

19th Century Balkan Historiography through the Travelogue: The Accounts by Western Travelers & Others

Anton Cebalo

Abstract

The Balkans pose a unique question in European historiography and definitions of Europe proper. Since the 17th century, the Balkans have been perceived by Western Europe as an in-between space and passageway to the Ottoman East. Scholars have tried to place the Balkans in the context of orientalism, but this has been met with much difficulty because of its representational ambiguity. Imposed as a concept, the Balkan identity was internalized by its people only after it was discursively branded that way by Western powers. Therefore, if we wish to understand the Balkans in how it was, then we must look at how it was known. By the 1800s, the Balkans became a popular travel destination for Westerners who wanted to comment on the East without stepping outside Europe. These travelers came with their own political prescriptions and theories; and, just as commonly, they came with the same totalizing observations, devoid of cultural context, and always talking with utmost authority. “The Balkans,” this fictitious and imposed construction, was made real through the traveling observer’s eye. This essay will demonstrate that these travelers were far less interested in accurately representing the Balkans as a space, but instead used their observations of the region as a vehicle to comment on Ottoman rule, their home country, and the state of Europe. These two lines of argumentation – an indictment of Ottoman influence and/or a critique of Western society vis-à-vis a critique of Balkan life – runs parallel throughout all these travelogues. These travelers were responsible for displacing the Balkan peoples through their writing, thus playing their part in making the Balkans the abject of Europe.

Keywords: Balkans, travel literature, historiography, orientalism, Bosnia, Serbia, Rumelia, Ottoman Empire

I. Introduction

The Balkans occupy a contested middle-ground in studies on orientalism since they are neither Western nor do they fit into Edward Said's conceptions of the "Orient." Instead, the region has historically been pulled by three distinct axes of power: The West, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. Although not traditionally colonized, a discourse of colonialism and orientalism still operates via representation and identity. In order to understand how this logic functions, we must first understand how the Balkans were known to those outside of it. By looking at travelogues from Western and Russian/Orthodox travelers, one can piece together a cogent narrative on how an inferiority complex was imposed upon the region by these narrators. Much more than just commentate on their travels, these travelers left a deep imprint on the discourse in their travelled lands and brought home these observations. Some of these travelogues were highly-regarded in their home country as true accounts of Balkan life and served as guides for geopolitical policymakers in Russia and the West. Given that the Balkan region and its many identities are molded so strongly by Europe's great powers, travelogues provide historians with primary sources on the region's discursive and political development.

The first instances of Western travel interest in the Balkan region began in the late 16th century, mostly among the British upper-class. Their observations proved to be meager, totalizing, and nebulous; interest in the Balkans as a cultural space was secondary to exploring the Ottoman East. After a century-long lull of interest in Western circles during the 1700s, Balkan travelogues began reappearing during the 19th century amidst a changing political landscape in Europe. The Balkans were back on the Western map, hoisted by the so-called "Eastern Question," the multiple Russo-Turkish wars, the 1856 Treaty of Paris, rising Balkan nationalisms, and the uprisings in Bosnia and elsewhere during the latter-half of the century. These travelogues were quite popular and formed significant public opinion in their home countries. For the aristocratic women who wrote them, it was one of the few outlets where they garnered respect in the realm of public opinion since these were topics far removed from their home country. In these travelogues, the Balkans

served as an in-between space and a testing ground for the traveler's own inter-cultural analyses and observations, including on how “Europe” proper is defined. When considering the origin, journey, and writings of each traveler, one can begin to piece together the discourse on the Balkans as a separate space from Western Europe. More than is presently acknowledged, the discursive basis for the Balkans as separate from Europe was constructed partly through these travelogues. These travelers used the Balkans as a vehicle for their political criticism, be it to make sly criticisms of their host country or as a means through which to indict all Ottoman influence on Europe.

