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Time and narrative: Temporality, memory, and instant history of Balkan wars

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Abstract

In this article, we explore the ways in which from the beginning to the end of twentieth century different temporalities and historicizations stemming from different narrative perspectives on the Balkan wars have constructed different commonplace, timeworn and enduring representations. In practical terms, we take issue with several patterns of narratives, such as the sensationalism of media industry, the essentialization of collective memory, the securitization of imaginary threats and the pacifist activism of normative transformations. It is our contention to argue that they historicize certain moments of rupture, which are subsequently used and misused to construct an anachronistic representation of Southeast Europe that may conceal hidden interests. Contrastingly, an alternative narrative that emphasizes a “history from below” as an apperception of the temporality of being can offer a revisionist approach that may show the futility of ahistorical accounts.¹

Keywords

Balkan wars 1912–1913, Yugoslav wars 1990s, sensationalism, essentialism, securitism, pacifism, anachronism, power relations, international politics, collective representations, Balkanism, stereotype, discourse, Southeast Europe, Carnegie Endowment

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Introduction

The idea that time flows with a direction, and that there is a past, a present and a future, is a mental construction based on cognitive functions like object recognition, spatial location and temporal reconstruction. In contrast with the idea of time, the construction of temporality is based on memory. Collective memory tends to bridge past and future, creating a usable past for a changing present. We examined in full detail elsewhere the similar ways in which narratives of the Balkan wars from the beginning to the end of twentieth century are often used as an alternative to history and real events (Abazi and Doja, 2016c) within a constructed hegemonic system of international representations (Abazi and Doja, 2016b). In a more general existentialist contention, these narratives bring to light how the past is imagined and represented in temporal terms. In this sense, our primary concern in this article is to show that the Balkan wars provide an exemplary instance of temporality.

Almost all accounts on the Balkans and the Balkan wars pay limited attention to temporality. Surely, the date of the events is acknowledged in most of the narratives, but the time as a background is immediately ignored thereafter. The conceptualization and contextualization of time is rather treated as a uniformed background notice and as an abstract ontological condition (Walker, 1993: 130–131). Such temporal blindness in the narratives of the Balkan wars makes it possible to view war and violence sticking along linear rhythms into a timeless historical vacuum, allowing for an unimpeded account of history of war that ought always to consist of exemplary violence. Despite the narrow difference between temporalizing and historicizing, the convergence between temporality and historicity can show the overlapping aspects that have ultimately overdetermined Balkan imageries of backwardness, ethnic-religious hatred and ferocious aggressiveness, as they act 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.

Triggered in the aftermath of the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, a series of perceptive and critical interdisciplinary studies 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 (Almond, 1994; Bjelić and Savić, 2002; Campbell, 1998; Cushman, 2004; Cushman and Mestrovic, 1996; Gagnon, 2004; Garde, 2004; Goldsworthy, 1998; Green, 2005; Hammond, 2004; Hansen, 2006; Hatzopoulos, 2003; Mestrovic, 1994, 1996; Todorova, 1997). Some of these works relate directly to the issues of the 1912–1913 Balkan wars

(Akhund, 2012; Farrar, 2003; Hall, 2000; Hansen, 2000; Kévonian, 2008; Kolev and Koulouri, 2005; Michail, 2012; Pettifer and Buchanan, 2016; Simić, 2013; Todorova, 2013; Trix, 2014). They demonstrated the ongoing growth of theoretically sophisticated and politically aware scholarship within Southeast European studies (Bieber et al., 2014; Djokić and Ker-Lindsay, 2011; Fleming, 2000; Ingraio and Emmert, 2013; Njaradi, 2012; Stokes et al., 1996; Ramet, 2005). Especially, the publication of *Imagining the Balkans* (Todorova, 1997) established *Balkanism* as an important concept, which is productively used in debates on the problematization of the historical relationship between West and Southeast Europe as well as those of West European discourses through which Southeast European societies are Balkanized. These studies are concerned with the mechanisms through which the Balkans, or Southeast Europe,² have been transformed into an “internal other” within the European imagination, and the manner in which this otherness has been internalized on the part of Southeast European societies themselves. For the most part, they aim at uncovering the “entangled histories” (Daskalov and Marinov, 2013; Daskalov and Mishkova, 2013; Daskalov and Vezenkov, 2015) and “alternative modernities” (Mishkova et al., 2014) in Southeast Europe. An enormous amount of scholarship has been also devoted to understanding the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia and the role of international politics, including the implications that various legal, diplomatic, political and military international interventions in Kosovo (Doja, 2001; Abazi, 2001a, 2001b, 2002, 2004, 2008b, 2012) might have had both for international society (Bellamy, 2002) and for international relations theory (Abazi, 2005).

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 not only, in particular, on nationalism and the state-building process in Southeast European countries but also on a certain Balkan image of Southeast Europe, in general, and of the Balkan wars, in particular, that is constructed in the public opinions, shared beliefs and collective representations, which is considered elsewhere as forming a hegemonic cultural system of the Western-imagined international society (Abazi and Doja 2016b). Already, a number of efforts have convincingly demonstrated that the stereotypes and prejudices drawn on to construct such hegemonic international representations unabatedly fly in the face of ample empirical evidence. For instance, statements about the nature of the Balkan wars might have changed and the meanings of violence shifted consistently (Michail, 2012). Nationalism might have also been widely limited by oscillations between the aggressive behavior of military and political elite and the apathy, even hostility, of the peasantry majority (Farrar, 2003; Hatzopoulos, 2003; Roudometof, 2000). Again, media public information

about events and politics might have been shown to be non-stereotypic, ambivalent and in some cases even positive (Dorn-Sezgin, 2013). Or else, the humanity of Southeast European peoples might have not been given the attention that it deserved (Dimitrova, 2013; Kolev and Koulouri, 2005; O'Loughlin, 2010). Such studies have conclusively challenged the unified validity claims of ruthless violence, war atrocities, aggressive nationalism and dirty politics of the Balkan wars, or the "inhumanity" of Southeast European peoples, from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century (Campbell, 1998).

In particular, the essentialist view cannot account for the "non-recurrence or the great deviations from an average pattern of recurrence" of either conflict or cooperation (Holsti, 1991: 301). After all, there has been a credible co-existence and co-operation between different societal and interstate groups in Southeast Europe for long periods in both past (Weaver, 2016) and recent times (Kut and Sirin, 2002), arguably despite the Ottoman period or the heydays of Yugoslavia. Even if members of two different social groups can be hostile to each other here and now, this needs not be always the case of their eternal condition, and transfers of political ideologies and institutions are convincingly substantiated throughout much of entangled Southeast European histories (Daskalov and Mishkova, 2013). The notion of unchanging, essential characteristics of a culture is largely rejected and the adoption of modern constructivist perspectives on culture and identity is incompatible with attempting to identify and construct national and international identity on the basis of a perfect correlation with cultural and historical evidence.

