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WE AND THEY – THE OUR AND THE OTHER. THE BALKANS OF THE 20TH CENTURY FROM A COLONIAL AND POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE¹

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Keywords: symbolic colonization and decolonisation of Balkan, balkanisation, literary creation of the Own and the Other, contemporary postcolonial discourse, imperialism of the imagination

Słowa kluczowe: symboliczne kolonizowanie i dekolonizowanie Bałkanów, bałkanizacja, literackie reakcje swojskości-obcości, współczesny dyskurs postkolonialny, imperializm wyobraźni

Abstrakt: Magdalena Koch, MY I ONI, SWÓJ I OBCY. BAŁKANY XX WIEKU Z PERSPEKTYWY KOLONIALNEJ I POSTKOLONIALNEJ. „PORÓWNANIA” 6, 2009, Vol. VI, ss. 75-93, ISSN 1733-165X. W artykule został przeanalizowany dyskurs bałkański XX wieku z kolonialnego i postkolonialnego punktu widzenia. Pierwsza część przybliża geopolityczny stosunek do Bałkanów, skupia się jednak nie tylko na nazwie geograficznej Półwysep Bałkański, lecz przede wszystkim na figuratywnym i metaforycznym języku, bazującym na stereotypach i negatywnych „etykietkach” Bałkanów, takich jak: „beczka prochu”, obszar „zadawnionej nienawiści”, „zderzenie cywilizacji”, „strefa rozłamu”, europejskie „jądro ciemności”, „dzika Europa”, „jeszcze-nie” Europa. Ten stosunek opiera się na opozycji My-Oni z kolonialnego, punktu widzenia Zachodu. W drugiej części tekstu zostaje przeprowadzona analiza trzech utworów prozatorskich autorstwa wybitnych pisarzy z Bałkanów – chorwacki dyskurs literacki jest reprezentowany przez Miroslava Krležę w opowiadaniu *W Dreźnie. Mister Wu San Pej interesuje się problemem serbsko-chorwackim* (1924), serbski dyskurs przedstawia Ivo Andrić w opowiadaniu *List z roku 1920* (1946), natomiast bośniacki – Nenad Veličković i jego powieść epistolarna *Sahib. Impresje z depresji* (2001). Te trzy dyskursy z różnych przełomowych dla Jugosławii okresów pokazują, że pisarze chętnie sięgali po figurę „Obcego”, by uwypuklić problemy związane z własną złożoną, często zwielokrotnioną tożsamością. Ostatnia część akcentuje nowe, postkolonialne podejście do problemu Bałkanów – uczestniczą w nim wybitni naukowcy pochodzący z tego regionu, którzy zrobili kariery w Europie Zachodniej i USA. W tej części zostają zaprezentowane trzy fundamentalne dla tego problemu książki – studium Marii Todorowej (Bułgarka) *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), monografia Vesny Bjelogrić-Goldsworthy (Serbka) *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998) oraz antropologiczna książka Božidara Jezernika (Słoweniec) *Wild Europe. The Balans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (2004) jako przykłady korygującego wobec istniejących dotychczas reprezentacji i wyobrażeń Bałkanów.

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Abstract: Magdalena Koch, WE AND THEY, THE OWN KIND AND THE OTHER. THE BALKANS OF 20TH CENTURY FROM THE COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVE. „PORÓWNANIA” 6, 2009, Vol. VI, pp. 75-93, ISSN 1733-165X. This paper gives an analysis of the Balkan discourse in 20th century from colonial and postcolonial point of view. In the first part the West European geopolitical and metaphorical approach is considered. It is focused not only on the geographical name of Balkan Peninsula but first of all on the figurative and metaphorical language introducing and forming different stereotypes and images of Balkan representations as for example a “powder keg”, an area of “ancient hatreds”, “the clash of civilizations”, “the fracture zone”, European “heart of darkness”, “wilde Europe”, “not-yet”/“never quite” Europe and so on. Those images are based on WE and THEY opposition from the Western colonial point of view. The second part of the paper analyzes three prose works by eminent writers from the Balkans – Croatian literary discourse is presented in Miroslav Krleža’s short story *In Dresden. Mister Wu San Pey is interested in Serbo-Croatian problem* (1924), Serbian one is represented by Ivo Andrić’s short story *A Letter from 1920* (1946) whereas Bosnian – by Nenad Veličković’s epistolary novel *Sahib. Impressions from depression* (2001). It discovers that Balkan writers in different crucial historical periods used the figure of “the Stranger”/“The Other” to underline more vividly their own identity problems. So for them the juxtaposition of “the own kind” (We) and “the stranger” (They) is basic to demonstrate a very complicated of European (colonial) and Balkan (colonized) relationship and mutual perception. The last part gives the analysis of a new postcolonial approach to the Balkan discourse initiated in Western universities by the eminent scholars of Balkan origin who published their books in English. In this part Maria Todorova’s study *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), Vesna Bjelogrić-Goldsworthy’s monography *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (1998) and Božidar Jezernik’s anthropological book *Wild Europe. The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers* (2004) are presented as an example of a corrective counterpoint to currently circulating representations of the Balkans.