II. Orientalism in Balkan Historiography

The Balkans occupy a strange middle-ground between the two categories in Edward Said's schema of orientalism: Europe (the West) and its constitutive other, the Orient or East. Part of the issue is that Balkan historiography has been steeped in Western and Russian impositions. This has left a deep imprint on its people's self-perception: in other words, “what we know about the Balkans cannot be separated from *how* we know it” (Dušan 498). Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova calls the specificity of this historical dilemma as *balkanism* which, although related to Said's *Orientalism*, diverges from it on account of the historical representation of the Balkan space. What makes the Balkans categorically different from Said's conception of the Orient is that the Orient “has an intangible character, [whereas] the Balkans have a tangible and concrete existence in Western historical accounts” (Neofotistos 19). Moreover, “the Orient [...] is portrayed in Western accounts as Europe's complete opposite, [whereas] the Balkans are construed as an ambiguous category on the periphery of Europe, “as an “incomplete self” (Neofotistos 19). This is largely why Western travelogues oftentimes prescribe cultural purification or Western occupation as the necessary political antidote, so that the Balkans can finally, presumably, “complete itself” and join the greater, Christian European community. The Balkans also do not possess the affluent and romantic escapist qualities present in Western illustrations of the Orient. As Todorova writes, “the Balkans... with their unimaginative concreteness, and almost total lack of wealth, induced a

straightforward attitude, usually negative, but never nuanced” (Todorova 14). Balkanism is thus not a subset of orientalism, but is its own category altogether. The Balkans are instead seen as the “bridge” between the West and the Orient, as if a passageway between “stages of growth.” Naturally, this evokes labels such as “semi-developed, semi-colonial, semi-civilized, and semi-oriental” – some literature goes as far as calling the region a “bridge between races” – and, indeed, 19th century travelogues speak of the Balkans in these terms (Todorova 16). Todorova’s concept of balkanism is precise; whereas orientalism assigns opposites, balkanism is about *ambiguity* in a land of contradicting identities. The term “balkanism” thus captures the changing discourse towards the Balkans from the 18th century to World War I. In due time, this discourse became “hardened” within Balkan society itself and was reflected in a persistent inferiority complex relative to Europe that still exists today. Being a category of discourse, Todorova argues that pejorative balkanism has been used by Western scholars since the 18th century. Indeed, even today, some scholars utilize terms such as “balkanization” to describe any region breaking up into hostile states.

Discourse on the Balkans has its own unique rhetorical arsenal which it defers to when being discussed. Its representation operates through centuries-old histories, travelogues, literature, and journalism. Balkan representation thus traditionally operates within the bounds of *how it was known* by those outside of it. This is even applied wholesale by people living there themselves, in a process dubbed by Milica Bakić-Hayden as “nesting orientalism” where the discourse of “the Other” is appropriated by those who were themselves designated as that category within its discourse (Dušan 490). Naturally, this has been the butt of many self-aware jokes, by Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek and others, on how Slovenes view themselves “more Western” than Croats, who feel similarly towards Serbs, and Serbs who view themselves as “less Eastern” than Albanians, and so it goes. It would seem that, even for the people living there, the Balkans lack concrete, geographic boundaries; instead, what is Balkan is often “not-us,” and this is even quite true for those living in the region. Therefore, the land constantly finds itself representationally displaced as if somehow lying suspended outside of Europe proper.

This phenomenon of “self-otherizing” was not unknown to Edward Said, who used such language to describe Sigmund Freud in *Freud and the Non-European*. Freud, an Eastern Europe Jew, “saw himself the subject of stereotyping that today might as well be designated ‘orientalist’” (Dušan 491). Yet, Freud’s psychoanalytic methodology was employed by Radovan Karadžić, the first president of the Republika Srpska who was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). What Karadžić, a trained psychiatrist, found useful in psychoanalysis was its idea of the “split subject” which he viewed as the *subjective* articulation of the split *objective* historical-subject of the Serbian nation. The Serbian nation, this split historical subject, thus had to be cleansed and the “other” elements had to be removed in order to absolve itself and be complete. The first step was to separate oneself from the lumped Balkan identity. The means with which these brutal nationalist leaders sought to complete “European subjectivity” was through the violent ripping apart of their regional multi-faith communities, so that they would be seen as a homogenous people who could then be made intelligible in proper European discourse. It was thus due to Western impositions of representational purity that the Balkans cannibalized itself. Karadžić was able to turn the discourse of balkanism against itself and sought to ethnically cleanse much of the Balkans of its ambiguities so as to render it solely Serbian. Karadžić, also a poet no less, delicately wrote of the “purification” of one’s people” to remove the taint which bound them to their split consciousness and relegated them as an abject of Europe and the West. This articulation of identity is particular to the Balkans and cannot be captured in orientalism. Balkanism is instead a more appropriate discursive designation given the Balkans’ peculiar historical position as the “in-between” and “incomplete” entity between Europe proper and the other-ized Orient. This pervasive discourse can be traced through the 19th century travelogue and how these travelers ascribed these complexes onto the land.