In this article, we do not aim at merely cataloging or seeking a correct reading of related historical narratives to achieve a "non-perspectivistic picture" (Mannheim, 1954: 266) of the events, the nature of war and violence or the ethnicities and religiosities in Southeast Europe. Neither aims this paper to critically address the question of nationalism and state-building process in Southeast Europe quite often associated with the Balkan wars. Our aim is to scrutinize the temporal attention given to Balkan wars and violence in Southeast Europe as an essential resource and enduring topic of West European concern, thus contributing to the growing interest in different forms of historicization by exploring the ways how the past is represented, interpreted and manipulated to explain, justify and replace the present. History does not necessarily depend upon narrative forms that overstate facts in a quest for sensationalisms, essentializations, securitizations or normative transformations. By taking at issue different narratives of war, we will show that they signify an anachronistic mode in which beliefs and representations could be constructed and history

could be apprehended in ways that make present and “represent” the narratives of another past.

A focus on the temporality of the Balkans wars may show more than a dynamic and disputed process, in a making and remaking of Southeast Europe over time as a virtual geopolitical space, organized according to broader political and ideological conditions. This inevitably allows us to seize not only the spatial approximations but also the causal differences and more importantly the different states of consciousness with which real people from one time to one other experienced either the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 or the Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s. Granting a role to a history of real people in the course of different wars makes temporality uncertain and problematic because the timing of human agency challenges the meaning of war as predictable, inevitable and therefore normal to the region.

We recognize that when the formalized historical narratives that inform different representations write authoritatively about war history and meet formal requirements of academic research, relying on empirical methods, archival enquiry and recorded testimonies, it is difficult to prefer one over another. Simply, “since these conceptions have their origins in ethical considerations, the assumption of a given epistemological position by which to judge their cognitive adequacy would itself represent only another ethical choice” (White, 1973: 26). This makes the choice difficult and a criterion external to the narratives should be applied. To avoid ethical judgments in evaluating the political implications of sensationalism, essentialism, securitism and pacifism, with which we deal in the following sections, we must engage with a “method of immanent critique rather than abstract ethics to criticize the present order of things” (Linklater, 1990: 22). Accordingly, at this time, we shall be prospective, concerned not only with taking stock of narrative legacies but also with proposing the kinds of alternative narratives. They might be revealed from the critical awareness of the extant hegemony of imagined temporality, which may ultimately open the perspective of a history from below or the daily life of ordinary people as the driving factor of history.

Narrative legacies

For several reasons, the scholarly literature on the Balkan wars at the end of nineteenth century and beginning of twentieth century have remained incomplete and episodic, either because the First World War obliterated their memory or because the archival sources and scholarly works in local historiographies proved to be linguistically difficult to access. It is argued that the Balkan Crisis has slipped below the horizon of the British

and other Western histories of the pre-Great War period (Clemmesen, 2012), simply because it was made deliberately invisible in Winston Churchill's influential book on the "World Crisis 1911–1914" (Churchill, 1923).

Another reason is the Cold War ideological division, clearly overtaken by Realpolitik, which might have rendered scholarship oblivious to the Balkan Wars. In different historical publications of the Cold War, the issue of the Balkan wars is either absent or discussed in passim in the context of demographic displacements (Stavrianos, 1958), the political establishment of Southeast European national states (Jelavich and Jelavich, 1977) or slightly as an "unmitigated violence that occurred in the sharing out of the booty" (Hösch, 1972: 142).

In some among many academic conferences organized to commemorate the centenary of the 1912–1913 Balkan wars, we came across different historical "truths" and firmly held opinions about facts, events, behaviors and their lasting significance for the region. They provide evidence that the Balkan wars continue to divide many of the peoples, the scholars and the states of the region and beyond. Very diverse influences that have existed for so long and continue to exist today, as indicated elsewhere (Abazi 2016), may have prevented the conditions for the creation of the possibility of construction and development of a critical theoretical narrative and alternative representation of war in Southeast Europe.

This may also explain why the 1914 Carnegie Report suddenly re-emerged in the 1990s, in both reprint (1993) and in sequel (1996), to become the single most often cited source on wars in Southeast Europe. As shown from a simple Google search,³ even one single passage is reproduced verbatim in extenso, though more often truncated, in no less than 60 books and many hundreds press and journal articles, policy reports and other documents dealing with the wars of the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

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 (Berri, 1913; Carnegie Endowment, 1914; Durham, 1914; Hanotaux, 1914; Trotsky, 1980; Tucovic, 1914; Young, 1915), it is difficult to make generalizations about the nature of these wars. Yet, war violence has been recast in many accounts of the troubles in Southeast Europe as "secretions of history" so as to explain moments of great ruptures, liberations, nation-buildings, dissolutions and the like. These accounts are appropriated to construct an almost coherent framework for sensational discoveries that have been "used to demarcate historical periods" (Stewart, 2003: 481) and check whether the advances of modernity were stopped in their tracks.

In all these early accounts, violence has been “the leitmotif of the Balkans wars” and 100 years ago, there was clearly a thoroughly negative estimation of Southeast Europe (Todorova, 1997: 121). Regardless of the prevailing socio-political conditions of early state-building and alternations of regional and international politics, in many contemporary accounts war has remained a sure indicator of a Balkan predisposition towards destructive violence, and the primary reading path to a supposed abnormal history of the undisputed non-modern and uncivilized peoples of Southeast Europe (Michail, 2012: 226).

From a book published before the 1912–1913 Balkan wars break out, we already learn that

history has proved that the Near East [Southeast Europe] has been both the scene of and the reason for war after war. For a variety of reasons, this quarter of the universe is still a continual source of danger to the peace of the world. The Balkan peninsula and Asia Minor may always be the scene of insurrection or massacre. (Woods, 1911: 5)

Another single phrase in an acclaimed travel book, on the eve of another great war, illustrates the Western stereotype that developed of the timeless image of a Southeast European propensity for extreme war violence: “Violence was, indeed, all I knew of the Balkans” (West, 1941: 375).