The post-colonial studies’ perspective, more and more pervasive in the humanities in the last two decades, defines a new area of thinking that leads to the re-evaluation of old problems. I would like to use this framework to look at the Balkans of the 20th century and thus refresh our thoughts on this region. I would like to describe three stages which I think comprise the Balkan discourse. First of all, I want to show the symbolic colonization by the West (We – They) of the notion of “the Balkans”. Secondly, I want to describe three examples (Croatian, Serbian and Bosnian) of how some of the literatures of the region dealt with this kind of colonial discourse by means of introducing the figure of the Other as a medium of polemic opposition to the Our, changing the perspective We (Our) and They (Other). Thirdly, I will depict the contemporary Balkan post-colonial discourse initiated by intellectuals from the Balkans.

The colonizing power of the metaphor

According to Maria Todorova, who paraphrased the famous words on communism, “a spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of the Balkans”³. In short, it is

³ M. Todorova, *Imaginarni Balkan*. Prevele s engleskog D. Starčević i A. Bajazetov-Vučen. Biblioteka XX vek, Beograd 1999, p. 15.

customary to think that the political 20th century began in the Balkans and vehemently ended there as well. The annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 by the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the successive two Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913 became a symbolic beginning of the previous century. The Balkan's renown was completed by the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand by the Bosnian-Serbian Gavril Princip on 28.06.1914 on the anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Field (28⁷/.06/.1389) which remains a symbol for the Serbians till this day. This event became a pretext for World War I. The 20th century ended with a bloody war in the Balkans (1991-1995). The Dayton Agreement in November 1995 gave rise to a new distribution of power and many post-Yugoslavian nation states. The conflict around Kosovo intensified and was ended by a bombardment of Serbia by NATO military forces in 1999. In February 2008 the issue was ended but it divided many European countries (some recognised Kosovo as a new state, others did not).

The average European, even if not particularly interested in the South-East region of Europe, has surely heard stigmatizing and colonizing terms such as “The Balkan Cauldron”, “The Balkan Powder Keg”, “Wild Europe” or “Turkish Europe” (which means less civilized, filled with oriental tastes and relics of the Ottoman rule). During the times of the recent bloody collapse of Yugoslavia, apart from the old terms, there appeared new stereotyping images such as *The Clash of Civilizations*⁴, *The Fracture Zone*⁵ or the European “heart of darkness”⁶. In other words, the Balkans became a metaphor of conflicted multiculturalism, a region of continuous (resuming) hatred, a boiling point and a region of destabilization that generates unceasing conflicts. This Balkan imaginary imposed on lay thinking is basically a colonization of thought and notion because it came into being mainly in the West and then was adopted by the Balkan countries themselves. The perception of the Balkans is mainly comprised of pejorative or even contemptuous labels⁷. The Balkans constitute a liminal area, “a transition zone”, a

⁴ S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*. “Foreign Affairs” 72, nr 3, Summer 1993, p. 23-49.

⁵ S. Winchester, *The Fracture Zone: A Return to the Balkans*. London, Viking, 1999.

⁶ Cf. T. Z. Longinović, *Vampires Like Us*, in: *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation*. Red. D. I. Bjelić and O. Savić. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2002, p. 51. Cf.: W. J. Clinton, *A Just and Necessary War*. “New York Times”, May 23, 1999, A 17.

