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The Mytho-Logics of Othering and Containment: Culture, Politics and Theory in International Relations

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we adopt a socio-anthropological approach to understand how hegemonic international representations are constructed in the politics and theory of international relations, specifically how Southeast Europe is perceived in West European imagination. We focus on various forms of travel writing, media reporting, diplomatic record, policy making, truth claims and expert accounts related to different narrative perspectives on the Balkan wars, both old (1912–1913) and new (1991–1999). We show how these perspectives are rooted in different temporalities and historicizations, and how they contribute to international representations that affect international politics, particularly in relation to perpetuating othering and containment of Southeast Europe. We demonstrate through a detailed analysis and problematization how these international representations are culturally and politically constructed. They do not neutrally refer to a reality in the world; they create a reality of their own. As such, how international representations are constructed is itself a form of power and hegemony in both the practice and the theory of international relations.

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Introduction

The main aim of this article is to problematize the dominant narratives of Balkan wars in terms of performative practices. We assume that these narratives are performed and practiced in ways that engender certain types of public representations in the West European imagination of not only the Balkan wars, but also Southeast Europe and Southeast European peoples. We analyse the performance of these narratives to attempt to understand how the international representations of Southeast Europe have been constructed throughout the twentieth century. In many ways, from the 1912–1913 Balkan wars to the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, international representations have remained fixed in Western thought as a “present history” and they resonate with a historical and civilizational rhetoric that is linked to an othering process or a politics of “otherization.” In particular, we highlight the inflated references to the atrocities of the Balkan wars, which continue to dominate both the narratives and the policies regarding current events in the region. Such exaggerations revive old stereotypes and indiscriminate essentialized

generalizations related to “non-European” qualifications, such as ancient ethno-religious hatred, violence and un-civilization. Incidentally, a similar essentialist and time-less bias can be found in the debates taking place in the field of international relations theory.

War and violence in Southeast Europe have become a vital resource and enduring topic of West European concern, both politically and academically. Much of the discussions revolving around the Balkan wars, as shown elsewhere (Abazi 2016), suggest 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, homogenous, bounded territories in the case of the second war (June–July 1913). With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and the coalition of national forces in the first Balkan war, 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 One.

Similarly, in spite of the boom of publications in the aftermath of the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, there must have been again more going on than a supposed unleash of primordial ethno-religious hatred, easily attributed to old hostilities that are claimed to repeat always themselves in the region, particularly during the Balkan wars of the early century. Everything seems indicating that there may also be more than a dynamic and disputed process, in the making and remaking of the facts of Balkan wars and the resulting international representations of Southeast Europe over time. At the end, 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 virtual geopolitical space, which seems to be constructed and organized according to broader political and ideological conditions, yet to discover.

There are many types of knowledge produced about the Balkan wars of 1912–1913 and the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s that focus in particular on nationalism and the state-building process in Southeast Europe as well as on the international representation of Southeast Europe. Already, a number of efforts in the growing field of critical Southeast European studies, which we examine in more detail elsewhere (Abazi and Doja 2016b, 2017, 2018), 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. Such studies have conclusively challenged the essentialist 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 (Campbell 1998).

Clearly, the extant scholarship on Balkanism has already deconstructed the confinement of Southeast Europe to the margins of Europe and in this analysis we cannot merely catalogue or seek a more correct or more balanced reading of the historical narratives related to the Balkan wars. Nevertheless, the arguments and the insights obtained from a critical awareness of the hegemonic narratives on these wars can provide a new perspective on the narrative legacies that have plagued Southeast Europe in international representations. Our primary concern is a politics of knowledge that moves beyond narratives of Balkan wars and is focused on the social construction of objective history and the international hegemonic representations of Southeast Europe.

International Representations as a Cultural System

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 of the 1990s (Cushman 2004, 8), had a decisive, independent influence on the outcomes of the wars as well as on the international representations of Southeast Europe.

Theoretically, the analysis is related to a considerable body of works in the constructivist tradition, which incidentally have also considered the Balkan wars more specifically (Campbell 1998; Hansen 2006). Its gist will lie with an approach where international representations are significant for the construction of a performative identity of Southeast Europe and Southeast European peoples and where both narrative accounts and foreign policies are discursive practices through which such identities are constituted and performed.

Because our critical reflections are inspired by the ideology of history and politics, in our argument we shall keep the focus on the hegemonic cultural system of international politics. Methodologically, we move away from the political conception of international representative institutions and adopt a socio-anthropological approach that considers international beliefs and representations in general and those of the Balkan wars in particular as forming a hegemonic cultural system. In this sense, from the theoretical perspective of international relations advocated by Hedley Bull, the whole system of ideas and beliefs on Southeast Europe can be considered to have been elaborated collectively as representations by what is termed an “international society of states” (Bull 1977) as imagined by the Western “standards of civilization” (Gong 1984). Following Durkheim’s *Rules of the Sociological Method* (Durkheim [1895] 1988), we consider that this international society elaborates, like any society, a specific system of “collective representations” as an autonomous reality. “The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own” (Durkheim [1893] 1984, 63).

Durkheim used first the term *collective conscience* or common consciousness and later the term *collective representations* to refer to this system. The point in Durkheim’s main concern is not with the conscious or psychological state of specific individuals, but rather with the “distinctive reality” of collective beliefs and sentiments that are “diffused over society as a whole” and that exist “independent of the particular conditions in which individuals find themselves” (Durkheim [1893] 1984, 63). In fact, individuals pass on, but collective representations abide. Accordingly, the beliefs and sentiments common to international actors would substantiate the intellectual attitudes and collective representations of the Western international community independently from the individual mental images and dispositions of any of the actors in the international system. A similar social theoretical view also appears in influential writings on systemic constructivism. Alexander Wendt, for instance, maintains that in international politics “collective representations have a life and logic of their own that cannot be reduced to actors’ perceptions or behavior” (Wendt 1999, 264, see also 150–165).

From a socio-anthropological perspective, the focus is not necessarily on a specific method, but says ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation that may provide an exhaustive account of the subject under study, or on the end product of a detailed ethnographic description. What is distinctive about modern anthropology is not a preoccupation with the particularities of fieldwork, or “thick description” (Geertz 1973, 6), but conceptual analysis. The mission of anthropology is the comparison of culturally embedded concepts, beliefs and representations between societies differently located in time and space, the forms of social life they articulate, and the power they release or disable (see Asad 2003, 17). In this case, considering the specific cultural system of collective representations elaborated by international society, like any cultural system, requires distinguishing the very relationship between culture and society.

