activities where one can gauge the reactions to the Balkan wars, ranging from openly and fiery nationalistic apologies to confrontations critical of any display of extreme nationalism. Many national and international conferences and other academic competitions on the topic were also organised all over Europe and North America. Again, in these conferences, we frequently came across quite diverse and conflicting yet firmly held views, all of which were put forward as ‘truths’ regarding historical facts, events, attitudes, and their lasting significance for the region.<sup>108</sup> This shows that the Balkan wars continue to divide many of the peoples, the scholars and the states of the region and beyond. Indeed, when one recalls these or other facts, events and attitudes, this does not necessarily lead to a better understanding of the Balkan wars, but rather reveals the conviction that the holders of these views have in the validity of their own truth claims.

Throughout the discourse on the Balkan wars, whether in the 1910s or in the 1990s, relativist positions usually took the form of moral equivalence, arguing that ‘all sides are equally guilty’ for committing war crimes, atrocities and genocide. The distinction between aggressors and victims was blurred, and everyone became a member of a warring faction filled with ancient hatreds. The Bosnian war especially ‘became a strange beast: a perpetratorless crime in which all were victims and all more or less equally guilty’.<sup>109</sup> The alleged equivalence of sides made the moral analysis of Balkan wars problematic. The attempt to make moral judgments or definite conclusions about the ‘truth’ was lost in the privileging of interpretations that favour the use of morally neutral, relativistic categories in order to create the perception of equality of guilt and the assignment of equal responsibility for collective violence and mass killing.

Much of such relativist discourse was grounded in a more general negativity towards Balkan nationalism, thus assuming a particular brand of nationalism that is always seen as the underlying cause of the Balkan wars. In many accounts, a common point of departure for analysis ‘seems to rely on an undeviating causal chain: people in the Balkans are nationalists, [which] generates mutual hatred, which under particular circumstances might lead to bloodshed’.<sup>110</sup> In this case, Balkan nationalism was seen as a ‘virus’ and very little attempt was made to come to terms with new political realities in Southeast Europe. As the language used by both policy- and opinion-makers is not neutral, the result was highly relativistic. Indeed, ‘labelling nationalism as a pathology places it beyond human control [and] avoids the issue of culpability by seeing all parties as equally infected’ and therefore equally responsible.<sup>111</sup> This rhetoric is both ahistorical and atheoretical. It does not distinguish among nationalisms representing different ideological developments with different political consequences, but glosses over a failure to come to terms with the complexities of different political and instrumental ideologies.

This style of relativistic discourse was evident across a broad range of ideological positions within West European and international press, scholarship and politics, which have done much to reduce Southeast European collective memories and temporalities to an immutable core. Essentialist views have been also purveyed in some of the many publications on the Balkan wars by international scholars, who have reflected the atmosphere of the time in the titles of their books, by using ‘historically pregnant names’.<sup>112</sup> They have included such expressions as Balkan babel, Balkan inferno, Balkan ghosts, broken bonds, Balkan tragedy, death, chaos, horrors, slaughterhouse, or ‘Third’ and ‘Other’ Balkan Wars.<sup>113</sup>

So far, it cannot be coincidental that the international response to the Bosnian crisis 'produced constellations remarkably reminiscent of the alignments of the Great War: with the former Central Powers backing Croatia and the former Entente Powers indulging Serbia.'<sup>114</sup> The conflict over Kosovo dramatised this issue in even more subtle ways. However, the marked differences dictated both by national contexts and by national agendas were somehow levelled by the unprecedented situation of crisis where the member states of the European Union were drawn, directly or indirectly, into a major war on the same side over an issue that united their interests. In these conditions, it is hardly surprising that during the military campaign there was a degree of synchronisation in the focus of public attention mediated through the press, as a comparison between the French, German and British establishment press clearly showed.<sup>115</sup>

The German Defence Minister, for instance, speaks of a Serbian 'policy of genocide',<sup>116</sup> while the German Foreign Minister speaks of a European standard, against which the actions of Serbian leadership must be measured: 'a throwback to the Europe of the 1930s' that 'is not ours', thus stressing the need to present the war as a moral imperative in Germany.<sup>117</sup> The German press was sensitive to the complexities of Serbian culture and politics, while emphasising a deep-seated cultural issue.<sup>118</sup> This was related to the mystifications in the Serbian intellectual discourses of the symbolic importance of the Kosovo myth that plays an instrumental role in the Serbian national myth, especially for speaking out Serbian victimisation and asserting that there is a world conspiracy against the Serbian people.<sup>119</sup> Even before the ethnic conflicts of the 1990s started, the Serbs actually believed in that myth. However, the instrumentality of the myth during the Kosovo campaign made it possible for Serbian political leadership to hope for strengthening power by NATO air strikes and expect to see Kosovo partitioned,<sup>120</sup> which is something that had been already recommended by the notorious memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences in 1986 and many Serbian intellectuals afterwards.<sup>121</sup> Similarly, while the British media take the straight line of treating the Serbian regime as an enemy that needs to be defeated, the message was relayed that this was a fight against evil. Even though the tone was generally dispassionate and pragmatic with only occasional lapses into emotive language,<sup>122</sup> mainly when referring to the plight of Kosovo Albanians,<sup>123</sup> the long-term historical origins of the conflicts in Southeast Europe were often detailed in an analysis that drew inspiration from a 'clash of civilizations'.<sup>124</sup>