During the crumbling days of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the violence of the 1912–1913 Balkan wars re-emerged as a compelling argument in many books and reports that inspired a sort of selective “memory boom” (Winter, 2006) and uncritically paraded the brutalities of past Balkan wars before a watching world. Many commentators repeatedly overemphasized parallels between the barbarisms of the 1912–1913 Balkan wars to explain the Yugoslav conflicts of the 1990s. Over the past decades, the casual reader of the international press was encouraged to believe that ethnic-religious hatred, wars, violence and atrocities in former Yugoslavia ought to be endemic and primordial (Cohen, 1993; Gallagher, 2007; Gati, 1992; Glenney, 1996; Hislope, 2007; Judah, 1997, 2002; Kaplan, 1993; Kennan, 1993; Nation, 2003).

Most of the writers made violence in Southeast Europe attain an indefinite continued predominance, forming a coherent whole that provides a proof of the inherent character of Southeast European peoples and “permits us to see the end in every beginning” (White, 1987: 24). By looking to discover a past that could explain the present, the motivations of historicization and temporalization of the Balkan wars converged to create the idea of violence as a significant occurrence that ought to be cultural specific to Southeast Europe.

Several kinds of narrative, to which we briefly call attention hereby under the heading of sensationalism, essentialism, securitism or pacifism, suggest they may serve as exemplary moments of a vision into which imaginative temporal journeys fuse to construct a present imbued with a particular intentional meaning not only about war and violence but also implicitly about Southeast European peoples and societies. The preponderance of violence in all these narratives strikingly involves time-based imagery and ideas at the same time as they have the potential to inform political choices in the present. As shown in relation to the Kosovo conflict (Abazi, 2004), they may deeply affect the actual involvement in the current international affairs towards the region.

Sensationalism

The vast majority of sensational writings is produced not by academic scholars in the strictest sense of the term but rather by a freelance, extra-academic or pseudo-academic cottage industry. Many journalists, travelers and correspondents suddenly became “Balkan experts,” simply by flying to the war zones for a few days or weeks to report their story. By the nature of their trade, they do not focus on a subject until it becomes a hot topic. They come prepared to “witness rather than to analyze” (Stokes et al., 1996: 141). The highbrow international press provided *A Witness to Genocide* and the “horrors of ethnic cleansing” in Balkan social life in association with “the virus of aggressive nationalism” whose “long-suppressed forces have been unleashed once more in the present” (Gutman, 1993: 175). Indeed, according to some other commentator, such “mad war” could only be grasped if you “turn back your clock,” keep going and then head back “to the 15th century,” as if the past were inescapable in inducing the people to kill and “die for what their great-grandparents once did” (Cohen, 1992). So the “fragile peace shatters as Balkan hatred overflows,” in the perpetual struggle of “rival ethnic groups” killing each other “for imagined national spaces” (Beaumont and Wood, 2001). And so, for many commentators, the ghosts of ethnic feuding revived in the Balkans the idea that “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” (Traynor, 1990).

The work of this group of Balkan “specialists” and “parachute journalists” is targeted mainly at 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 (Cohen, 1993;

Gutman, 1993; Judah, 1997, 2002; Kaplan, 1993; Rieff, 1995). These works may vary notoriously in quality and utility, but they are all reminiscent of the perception of something very distinct about a loosely defined but contentious, dangerous and violence-prone area, which has long stood for the exception and continues to be so. Many of these writings consciously or unconsciously perpetuated the idea that at the end like at the onset of the twentieth century the “barbarism” of the Southeast European peoples was so close and yet so far, to recall a phrase once again coined for Greece, in the southeastern “margins of Europe” (Herzfeld, 1987). As has been shown elsewhere in greater detail in the case of writings on Albania in the early twentieth century, especially by Austrian and German travelers (Doja 2014a, 2014b), the impression was always given that people’s life was concerned with 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 discovery of collective memories and absolute myths about the Balkans. Becoming influential in the dominant politics of memory of the Balkan wars, they seem 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 seller’s case studies hawked the whole of Southeast Europe to the political class and to the general public who imagined it as “Balkan” (Todorova, 2005: 153). In particular, the timeless Orientalizing and Balkanizing images from selected and reported narratives interwove the past and the present by singling out specific acts of war and violence, which were so labeled and reified. 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, these narratives have enabled the construction of a primordial, timeless and unchanging ethnic-religious hatred that is paradoxically connected in a clear and immediate way to the ever-changing present. That is why the label “Balkan” has often been associated with Balkanization and taken to represent a complicated and irresolvable political situation that is often assumed to be based on complex and variegated fratricidal division and “widespread feelings of victimization, vindictiveness and fatalism” (Bideleux and Jeffries, 2007: 1).

Essentialism

Like sensationalist non-academic sources, reputedly more serious accounts also seemed to view that in historical perspective “the Balkan proclivity for ethno-religiously based violence [as] an explosion of intercommunal hatred and savagery was not at all surprising” (Cohen, 1993: 270). Many believed that “there is no ideology in the Balkans which 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 the entire nations into the inferno” (Mojzes, 1994). Similarly, others have seen more specifically how the “struggle between Serbs and non-Serbs lies at the heart of the instability for which Yugoslavia was famous for” (Ramet, 2002: 1).

The spectrum of wars of an earlier time seems to have reflected an extreme valuation of the past towards the quest of a cultural inventory of collective memories that seems to have inspired and encouraged the need to develop an “ethno-cultural” approach. Remarkably, such attitude that generally ventures out into primordial essentialism is adopted by both Western and local research on Southeast Europe. In particular, most local scholarship and politics in Southeast European countries inadvertently contributed to such abnormal reading path, simply because they remain stuck to isolated narrow nationalist frameworks. As shown elsewhere in more detail regarding either German-speaking Albanologie (Doja 2014a, 2014b) or native Albanian studies (Doja 1998, 2015; Abazi and Doja 2016a), a strong tradition of scholarship has aimed at emphasizing the essential and immutable character of a people’s culture and history. Often they use and misuse past collective memories in favor of given interests in the context of ideologies aimed at projecting identity boundary and cultural hegemony by glorifying, victimizing or obliterating the past as a means of gaining ascendancy and legitimacy in the present.

Rather than a sound concern with people’s life or with what was happening before and after historically traumatic events, such a way of writing and talking about Southeast Europe seems to be born of cultural insecurity, or yield to a cultural hypochondria, in which conflicting national claims to moral superiority and contingent victimizations are used to promote aggressively several rationalizations of the root causes of the Balkan wars of 1912–1913 or the Yugoslav crisis in the 1990s. To varying degrees, this is the case with some earlier contributions on the 1912–1913 Balkan wars by local scholars trying to find evidence for national claims (Damianova, 1989; Donev, 1988; Kiraly and Djordjevich, 1987; Murzaku, 1987; Sipcanov, 1983), as with many recent accounts of the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s that are denounced to be frequently influenced by Serbian

propaganda (see Cushman, 2004). Such trends have still persisted with a proliferation of celebrations and exhibitions to commemorate the centenary of the 1912-1913 Balkan Wars, which are often tailored for the claims of specific national projects, as in the case of a local conference in Macedonia (Vankovska, 2016). Another case in point is the massive conference proceedings, frequently giving voice to the Turkish views of Neo-Ottomanism (Yavuz and Blumi, 2013).