Throughout the history of anthropology, scholars have adapted the notions of culture to suit the dominant concerns of the day, thus making the anthropological account of culture “something of a success story” (Kuper 1999, 226). In a definition indebted to the Victorian anthropologist Edward Tylor, culture is conceptualized as a “complex whole” of knowledge, beliefs, values, capabilities and forms of behavior that the individual acquires “as a member of society” (Tylor 1871). Later, this influential concept was elaborated further, as the emphasis shifted from manifest patterns of behavior to underlying structures of symbolic meaning. In a series of erudite and elegant essays written in the 1960s and 1970s, Clifford Geertz depicted culture as a “system of meanings” and other collective or corporate resources established by convention, reproduced by traditional transmission, and largely shared by a population (Geertz 1973, 1983). In this conceptualization, culture refers to an ordered system of acquired, cognitive and symbolic meanings and other resources of existence in terms of which social interaction takes place, whereas society refers to the social organization of human life, the ongoing process and pattern of interactive behavior, the form that social action takes in the actually existing network of social relations (Geertz 1973, 144–145). Later on, it became even more profitable to seek the generative source of culture in human practices, situated in the relational context of people’s mutual involvement in a social world.¹ In addition, the ordered cultural system of particular beliefs, expressive symbols, values and representations that people use to define their world, express their feelings, interpret their experiences, make their judgments and guide their actions to adapt to their own physical, social and political environments is specific to a given social entity. Seen from this perspective, the cultural system of beliefs, values and representations becomes a marker of difference between groups and a symbolic resource to confer identity on the group, whether this group is a society or a polity.

We might be right then to assume an international cultural system, which like any cultural system could be considered to consist of similar identity-conferring resources that are specific to Western international society as a social entity in its own right. These resources form a complex system of organized knowledge and belief based on cultural learning of symbols and codes, which allow international actors to structure their experiences and perceptions, formulate acts and choose between alternatives of internationally distributed and shared meanings. This does not necessarily prove that the identity of international actors, like any collective identity, can be organized, negotiated or manipulated independently of the cultural corporate content that is associated with the identities. Fredrik Barth demonstrated that this should only allow us to grasp the social effects of

cultural corporate difference between the actors (Barth 1969). As Edmund Leach succinctly put it: “culture provides the form, the *dress* of the social situation” (Leach 1954, 16; italics in the original). That is to say, when seeking to understand the international cultural system in line with a tradition that goes back to the founding fathers of French and British anthropology (Lévi-Strauss [1950] 2012; Radcliffe-Brown 1952), we should focus on the social and power relationships that are established through the allocation of roles and status among international actors, and not on their cultural characteristics or corporate resources.

What is important in the analysis of international beliefs and representations is not the kinds of cultural contents and corporate resources of particular actors, but rather the social organization of their differences, which then makes the various categories of cultural content and corporate resources organizationally relevant. In the process of identification and othering, not all cultural contents and corporate resources are used and taken into account, namely, not their objective similarities or differences, “but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant” according to the actual social situation in which they are engaged (Barth 1969, 14). The dynamics between the imposition and the acceptance of collective and corporate identities is grounded in the structural and transactional principle that real entities, whether social groups or state polities, including international society, are only constituted in relation to one another or between “us” and “them.” Whatever the properties, as shown in several historical and political instances of Balkan identity reconstructions (Doja 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2008c), any identity is only applicable in reference to an otherness and can only be realized by a dichotomous group organization on the boundary of one in contact, confrontation with or contrast with the other.

From an expanded anthropological perspective following the *Interpretation of Cultures* (Geertz 1973), we consider that international beliefs and representations in general and those of the Balkan wars in particular are constructed intersubjectively as a cultural system of hegemonic meanings internationally shared. They are defined, interpreted and negotiated in the course of international interactions, on a specific subject, based on a specific set of discursive acts, informed by specific knowledge and codes, which a specific set of international actors learn and put into practice. As such, international beliefs and representations allow the interpretation of situated experience and the generation of international political behavior but they cannot be measured against some real or true facts derived from historical narratives and empirical evidence. Instead, as it were, the validity-claims of the international hegemonic representations of Southeast Europe must relate to specific interactive and discursive social structures that facilitate the conditions for the claims to attain a representational status.

The discursive practice related to truth claims about facts, events and behaviors manifests itself in a way that both informs and is influenced by a particular imagination or narrative while leaving silent others, showing how some interpretations are empowered while others are undermined (Campbell 1998). In the Southeast European context as elsewhere, the role of ideas and discourses in the construction and reconstruction of war must first be clarified. If we aim to go beyond explanations based on rationalist interests, path-dependent history and cultural-framing preferences, we must consider competing political interests. From this perspective, one inevitably needs to integrate a genealogical critique and a conceptual problematization of the constitutive factors of

the dominant war narratives and related discursive and political practices. This requires an examination of the performative and instrumental functions of ideas and practices at play and their mythological rationalizations.

Performative Practices

Dominant discourses in international hegemonic representations are not simply signs that refer to or represent some reality, but a system of categories that makes a reality possible. To paraphrase Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* ([1969] 1972), these discourses are not about objects of truth; they are practices that systematically constitute, in our case, the Balkan image of Southeast Europe as “the object of which they speak” (Foucault [1969] 1972, 49). Arguably, from a symbolic-anthropological perspective that lay stress on the autonomous reality of the systems of representations (Geertz 1973), the international beliefs and representations of the Balkan wars show the extent to which analytical categories of violence, ethno-religious hatred and modernity, or civilized West and uncivilized Balkans, are often mistaken for an empirical evidence of reality, which is detached from political practices and vested interests.

In particular, “the discursive character of historical facts” (Callinicos 1995, 76) assumes an oddly prescriptive and performative function. In the aftermath of the crisis and the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the “truth claims” about the “real” facts, events and behaviors related to the nature of Balkan wars have determined the flux of ideas at work among Western scholars and policy strategists who dominated “virtually all historical references in the media, including the highbrow press” (Banac 1992, 143). The outcome is the construction of a public representation in the Western-imagined international society of states that “re-balkanized Southeast Europe and revived old Western stereotypes about the Balkans and Balkanization” (Simić 2013, 114).

In terms of realistic legacy, as long as collective representations and beliefs of the Western-imagined international society of states “have observable effects or are manipulable by human agents, we can in principle speak meaningfully about the ‘reality’ of unobservable social structures” (Wendt 1987, 352). In the case of the international representations of Southeast Europe, their effects can be observed through the manipulation of reiterative and selective citational practices. The recurrent highlighting of particular memorialized images and analogies based on preconceived beliefs and perceptions of the Balkan wars and a bygone ethnicized violence (Carnegie Endowment 1914, 1993, 1996; Kaplan 1993; Kennan 1993) have led to a discursive reconstruction of Southeast Europe. This has brought into being a reality of “the Balkans” in international hegemonic representations as a set of intercivilizational groups that tend to engage in the expansion and escalation of conflict (Huntington 1996, 272).