III. The Travelogues of Western Aristocrats

If we cannot separate the actual, geographic Balkan space from *how it was known*, our first task must then be to uncover how it was described and narrativized. Before Western Europe categorized the Balkans as a separate region, “the Ottoman Empire was treated as a unified space in Europe and Asia” (Todorova 62). The beginnings of industrialization in Western Europe brought with it improved communication, more foreign trade, and deep upheavals in its social, political, and cultural life. The opening up of the world to Europe also rendered untenable the unitary model of the Ottoman empire as one region. The Balkans was then “discovered” by Westerners as a distinct cultural, social, and geographic entity, albeit one that was still poorly understood (Todorova, 62). If the Balkans were created by the Ottoman Empire, it was “discovered” and cemented as a separate space by Western travelers and scholars.

Travelogues grant us with the best means to trace this discursive development since they provide the link between the geographic space and the presentation through which the Balkans are known to Western audiences. The stock traveler in 19th century Balkan travelogue literature is the British aristocrat, who traveled through Ottoman Rumelia either as their destination, or en route to Istanbul. In these travelogues, many travelers passed through the same space but deduced from it different lessons and political prescriptions. Their writings were less about the *actual* material conditions of Ottoman Rumelia, but instead spoke more of the traveler’s own audience, journey, and ideological penchants. Thus, they passed through the Balkans not out of impartial interest, but rather with the intention of inscribing their view of the culture, people, and land onto the space itself – which, in turn, soon became integral to Western perceptions. And, in many cases, this fact was also internalized and appropriated by the people living in the Balkans themselves.

It was during the 19th century that Southeast Europe emerged in the public British imagination as “a peripheral zone of barbarism and conflict” (Hammond 602). While this was done largely through travelers’ accounts, this imagining began to interact with the British state. These travelers journeyed amidst the so-called Eastern Question in British politics, and they were

determined to participate and provide a constant stream of information, none of which truly clarified the issue. These stances did not all make up one coherent political ideology, and the travelogues themselves vary in their political prescriptions and allegiances. Despite being politically disparate, these travelogues often argued for an imposed power to civilize the Balkans. For many of Western travelers, the necessity of a foreign force to establish order was the highest priority, whatever their reasoning for it may have been. Underneath it all, the fact that these were still Europeans filled these travelers with psychological fears. For example, some British travelers experienced “threatening moments of self-recognition in which some aspect of Eastern Europe reminds them of the British Isles” (Gephardt 295). This fear was even reciprocated by the British state; Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli proclaimed that the League of Three Emperors (the German, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires) “was beginning to treat England ‘as if we were Montenegro or Bosnia’” (Gephardt 295). Instead of being construed as their young Italian and German neighboring nation-states, the Balkans were constructed through discourse “developed primarily, though not exclusively, for usage on the colonial object” (Gephardt 603). Regardless of their political affiliations, most if not all of these British travelers agreed on the subordinate status of the lands they were visiting through cultural signifiers, evoking “a place of comedy, romance, or imminent threat” (Gephardt 603).

During the height of the Bosnian peasant revolts of 1875, archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans traveled to Bosnia and recorded his experiences in his text *Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot During the Insurrection, August and September 1875*. Although only in his 20s at the time of his travels, Sir Arthur Evans would later become a towering figure in archaeology for his work on Aegean civilizations during the Bronze Age. The beginning of his text is an immediate account of the troubles, captured through short phrases and spaced by abrupt dashes. Violence by the Turkish Orient against Christians is highlighted as a particular problem. He writes of a “murder of a young Christian by two armed Turks,” the “dangerous spirit of the Mahometan population,” an “outbreak of Moslem fanaticism,” “farmers... being tortured by Turks,” “panic amongst Christians,” and

describes the Bosnian insurrection as a “Mahometan counter-revolution” (Evans xiii - xvii). His illustrations of Bosnian women as a feminine “other” show a gendered orientalist discourse. He speaks of them as covered in glittering jewelry and tunics; he compares them to “exotic insects... with the forewings of dazzling gauzy white and underwings of scarlet” (Evans 9). In his text he also recounts a brief history of Bosnia, stressing its Slavonic origins, and how the Islamization of the region was the elevating of Islam to a “national character... of a fanatical hue” (Evans xcvi). He further writes:

... Even Englishmen may be inclined to accept the conclusion that the present connection between Bosnia and the hated government of the [Ottoman] must be severed; the more so as the geographical configuration and position of Bosnia—a peninsula connected only with the rest of Turkey by a narrow neck—make it almost impossible to hold out against a serious invasion, and put it always at the mercy of foreign agitators.