By contrast, one of the features of the French coverage of the war was a willingness to consider the Serbian case with more sympathy and some support, or at least with a refusal to demonise the Serbs as a group. Often, French intellectual and political elites consider what they perceive as lies and exaggerations in the western account of the war.<sup>125</sup> French commentators continually stress a process of demonisation in other national press coverage. They note in the German political press a tendency to use the vocabulary of the Third Reich, such as concentration camp, genocide or *Völkermord*, and to directly compare the events in the Balkans to the Nazi ethnic cleansing.<sup>126</sup> This is understood as a 'diabolisation nécessaire' to pull the Germans into the war. While political perceptions are reported in the German press together with other factors such as cultural and historical issues related to France's historical support for the Serbs, French journalists stress the long tradition of Franco-Serbian friendship in a constant call for a negotiated settlement and diplomatic initiatives.<sup>127</sup> Similarly, British politicians and press are also shown in the French press to be engaged in the elaboration of a discourse that demonised Serbian political leadership and distorted the information into a propaganda machine.<sup>128</sup> French journalists had been very circumspect in the

reporting of alleged atrocities. The stories of Albanians used as human shields were mainly reported in French press as unverified, with extensive use of inverted commas, the conditional and the subjunctive, all stylistic devices to indicate that the writer cannot vouch for the accuracy of the information being given.<sup>129</sup> As a corollary, there is an underlying criticism that the full debate was not being heard in the UK, while the war was purposely portrayed to the British public as a fight against evil and for morality and human rights.<sup>130</sup>

One cannot understand such trends solely by examining the objective facts of history. A critical interrogation and concrete sociological analysis are demanded, which must also examine the cultural system of the West European-styled international society that frames hegemonic representations and political policies. As we show in more detail elsewhere,<sup>131</sup> this is important because these accounts defined the cognitive frames and terms of discourse with which several scholars and observers framed their own essentialist beliefs and relativist interpretations of the Balkan wars into public and hegemonic representations of Southeast Europe in international society.

Essentialist beliefs and relativistic interpretations worked not so much because they were the dominant element of discourse on the Balkan wars. Rather, their transformation into international hegemonic representations was possible precisely because these beliefs and interpretations were largely grounded in the rhetorical commitment to the supposed social-scientific and balanced interpretation of historical events. By drawing on the rhetoric of objectivity, they appeared reasonable and plausible regardless of their empirical validity. In this way, they attained a representational status and exerted their public effect in international society not simply as a reflex of the social positions of the intellectuals who produced them. Once created as hegemonic representations, they became active and independent cultural forces that served as important frames of reference and typifications to guide the formation of subsequent ideas and political practices in other sectors.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, these representations guided much of West European understanding of the Yugoslav conflicts and legitimated the international political choices of inaction, such as indifference and non-intervention to prevent genocide in Southeast Europe.<sup>133</sup>

More specifically, the reduction of collective memory to an essentialist core and the elevation of nationalism to the status of a mystical causal agent make it difficult to break free from the conceptual framework of primordial, timeless and unchanging ethno-religious hatred, violence and atrocities. The relativism of this conceptual framework 'distracts the reader from examining relevant evidence,'<sup>134</sup> which may warrant different, more critical and more politically informed interrogations. This is even more the case when this unsound and hazardous conceptual framework is often taken at face value to fuel public international representations of Southeast Europe without a proper problematisation. The same essentialist approach, which intersects with both social and political analyses of wars, is often reproduced in academic writings on international relations to claim that war in Southeast Europe has an essentially different and culturally distinct character.

In this respect, these accounts should and must be considered in regard to their moral and ethical implications, which were unspoken and masked, but nonetheless crucial to political outcomes. As shown in relation to the Kosovo conflict,<sup>135</sup> the international representations worked out by similar essentialist and relativist accounts may still affect significantly the attitude of the international community and its actual involvement in the current international affairs towards the region. These representations create imagined boundaries that prevent a free movement of ideas and people between the West and the Southeast of Europe,

reaffirming the scenario of a 'cordon sanitaire' that amounts to saying: 'Since these countries are still trying to solve their old problems, well, we can just wait and see before addressing the issue of their integration.'<sup>136</sup> The essentialist and relativist assumptions then inform international attitudes towards Southeast Europe that result in acts of security containment. This is, for instance, what makes it necessary for Western Europe, in its quest for security and containment, to adopt a selective stance in the endless process of 'differentiated integration',<sup>137</sup> of the so-called 'Western Balkans'.<sup>138</sup> As long as this attitude is comforting to those in Western Europe, it will continue to support the Balkan image of Southeast Europe in international representation as inherently prone to war, and justify an international politics of further containment and otherisation.