National accounts have often essentialized the collective memories, which were thereafter conveyed as such in some of the many publications that reflected the atmosphere of the time in their titles with “historically pregnant names” (Campbell, 1998: 40). While referring to either Balkan Babel, inferno, ghosts, broken bonds, tragedy, chaos, horrors, slaughterhouse or “Third” and “Other” Balkan Wars (Cohen, 1993; Glenny, 1996; Kaplan, 1993; Kennan, 1993; Mojzes, 1994; Ramet, 2002; Woodward, 1995), many of such publications assumed a certain kind of nationalism to be the underlying cause of mutual hatred. In their context, a common point of departure for analysis “seems to rely on an undeviating causal chain: people in the Balkans are nationalists, their nationalism generates mutual hatred which under particular circumstances might lead to bloodshed” (Hatzopoulos, 2003: 31).

Such mystification of collective memory and nationalism makes it difficult to think about them outside the particular conceptual universe of primordial ethnic-religious hatred, violence and atrocities. It “distracts the reader from examining relevant evidence” that may lead to more useful conclusions (Ramet, 2005: 3). Nevertheless, it is often taken at face value to fuel public international representations of Southeast Europe without a proper problematization that deserves full consideration in its own right and which must be examined at another time. At any case, the same essentialist approach, intersecting with both social and political analyses of wars, is often reproduced in international relations writings to claim a distinct character of war in Southeast Europe, aimed at othering it.

Securitism

In a securitist representation, driven by a securitization logic that is argued to create threats rather than respond to them (Balzacq, 2010; Buzan et al., 1998; Wæver, 1995), the lessons learned from the perpetrated violence in the Balkan wars are important as long as they serve to understand the nature of threats to the existing international system. The significance of ethnic-religious hatred and violence in the light of cultural or civilizational differences is that it makes of civilized Europe a victim of threats coming from the savage Balkans. Arguably, the Balkans stand as an affront and challenge

both by virtue of their claim to be part of Europe and by their apparent ability to dramatically affect Western history, which must have fueled their international imaginary representation as a “powder keg” in Europe.

Commentators have long been flummoxed by the fact that “these wretched and unhappy little countries in the Balkan Peninsula” could have been the cause of major European conflicts such as World War I. Shortly before World War II, a very influential book was published that was translated into most European and some non-European languages and was reprinted no fewer than 47 times within two years of its publication. This book explicitly laid the blame for the outbreak and outcome of World War I on Southeast Europe:

Some hundred and fifty thousand young Americans died because of an event in 1914 in a mud-caked primitive village, Sarajevo. Loathsome and almost obscene snarls in Balkan politics, hardly intelligible to a Western reader, are still vital to the peace of Europe, and perhaps the world. (Gunther, 1936: 437)

One may wonder whether the so many deaths would have seemed less senseless, had the chain of events that led to them been set in motion in Paris or in London (Fleming, 2000: 1226), but it is symptomatic that the same statement was preserved even in the war edition of 1940. As understandable as the bitter feelings might be “the snarls of Hitler were, obviously, more intelligible to Western readers, because they were Western” (Todorova, 1997: 129). It is only one step from here to the flat assertion that even World War II can be blamed on Southeast Europe. Admittedly, this is a difficult step to take, and over 50 years were needed for someone like Robert Kaplan to take it with his *Balkan Ghosts*, claiming Southeast European origins for Nazism (Kaplan, 1993: xxiii).⁴

Similarly, the blueprint of conflict in Southeast Europe re-emerged in securitist narratives of the post-Cold War era as “the new force for trouble,” specifically in terms of “hyper-nationalism” (Mearsheimer, 1990: 7–12; Mearsheimer and Pape, 1993), “neo-tribalism” (Franck, 1995; Tierney, 2002) or a “Balkan Oriental” with “bloody borders” (Huntington, 1996: 269). They are all pointed as the main sources of threat likely to release oppressed ethnic-religious rivalries and ancient hatred, which could lead to the “Balkanization” of a multipolar Europe regardless of the existing order in international politics.

Taking at issue the Yugoslav wars explicitly, many scholars have argued that their dynamics of disintegration at the sub-state level cannot fit within the Clausewitzian definition of war as a rational instrument of state policy and they cannot be properly understood by focusing on traditional ideas about the causes, nature and impact of war in world politics (Holsti, 1996;

Huntington, 1996; Kaplan, 1997; Van Creveld, 1991). While the question of nationalism, be it hyper or aggressive or not, is quite often associated with the Balkan wars and the Yugoslav conflicts in Southeast Europe (Glenny, 1999; Pavkovic, 2000; Yavuz and Blumi, 2013), unlike the old inter-state European wars, in Southeast Europe they are now labeled as “new” and “post-modern” wars of a “third kind” (Duffield, 2001; Gray, 1997; Holsti, 1992; Jung, 2003; Kaldor, 1999).

In these assumptions, the idea of “an unnatural conflict” get confused by the fact that it was simply triggered by international politics and hegemonic representations, thus coming to “constitute the counter-construction of the Western idea of the Balkans as entrapment” (Hansen, 2000: 355). In turn, this is what makes a politics of securitization and containment of Southeast Europe to look natural and quite necessary. As long as this attitude is comforting to Europe and shows Southeast Europe why it does not get what it deserves, the Balkan war-prone image in international representation helps justifying international politics by means of otherization, a topic that deserves full consideration in its own right and which must be examined in more detail at another time.

Pacifism

For the tenets of pacifism, the 1914 Carnegie Report provides an excellent illustration of a legalistic and idealistic narrative, with its 400 pages released in both French and English, which is often taken to offer a detailed and well-documented description of what happened in the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars. Despite what the title might suggest, the aim of the Carnegie Inquiry was not to show “the causes and conduct of the Balkan wars,” but “to inform public opinion” about the image of war in the ambition to prevent it. In perfect compliance with classical idealistic thought and the pacifist agenda at that time, the Report set an ambitious task.