Most scholarly or semi-scholarly works on Southeast Europe have been written during times of crisis and this can be seen in the representations that they have helped to construct. Often these authors are interested in their subject matter simply because contemporary conflict makes the topic timely (Fleming 2000, 1226). While this might be a pragmatic approach, the opinionated apprehension of facts from previous crises to refer to current conflicts, as in the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia or during the conflict in Kosovo, has led many journalists and scholars to hold what in other contexts

are termed “world views that may have both generated the catastrophe and narrated it afterwards” (Young 1988, 5).

A typical case in point is the introduction to the reprint of the 1913 Carnegie Inquiry,² where the 1912–1913 Balkan wars are used to endow the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s with an inflated meaning. Even though they occurred in different historical contexts, they are thought to be related as meaningful coincidences in a kind of synchronicity. However blatant and fanciful it might seem, pre-given concepts are constructed upon which the criteria of judgment are based. Historical encounters and the “development of those earlier ages, not only those of the Turkish domination, but of earlier ones as well,” particularly the 1912–1913 Balkan wars, are taken to provide evidence for the “aggressive nationalism that manifests itself on the field of battle and drew on deeper traits of character inherited presumably from a distant tribal past.” They all “had the effect of thrusting into the southeastern reaches of the European continent a salient of non-European civilization which has continued to the present day to preserve many of its non-European characteristics,” while they inform “the peoples of this age how much today’s problem has deep roots” (Kennan 1993, 12–13).

Another case 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” (Cushman 2004). In this debate, by adopting a relativist position with regard to responsibility for the ethno-nationalist conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the writings of some anthropologists are denounced to have resonated with Serbian nationalism at the time.³ These scholars might claim that the charge against them is spurious because their works were “written and submitted *before* armed conflicts began in Yugoslavia, not during them, and even the revisions requested by the editor were completed before much major fighting had taken place” (548; italics in the original).

Consequently, it might not be possible for them to mention “things which had not happened” at the time when they wrote (Cushman 2004, 548). In practical terms, it might not be possible for them to have reworked Serbian nationalist propaganda “more than a year before such material came into existence” (548). Similarly, it might not be possible for them to have converted nationalist themes of the Serbian perpetrators of genocide into respectable accounts “when no genocide had been perpetrated” (549). Finally, it might not be possible for them to have been “genocide deniers before genocide had even taken place” (549). Interestingly, they state their work focused “on the symbolic revival of the memory of the Second World War genocide victims and the use of those memories by Serbian nationalists to incite rebellion against the secession of Croatia in 1991” (556). They might even accept the assertion that conflict began before military forces directly engaged each other, but in that case, they claim this is a knowledge that could not be attributed to them at the time as they could not have a knowledge “about how events would transpire” (549).

However, the crux of the debate was precisely a kind of archaeology of knowledge that could point out the homologues between Serbian nationalist discourse and the discourse of certain accounts of conflict in the former Yugoslavia. The main purpose of the debate was to show how these accounts of the situation in Yugoslavia have masked and elided some of the central historical realities regarding atrocities and war crimes of a genocidal nature, while echoing several of the themes of Serbian nationalist ideology and

propaganda. Actually, in many cases, the connection between past and present is made quite overtly. For instance, these authors directly make a connection between Croatian atrocities against the Serbs during the Second World War and the acts of defensive Croatian aggression against Serbs in Croatia in 1991, which nevertheless occurred after the Serbian invasion of Croatia and the occupation of one-third of Croatian territory (Cushman 2004, 15).

Whether or not these accounts were written before the events took place, this strategy of linkage is a mainstay of Serbian propaganda that is adopted in many notorious western accounts of which the accounts under criticism in this debate are only some significant and notable examples. Indeed, these scholars were “creating an account of events that sounded much like the accounts put forth by Serbian nationalists long *before* the war and *during* the war” (Cushman 2004, 561; italics added). Their accounts were empathetic to giving credence to the idea of collective historical victimization, an idea that was central to Serbian nationalist rhetoric. It was an idea that was extant since the notorious Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences in 1986 or at least since 1988 when Serbian political leadership began their nationalist agenda, capitalizing on the social construction of the Orthodox Serbs as victims of Kosovar Albanians, Bosnian Muslims, Catholic Croats and self-determining Slovenians.

However, in reading how these types of narrative made perpetrators look like victims, there is not only the elision and denial of the experiences of the victims of Serbian aggression. Most importantly, it can be argued that the degree of moral equivalence that re-described the victims of atrocities as the cause of war and of the dissolution of Yugoslavia had at the same time a performative function. They provide a kind of anarchy of thought and confusion of ideas, which ultimately lead to the trivialization and the denial of war crimes and genocide and to the confusion of victims and perpetrators. Moral relativism strategies can take new forms and expressions, but as the recent controversy surrounding the Nobel Award to Peter Handke’s writings showed, they always claim to reflect the reality of the facts with a banal objectivism.⁴

In turn, the performative function of banal objectivism of certain facts had resulted into essentializing and reifying the Balkan character of Southeast European peoples as a whole. The use of empirical evidence from old wars to demonstrate the conditions of the present is not only misleading, but makes the early wars an intrinsic feature of the Balkan international representation of the latter-day Southeast Europe. In the end, the circular pattern of representations reveals a form of self-fulfilled prophecy. If Southeast Europe is a very special place with very distinct people, one should not be surprised at the dramatic and rather cruel things that sometimes happen there. Believing in the uniqueness of one’s background prepares people for unusual events, trains them not to be surprised by them and encourages them to cope with them. Most importantly perhaps, this inspires misperceptions about the exceptionality of war and the people who seemingly contradict the normative standards of war devised by the civilized world. In the Western-imagined international society of states, violence is an inevitable by-product of politics and incidentally economics. By contrast, in Southeast Europe, it is often supposed to be the outcome of “ancient ethno-religious hatred.” Yet, when dealing with Balkan wars, two interrelated issues should also be considered: the instrumental othering and the mythological rationalization of history in Southeast Europe.