### Anachronistic discourses

The accumulated narrative associated the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 with the Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s as 'meaningful coincidences' in a kind of synchronicity, despite the events having occurred in different temporal contexts and with no apparent causal relationship. As in cases of extrasensory perception, rather than a question of cause and effect, it is a question of thinking all of the events together in time, in a kind of simultaneity, about which psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung coined the term synchronicity 'to designate a hypothetical factor equal in rank to causality as a principle of explanation'.<sup>139</sup> This kind of synchronicity is a psychic factor that is independent of space and time and gives rise to relationships that cannot be explained by conventional efficient causality.<sup>140</sup>

Remarkably, Balkan wars and Yugoslav conflicts are also thought to be connected by a certain meaning, as meaningful coincidences, with the cause and effect supposed to occur simultaneously at the same time. It can be inferred that the authors of the accumulated narrative of Balkan wars are simply dealing with a paranormal reality. Obviously, this is quite absurd and no one would argue about that. Rather, the synchronicity behind all these narratives shows a cognitive bias of inductive inference or a form of selection bias towards searching for and interpreting information in a way that confirms their own preconceptions and avoids information and interpretations that contradict changing realities across temporal contexts.

In so doing, they might have created what Johannes Fabian called an 'allochronic discourse' on other people in another time, as 'a discourse whose referent has been removed from the present of the speaking/writing object'.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, the Balkan narrative is simply a kind of anachronistic discourse in which the temporal context of the discourse has been removed and the referent of the discourse has been alienated or otherised. Consequently, in most types of narrative on later politics and wars in Southeast Europe, the early Balkan wars are invoked and used discursively as if they had not taken place in a completely different time and context. Selected events of the past are represented as if they were of the present time, based on the assumption that Southeast European societies do not change.

Anachronism points a quite scandalous chronic phenomenon that could explain why in the West European perspective, Southeast Europeans or the 'Balkan other', like any other 'non-European', never occupy the same historical time even when they are contemporary to West European observers. This created a certain stereotype of 'a land of the living past',<sup>142</sup> which promoted a new figure of Southeast Europe and Southeast European peoples in West European imaginations that illuminates the simultaneous acts of exclusion and inclusion in

the history of European ideas. It is a mixture of the exoticism and 'Balkanism',<sup>143</sup> of a 'terra incognita',<sup>144</sup> in the 'margins of Europe',<sup>145</sup> which contributes to the logic of many 'nesting orientalisms',<sup>146</sup> partaking of 'the Orient within',<sup>147</sup> and signifying the potential of being an 'exotic other and stigmatized brother' at the same time.<sup>148</sup> As a result, whether the accounts of the Balkan wars are sensationalist stories or essentialist assumptions, they are similar in that they originate from a common construction that is a pure act of ethnocentrism. The accounts simply aim to identify continuous exoticised patterns of conflict. As such, they are not unlike what Edmund Leach once unforgettably denounced as 'the butterfly collecting' of older forms of anthropology.<sup>149</sup>

The discussion on this topic, which acquired a wider audience especially after the publication of *Orientalism*,<sup>150</sup> has traced the West–East temporal spatialisation and mental mapping of cultural differences to their intellectual roots in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.<sup>151</sup> Since the 1950s, however, as shown in more detail elsewhere,<sup>152</sup> Lévi-Strauss in his *Tristes Tropiques* had already deplored similar stances in travel writing and anthropology.<sup>153</sup> To borrow his terms, the literature on Southeast Europe would represent another instance of the same mistake of an entire profession or an entire civilisation in believing that men are not always men, and that some are more deserving of interest and attention, merely because in the midst of an otherwise relatively homogeneous Europe they seem to astonish us by the apparent strangeness of their customs, attitudes and behaviour.

The prevailing socio-political conditions of early state-building and the alternating episodes of regional and international politics notwithstanding, war has remained a sure indicator of a Balkan predisposition towards destructive violence, and the primary reading path to an abnormal history of an indisputably non-modern, uncivilised Balkans.<sup>154</sup> Remarkably, wars in Southeast Europe were exploited from the early to the late twentieth century in very similar ways. In the context of Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, adventurous fact-finders rediscovered the Balkans as a 'new exotic land'.<sup>155</sup> Various narratives established a continuity with the past, even though particular events are paradoxically products of changing circumstances. Massacres, the destruction of villages and cities, the plight of refugees, and ethnic cleansing produce the same effects. They are always selected as instances from the past to give rise to subsequent historicisations.<sup>156</sup>

Most of the commentators aimed at predicting the course of conflict and attempted to 'see the end in every beginning'.<sup>157</sup> By looking to discover a past that could explain the present, the Balkan wars and their causes were ahistoricised and atemporalised. They are seen as applying to all times, on the invalid assumption that the historical and temporal contexts in which the events are placed will not change. As indicated elsewhere,<sup>158</sup> this interpretation of events may have prevented the arising of conditions under which a critical theoretical narrative and alternative representation of war in Southeast Europe could be constructed and developed.