Such a revolution may seem a Utopian dream... For the moment, however, the ultimate form of Bosnian government is a question of secondary importance to the paramount necessity of re-establishing order in that unhappy land (Evans xcvi).

In the spirit of a kind of Christian “cleansing,” he thus recommends “reconciling the Mahometan population of Bosnia to the new order of things... by sacrificing the [Ottoman]” (Evans xcvi).

Careless political prescriptions and cultural distinctions follow through many of these 19th century traveling accounts. Robert Munro, another archaeologist, concluded his journey through the Western Balkans by praising the improvements brought about by Austro-Hungarian rule (Munro 390). Sir Arthur Arnold, a liberal British politician, spoke of Serbia and the Danube provinces as needing to “fall beneath the crown of the Kaiser” rather than have their autonomy continue (Arnold 235 – 236). The travel enthusiast and author James Creagh in his 1875 text *Over the Borders of Christendom and Eslamiah: A Journey through Hungary, Slavonia, Servia, Bosnia, Herzegovina,*

Dalmatia, and Montenegro, to the North drew a sharp contrast between the Germanized Slavonski Brod of Croatia with that of deeper, Turkish Bosnia with the former being “modern” and the latter as “decadent” and of the East (Berber). Belgian author and traveler Emile de Laveleye in his 1887 text *The Balkan Peninsula* also placed the Sava River as a civilizational boundary:

I have never seen the difference between West and East so strongly marked. Two civilizations, two religions, two entirely different modes of life and thought, are here face to face, separated by a river... this river has really divided Europe and Asia (De Laveleye 72).

However, he would go on to argue that this division, although existing for hundreds of years, would be corrected through Austrian influence during which “the Mussulmen character would rapidly disappear” (De Laveleye 72). British aristocrats Pauline Irby and Humphry Sandwith during the same period likened Bosnia to the “wilds of Asia,” which felt more like the Orient than their actual travels into Turkey and Mesopotamia (Berber). It is in this sense that Bosnia to these Western travelers was more “East” than the Orient itself; exotic and different, it was akin to stepping into another world, and the geographic proximity of this other world within Europe was seemingly magical. It was magical insofar in that it was a European anomaly, and they firmly believed that stepping into it would give them insight into the East more than the actual East ever could. It was through this crude mythologized narrative that the region’s suffering became the Western traveler’s entertainment, pleasure, and interest – and, to them, it was a clever, accessible way to access the Orient without actually stepping outside of continental Europe.

In the past decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in Victorian women travelers who were previously often relegated to a mere footnote to their male journeying counterparts. For these women “foreign travel was a means of redefining themselves, assuming a different persona and becoming someone who did not exist at home” (Hammond 57). Traveling to Eastern Europe had a phantasmic quality for these travelers, as if it were an adventurous fiction novel. Emily Gerard,

a Scottish author, compared her travels through Transylvania with the “experiences of Robinson Crusoe on the deserted island and of a fairy-tale princess who was carried off to gnomeland” (Gephardt 295). Not just women, but most male British travelers expressed such imperial imagination as a motive for exploration as well, falling spell to the “indolent charm and drowsy poetry of this secluded land” (Gephardt 295). Traveling also offered these aristocratic women a subtle means with which to influence public discourse. British aristocrats Georgina Muir Mackenzie and Adeline Paulina Irby, traveling in the 1860s, remarked that it was ““much more exciting [...] to be two Englishwomen in the wilds of Turkey than to be at home in England”” (Hammond 59). Their book *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey-in-Europe* became critically acclaimed in England and was used by liberal British statesman William Gladstone in speeches and parliamentary debates on the Eastern Question (Hammond 59). Given that knowledge of southeastern Europe was marginal in British public life, *Travels* brought a virtually unknown subject to British popular discourse. These women writers came to the Balkans with different expectations than their male counterparts, but their observations inevitably overlap. Just as Sir Arthur Evans wrote in his account, Mackenzie and Irby focused their writing on the perceived injustices committed against the Christians by their Ottoman overlords. Ultimately, all of these authors come to the same conclusion: that fellow Christians are being persecuted, and that the Ottoman influence must be removed from southeast Europe. However, Mackenzie and Irby do not prescribe foreign occupation as the solution for the Balkans as some other male Western travelers did. Instead, we see a condescending argument for national sovereignty on the basis of, for example, the Bulgarians being “shrewd,” “eager for intelligence,” and possessing an “industrious approach to agriculture” (Hammond 59). Both of them expressed similar opinions towards the Serbs and wished that both Montenegro and Serbia “draw Kosovo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina into ‘one Serbian fatherland’” (Hammond 60). Muir Mackenzie and Adeline Paulina Irby thus prescribed here a political solution that would frankly become the basis for multiple Balkan wars in the succeeding century, imposing their conceptions of Western nationhood as the only possible political solution.