Mytho-Logics of Othering

In international hegemonic representations, the construction of violence is formulated in the context of a typology of differences according to a binary discourse on civilizations. Whatever the narratives, their writers are always “intrigued by and attracted to the simple, yet passionate, Balkan Romantic Other” (Hansen 2006, 151). The mixture of “Orientalism” (Said 1978) and “Balkanism” (Todorova 1997) builds an essentialized construct out of the reality of the former areas having been subjugated by the Ottoman Empire. This essence was resuscitated at the end of the twentieth century in the narratives of the early Balkan wars. It resonates with the almost “homeostatic qualities” of Southeast Europe as a resident alien in West Europe, an internal cultural “other” confined to the margins of Europe and constructed in contraposition to the rest of civilized Europe. Much the same as anthropology once constructed its object with the “other” placed out of European time and out of European history (Wolf 1982; Fabian 1983), such a barbarous and violent area, in its disconnected geographical space and with its own historical time, does not belong to but contrasts with European civilization, enlightenment and modernity. Although the region is geographically and historically inseparable from Europe, in the imagination of West Europeans, Southeast Europe is traditionally represented as a European periphery. Arguably, the main purpose of the construction of this negative identification of “non-European Europe” is to reveal in contrast a more positive image that is built to represent “European Europe” as a civilizational unity.

Such ideas can be traced back to the writings of various West European travelers, diplomats, poets, journalists and scholars during the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. A number of studies have shown in detail how they firmly established the Balkan representation of Southeast Europe (Todorova 1997; Goldsworthy 1998; Fleming 2000; Hammond 2004). As a typical example, the 1913 Carnegie Inquiry depicted Southeast European peoples “not far from us, [as they] were then, and are still, unlike Europe, more widely separated from Europe than Europe from America; no one knew anything of them, no one said anything about them” (Carnegie Endowment 1914, 3). The same ideas were emphatically rearticulated during the 1990s, when the war and violence that followed the disintegration of former Yugoslavia were interpreted as a manifestation of the typical “Balkan character” of peoples inhabiting this part of Europe (Petrovic 2009, 21). In this way, the idea that “the territory of Yugoslavia has unfolded as a microcosm of the region as a whole” where “nowhere in Europe can a more complex web of interactions be found” (Lederer 1969, 396–397) seemed to be confirmed.

The “other” as coined especially in the metaphor of “Balkanization” has come to “signify persistent, intense, and intractable fracturing of human communities” and is often applied to all of Southeast European peoples. Typically, Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Albanians are classified together as Balkan peoples (Cushman 2004, 19). Their image is thus thickened as being barbarian, tribal and a savage “other” engaged in age-old conflicts, inherently violent, backward, uncivilized and unable to evolve. Not surprisingly, in the aftermath of the Cold War, Southeast Europe came to represent for the West “the third time zone of Europe” (Gellner 1994; Ignatieff 1995, 134), and Southeast European peoples a “second-class citizenship in the new Europe” (Longworth 1994, 6).

The division of Southeast Europe from West Europe, which is artificially articulated to constitute a space of moral superiority for the West, helps the creation of a reality in its own right that illuminates the simultaneous acts of exclusion and inclusion in the history of European ideas. Like in the more specific Southeast European context of the Bosnian identity, such a constructed character signifies at the same time the potential of being both “Brother” and “Other” (Hajdarasic 2015), containing the fantasy of both actual assimilation and desired difference. In this process, “writing of Balkan violence as primeval or unmodern has become a way for the West to keep the desired distance from it” (Mazower 2002, 154).

Even more problematic is the prejudice evident in the understanding of the history of Southeast Europe as well as the uses and abuses of history more generally (MacMillan 2001; 2009, 89). Perhaps this is best encapsulated in a phrase originally used in a restricted Cretan or Greek context but incorrectly attributed to Winston Churchill and generalized to “the Balkans” as a whole.⁵ As a typical Churchill aphorism, the belief that “the Balkans produce more history than they can consume” has been recycled and generalized by a good number of writers and politicians on Southeast Europe (Brown 2003). One example among others is that of the then EU Commissioner for Enlargement who, in an address at the University of Sarajevo in 2005, advised the audience to leave blind nationalism behind and choose a European future, saying, “I am sure you agree with me that it is high time that the Western Balkans can take a break and move from the production to the consumption of history!” (Rehn 2005). Obviously, regardless of whether one does understand what one means, in that context, the so-called Churchill aphorism was extremely arrogant.

The arrogance of this aphorism brings together the two aspects of the othering of Southeast Europe and the misperception of Southeast European history, which allows us to problematize them by using Lévi-Strauss’s mytho-logical thermal analysis of history (Doja 2005, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2020). In Lévi-Strauss’s theory, the claim that myths are machines for the suppression of time and disorder at the level of history and social relations (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 16) and the distinction of “historical temperatures” in his model of “cold” and “hot” societies (Lévi-Strauss 1961, 37–48) do not imply that there are not different kinds of history that matter. As it is argued in this context, what differ are ideologies about history (Stewart 2003, 485), and Lévi-Strauss’s distinction is primarily a subjective matter of different societies in their receptivity or resistance to “history” as an idea (Lévi-Strauss 1983, 1218). From this point of view, international hegemonic representations can be seen as a cooling machine in the hot power game of international politics.

Without a doubt, the “hot” processes of warfare in European history are systematically followed by the “cooling” mechanisms of peace in international order, such as in Westphalia (1648), Vienna (1814–1815), Berlin (1878), Versailles (1919), Yalta (1945), or Dayton (1995), to name but a few. Apparently interested in practical plans, what consummation of history means for European powers is that more often than not they are consumed by political myths. The cooling device of international peace treaties is not dissimilar to that of the myths of the so-called primitive peoples. In Lévi-Strauss’s sense, both European powers and primitive peoples might have managed to work out a reasonable way to insert the irrationality of war and calamity into some kind of rationality. By means of their own ceaseless logical transformations, as outlined elsewhere

(Doja 2008a; Santucci, Doja, and Capocchi 2020), in one case or another, myths generate the appearance of stability, an illusion of timelessness that cannot be affected by changes in the world. Therefore, the peace treaties as processes of ongoing logical transformations of the system of international relations also serve as a cooling mystification machine for the obliteration of hot history, “even and particularly that which might be thought to defy the system” (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 243).

Similarly, the way a Churchill aphorism is constructed out of creative writing and is transferred into political discourse underpins its mytho-logical transformational qualities. By arguing specifically that Southeast European peoples tend to “produce more history than they can consume,” one inevitably tends to cool down the history of horrible tragedies, wars and other plagues in one’s own society by blaming them on “other” histories. In other words, this aphorism is being used to give the illusion (“it goes without saying, on a purely symbolic level”) that violence, war atrocity, ancient ethno-religious hatred and the like are somebody else’s business. The argument that Southeast European peoples might have complex histories that should be taken at distance from the ongoing progress of West European civilization is clearly assumed here. It makes it plain that West European powers, as Lévi-Strauss showed for the so-called cold societies in similar contexts, “deploy all their efforts and they spend boundless ingenuity” in the hope, which is certainly vain, to maintain the international society of West European civilization “intact against the dangers coming from inside and from outside” (Lévi-Strauss 1993, 10).