Arguably, the ahistoricisations and atemporalisations of the Balkan wars and their circumstances are examples of a vision in which temporal journeys into an imagined past fuse to construct an imagined present. They will persist through time imbued with a particular intentional meaning, not about wars in general, but about the influential idea of violence as a significant occurrence that is urged to be recognised as the defining cultural characteristics of Southeast European peoples and societies. Quite often, banal narratives and competing representations of the Balkan wars have cherry-picked and interpreted historical facts to create a new body of putative facts that construct international hegemonic



representations, which often tend to cast Southeast Europe remote from the rest of Europe, especially as a place of immemorial ethno-religious hatred, nationalist watersheds, ethnic tribalism, barbaric brutality and civilisational incompetence.

However, this constant characterisation in terms of civilisations places Southeast and Western Europe at odds with each other, and must not be taken at face value. We also need to consider the creative and constructed aspect of politics and the role it plays in this representation. Indeed, the development of hegemonic international representations is much more complex than a series of spurious, impressionistic, anachronistic, ethnocentric and xenophobic utterances, or even more complex than a mere linear process of intentional manipulation of human minds designed to prompt certain reactions. As shown in the case of various international interventions in Kosovo,<sup>159</sup> more than conflict resolutions, such representations serve the purpose and vested interests of control and domination, which are not necessarily named and personalised or made explicit. This is even more apparent when the goal is to redefine a geopolitical location in the hierarchy of relations within the Western order of things in international affairs.

## Conclusion

By all accounts, the reading of the narrative legacies of the Balkan wars, and the rationale applied by the professional communities and the 'expert milieu' of scholars and observers, requires a closer sociological analysis of the social actors who participate in this process. Different factors influence any narrative legacy and all play a role in the selection process of narrative media production. What is selected, presented and represented as significant narrative depends on factors such as the personal and professional background of scholars and observers, the media routines, the organisational framework, and the societal, political and ideological context. The exploration of the precise channels through which narratives of the Balkan wars circulated, the uses made of these writings, how they affected state policies and how these policies were elaborated by specified decision-making elites, is an issue in its own right. Even though any given study cannot address at once all levels of this 'hierarchy of influences',<sup>160</sup> an awareness of these multiple perspectives helps keep our thinking open. In particular, by juxtaposing various form of travel writing, media reporting, diplomatic record, policy making, truth claims and expert accounts, we tried to consider and recognize the different narrative perspectives on the Balkan wars against a background of the ideologies of history and politics. If this sociological approach to knowledge may allow attaining a new level of objectivity,<sup>161</sup> we may conclude that the circulation of ideas and practices, their reception and their use, in this case as in others, are contingent upon different political situations and experiences, with systematic implications for foreign policy and public debates, including the scholarly theorising on the meaning of war and international affairs.

The pervasive discourses on the Balkan wars may appear unusual and difficult to grasp, if one employs traditional categories that are developed in sensationalist and essentialist accounts of media industry and pseudo-academism. However, an analysis of the narrative legacies, when linked to a careful examination of the historical contextualisation of different accounts from an ideological perspective, can result in a more critical understanding of the hegemonic role of anachronistic and ethnocentric politics of international beliefs and representations of Southeast Europe. In attempting to analyse the history and the politics of the Balkan wars, the aim of this article was to frame the argument in such a way as to focus

on a critical reassessment of narrative legacies and move away from the close association of Balkan wars with the essentialisation of Southeast Europe. The concluding argument is that the discursive practices of different narratives have constructed a distorted representation of Southeast Europe in international society, which may have resulted in a potential underestimation of the pressing problems at both regional and global levels, whereas Southeast Europe must be considered an integral part of European history and politics.

In methodological terms, we undertook a comparative analysis of ideas rather than a search for an extended positive proof. We adopted a critical approach to ideological conceptions of history and politics by focusing on the political processes and power relations that define narratives of wars and their place in social relations. The aim of this article was not to write a history of Balkan wars, but rather to examine how various narrative legacies and the political implications of those discursive practices have defined the West European imagination of Southeast Europe. While this approach might not have resulted in an exhaustive treatment, and certainly a number of questions remain open, it is hoped that the discussion herein will provoke at the very least a non-stereotyped debate on the effects of narratives and representations, and will result in further, deeper inquiries in this direction.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of this article were presented at a series of international conferences: *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913: A Conference to Mark the 100th Anniversary*, organised by the Faculty of History, University of Oxford (UK), 17–18 October 2012; *From Balkan Wars to Balkan Peace Project: The EU Integration*, organised in Tirana (Albania) by the Center for Strategic Research, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 May 2012; *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913: An International Academic Conference*, organised in Tirana (Albania) by the Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung, Regensburg (Germany), 10–11 June 2013. We have benefitted greatly from the comments, encouragements, discussions, and presentations of all participants, as well as from numerous friends and colleagues who read parts of this paper at various stages and helped to improve our argument: Nicholas Onuf, Sabrina Ramet, Mark Almond, Robert Evans, Tom Buchanan, James Pettifer, Maria Todorova, Bernd Fischer, Conrad Clewing, Leen d’Haenens, Thomas Lindemann, Chris Wright. We are also very grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and recommendations.