If the minds of men can be turned even for a short time away from passion, from race antagonism and from national aggrandizement to a contemplation of the individual and national losses due to war, and to the shocking horrors which modern warfare entails, a step, and by no means a short one, will have been taken toward the substitution of justice for force in the settlement of international differences. (Carnegie Endowment, 1914: Preface)

Surely, the outrage caused by wars in the Balkans was a good “opportunity” to mobilize support for the pacifist agenda, towards establishing new laws for all old established and new emerging powers around the world. The aim was to create a new shape of international relations

based on the use of international law, in particular to prevent a permanent state of war between States. Actually, a number of conventions and declarations were drafted in this period. They attempted to codify the legal ways for States to engage in war (*jus ad bellum*), to impose limits of conduct in wartime (*jus in bello*) and to create institutions to manage and arbitrate the disputes among States, like the Court of Arbitration established in 1899 in Hague (Schindler and Toman, 2004: 22–34).

The acknowledgment and inflated assessments of violence perpetrated in the Balkan wars as of a non-civilized and non-European kind were spurred by the political and ideological developments that brought into being and “justified” the moral discourse of the West against misconduct in war, which implicitly paved the way for the otherization of Southeast Europe once again during the wars in Yugoslavia. Indeed, soon after the old Balkan wars, it was clearly stated 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” (Young, 1915: 378–379). From that, it can be inferred that Southeast Europe had to aspire to and attain Western “standards of civilization” (Gong, 1984) to enjoy equal status in the European society of states. From the beginning to the end of the century, one after another self-styled authoritative reports (Carnegie Endowment, 1914, 1993, 1996) illustrate how the narratives of violence became part of history. Over the century, these narratives have constantly renewed the message that Southeast European peoples live in another time, making it necessary, for security reasons, to contain them and fence them off from the rest of Western Europe.

Toward alternative narratives

Obviously, it is rather naïve to believe in the reading of Balkan wars as a “scoop” sold by the sensationalism of media industry and pseudo-academism. So is with the “mystification” stirred by the essentialism of collective memory. Still, it is equally problematic to consider Balkan wars as a product of “hyper” or “aggressive” ethno-religious nationalism in the “great” history of threats securitized by the realism of state politics or as a product of “genocide” in the “naïve” history of illegitimate war on which insisted the idealism of pacifist activism. The value that any hegemonic representation might place on the violent pages of history, built on whichever sensationalist, essentialist, securitist or pacifist narratives, can by no means be simply reduced to, or dictated by, objective restatements of empirical or archival evidence. Apparently, “the belief in a hard core of historical facts existing objectively and independently of the interpretation of the historian is a preposterous fallacy, but one which is very hard to eradicate” (Carr, 1961: 12).

As Nietzsche warned in another context, “objectivity” is not a “contemplation (*Anschauung*) without interest” (Nietzsche, 2007: 87 [83.12]). The main problem with the accounts of the Balkan Wars is not about the objectivity and quantification of “real” facts, but rests on the interpretation of facts upon which truth claims are based. Any created knowledge or “theory is always for someone and for some purpose” (Cox, 1981: 128), while power is “integral to all discursive practices, to the way we think and act, to the way we are defined as thinkers and actors” (George, 1994: 157). Facts, events, personalities and practices in history acquire meaning and importance, and are interpreted and reinterpreted, in the context of particular political interests. It is a question of ideologies of history and politics that arise contingently in relation to different political situations and experiences with systematic implications for foreign policy and public debates, including the scholarly theorizing on the meaning of war and international affairs. Hence, wherever and whenever historical facts are shown to construct whichever war narrative, favoring a certain representation over others, specific interests are always being served and profound political implications are often covered.

In theory, we recognize that sensationalist, essentialist, securitist and pacifist accounts are not compatible with each other. Yet, the focus on their important overlapping attributes allows referring to all accounts as if each of them exposed one of the faces of a single biased idea that brought into being a vision of permanence in international imaginary representations of Southeast Europe in spite of changing realities. At that juncture, a revisionist approach is in order to critically expose the anachronistic politics of historicization in the narratives of the Balkan wars and challenge the futility of ahistorical accounts and the pervasive hegemonic international representations of Southeast Europe. The possibility of such alternative narratives of Southeast European peoples and societies emphasizes the instrumentality of memory construction and a “history from below” both as an apperception of the temporality of being and as an emancipating interest in the social and political transformations in Southeast Europe.

Against anachronism

Remarkably, in the context of Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, wars in Southeast Europe were exploited from the early to the late twentieth century in very similar ways, open to adventurous fact-finders, who rediscovered it again as a “new exotic land” (Skalnik, 2002). Various narratives established a continuity with the past, even though the facts relating to 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 historicizations (Stewart, 2003: 489). In this case, the narratives came as a common construction and pure act of ethnocentrism simply meant to single out continuous exoticized patterns of conflicts, not unlike what Edmund Leach once unforgettably denounced as “the butterfly collecting” of older forms of anthropology (Leach, 1961). Moreover, they created what Johannes Fabian calls 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” (Fabian, 1983: 143).

The notion of allochronism, which is often taken over and appropriated with not an always adequate acknowledgement, clearly points out to the scandal of a chronic phenomenon where, viewed from the western perspective, the Balkan “Other” like any other “non-westerner” are always living in another time and never occupy the same historical time, even when they are contemporary to Western observers. In this way, a certain stereotype is created, as always, of “a land of the living past” (Durham, 1909). It is a mixture of exoticism and “Balkanism” (Todorova, 1997), partaking in the logic of many “Nesting Orientalisms” (Bakic-Hayden, 1995), regarding a “terra incognita” (Pandolfi, 2005) on the “margins of Europe” (Herzfeld, 1987), which promoted an image of Southeast Europe and Southeast European peoples that approximated almost anything and any people in the world, but never West Europe and West Europeans.

The discussion on this topic, opened by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), has traced the West–East conceptualization of cultural differences to its intellectual roots of eighteenth-century Enlightenment (Wolff, 1994). Since the 1950s, as we showed in more detail elsewhere (Doja 2008a), Lévi-Strauss in his *Tristes Tropiques* had bitterly deplored similar stances in travel writing and anthropology (Lévi-Strauss, 1955). To borrow his terms, this literature on Southeast Europe would represent another instance of the same mistake of a whole profession or a whole civilization in believing that men are not always men, and that some are more deserving of interest and attention, only because in the midst of Europe they seem to astonish us by the apparent strangeness of their customs, attitudes and behaviors.

Quite often, banal narratives and competing representations of the Balkan wars have exposed and interpreted the “facts” of ethnic-religious hatred and war atrocities to create the supposed nature of Southeast European peoples. Precipitously, the international hegemonic representations often tend to cast Southeast Europe in oddly familiar contours of immemorial ethnic-religious hatred, nationalist watershed, ethnic tribalism, barbarity and civilizational incompetence, assuming autocratic and

corrupted societal relations, which question people's ability to embrace modernity and to achieve development and prosperity.