Irby and Mackenzie also passed judgment on the social mores of the Balkan lands in proto-feminist engagement. They “lament the restrictions on female education, the oppressiveness of marriage expectation, and the abuses of traditional rural customs” (Hammond 61). However, these same critiques were simultaneously critiques of the gendered social mores they faced at home in Victorian Britain. Traveling gave these aristocratic British women travelers an opportunity through which they could make political criticisms – it was the *journey* that granted these women an entry point into British political discourse and many of their political prescriptions for the Balkans are, conversely, for Britain itself rather than the Balkans. In other words, the Balkans served as the vehicle through which they could make political commentary. This same logic applies to many of these Western traveling writers: in prescribing their political solutions to the plight of the Balkans, they were simultaneously drawing on the West as their reference, and thus their criticisms of the Balkans intersected with their criticisms of Western society. Their general prescription for the region was to ultimately see that these people break free from the yoke of Ottoman rule. Take, for example, the 19th century British travelling writers: their criticisms of the Balkans oscillated between two camps. On the one hand, their critiques of social mores and life in the Balkans were inadvertently indictments against the Ottoman Empire for the perceived wretchedness of the Balkan lands; and, on the other hand, were also criticisms of the social limitations of their own Victorian British society. These two lines of argumentation – an indictment of Ottoman influence and/or a critique of British society vis-a-vis a critique of Balkan life – runs parallel throughout these travelogues. Similar cases are found among the texts of other Western travelers.

IV. The Other Travelers: Orthodox and Russian Accounts

Thus far, only Western travelogues have been discussed to understand how the Balkans were known. One must consider, however, contrasting travelogues to bring truth to the claim that these traveling accounts had more to do with opposition to Ottoman rule and the traveler’s origins, rather than the Balkans themselves.

Maria F. Korlova was an upper-class Muscovite traveler who journeyed to Macedonia and Albania in 1868 and documented her observations. Despite hailing from Russia, her observations draw similarity to Mackenzie and Irby and other Victorian traveling women. Like them, she remarks on the lack of “female emancipation,” a concept she associates with European modernity and progress (Davidova 80). She made these remarks decades before women’s emancipation became a central issue in Russia. Her essay is not a case study on Eastern-Western relations, but instead demonstrates how “gender and class can be inserted into debates about Russian identity and Russia’s place in Europe’s symbolic map of modernity” (Davidova 80). She comments that she is traveling in a country not yet visited by a “single Russia female,” thereby establishing an authoritative voice on account of her gender, social status, and nationality (Davidova 83). As has been mentioned thus far, Korlova’s account bears a striking resemblance to other upper-class women travelers of the Balkans at this time. However, this begs the question: how did these women, living in different regions, all come to similar conclusions in their Balkan travels? Arguably, it is because they all belonged to the same social milieu: “they were all concerned with enhancing women’s status and commented on their national identity and notions of European belonging” (Davidova 83). It was during the 19th century that a trans-European class consciousness was developing among the aristocratic upper-classes, and these women perceived the historical moment similarly due to their class background. Most of them were of the same stock as those that participated in the Grand Tour where upper-class men would travel Europe and mingle with the upper-crust of polite European society. A class dimension across the entire continent of Europe was what united these women, not their country of origin. Most of these 19th century women traveling writers in the Balkans thus intersect on three major points: (1) they make criticisms of gendered social mores which they could not do in their home country, (2) there is an emphasis on being the “first visitor,” and (3) an aristocratic belief in being a part of a superior culture, and always trying to cross cultural boundaries but never class boundaries.