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## Notes

1. The meaning and role of international representations as a cultural system of international society is examined in full detail elsewhere: Abazi and Doja, "International Representations".
2. Cushman, "Anthropology and Genocide," 8.
3. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* p. 266.
4. Connelly and Welch, *War and the media*; Baines and O'Shaughnessy, *Propaganda*; D'Almeida, *Histoire mondiale de la propagande*; Welch, *Propaganda, Power and Persuasion*.
5. Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.
6. Dayan and Katz, *Media Events*.
7. Durkheim, *Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*.
8. Couldry, Hepp and Krotz, *Media Events in a Global Age*.
9. Beck, *Kosmopolitische Blick*.
10. Chouliaraki, *The Soft Power of War*; Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator*.
11. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*.
12. Stewart, "Dreams of Treasure," 481.
13. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 28.
14. Petrovic, *Long Way Home*, 29.
15. Abazi, "Albania in Europe", pp. 229–235.
16. Wachtel, *The Balkans in World History*.
17. Hall, *Consumed by War*; Hall, *War in the Balkans*.
18. Anderson, *The Eastern Question*; Macfie, *The Eastern Question*.
19. Stavrianos, *The Balkans since 1453*; Hösch, *The Balkans*; Jelavich, *History of the Balkans*; Castellan, *Histoire des Balkans*; Mazower, *The Balkans*; Hall, *The Modern Balkans*; Lampe, *Balkans into Southeastern Europe*.
20. Sipcanov, *Correspondants de Guerre*; Kiraly and Djordjevic, *East Central European Society and the Balkan Wars*; Damianova, "La Fédération Contre l'Alliance Militaire".
21. Berri, *Assedio di Scutari*; Durham, *The Struggle for Scutary*; Carnegie Endowment, *Balkan Wars Report*; Tucović, *Srbija i Arbanija*; Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*; Hanotaux, *La Guerre des Balkans et l'Europe*; Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*.
22. Abazi, "Between Facts and Interpretations".
23. With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the coalition of national forces in the first Balkan War, for instance, a series of transformations were initiated in international politics, marked by the end of empires, the building of nation-states, the spread of communist ideas and the shaking of the old international order, even though these transformations are often attributed incorrectly to World War I.
24. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.
25. Almond, *Europe's Backyard War*; Mestrovic, *The Balkanization of the West*; Mestrovic, *Genocide after Emotion*; Cushman and Mestrovic, *This Time We Knew*; Campbell, *National Deconstruction*; Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania*; Bjelić and Savić, *Balkan as Metaphor*; Hatzopoulos, "All That Is, Is Nationalist"; Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War*; Cushman, "Anthropology and Genocide"; Hammond, "Uses of Balkanism"; Garde, *Le discours balkanique*; Green, *Notes from the Balkans*; Hansen, *Security as Practice*.
26. Hansen, "Past as Preface"; Hall, *The Balkan Wars*; Farrar, "Aggression versus Apathy"; Kolev and Koulouri, *The Balkan Wars*; Kévonian, "Enquête, Délit, Preuve"; Akhund, "The Two Carnegie Reports"; Michail, "Western Attitudes"; Simić, "Balkans and Balkanisation"; Todorova, "War and Memory"; Trix, "Peace-mongering"; Abazi, "Between Facts and Interpretations".
27. Naimark and Case, *Yugoslavia and Its Historians*; Cohen and Dragović-Soso, *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe*; Biondich, *The Balkans*; Vujačić, *Nationalism, Myth, and the State*.
28. Terrett, *The Dissolution of Yugoslavia*; Glaurdić, *The Hour of Europe*.
29. Doja, "Démocratie et stabilité"; Abazi, *Intrastate Conflicts*; Abazi, "Kosovo"; Abazi, "Kosovo Conflict"; Abazi, "The Role of International Community"; Abazi, "A New Power Play in the Balkans"; Abazi, "Çështja e Kosovës".
30. Bellamy, *Kosovo and International Society*.