⁷ I. Čolović, *Balkany – terror kultury*. Transl. M. Petryńska. Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2007, p.134-135.

bridge between Europe and Asia, Christianity and Islam. It has always functioned as an area “in motion” and remains unstable in the sense of “geopolitical tectonics”.

The notion of “balkanization” made a career in the 20th century, particularly in the West. Initially (after the Congress of Berlin in 1878) it meant the process of creating countries after the weakening and slow fall of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan Peninsula (Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania and Bulgaria). This notion was then used to define the process in which countries based on the national criterion came into existence after World War I as a result of the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Tsarist Russia. Later the noun became a synonym of the nationalistic fragmentation as such, but also the counterpart of the tense relations between the small neighbouring countries that brought about continuous conflicts. The term balkanization began to be used intensively anew after World War II and then it referred to the process of decolonization which took place in the 1950s and 1960s in different regions of the world. With time “balkanization” as a term began to be used separately from the Balkans but came back to the Balkan Peninsula towards the end of the 20th century when it was used to refer to the geopolitical “balkanization” of Yugoslavia which resulted in a bloody collapse of the federation whose place was taken by several new nation states⁸. It is visible that the adjective “Balkan” and the noun “balkanization” had a history stemming from neutral connotations and developed all the way to negative political and ideological connotations linked both to the process of colonization (the war of the superpowers on the area of influence) as well as, later on, decolonization (the fall of the empires and creation of smaller nation states). With time this notion became an abstract demon and turned from a geographical name to one of the most scornful labels in intellectual discourse.

The Balkans – a colonised notion

The very name “Balkans” is practically an example of the “colonial” forces coming from the Ottoman Empire as well as European superpowers of the West. It

⁸ M. Todorova writes about this in Chapters I and V of the book: *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press, New York 1997 and V. Goldsworthy in the introductory chapter to the book: *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. New Heaven and London, Yale University Press, 1998.

entered the official terminology in the European languages only in the 19th century making it relatively new. At the beginning it was introduced as a codified geographical name – the Balkan Peninsula, afterwards as a political name of the region – the Balkans. Before that – since the ancient times until the beginning of the 19th century – the area called at present the Balkan Peninsula – was known under the Greek name of **HAIMOS**, which in geographical terms meant the mountain range that connected the Black Sea with the Adriatic Sea. Whereas **BAL-KAN** is a word that stems from Turkish and means basically the same as the Greek name⁹. The second notion began functioning as a geographical term only after the regaining the Peninsula Haimos by the Ottoman Empire. From the 16th century to the 18th century – writes Maria Todorova – both names (the Greek and the Turkish) were used interchangeably¹⁰. The Turkish version was popularised by the German geographer August Zeune in 1808 as the official scientific name for the Balkan Peninsula and with time superseded the Greek one¹¹. In the 19th century and particularly in the 20th century when Europe constituted an ideological formation based around modern discourse and civilisational development, the Balkans became “The Other” described in numerous relations by European travellers. These relations were naturally reductionist in character and done on the basis of tales from interpreters because the Western travellers did not know the local languages. They were based on stereotypes of the Balkans and on the description of their own projected expectations. They were characterised by the colonial mentality. The vision of the world based on imaginations of culture, civilization and development on the basis of the dichotomous rule: centre (We) – peripheries (They) played a significant role in the conception of the intellectual and political elites of Western Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Western Europe was a synonym of development, civilization, culture, urbanization, pragmatism, rational thinking which means a synonym for a coloniser that brings “the correct” values, whereas the Balkans – the symbol of non-modernity, stagnation, backwardness, superstitions,

⁹ Cf. Todorova in Chapter I of the book *Imagining the Balkans* entitled *Balkan – nomen*.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Todorova, op. cit., p. 45-72.

¹¹ For M. Todorova the Balkans include Greece, Bulgaria, Albania, Romania, former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Kosovo, Band H, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia) with the exception of Slovenia, which had never constituted part of the Ottoman Empire. Hungary is not included because of its later role in the Habsburg Monarchy.

tendency to despotism, and remoteness from development – were forced to implement “the real” values from outside.

Our and the Other

During the 20th century the term “Balkans” basically became an area of war between the East and the West, the Past and the Present, Barbarity and Civilisation. How have the inhabitants of the region created their own national identity and how did they think about it? They usually have a multiple (Balkan, Yugoslavian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian or yet another, e.g. regional – Dalmatian, Vojvodina, Slavonic) identity but nonetheless they have included it in the broadly understood European identity. We can observe the phenomenon of a hybrid identity that is shaped on the border of ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural opposition. Then, how could one simultaneously be an inhabitant of the stigmatised Balkans and a “real” European?