However, other traveling writers in the Balkans visited with the intention of reaffirming their place of origin. For those Russians traveling to Bulgaria in the 1840s, they “saw it as the cradle of Slavic civilization and written culture” (McArthur 2). Their travels focused more on Bulgarian archives and monasteries, oftentimes pillaging them so their materials could be brought back to Russia. The shift in Russian travel literature noticeably changed during the rising tides of nationalism. Whereas, “in 1810 some Russian travelers empathized with the Turks, few travelers did after 1840” (McArthur 2). Here, again, we have an instance of travelogues illuminating more about their host country and culture than the space they are said to be describing. The drastic change in opinion towards the Balkans in Russia is not because Serbia had accelerated in its economic development from the 1810s to the 1840s; rather, the political climate in Russia changed as did geopolitics. Slavophilism became a popular political ideology in Russia, along with the souring of relations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire culminating in multiple wars during the 19th century.

On some accounts, the tone of all these travelogues is the same. They are often outright hostile to Ottoman influence, no matter their intended audience. The aristocratic travelers who journeyed to the Balkans belonged to the same milieu since a trans-European upper-class was developing its own separate consciousness apart from the rest of Europe. Therefore, similar topics are touched on in all of these accounts, namely criticisms of Balkan social mores, the perceived oppression of Christians, the “backwardness” of its people, and outright hostility towards anything Ottoman. However, some Russian travelers veered off these political diatribes and sought cultural preservation. In doing so, they were acting in accord with the nationalist movements of their time, and they paid particular attention to how these lands related back to their native country of origin. A notable exception to this rule was Maria F. Korlova, who wrote her account similar to other Western aristocrats of her class milieu. The divergence between these aristocratic travelers and other more marginal travelers, Russian or otherwise, speaks of a difference of priorities: the former highlighted their European identity, as a cross-continental elite with the same interests, but the

latter documented culture during a time of burgeoning Slavophilism within their host country and took this perspective in their travels. These travelogues thus demonstrate the two different ideological strains taking root in Europe in the 19th century: the trans-European identity as was made conscious in the upper-crust of European society and the nationalist undercurrent which inspired some Russian and Orthodox travelers to journey to the Balkans to find lost cultural treasures for their respective nationalist histories. This contradiction of interests between the nationalists and pan-Europeanism would come to a head many times over in Europe, starting with the nationalist revolutions of 1848.

V. Rebecca West and the New Balkan Travelogue

Black Lamb and Grey Falcon by Rebecca West deviates from the aforementioned standard discourse of balkanism, but only towards the Serbs; Bosniaks are excluded from West's focus altogether. Published in 1941, much can be said about her 1,100 pages of detailed text which are filled with historical insight delicately put alongside West's actual traveling account. She thus re-imagines the landscape through what came before it. However, she does so by inverting the entire orientalist discourse – whereas previous writers had seen this Balkan “Other” as contradictory to themselves, West instead fetishizes them. She illustrates them to be somehow “more European” than Europe itself, possessing almost magical qualities that she had rediscovered. This has much to do with her opinion of the Serbs, towards whom she held the highest, almost fanatical, regard for. That being said, she maintains the same discourse as previous travelers regarding the Bosniaks, except from a different source: she looks negatively on Bosniaks because she is a Serbian nationalist, and thus views them as unfortunate “Muslim Serbs.” West reproduced the orientalist discourse through her Serbian nationalism. She maintains the “bulwark myth” as a central component of Balkan (or Serbian) identity which rests on being exclusionary towards Muslims and anoints Serbs as the protectors of Christendom. Her work absolves the Serbs of their wretched history in

Western narratives, very prolifically and poetically even — but for the rest of the peoples living there, especially the Bosniaks, the same orientalist narrative is peddled with no regard.