31. Abazi, *Ethno-national Conflict*.
32. Stokes, Lampe, Dennison and Mostov, "Instant History"; Fleming, "Balkan Historiography"; Ramet, *Thinking about Yugoslavia*; Djokić and Ker-Lindsay, *New Perspectives on Yugoslavia*; Njaradi, "Balkan Studies"; Ingrao and Emmert, *Confronting the Yugoslav Controversies*; Bieber, Galijaš and Archer, *Debating the End of Yugoslavia*.
33. Fleming, "Balkan Historiography," 1227.
34. Daskalov and Marinov, *Entangled Histories I*; Daskalov and Mishkova, *Entangled Histories II*; Daskalov and Vezenkov, *Entangled Histories III*.
35. Mishkova, Trencsenyi and Jalava, *Regimes of Historicity*.
36. Michail, "Western Attitudes".
37. Roudometof, "Social Origins of Balkan Politics"; Farrar, "Aggression versus Apathy"; Hatzopoulos, "All That Is, Is Nationalist".
38. Dorn-Sezgin, "Between Cross and Crescent".
39. Kolev and Koulouri, *The Balkan Wars*; O'Loughlin, "Inter-Ethnic Friendships"; Dimitrova, "Balkan War Evidences".
40. Campbell, *National Deconstruction*.
41. See *Balkany i balkanskaia voina*, <http://www.magister.msk.ru/library/trotsky/trotm083.htm> (accessed 18 May 2016).
42. Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*.
43. Todorova, "War and Memory," 8.
44. Trotsky, *The Balkan Wars*, 282–3.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Todorova, "War and Memory," 19.
48. Founded in 1910, the Carnegie Endowment was a non-governmental organisation zealously engaged in the pacifist movement. Its objectives were the promotion of international public awareness, by providing evidence and information about the effects of war on civilian populations, in order to support international laws and organisations for the arbitration and peaceful settlement of disputes among states. The best way to support these goals was to give compelling examples, by exposing the wrongdoings of secret diplomacy and power games leading to wars. This would induce sufficient indignation either to prompt humanitarian intervention or to encourage the creation of international legislation on the treatment of civilians in war and on the limitation of the political and socioeconomic implications of war.
49. Carnegie Endowment, *Balkan Wars Report*.
50. Akhund, "The Two Carnegie Reports," 29; Trix, "Peace-mongering," 158.
51. Akhund, "The Two Carnegie Reports," 9.
52. Trix, "Peace-mongering," 151.
53. Ibid.
54. Akhund, "The Two Carnegie Reports," 9.
55. Trix, "Peace-mongering," 152.
56. Akhund, "The Two Carnegie Reports," 21; Trix, "Peace-mongering," 153.
57. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 121.
58. Duggan, "European Diplomacy," 633.
59. "The Balkan War Enquiry," *The Economist* 79 (18 July 1914), 106. The column must have been signed off on by Editor Francis W. Hirst who had participated in the 1913 Carnegie inquiry on the Balkan Wars.
60. Spencer, "The Balkan Question," 581.
61. Young, *Nationalism and War in the Near East*, 378–9.
62. West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 375.
63. Gong, *The Standards of Civilization*.
64. Trix, "Peace-mongering," 148.
65. In the 1990s, a reprint of the 1913 inquiry with a gratuitous caption, Carnegie Endowment, *The Other Balkan Wars.*, and with a substantial introduction, Kennan, "The Balkan Crises 1913 and 1993", left no room for doubt that conflict inherited from a distant tribal past prevailed in the same

Balkan world. Later, a sequel tried to show the endurance of the pattern. Carnegie Endowment, *Unfinished Peace*. In a simple Google books search, just a single passage – ‘Houses and whole villages reduced to ashes, unarmed and innocent populations massacred ... such were the means used by the Serbo-Montenegrin soldiery, with a view to the entire transformation of the ethnic character of regions inhabited exclusively by Albanians’ Carnegie Endowment, *Balkan Wars Report*, 151. – is reproduced, sometimes *verbatim in extenso*, though more often truncated, in no fewer than 70 books and many thousands of press and journal articles, policy reports and other documents dealing with the wars of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. See [https://www.google.com/search?q=Carnegie+1914+homes+ashes&btnG=Chercher+des+livres&tbm=bks&tbo=1&hl=fr&gws\\_rd=ssl#newwindow=1&hl=fr&tbm=bks&q=houses+and+whole+villages+reduced+to+ashes%2C+unarmed+and+innocent+populations+massacred+with+a+view+to+the+entire+transformation+of+the+ethnic+character](https://www.google.com/search?q=Carnegie+1914+homes+ashes&btnG=Chercher+des+livres&tbm=bks&tbo=1&hl=fr&gws_rd=ssl#newwindow=1&hl=fr&tbm=bks&q=houses+and+whole+villages+reduced+to+ashes%2C+unarmed+and+innocent+populations+massacred+with+a+view+to+the+entire+transformation+of+the+ethnic+character) (accessed, 18 May 2016).