Surely, over the centuries, West European great powers and other major players in international society have fired off on Southeast Europe more “hot” history than the local political engine could “cool” down. This heated history must have forced in the first instance the peoples of Southeast Europe to elaborate logical transformations in their own political mythologies. However, in this particular way, we can similarly begin to understand how West European powers have also made the ongoing consequences of their own beliefs and representations of the Balkan wars take the form that they did and how they have linked them in specific ways to their own ongoing political projects. Arguably, international representations are a hegemonic project of the Western craft that puts a disciplinary understanding in the meaning of history and in the policy agencies of international politics. These agencies, including academic studies and opinionated press, define and distribute public meanings for consumption. Actually, even though not always explicitly stated, up to now Western scholarship and politics merely tell us how the world should imagine and accordingly treat Southeast Europe.

By contrast, the growth and glorification of Western Europe must be seen as an integral component of the international society of states. International interest groups try to give meaning and significance to facts by using formal and informal institutions and any possible medium of communication. Returning to history and events of the past in a selectively disciplined way perpetuates the same mythical histories, stereotypes, and mentalities that more often than not drive policy attitudes towards isolating the Balkan “other” who end up in seeking and adopting behavior that thwarts cooperation and integration. In essence, when Southeast Europe is subjected to this discourse, it seems to thicken the Balkanized image in international hegemonic representations. At the same time, the discursive securitization of the “threats” supposed to come from Southeast Europe reconstitutes an identity marked by Balkanization.

As it stands, we need to move from a historical inquiry that lacks critical purchase to a form of cultural critique that could act as a turning point between professional scholarship and contingent problematizations. From this perspective, one inevitably tends to integrate international affairs in a system of logical transformations and adopt the theoretical perspective of international agency in historical change. In particular, to make sense of the cultural and political situation of Southeast European societies, we need necessarily integrate into analysis the instrumental ideology of West European politics and the disciplinary effect of international theory, to which we now turn.

International Securitizing Politics

An analysis of the historical conditions of possibility of the present ways of doing, being and thinking among such interest groups is required to reveal and understand the ways in which the particular events of the Balkan Wars are represented and often affect what these interest groups believe and claim to be the truth. International hegemonic representations and beliefs may comply with the needs of political and ideological projects furthered at a given time, and which might have been inspired and fueled by the fervor of idealist pacifism, sensational essentialism or realist securitism during the Balkan wars. However, they can also be the effect of unrelenting militarism, fascism, communism, internationalism, multiculturalism, civilizationism, religionism, humanrightsism, and any other kind of fundamentalism that is coming next.

Violence as a signifier of international hegemonic representations of Southeast Europe is an everlasting normative and ideational Western assumption based on “the governing codes of subjectivity in international relations” (Campbell 1998, 170). That is why the same prescriptive international representational codes underlying the normative and ideational structures upon which the violence of the 1912–1913 Balkan wars was qualified in different narratives re-emerged aggressively to guide the public understanding of the forceful dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. The ideas and beliefs that emerged from these discursive codes of subjectivity seem to have been successful in constructing a distorted essential identity of Southeast Europe that has remained unchanged in spite of substantial changes in practice.

The contingent problematization of the meaning of the Balkan wars in international hegemonic representations can shed light on the historical conditions of the possibility of practices that have induced uncompromising, inflexible, constant and causal beliefs. These beliefs and representations seem to have left their mark on public opinion, academic accounts and international politics in relation to Southeast Europe. The essentialist way in which Southeast Europe is represented and the belief that Southeast European societies have a specific set of cultural characteristics constitutes a reference point in the Western-imagined international society of states. This is a reference point for understanding and misunderstanding the current situation. It seems to make past events constrain, legitimize, justify, or excuse the political behavior and attitudes of national and international actors in current times. The same beliefs and representations lend weight to continuous misperceptions of international relations on a more global scale as well as to misleading trends in social and political theories of international relations.

The southeastern part of Europe was for a long time the border between the Islamic world of the Ottoman Empire and the Christian West of European empires, and the

relative power of each of these competing forces may be seen in the political and religious structures of the region. However, early on, Southeast Europe became a “neutral, non-political and non-ideological concept which abolished the standing historical-political dichotomy between the Danubian Monarchy and the Ottoman Balkans that had become irrelevant” (Bernath 1973, 142). Later, as shown in the case of Albania (Abazi 2004a), it even became an integral part of the European and Mediterranean security environment.

However, the dominant discourse on the Balkan wars prompted an international hegemonic representation that clearly affected the West European and international approach to intervention in the 1990s. International politics was not based on Southeast European political developments and moral considerations in the aftermath of the Cold War, but on the consequences that the Yugoslav conflicts might have for West European security and international order (Abazi 2001). Intense journalistic coverage kept the conflicts in the limelight in North America and Western Europe. Policymakers often used the worst examples of that coverage, such as the “Balkan Ghosts” (Kaplan 1993) or the “Other Balkan Wars” (Kennan 1993) to support or excuse their views, decisions and policies (Hajdarpašić 2009), particularly regarding the securitization and containment of the Yugoslav conflicts in Bosnia (Hansen 2006) and Kosovo (Abazi 2004b).

Such an attitude may explain the otherwise unconceivable international motivation behind the notorious reluctance or deliberate temporizing of humanitarian and military intervention in Bosnia. It was after reading the *Balkan Ghosts* (Kaplan 1993), for instance, that the American President Bill Clinton suggested that “the conflict in Bosnia had deep historical roots,” thus implying that intervention was senseless there (de Parle 1995, 45). Even more British Conservative politicians and the so-called experts in many think-tank and the press vastly overestimated the difficulties of intervention along a mentality of “conservative pessimism” (Simms 2001). They normally evaded Serbian responsibility for the atrocities and they maintained that ethnic cleansing was an unpleasant fact of life. Such a dominant ideology might have propelled Britain to sit out of the Bosnian conflict, but in a mixture of post-imperial weariness with genuine imperial arrogance, Britain made damn sure no one else did either to reverse Serbian aggression. Astonishingly, for many Western officers posted in Bosnia or in Kosovo the ancient hatreds co-existed for a long time with a grudging admiration for the Serbs (Doja 2001), who perpetrated a deliberate campaign of mass rapes, ethnic cleansing, and genocide against Bosnians and Albanians (Doja 2019b), and eventually transformed them into ethnic “Muslims” (Doja 2019a). Even Ratko Mladic, the butcher of Srebrenica, was not all bad in the considered view of some British officers, but a “man who generally kept his word” (Cohen 2001).