Actually, non-civilized temperament and behavior are advanced as if they were inherited and inherently embedded in the social identity of Southeast European peoples. However, the civilizational constancy that opposes Southeast to West Europe must not be thought as accidental, but fraught with danger. In this case as in others, the creative and constructed aspect of politics is often ignored. They serve a purpose and given interests of control and domination, especially for redefining their geopolitical existence in the hierarchy of relations within the Western order of things in international affairs. In turn, the politics of non-recognition of Southeast Europe as an integral part of Europe may have hazardous implications of alienation and engagement in other potential conflicts (Lindemann, 2010, 2014).

Uncovering hidden attitudes

Facts are not self-revealing, but important deductions can be drawn from the political implications of different attitudes and forms of activism. Inconceivable as it might seem, some authors have unambiguously argued that the pacifist agenda also informed a quite sophisticated Western geopolitical agenda, aimed at providing Europe with an opportunity to reinstate its leading role in the world (Grossi, 1994). In particular, D'Estournelles de Constant, the 1909 Peace Nobel Prize laureate and Head of the 1914 Carnegie Inquiry Commission, aimed to upgrade France's position as a "normative" power in international relations, something which was later to be taken over by the European Union (Manners, 2002). Such a move was necessary at that time, he believed, to face the rise of the political and economic dangers coming from the new emerging powers, especially against North American and East Asian threats, in his own words, against *le péril américain et le péril jaune* (Barceló, 1995: 17), just as today the European Union seeks to impose itself as a dominant power in international affairs.

After all, pacifism and other idealist and liberal institutionalism have always had and still have a progressive sensibility arguing that war of any kind is atavistic, morally unacceptable, pragmatically not worth the cost. It can be eventually stamped out, due to change of moral values from war-monger militarism to galloping pacifism (Mueller, 1989), or the mitigating role of international institutions (Keohane, 1988). However, both pacifists and institutionalists overwhelmingly also believe in what amounted to a theory of "just war" (*jus bellum iustum*), which was nevertheless unable to stop two old world wars and many other new wars (Bellamy, 2006).

Eventually, their rational purpose of morally justifiable interests end up joining the rational purpose of realist predictions according to which “the actions of states are determined not by moral principles and legal commitments but by considerations of interest and power” (Morgenthau, 1970: 382).

Such interest-oriented attitude is clearly illustrated in the historical context of the decisions by the European Powers in the Berlin Congress of 1878 that disrupted “the normal development of the highly national conception of an alliance between the Balkan peoples” (Carnegie Endowment, 1914: 40) and put to the end the regime of Concert of Europe established in 1815 between the Great Powers, which prevailed on diplomatic rather than war solutions in case of disputes (Ramet, 1995: 456–457). They meant a frustration of national aspirations in Southeast Europe, a return to the Realpolitik of short-term gains in Europe, and ultimately future wars. Actually, “the direct and logical outcome of the Berlin settlement was the Serbian–Bulgarian war of 1885, the Bosnian crisis of 1908, the two Balkan wars of 1912–1913, and the murder of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in 1914” (Stavrianos, 1958: 412). In that light, the Balkan wars emerge as “not just a prelude” to, but the final preparations for, the European Great War (Clemmesen, 2012).

Definitely, Balkan wars must be placed in the broad context of a larger history of the twentieth century. Far from being an unusual event, an instance of tribal warfare beneath the consideration of civilized people, the homogenization of nations through population exchanges, refugee flights, border adjustments and genocidal massacres are a dominant characteristic of the modern experience (Todorova, 1997). In placing Southeast in European context, it might be useful not to forget that European powers have already perpetrated the colonial genocides in Africa, the extermination of indigenous peoples in the Americas, the *Drang nach Osten* ethnic cleansing in East Europe, the population exchanges in Southeast Europe, and most importantly, the two World Wars and the Holocaust. By virtue of this background, war or violence, should the case arise in Southeast Europe, is certainly of little account to be part of Europe.

Arguably, it is difficult to conclude that the culture of violence is what most characterizes the peoples of Southeast Europe. This does not mean that crimes and devastation have not occurred during the Balkan and Yugoslav wars in Southeast Europe. Simply, the narrative accounts of Balkan wars have the effect of a “historical constructivism” (Faubion, 1993) that typifies the observation that history and ideas out of time do shape current collective memories, which claim to explain how ethnic-religious hatred and antagonism could be inherent and everlasting characteristics of a specific culture. By problematizing the narrative accounts of

Balkan wars, we get some indication of exactly the sorts of issues that can be discussed throughout European contexts and temporalities.

Actually, the Balkan wars could bring nothing new to the theatre of European warfare and there is nonsense to believe that there is a distinct warfare defined in Balkan cultural terms. Balkan wars cannot be substantially distinct in any significant way from other forms of war in other places and other times, simply because war out of contextual particularities always remains a somatic violence between state polities or societal groups. Certainly, there are differences based on the local historical and cultural context where war might have taken place, and no one would argue with that. It is the idea that there is something cultural specific about war that is questionable. Specifically, the ongoing and hegemonic international representations of Balkan wars as exceptional and cultural specific to Southeast European peoples and societies are supported by weak arguments and contradicted by logical evidence.

Narrative accounts of the Balkan wars may have served merely to mystify collective memory and temporality, thus reifying them into obscure myths. Thereafter, these myths are detached from historical context and from everyday human lives, incidentally allowing for war and violence to be considered as culture specific to Southeast Europe. However, if we examine the anachronistic arguments used in various types of narratives and their underlying political and ideological projects, an alternative account can be developed for understanding conflict dynamics by considering the kinds of alternative narratives that might disclose potentially hidden agendas. The history of ordinary people might be an immanent resource that may offer an alternative historical evidence from the Balkan wars and new insights to understanding the ideology of history.

A history from below

Regarding the Balkan wars of 1912–1913, in contrast to reports of ethnic-religious hatred and atrocities, testimonies of the real life of ordinary people in Southeast European societies were and remain not reported extensively in the West European press. Such testimony was also largely absent from the many publications dealing with the conflicts that followed the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. There may be limited empirical evidence of the humanity of ordinary people during both the Balkan wars and the Yugoslav conflicts. Yet, such evidence could help us to gain an understanding of ordinary people's experiences, behaviors and attitudes. These accounts may well differ from those generally conveyed in hegemonic international representations. Ordinary people and social groups are real entities, rather than ideological constructions, and cognizance of this distinction could

seriously challenge the hegemonic representations of wars in Southeast Europe.