66. Todorova, “War and Memory,” 8.
67. Carnegie Endowment, *The Other Balkan Wars*.
68. Winter, “The Generation of Memory.”
69. Carnegie Endowment, *Balkan Wars Report*; Carnegie Endowment, *The Other Balkan Wars*; Carnegie Endowment, *Unfinished Peace*.
70. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*; Kennan, “The Balkan Crises 1913 and 1993”; Cohen, *Broken Bonds*; Gutman, *Witness to Genocide*; Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*; Glennly, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*; Judah, *The Serbs*; Judah, *Kosovo*; Nation, *War in the Balkans*; Gallagher, *The Balkans*; Hislope, “From Expressive to Actionable Hatred”.
71. Stokes, Lampe, Dennison and Mostov, “Instant History,” 141.
72. Gutman, *Witness to Genocide*, 175.
73. Lenard J. Cohen, “... And a mad, mad war”, *Washington Post*, 15 December 1992, 23.
74. P. Beaumont and N. Wood, “Fragile Peace Shatters as Balkan Hatred Overflows,” *The Observer*, 11 March 2001.
75. Anderson, *Imagined communities*.
76. I. Traynor, “Ghosts of Ethnic Feuding Revive in the Balkans,” *The Guardian*, 26 February 1990, 7.
77. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*; Cohen, *Broken Bonds*; Gutman, *Witness to Genocide*; Rieff, *Slaughterhouse*; Judah, *The Serbs*; Judah, *Kosovo*.
78. Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking-glass*.
79. Recurrent efforts in academic circles and by political elites to de-balkanise Greece have always been perceived as a major political and symbolic issue, but see “Generations of Pork: How Greece’s Political Elite Ruined the Country,” *Der Spiegel Online*, 5 May 2011, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/generations-of-pork-how-greece-s-political-elite-ruined-the-country-a-772176-druck.html> (accessed 18 May 2016).
80. Doja, “The Beautiful Blue Danube”; Doja, “From the German-speaking point of view”.
81. Todorova, “Trap of Backwardness,” 153.
82. “Balkan warriors abroad fight the good fight,” *The Economist*, 18 April 2015, print edition Europe, 25, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21648697-western-balkans-peace-some-go-abroad-look-war-fight-good-fight> (accessed 18 May 2016).
83. *Ibid.*
84. Abazi, “Albanians Weg zur Religiosität”; Doja, “The Everyday of Religion and Politics in the Balkans”.
85. “Balkan warriors abroad fight the good fight,” *The Economist*, 18 April 2015.
86. “Belgrade chaos fed off centuries of rivalry between Serbia and Albania”, *The Guardian*, 15 October 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2014/oct/15/belgrade-chaos-centuries-rivalry-serbia-albania> (Last accessed, 28/06/2016).
87. “Belgrade chaos fed off centuries of rivalry between Serbia and Albania,” *The Guardian*, 15 October 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2014/oct/15/belgrade-chaos-centuries-rivalry-serbia-albania> (accessed, 18 May 2016).
88. *Ibid.*

89. "Serbia-Albania brawl impossible to believe... in years of covering football at home and abroad, NOTHING had come close to this," *Daily Mail*, 15 October 2014, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2793384/the-scale-albania-s-brawl-serbia-impossible-believe> (accessed 18 May 2016).
90. Cohen, *Broken Bonds*, 270.
91. Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno*, 86.
92. Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 1.
93. Doja, "The Beautiful Blue Danube"; Doja, "From the German-speaking point of view".
94. Doja, "Évolution et folklorisation"; Doja, "From the native point of view"; Abazi and Doja, "From the communist point of view".
95. e.g. Murzaku, *Politika e Serbisë*.
96. Boyar, "The impact of the Balkan Wars."
97. e.g. Brown, *Nationalism, Democracy, and Security in the Balkans*.
98. e.g. Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*.
99. Veremis, "Scholarly Predilections on Balkan Affairs."
100. e.g. Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*.
101. e.g. Mestrovic, Letica and Goreta, *Habits of the Balkan Heart*.
102. e.g. Dragnich, *Yugoslavia's Disintegration*.
103. e.g. Hayden, *Blueprints for a House Divided*; Hayden, *From Yugoslavia to the Western Balkans*.
104. Cushman, "Anthropology and Genocide."
105. The debate followed in issue 4(4) of *Anthropological Theory* (pp. 545–581).
106. Cox, "Social Forces," 128.
107. It has been argued that the rhetorical strategies and discursive practices in these accounts are an intellectual reworking of several nationalist themes of the formal Serbian propaganda in order to convert them into respectable accounts that served to justify and legitimate Serbian military aggression and genocide in former Yugoslavia. 'Such discourse imagines itself as critical of a "one-sided" discourse and, in offering the "Serbian side of the story", claims to establish balance in the debate. Balance is achieved, but often at the expense of making confusing analytical and empirical distinction by the misapplication and decontextualizing of theoretical concepts, or by stressing one set of facts over another. In this sense, [these accounts] might be seen as "relativistic performances" which demonstrate their partisanship, not only by what they include but by what they exclude.' Cushman, "Anthropology and Genocide," 21.
108. The Oxford conference in October 2012 stressed, with few exceptions, the supposed neutrality of Britain and Western Europe before the outbreak of the Great War. Pettifer and Buchanan, *War in the Balkans*. The Tirana conference in June 2013, which was sponsored by the Regensburg Institute, showed ethnic atrocities perpetrated by Serbian armies against non-belligerent Albanians. The Tirana conference in May 2012, which was sponsored by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, saw the insinuation of a supposed Albanian allegiance to Ottomanism. Other cases in point are the massive proceedings of a commemorative conference held in the US with the sponsorship of Turkish agencies, in which voice was frequently given to current Turkish views of Neo-Ottomanism, Yavuz and Blumi, *War and Nationalism*. or a special issue of the Turkish Foreign Ministry *Journal of International Affairs* that was aimed at 'overcoming prejudices, building bridges and constructing a common future' between Turkey and the Balkans. *Perceptions*, 18(2), 2013.
109. Simms, *Unfinest Hour*.
110. Hatzopoulos, "All That Is, Is Nationalist," 31.
111. Lytle, "US Policy," 304.
112. Campbell, *National Deconstruction*, 40.
113. Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts*; Kennan, "The Balkan Crises 1913 and 1993"; Cohen, *Broken Bonds*; Mojzes, *Yugoslavian Inferno*; Garde, *Vie et mort de la Yougoslavie*; Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy*; Glenny, *The Fall of Yugoslavia*; Ramet, *Balkan Babel*.
114. Wheeler in Carter and Norris, *The Changing Shape of the Balkans*, 3.
115. Grundmann, Smith and Wright, "National Elites and Transnational Discourses."

116. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 29 March 1999.
117. "Slobodan Milosevic représente l'Europe des années 30: Ce n'est pas la nôtre," *Le Monde*, 24 April 1999.
118. Grundmann, Smith and Wright, "National Elites and Transnational Discourses," 310.
119. Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*; Bieber, "Nationalist mobilization and stories"; Gagnon, *The Myth of Ethnic War*.
120. e.g. *Die Zeit*, 11 February 1999.
121. Dragovic-Soso, *Saviours of the Nation*.
122. Grundmann, Smith and Wright, "National Elites and Transnational Discourses," 306.
123. e.g. "Murder Drives out a Suffering People," *Financial Times*, 5 April 1999; "Agony and Tears for Families in Exodus," *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 May 1999; "Nightmare of a Ruined Land Lies in Wait," *The Independent*, 7 May 1999; "The Hell of Tent Cities," *The Independent*, 10 May 1999; "Kosovo's Trail of Misery," *The Independent*, 12 May 1999; "The Hard and Warped Face of Balkan Man," *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1999; "Kosovo Capital Faces New Wave of Serb Terror," *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1999; "Serbs Went on a Rampage of Violence," *The Independent*, 3 June 1999.
124. "Christendom's ancient split filters today's view of Kosovo," *Financial Times*, 4 May 1999.
125. *Le Monde*, 13 May 1999.
126. Grundmann, Smith and Wright, "National Elites and Transnational Discourses," 309.
127. Ibid.
128. 'La Grande-Bretagne a, dès le début du conflit, été en pointe dans l'entreprise de la diabolisation de Slobodan Milosevic,' "M. Blair est déterminé à faire tomber M. Milosevic," *Le Monde*, 22 April 1999, 3.
129. "Kosovo: l'OTAN dénonce les 'boucliers humains', mais sans 'preuve formelle,'" *Le Monde*, 18 May 1999.
130. For more details, see Grundmann, Smith and Wright, "National Elites and Transnational Discourses"
131. Abazi and Doja, "International Representations".
132. Abazi, "Between Facts and Interpretations".
133. Cushman, "Anthropology and Genocide," 11.
134. Ramet, *Thinking about Yugoslavia*, 3.
135. Abazi, "The Role of International Community".
136. "Les frontières de l'Europe," *Entretien d'Europe* no. 27, <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/entretiens-d-europe/0027-les-frontieres-de-l-europe-dialogue-entre-michel-foucher-et-bronislav-geremek> (accessed 18 May 2016).
137. Dyson and Sepos, *Whose Europe?*
138. Petersen, *Western Intervention in the Balkans*; Braniff, *Integrating the Balkans*; Bechev, *Constructing South East Europe*; Sotiropoulos and Veremis, *Southeastern Europe Doomed to Instability*; Dzihic and Hamilton, *Unfinished Business*.
139. Jung, *Synchronicity*, 8.
140. Jung's theory of synchronicity, the view that the structure of reality includes a principle of acausal connection which manifests itself most conspicuously in the form of meaningful coincidences in time, is the culmination of his lifelong engagement trying to justify the paranormal. Jung, *On Synchronicity and the Paranormal*.
141. Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 143. In spite of the awkward term, many scholars have appropriated the notion of 'allochronism', though often without adequate acknowledgement.
142. Durham, *High Albania*.
143. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*.
144. Pandolfi, "Albania as terra incognita."
145. Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking-glass*.
146. Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms."
147. Neuburger, *The Orient Within*.
148. Buchowski, "The Specter of Orientalism in Europe".
149. Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology*.
150. Said, *Orientalism*.



151. Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*.
152. Doja, "From Neolithic Naturalness to Tristes Tropiques".
153. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*.
154. Michail, "Western Attitudes," 226.
155. Skalnik, "West meets East."
156. Stewart, "Dreams of Treasure," 489.
157. White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representaion of Reality," 24.
158. Abazi, "Between Facts and Interpretations".
159. Doja, "Démocratie et stabilité"; Abazi, *Intrastate Conflicts*; Abazi, "Kosovo"; Abazi, "Kosovo Conflict"; Abazi, "The Role of International Community"; Abazi, "A New Power Play in the Balkans"; Abazi, "Çështja e Kosovës".
160. Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message*.
161. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* p. 266.

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