The same ill-conceived international diplomacy may also explain the later ambiguous policy of socioeconomic and political transformations towards Southeast Europe as a whole (Balfour 2008). Unfortunately, current West European policy attitudes seem still to be determined by a similar subjectivity, which has resulted in an endless process of the European integration of the so-called “Western Balkans” (Seroka 2008; Bechev 2011; Braniff 2011; Petersen 2011; Dzihic and Hamilton 2012; Sotiropoulos and Veremis 2012).

In contrast to the Balkans as a geographical notion of a mountain range on the Balkan Peninsula, the 1998 European Council in Vienna coined a new political term. The “Western Balkans” was aimed to function as a euphemism for “the Balkans,” as that term

carried a historical burden of pejorative misuse. The new term, which is defined in EU discourses by the magic formula of “former Yugoslavia, excluding Slovenia, including Albania,” indicates the sub-regional target of West European and international policy in a selective way of “differentiated integration” (Dyson and Sepos 2010), specifically referring to the accession processes of the remaining Southeast European countries towards EU membership. There is nothing that sets them apart from neighboring countries. They all share, albeit in different proportions, a common historical and cultural legacy that is grounded in the Habsburg, the Ottoman, or the Soviet imperial ruptures (Abazi 2008a, 232). The Western Balkans are actually defined by what they are not (Petrovic 2009, 30). They are not EU members and there is no an “Eastern” counterpart but only the “Western Balkans” and the European Union. This awkward situation is even more complicated with Croatia becoming an EU member in 2013, thus detaching itself from the “Western Balkans” as a political entity, which will become even more meaningless when eventually all its remaining countries will join the EU.

As a geographical and a political term, the Western Balkans fulfills two parallel functions that are not synonymous but homonymous: “they do not cover the same area of meaning and their functioning is backed by different ideological mechanisms” (Petrovic 2009, 34). While the “Western Balkans” can be accepted and used as a geographic signifier, like “the Balkans” at an earlier time, it is “already becoming saturated with a social and cultural meaning that has expanded its signified far beyond its immediate and concrete meaning” (Todorova 1997, 21). Interestingly, the long-standing, culturally laden connotations of the attributes of the “West” and the “East” are actually reversed. While the almost unmarked “Eastern” counterpart awkwardly carries a somewhat more positive connotation, that part of Southeast Europe that was depicted during the 1990s as the most disturbing, the most nationalistic, and the most violent, is now reinvented under an apparently sanitized label. However, this rebranding also reinforces in a peculiar way the earlier Balkanized discourses by endorsing the perception that these former Yugoslav countries typify the perennial “Balkan” problem because they deviated from the normative course of post-socialist transition and for a while sank into the worst excesses of nationalism (Hajdarpašić 2009). Ultimately, the “Western Balkans” becomes an ideal replacement for the “Balkan other” as a whole, which is essential for maintaining this kind of othering.

Southeast European countries that are candidates for EU membership are undoubtedly seen as “part of Europe,” as the word goes, and it is “where they belong historically and in terms of civilization” (Petrovic 2009, 25). Indeed, their European belonging is emphasized in constant ideological claims in both EU and Southeast European political discourses (Abazi 2008a, 230–237). However, Southeast European peoples are often urged persistently, as in the case of Kosovo for instance, “to understand that only the fulfillment of standards will give the International Community confidence that Kosovo is ready for substantial self-government” and that “the fulfillment of standards is necessary . . . to make Kosovo a normal European society” (Steiner 2003). This supports a notion about Southeast European peoples as not being European, in a place not real part of Europe, but that have to be Europeanized. Similarly, the continuous emphasis on the European identity of Southeast European countries candidates or newcomers to EU reveals it as a dubious issue. Neither the subject who pronounces this nor the addressee are entirely convinced of its truthfulness, while the need to confirm it repeatedly points to its ambiguity.

Of course, similar discourse of Europeanization is old and was also applied long time ago to all Central and East European candidate countries, which have to meet EU membership criteria. In each case, however, the discourse that legitimizes the integration of individual European countries in the European Union is performed through the selective reference to or deliberate omission of certain historical legacies, the choice of which is predicated on the degree of Europeanism assigned differentially to West and East European societies (Petrovic 2009, 65). In the political, ideological and cultural context of the new Eurocentric meta-discourse, the newcomers to the European Union are found themselves in a situation in which they are “almost European but not quite European,” in other words “soon to be Europeanized Non-Europeans who still have to learn a lot about being European” (Velikonja 2005, 26). Within this ambiguous space in which Europeanism is a given to some countries, while others have to work for it, an ideal arena appears for the shaping of a new European Balkanism (Hammond 2006) that places Southeast European countries in the position of a colonized subject.

Discourse on the accession of the Western Balkans to EU membership reintroduces Southeast Europe as a European periphery in need of supervision by Western Europe, an idea that has been around since the 1910s,

once these fertile countries were linked to the rest of Europe and connected like the rest of Europe, they would of themselves become peaceful by means of commerce and trade and industry, enriching themselves in spite of their inextricable divisions. (Carnegie Endowment 1914, 8)

At this time, it was believed that “despite the semi-barbaric rawness of their civilization” these states would be able to form an independent community from “which someday a nation might be formed worthy to take its place among the greater European states.” However, it was held that

to be reclaimed from their semi-civilization in the interest of European peace and security, while they need not actually be placed under the tutelage of more advanced peoples, they must at least be held to a rigid observance of their duties toward more orderly and progressive communities. (Spencer 1914, 581)

It seems that not much has changed in the current context, as there appears to be a re-actualization of the long-established patterns of German-Austrian colonial practices and the colonial discourse of West European domination. Moreover, the established traditions of scholarship, as shown elsewhere in more detail in relation to German-speaking *Albanologie* (Doja 2014a, 2014b) and native Albanian studies (Doja 1998, 2015; Abazi and Doja 2016a), have enabled the political elites in both the EU and Southeast European countries to openly articulate and appropriate a new colonial discourse of Balkanism, which is legitimated through the EU accession process.