An account that differs quite radically from the narratives discussed thus far can be extracted from the perspective of those who participated in and directly experienced the Balkan wars. Some recent publications have made available the experience of war as documented by soldiers and ordinary people of various nationalities in handwritten letters, records, photographs of everyday life and art work (Biondich, 2011; Dimitrova, 2013; Kolev and Koulouri, 2005). These documents show both the commonality of suffering and the feelings of camaraderie among former enemies and demonstrate that it was inconceivable to all of them to accept the destruction and suffering of war as a normal condition. In particular, we are shown the experiences of women in wartime, from the perspective of both the idealized woman as mother or heroine, and that of actual women on the frontline or in supporting roles as nurses, mothers and wives (Kolev and Koulouri, 2005: 68–73). These personal accounts challenge the stereotypes of enduring inimical representations, as well as preconceived notions of the relationship between human behavior and ethnic-religious affiliations. They counter the association of violence and destruction with cultural, religious and ethnic stereotypes. They suggest that human beings accord human values to all humans and feel compassion for those sharing the same suffering, despite the prejudices that may have led to the depiction of others as culturally and ethnically different.

In fact, after desperate fighting and destruction, many of the survivors managed to overcome ethnic-religious hatred and distrust. As a war correspondent of the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913 observed, “often the enemies of yesterday were shaking hands, and short episodes like these were repeated frequently” (Berri, 1913: 252), and this was also the case in the more recent Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s (O’Loughlin, 2010). In particular, the ethnic and religious co-existence in Southeast Europe at the beginning and the end of the twentieth century should not be underestimated. The alternative educational project on teaching modern Southeast European history (Kolev and Koulouri, 2005), like a documentary based on the first photographs and films of the Balkans,⁵ both explore the lives of ordinary people in the midst of the dramatic changes that transformed Southeast Europe after the Balkan Wars of 1912–1913. They provide documented evidence of ethnic and religious co-existence and human solidarity among different people across the Southeast European areas at war at that time. Similarly, a recent documentary on the Bosnian war of 1992–1995 in former Yugoslavia shows an inspiring story of friendship and commitment taking place between a group of Jewish, Muslim, Croat and Serbian people.⁶ They “never got the memo” because outside of the besieged

Bosnian capital, nationalist politicians swore that these ethnic groups could not get along.

The temporalization and contextualization process must take into consideration the interactive relationships between ordinary people and social groups, the time and context in which action takes place, which could reveal the very meaning given by them to their own actions. Here, we need to distinguish between the memories and testimonies upon which different representations are built. Such a distinction may help us to better understand both how collective memory is mystified to construct erroneous representations and how instant testimonies may provide the potential for an alternative interpretation.

Collective memory does not refer to memories *per se*, but to present experiences of the memories of past events. The present moment of recollection always and most decisively inflects the memory. Even

the past in history varies with the present, rests upon the present, is the present... There are not two worlds – the world of the past happenings and the world of our present knowledge of those past events – there is only one world, and it is the world of present experience. (Oakeshott, 1933: 82–83)

The memory connection to the past is not actually mediated by the accuracy of recall, but by imaginative investment in actual recall, supplemented by a projection of the past onto the present, and the creation of a new world of immediate experience that is based on actual recalled events. This impressionistic character of memories is packaged in different forms, autobiography, biography, memoirs, academic histories, popular stories, media reports, witness accounts, creative writing, monuments, cemeteries, museums, archives, etc. As in the case of the Balkan war correspondence of Trotsky, the task is to un-package memory and even more importantly to study the packaging itself (Todorova, 2013: 19). Memory accounts hold their specific narrative sways and consistencies, and they may have a particular legitimacy. Like myths, memory accounts possess both credibility and authority, but they are not necessarily accurate.

Memory accounts have a clear social function. Among other things, the frequent ascriptions of role relationships are embedded in representations that are built upon collective memory. For example, as shown in more detail elsewhere (Doja 2008b), there is an oppositional conceptualization of territorial and religious groups in Southeast Europe, such as highlander/lowlander, urban/rural, autochthonous/heterochthonous, etc. An open series of such antithetical pairs are applied interchangeably to different groups of people, regardless of the actual ascriptions, to exalt or debase their identity. In this way, they are characterized as either moral or

immoral, pure or impure, civilized or non-civilized, European or non-European. Such representations of identity are often based on intersubjective images and perceptions to which people's lives and interactions relate, especially in the context of conflict.

Sociologically speaking, collective memory is a reliable and structured resource for the evaluation of shared understandings and expectations that persist over time even as individual actors come and go from one social ascription to another and into the logic of which new actors are socialized (Halbwachs, 1976, 1997). Notwithstanding its potential exploitation in the social theory of international politics (Wendt, 1999), the collective memory of traumatic events is involved in the formation of a new individual identity. As argued in other contexts, the identity of a post-conflict generation "forms a narrative of self-definition and is the beginning of coming to terms with the past in ways that are meaningful for the future" (Sicher, 2000: 84). The narratives thus constructed serve to create a new social identity, that of the post-conflict or second generation of survivors. They serve as a kind of "post-memory" or post-memorial work that "strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with the resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (Hirsch, 2008: 111 [emphasis given]).

To grow up with such overwhelming memories that have been passed down through the generations, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own stories and experiences cast into doubt or displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. Arguably, people who are exposed to intergenerational stories of traumatic events have a distinct capacity for personalizing and giving new meaning to similar accounts of these historical events. Further, this disposition may make them more sensitive to discourse that includes references to those past traumatic events, especially if the aim of those producing such discourse is to mobilize collective memory for a collective political action (Dragojević, 2013).

By contrast, instant testimonies, such as a letter or other artifact originating from an event located in a particular moment of time, in a particular situation, and within a particular social interaction, represent historical events in the condensed form of a snapshot. These testimonies are filled with potential narrative energy, but they do not always literally fill out representations by going into historical narration, which could turn them from "facts of the past" into "historical facts" or historical information deemed important according to one point of view or another (Carr, 1961: 11–13). As they are in a sense historically unplotted, they can be felt as a painful loss for the historian who tries to selectively piece together the facts

of the past. However, at the same time, they can be felt as an enrichment for the history that people themselves make in the particular situations of their own social interaction. In the sense of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, such instant testimonies can be considered as what validates the meaning and purpose of existence (Heidegger, 1977).