West writes of the Slavs as having an “infinite capacity for inquiry and speculation,” as opposed to the Turks who “have no word in their language to express the idea of being interested in anything” (West, 302). Remarkably enough, oftentimes orientalist discourse does not come from West’s words, but rather, is re-imagined through the people she encounters. In one such encounter, a Jewish man remarks that “I used to feel ashamed because the Germans took me as an equal, and here in my house I was treated as an inferior to men with fezes on their heads” (West 313). In yet another heated encounter, a Bosniak man steps into their conversation, as if discursively intervening against her Serbian supremacist attitudes: “then perhaps you can explain why your Belgrade gangster politicians have devised this method of insulting us Bosnians... [and] we have seen them insulting our brothers the Croats” (West 311). Despite having little to no prior knowledge of the Balkans, West makes very firm statements on the nature of its people, and her diagnosis of its problems, and what *should* be done in the spirit of all Western travelers who came before her. She describes Bosnian women as not “[looking] in the least oppressed... they are handsome and sinewy like their men” and, in fact, they resemble the men in that “[they] look like heroes rather than heroines” (West 327). In one absurd observation, she remarks “always, in this part of the world, where there is running water, there is an elderly Moslem contemplating it (West 396). Her solution to the region is, most concretely, Serbian nationalism. Her curiosity with Bosniaks stemmed from how little she knew of Islam; a “population of Islamicized Europeans” struck her as “antithetical to Europe” (Hall 80). The Turks, she felt, “deserved destruction collectively.” She believed they had left the Bosniaks as a kind of “walking dead,” as the damned, with the Serbs being their opposite, as the saved (Hall 82). According to West, however, the Bosniaks were not directly guilty of their misdirection. Their supposed “Turkishness” could not be uprooted through the forces of any other group, she believed, Serb or otherwise. If we accept her words that nationalism “had come to a stage where fantasy becomes a compulsion to suicide,” then

perhaps the solution for West would be symbolic suicide, one of culture, and one where Bosniaks retracted their history to embrace the fantasy, the one she took as valid, i.e. bellicose Serbian nationalism. It is in this sense that she might have agreed with Sir Arthur Evans, albeit for different reasons: in order to redeem Bosnia, its people must begin “by sacrificing the [Ottoman]” (Berber).

VI. Conclusion: Creating Coherence from Falsities

Regardless of the lucidity of the text, and the sheer brilliance of its prose, West’s text (and all of these travelogues) leaves us asking a question that may be unanswerable: can the Western traveling author ever escape the orientalist discourse? – and, even further, can *any* author documenting regional history ever escape the trap of essentializing, of generalizing a peoples into a pathology in an effort to describe them? The travelogue falls into these traps, for it is immensely difficult, if not impossible, to discuss the Balkans without illustrating an image of the “common person.” In some sense, West’s account is “more true” than previous travelogues of the region because it gives historical weight to every encounter, however I question whether even phrasing it in this fashion lends itself to being more accurate. For it is not necessarily that an account is actually “more true,” because all accounts are steeped in projections and speculations; that much is inescapable. However, it could be said that West’s account is more vivid, if anything, because of its historical narrative and detail, but this does not necessarily make it an accurate, true representation of the Balkans. This is arguably impossible to capture in literary form. *All* travelogues fall victim to deferring their comparisons relative to their author’s origins; one cannot escape these biases and, in some sense, should sometimes be welcomed as a means of legitimate comparisons (within reason, of course). So, we are left with these fleeting reflections on a particular historical moment in the Balkans, molded by the respective socio-economic milieu of each traveler. These traveling accounts attempt to get to the “real” Balkans, oftentimes portrayed as one before Turkish influence, but locating this precise origin is impossible – this is because it does not exist. There is no derivation with which to judge Bosnia or the Balkans on, no historical “essence” which was lost, and no

glimpse into a bright future inscribed on the land. All of these are an author's projections, conscious or not, and are engraved in the literary form as such. Looking at these with a critical eye, all we have left is no form, just our description of it, and perhaps that is enough to make it "true." The photographer Michael Ackerman is quoted as saying, "places do not exist, a place is just my idea of it" – and, given that there is no historically fixed point, perhaps that is all we can actually argue at its most basic level.