The active relations between the European Union and Southeast Europe in the fields of politics, commerce, culture and research may be compared to earlier relations between the Habsburg Empire and Southeast Europe (Doja 2014a, 323; 2014b, 296). Their intensification can be seen as an intention to secure and strengthen the EU’s political, economic and cultural influence over Southeast European countries in the form of “cultural imperialism” (Tomlinson 1991). This concept has been used since at least the 1970s as an explanatory framework in the areas of communication studies, international relations, political

economy, anthropology, education, science, literature and history (Hamm and Smandych 2005). The main thrust of cultural imperialism is cultural violence, which

highlights the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society. One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable. (Galtung 1990, 292)

Arguably, the EU places similar emphasis on the practice of promoting and imposing those aspects of culture that could be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence to achieve its aspirations. These aspects are exemplified by discourse and ideology, language and art, research and education, in ways that refer to the creation and maintenance of unequal civilizational relationships. They take various forms, such as an attitude or a formal policy of academic influence and research preferences, following the old German-writing tradition of *Südostforschung* (Southeast research) (Doja 2014a, 2014b). In this way, the EU reinforces the cultural hegemony of Europeanization that ought to determine Southeast European cultural values in the West European margins of EU.

Arguably, at the roots of the current dissent between West and East EU member states, we may see the EU discourse of differentiated Europeanization during Central and East European enlargement. Similarly, the West European policy of differentiated integration and more generally the harmful international policy of securitization and containment of Southeast Europe may have unintended consequences, as shown elsewhere more specifically in the case of Kosovo and Albania (Doja 2001; Abazi 2004b, 2008b, 2011, 2020), in terms of the continuous misperceptions of international relations on a more global scale. A combination of factors such as the end of Cold War ideologies and the invigoration of new ideologies of integral nationalism, civilizational fundamentalism and international terrorism, increase the chances that regional leaders will be able to seize power and shift allegiance to their advantage very quickly.

Definitely, we are no longer dealing with an internal Eastern question or simply with a Western representational issue, but with global realpolitik. Western Europe is increasingly under the pressure of competing global powers, but if it misrepresents Southeast Europe, this would be detrimental to Europe as a whole. If Southeast Europe is not recognized in full representational and political terms as an integral part of Europe, this may alienate the whole region, individual countries at the state level or certain members of the population at an individual level, and engage them in other potential conflicts (Lindemann 2010, 2014). This may also push them to look further to the East, perhaps not to the old Eastern Communism, but to the new Eastern power of Russian Pan-Slavism, or even to Neo-Ottomanism and fundamental Islamism (Abazi 2019). A new propaganda machine is working industriously to elaborate new international representations in that direction, and this machine already includes a certain activism and scholarship that aim at “reinstating the Ottomans” anew in Southeast Europe as elsewhere in the Middle East (Blumi 2011).

International Theoretical Politics

The essentialist elaboration of international hegemonic representations of Southeast Europe also informs certain trends in the social and political theory of international

relations. These include both the radical realist theses of the “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996) and the social constructivist theses of “collective identity formation” (Wendt 1994). Actually, both Samuel Huntington and Alexander Wendt remain attached to the prescriptive character of collectively held ideas about identity, in terms of collective memory, culture, religion, language and history at the level of a given society. In the case of Southeast European societies, the Balkan wars are described as “fault line wars” between essentialized civilizations (Huntington 1996, 269–272) or as wars caused by “primordial ethnic hatred” (Wendt 1999, 163).

From the social constructivist standpoint (Wendt 1999), the social identities of states are thought to be constituted by the normative and ideational structures of international society that ascribe a status, role or personality to a state, while the corporate sources of state identity are thought to refer to “internal human, material, ideological or cultural factors that make a state what it is” (Reus-Smit 2002, 494–495). Wendt believes that the identity of the state informs its interests, and in turn, its actions. However, in his distinction between social and corporate identities of the state, he is unable to conceptualize adequately the external (international) and internal (corporate) sources of identity ascription and self-ascription. Unexpectedly from the standpoint of the theoretical concept of culture, an essentialist position is surreptitiously introduced in understanding cultural corporate resources, while the external international domain and the domestic political realm are mistakenly confused.

The power and complexity of the expanded anthropological perspective following the *Interpretation of Cultures* (Geertz 1973) lie in a basic understanding of culture as a complex set of interdependent abstractions built from social relationships and from the conceptions and meanings that members of a social or corporate group broadly share. This makes it possible to see how power relationships are defined and constructed, interpreted, and negotiated in social interaction. As such, culture cannot have a concrete existence as a “thing” out there, even though it is located and transmitted within social groups. The social transmission of culture tends to unify people within a group by providing a common experience, which tends to generate a common and implicit understanding of future events. Thus, a group’s members share a culture that is distinct from other cultures, simply because members of a given group are differently cultured from members of other social or corporate groups. In this sense, culture becomes a marker of difference between groups and an identity-conferring resource for the group. In turn, this is the simple reason why the concept started to be used in plural in the sense of humankind being divided into a number of separate and distinct cultures. In the plural sense, however, the concept has been used and misused in ways that often lead to the dangerous reification and racialization of culture itself.

From eighteenth-century Herderian German Romanticism to twentieth-century Boasian American anthropology, the pluralistic conceptualization of culture was offered as a historical relativistic alternative to scientific racism and speculative ethnocentric evolutionism (Stocking 1968). As the idea of universal progress lost ground to the perspective of relativism, the pluralistic vision of human difference in the search of Herder *Volksgeist* or Boas “genius of the people” carried out the possibility of relativistic tolerance (Stocking 1996). However, in their emphasis on internal integrity, as we showed in more detail elsewhere (Doja 2014a, 2014b, 2015; Abazi and Doja 2016a), the concerns about culture were haunted by the intolerant political possibilities of exclusion and purification. Ultimately, the vision of separate and distinct cultures often lead to the modern politics of

ethnic cleansing, but also to the naïve assumptions of “groupism” (Brubaker 2009). As a result, cultures are thought to have clear boundaries and be associated with exclusive, timeless and unchanging lifestyles that exclusively relate to actual groups of people. The social world is thought to be populated by homogeneous groups, which are closed and differentiated, discrete and out of time, and that become the protagonists of social life as if they were naturally things out there in the world.

Without doubt, social groups, and hence states, are in the first instance collections of individual actors that share a common ascription and self-ascription, but with no necessary relation to any particular cultural corporate content. There is much controversy in social theory, but the point that the cultural content and meaning of collective identity are open to change and redefinition, after its initial inception, is not contested. Actually, since the classic approach initiated by Fredrik Barth’s introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Barth 1969), it became more profitable to focus in anthropology and social theory on the analysis of the foundation and maintenance of group boundaries, rather than on the cultural characteristics of any particular group.