Instant testimonies and people's histories contrast with collective memories and with imagined temporalities. As argued in other contexts, they are "a living commentary on the limits of autobiographical narrative when the theme is of unprecedented atrocity" and they reveal "the limits of memory's ability to recreate that past" (Langer, 1991: 61). More than anything else, they make manifest the ultimate impossibility of mystifying the war experience. In this sense, these personal testimonies could help to demystify prevailing representations and reveal hidden agendas. They contrast with both collective memories and the anachronistic narrative renderings of sensationalist, essentialist, securitist or pacifist representations because they are naturally narratives beyond analogy, metaphor and mythic associations. The outcome of this complex narrative process can ultimately be interfaced with what is termed a "history from below" (Thompson, 1966). The complexities of ordinary people's experience could be integrated as an important driving factor of history that may open up possibilities for an alternative narrative of the Balkan wars and an alternative representation of Southeast Europe. This perspective, regardless of its emancipatory ideology, may reveal that it is possible to challenge the assumptions of hegemonic narratives and political practices by which a stigmatizing image of Southeast Europe is naturalized and appropriated as a matter of natural fact by the Western world.

However, a critical approach that contrasts the anachronism and the hidden agendas of the pacifist, sensationalist, essentialist and securitist claims of hegemonic narratives with a perspective on "people's history" does not offer only a convenient way of classifying the growing literature on the Balkan wars. Nor does it show merely that another narrative of war is possible beyond the active policy of pacifist idealism, the essentialist mystification of collective memory, the sensationalism of media industry and pseudo-academism or the militarist politics of state realism. Rather, it can be used as a revisionist approach to bring to light a hitherto unnoticed intersubjective reality. In this way, existing viewpoints on the allegedly objective realities to which we have grown accustomed can be challenged and denaturalized. These extant ways of thinking can be shown to be contingent, open to revision, and as not necessarily offering the most warranted or useful way of looking at past events. In addition, existing representations of warfare can be compared and contrasted with alternatives that have, consciously or unconsciously, been buried. The possibility of constructing alternative narratives from different

sources would open up an overall frame of thinking about the ways in which particular historical events can be contextualized and interpreted.

Basically, shifting the focus to people's history could illuminate the weaknesses of anachronistic narratives, and also ground history in the humanity of ordinary people and the reality of changing circumstances. As advocated in other contexts, this "interest of emancipation" could open up possibilities for social and political transformations (Neufeld, 1995: 14), thereby paving the way for an alternative image of Southeast Europe in international representations. Notwithstanding the context of conflict and war, an examination of the experiences of ordinary people, as shown in the case of contemporary Bosnia (Campbell, 1998; O'Loughlin, 2010), may ground the individual and collective identities of ordinary people in Southeast Europe in a continuing and changing present, full of potential to transform past traumas into future rewards.

Conclusion

The pervasive essentializing discourses that surround the Balkan Wars may appear unusual and difficult to grasp, if one schematically employs traditional categories developed in both scholarship and politics. In turn, an analysis of the narrative legacies, linked to a careful examination of their historical contextualization in ideological perspective, provides a more critical reflection on the anachronistic and ethnocentric politics of the narrative of wars in Southeast Europe. While analyzing 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 different accounts and move away from the close association of Balkan wars with the essentialization of Southeast Europe. The discursive practice of different narratives have created a distorted perception of Southeast Europe in international society, used as a justification for policies of securitization and containment or neglect and disdain towards the pressing problems at both regional and global levels. Ultimately, we urge for considering Southeast Europe as an integral part of European history and politics.

In methodological terms, we engaged with a comparative analysis of ideas rather than with a search for an extended positive proof. We argued for a critical approach to ideological conceptions of history and temporality by focusing on political processes and power relations that define wars and their place in social relations. The possibility of alternative narratives and temporalities of the Balkan wars is proposed as a way into new insights to the understanding of the ideology of history. The aim of this paper was not to write the history of Balkan wars, but instead examine in what way their representations and their implications have defined the West

European imagination of Southeast Europe. Eventually, this approach might not be exhaustive and certainly a number of questions remain open, especially to future archival research. However, if this paper has managed to provoke at the very least a non-stereotyped discussion throughout a set of reflections on what essentializing concepts and representations can do, it will hopefully constitute an encouragement for further, deeper enquiries in this direction.

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Notes

1. Earlier versions of this article were presented to a series of international conferences: *The Balkan Wars 1912–1913: A Conference to Mark the 100th Anniversary*, organized by the Faculty of History, University of Oxford, 17–18 October 2012; *From Balkan Wars to Balkan Peace Project: The EU Integration*, organized 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*, organized in Tirana (Albania) by the Institut für Ost- und Südosteuropaforschung, Regensburg, 10–11 June 2013. We have benefitted greatly from the comments, encouragements, discussions and presentations of all participants, especially Tom Buchanan, James Pettifer, Nicholas Onuf, Sabrina Ramet, Robert Evans, Mark Almond, Thomas Lindemann, Bernd Fischer, Conrad Clewing and many others.
2. Considering Southeast Europe normally as an integral part of European history and politics, in this article, we use “Southeast Europe” as a term much more appropriate than “the Balkans.” Surely, even this term might also have acquired negative connotations in the past with long lasting effects (Todorova, 1997: 28). Nevertheless, as a political term, “Southeast Europe” must implicitly acknowledge the fact that the southeastern part of Europe is a full part of Europe. Correspondingly, the problems arisen in Southeast Europe are European problems and the solutions to these problems must be European solutions. Arguably, it may well be the case that Southeast Europe, as shown in the case of Albania (Abazi, 2008a:229–235), 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.
3. Google search for “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, 1914: 151), at https://www.google.com/search?q=Carnegie+1914+homes+ashes&btnG=Chercher+des+livres&tbn=bks&tbo=1&hl=fr&gws_rd=ssl#newwindow=1&hl=fr&tbn=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 25 July 2016).
4. Remarkably, at the *Conference to mark the 100th Anniversary of the Balkan Wars 1912–1913* organized by the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford on 17–18 October 2012, where an earlier version of this paper was also presented, we witnessed how one discussant contended that the course of World War II was changed because of the German troubles with internal Southeast European politics. The German forces invaded Yugoslavia in spring 1941, we were reminded, thus delaying Hitler’s attack of the Soviet Union. Shocking and unbelievable as it might seem, instead of praising Southeast European politics for causing the failure of the Nazi *Blitzkrieg*, the Oxford don wickedly put the blame on Hitler’s dealing with Balkan quarrels, as if Southeast Europe were always to put a curse on things European!
 5. Silent Balkans, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVMpt7Ct3Jc> (accessed 25 July 2016).
 6. Survival in Sarajevo – Friendship in a time of war, 16 December 2013, <https://youtu.be/YQ5uDDQnk2I> (accessed 25 July 2016).

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