However, we can deduce a few truths from these many travelogues. Firstly, as has been demonstrated by the British travelogues alone, these reflections had a real impact on discourse and public policy back home. It brought the Balkans to an audience who had previously not known much, if at all, about it. Secondly, the similarity in these travelogues demonstrate that the travelers were using the Balkans as a vehicle with which to make their own political criticisms and observations, many of which reflected the politics from whence they came. For the aristocratic travelers, like Maria F. Korlova and others, the observations were strikingly formulaic and similar, as if they were products of the same society despite living in disparate places. This was a consequence of their class-basis, and this can be taken to be wholly explanatory of the similarity in form and content. However, what unites all of these travelogues, albeit for different reasons, is their animosity towards Ottoman influence. For the Russian travelers, the Slavic character was elevated and Ottomanism was seen as a corrupting influence; Western travelers also despised the Ottoman foothold in Europe, but they prescribed a different solution more-aligned with their country's interests, i.e. foreign occupation. Whatever their political orientation, all of these travelogues deferred to the geopolitical interests of their host country. It is therefore difficult for anyone to read these and take their observations at face-value as representative of what was actually-happening in the Balkans at the time. As has been stated in this essay repeatedly, what we know about the Balkans cannot be separated from *how* we know it. Therefore, these travelogues altogether provide us a discursive basis from which we can understand *how* the Balkans were perceived during the 19th century, and this, in turn, brings us one step closer to understanding the

space as it was actually lived by the people there. We can then begin to unravel the Balkans from orientalist historiography, and find that it occupies something separate from Said's schema, as is articulated by Maria Todorova's concept of balkanism. However, this can only ever be done piecemeal, because we cannot encapsulate the entire scope of a region's history, not to speak just of the Balkans but of any space. Therefore, all we are left with are these travelogues, as historical fragments, to help us approximate a historical reality worth preserving.

Works Cited

- Arnold, R. Arthur. "From the Levant, the Black Sea, and the Danube: Vol. 2." London: Chapman & Hall, 1868. Internet Archive. Web.
- Belić, Dušan. "Immigrants as the Enemy: Psychoanalysis and the Balkans' Self-Orientation." *Slavonic & Eastern European Review*, vol. 87, no. 3, 2009, pp. 488 – 517.
- Berber, Neval. "Unveiling Bosnia-Herzegovina in British Travel Literature." *Spirit of Bosnia*, vol. 5, no. 4, 2010 <http://www.spiritofbosnia.org/volume-5-no-4-2010-october/unveiling-bosnia-herzegovina-in-british-travel-literature-1844-1912/>
- Davidova, Evguenia. "Gender and Culture in the Turkish Providence: Observations of a Russian Woman Traveler." *Aspasia*, vol. 6, 2012, pp. 79 – 95.
- De Laveleye, Emile. "The Balkan Peninsula." New York City: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1887. Internet Archive. Web.
- Evans, Arthur. "Through Bosnia and the Herzegovina on Foot During the Insurrection, August and September 1875." London: Longmans, Green, 1877. Internet Archive. Web.
- Gephardt, Katarina. "'The Enchanted Garden' Or 'The Red Flag': Eastern Europe in Late Nineteenth-Century British Travel Literature." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2005, pp. 292 – 306.
- Hall, Brian. "Rebecca West's War." *New Yorker Magazine*, 1996. Web.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1996/04/15/rebecca-wests-war>

Hammond, Andrew. "The Uses of Balkanism: Representation and Power in British travel

Writing, 1850 – 1914." *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 82, no. 3, 2004, pp. 601 – 624.

McArthur, Sarah. *Slavophile Ideology and Representations of Serbia in Russian Travel Writing, 1810 – 1850*. Budapest: 2007. Web.

http://www.hist.ceu.hu/conferences/graceh/abstracts/mcarthur_sarah.pdf

Munro, Robert. "Rambles and Studies in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Dalmatia with an Account of the Proceedings of the Congress of Archaeologists and Anthropologists Held at Sarajevo, August 1894." London: W. Blackwood. 1900. Internet Archive. Web.

Neofotistos, Vasiliki P. "The Balkans' Other Within: Imaginings of the West in the Republic of Macedonia." *History and Anthropology*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2008, pp. 17 - 36. West, Rebecca. Black Lamb and Grey Falcon. Penguin Classics, 2007. Print.

About the Author

Anton Stjepan Cebalo is a writer and historian based in Philadelphia, USA. He graduated from Cornell University with a concentration in history. Anton's interest in history began when he was young. Beginning his own research blog (<https://antoncebalowordpress.com/>) when he was just seventeen years old with revisionist polemics regarding political economy and history, it has since developed into a credible academic blog still maintained today. His main academic focus has been on the formation of Eastern Europe as a separate geopolitical space within Europe. His theoretical framework emphasizes the relationship between material and ideational forces, and how these forces intersect to form the enduring myths and ideology of today's nation-states. Much of Anton's writing touches on the contemporary topics of modernity, post-colonialism, capitalism, identity, nationalism, and displacement, emphasizing their historical continuity.