Oddly enough, Wendt seems to believe that “collective memory” is still a key “cognitive resource” that helps explain “the relative ease” with which Southeast European peoples respond aggressively to each other actions, as well as “the larger aggregate tendency for such seemingly irrational conflict to recur over time” (Wendt 1999, 163). As a proximate expedient, this might be right if it were an essentialist argument at the level of the internal domestic realm, but it cannot work in terms of a systemic constructivist argument at the level of external international affairs. Collective representations of the permanence of primordial ethno-religious hatred and nationalism, violence and war atrocities, civilization and un-civilization, cannot be part of a Southeast European cultural system, but must be considered at another, external, macro level. Rather, from a social theoretical perspective of international relations, they must form an ideological system at the level of the Western-imagined “international society” that includes states and organizations, policy-makers and opinion-makers, geopolitical strategists and specialists, travelers, journalists and scholars. It is the micro-level role relationships based on the frequent subjective images and perceptions of these actors in their social interaction with Southeast European societies that create the Balkan “generalized Other” (Mead 1934) that becomes embedded in the macro-level collective representations of international society. The “reality” of these social structures is perhaps unobservable, but the collective representations that form the cultural and ideological system of international society, which is manipulated at will by its human agents, have lasting observable effects.

The international representations of Southeast Europe are constantly manipulated through social interactions and discursive practices. As such, they are necessarily constructed as a specific cultural trait of the Western-imagined international society of states. Contrary to what we are taught to believe, it is not the historical past, the enumeration of Southeast European cultural traits or the cultural inventory of Southeast European collective memories that shape and essentialize the identity of the “backward” Balkans and characterize the “Balkan” nature of wars. Eventually, the constancy of international representations cannot be explained by referring to the historical and cultural diversity of purported civilized West European powers and uncivilized Southeast European states, but rather by recognizing the repeated occurrence of certain, rather than other, deliberate patterns of biased interaction between West and Southeast European actors across time.

From such a transactional perspective, the prescriptive character of international hegemonic representations of Southeast Europe must be a function of the continuous maintenance of an imagined cultural boundary with Western Europe, defined by a long sociocultural interaction. A careful examination of the social organization of cultural boundaries between “backward” Southeast Europe and “civilized” West Europe clearly shows that they are not the implication or the outcome of either Southeast European or West European identities. It is rather the establishment, the maintenance and the perpetuation of a cultural boundary that create and recreate these identities by constantly signifying them. These boundaries are actually derived from a deliberate process of negotiations to establish structures that are “comparable to potential governance structures,” which define the “sets of acceptable contracting partners” (Somer 2001, 146), along “a series of constraints on the kinds of roles [one] is allowed to play and the partners one may choose for different kinds of transactions” (Barth 1969, 17).

Conclusion

The pervasive character of idealist and realist discourses on the Balkan wars may appear unusual and difficult to grasp, if one employs traditional categories that are developed in both scholarship and politics. However, an analysis of the narrative legacies, when linked to a careful examination of the historical contextualization of different accounts from an ideological perspective, can result in a more critical understanding of the role of hegemonic politics of international beliefs and representations of Southeast Europe. In attempting to analyze 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 the problematization of different accounts and move away from the close association of the Balkan wars with the essentialization of Southeast Europe. We have argued here that the discursive performative practice of many accounts has created a distorted representation of Southeast Europe in international society, which has been used as a justification for policies of securitization and containment of Southeast Europe and has led to confusion in international relations theory. Finally, the side-effect of this situation seems to be a potential underestimation of the pressing problems at both regional and global levels, whereas Southeast Europe must be considered as 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 the hegemonic politics of international beliefs and representations by focusing on the political processes and power relations that define wars and their representations in international relations. The problematization of representational narratives and practices related to the Balkan wars has revealed new insights into the hegemonic politics of international representations. The aim of this paper was not to write a history of the Balkan wars, but rather to examine how their international representations and the implications of those representations 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 essentializing concepts and representations and will result in further, deeper inquiries in this direction. Ultimately, through this discussion we have aimed to show the extent to which writings about the Balkan wars

can create and represent another, unsuspected reality, that of hegemonic representations in the Western-imagined international society of states, a topic which this article showed that we must start to deal more seriously with, both in the arena of international politics and in the field of international relations theory.

Notes

1. From a variety of viewpoints, many have criticized the sharply bounded and overly neat and tidy picture suggested in the dominant concept of culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986). However, Geertz's work still remains both foundational to and in critical counterpoint with that vast interdisciplinary spectrum of scholarship known today as cultural studies (Ortner 1999). In particular, considering the continuing implications of the expanded anthropological perspective of culture in the contemporary context may become another significant instance in which the theoretical understanding of the world can be made to progress, along the overarching revival of the kind of vigorous theoretical debate toward causal explanations that tended to disappear from anthropology in the 1980s onwards.
2. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace sent an International Commission of Inquiry to Southeast Europe in August 1913 with the explicit objective to investigate allegations and collect evidence for “the causes and conduct of Balkan wars” (Carnegie Endowment 1914). In 1990s, a reprint of the 1913 inquiry with a gratuitous caption on “Other Balkan Wars” (Carnegie Endowment 1993) and with a substantial introduction to “Balkan Crises 1913/1993” (Kennan 1993) left no room for doubt that conflict inherited from a distant tribal past prevailed in the same Balkan world. Again a sequel on “Unfinished Peace” tried to show the endurance of the pattern (Carnegie Endowment 1996).
3. The debate followed in *Anthropological Theory* 4 (4): 545–581.
4. If one insists on certain facts, for instance, if Peter Handke is “just a good writer,” if the protests are just feelings of some Bosnians and Albanians, or if there are also political and opportunistic attitudes of one or another former Nobel laureate in the past, this means the same moral relativism and even a certain amorality. Bosnian and Albanian protests can be deemed prejudiced and therefore irrelevant, while a deliberate diversion of public attention to relativize and minimize the compromising scandals, in which the Nobel Academy was itself entangled, could be backed by an even more scandalous award to Peter Handke, an author who promotes war crimes and genocide in former Yugoslavia. For more details on this issue, see Doja (2019c).
5. The overstated catchphrase credited to Winston Churchill is taken from a Scottish short-story writer and humourist: “the people of Crete unfortunately make more history than they can consume locally” (see “The Jesting of Arlington Stringham” in *Chronicles of Clovis* [1911] by Saki, alias Hector Hugh Munro; cited from *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* [2014], edited by Elizabeth Knowles, 8th ed., 7.7). It echoes with the English proverb “when Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war” (see *The Rival Queens or the Death of Alexander the Great* [1677] by Nathaniel Lee, act4, sc. 2; cited from *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* [2014], edited by Elizabeth Knowles, 8th ed., 12.56).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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