I would like to shortly describe how the three great writers of the 20th century reacted to this issue in: Croatia (Miroslav Krleža), Serbia (Ivo Andrić) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Nenad Veličković), in three crucial and breakthrough moments of the history of the first (1918-1945), the second (1945-1991) and the third Yugoslavia (from April 1992 to February 2003¹²). One of the favourite literary strategies in these works was the method of confrontation with the “Others” by means of introducing the “Other” into the literary texts. It was basically a polemic act with the imposed metaphoric (Balkan) identity that consisted in doing away with the foreign colonial discourses, an ironic defensive gesture against hegemonic stereotypes, their own narration opposing mental colonialism, an attempt at dismantling it from the inside by means of “insiders”, their own objectification and simultaneously an attempt at defining oneself.

The Croatian creation of the Ourness and the Theirness

Miroslav Krleža (1893-1981) discussed this issue in the story *In Dresden. Mister Wu San Pey is interested in the Serbo-Croatian problem* (1924). He presents in it the Croatian point of view on identity after World War I when the creation of a common

¹² In February 2003 the term Yugoslavia ceased to exist and instead Serbia and Montenegro came into being and existed during the years 2003-2006. After the results of the referendum on 03.06.2006 in Montenegro, there came into being two separate countries –The Republics of Serbia and Montenegro.

country began – The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (in December 1918). The text is constructed on the basis of the typical for Krleža, ironic, multilayered polemics with an viewpoint that colonises thoughts about the Other. The story is in the form of a conversation that takes place in front of Dresden Gallery between a Croat, the inhabitant of the newly created European country, and a Chinese person. The eponymous Mister Wu San Pey wants to understand where the “exotic”, from the Chinese perspective, country of his interlocutor is and get to know what it is like. A culture and mentality clash takes place:

- I totally cannot imagine where is your Yugoslavia.. [...] Oooh, yes! Chekoslavia!
- No, no, Mister Wu San Pey! You’re wrong, Yugoslavia is not Chekoslavia. Chekoslavia is Chekoslovakia. Slovakia, Slovenia, Slavonia, Yugoslavia, Chekoslovakia are all different nations, different countries.
- Strange! It all sounds quite similar. Panslavia!
- Yugoslavia is a Balkan country, Sir. Balkan!¹³.

This dialogue is a great opportunity to illustrate the issue of We-They not only within internal (Southern Slavic) national tensions but also as a problem with the Serbian, Croatian or Yugoslavian identities. It allows us to create an intra-continental point of reference on the axis between Western Europe and South-Eastern Europe (the Balkans). The third aspect of the issue of Ourness-Otherness is constituted by the intercontinental arrangement: Chinese – European/Balkan, that is Europe - Asia. This way, by means of using the subversive power of mockery and (auto)irony, Krleža dismantles the Yugoslavian stereotypes but also fights the Eurocentric, colonial point of view. He also includes the issues around the language that is of importance as a source of identity:

- I am not from Serbia! I am from Croatia! Well, in fact from Serbo-Croatia! Or Croato-Serbia! [...]
- What is the difference between Serbian and Croatian?
- In the stress, mister Wu San Pey! The Serbians stress the first syllable and the Croats the second or the third. Or is it the other way round [...] but for a non Serbian-Croatian ear these difference aren’t noticeable¹⁴.

The author works out the European stereotypes in circulation such as, e.g. the image of the brave Serbian (“the famous Serbian artillery” even the Chinese had heard

¹³ M. Krleža, *In Dresden (Mister Wu San Pey is interested in the Serbo-Croatian problem)*. Transl. J. Wierzbicki, in: same author, *Dzienniki i eseje*. Select. by J. Wierzbicki. Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, Łódź 1984, p. 202-203.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 208-209.

about) or the ancient religious debate between the Orthodox Serbs and the Catholic Croats (that feel that they belong to the “better” Latin Europe with their own myth of *antemurale christininitatis*):

- We are also divided by God.
- How is it possible? God unites the nations of the world, he does not divide them.
- You see Sir, everything is different in our country. The Serbs have printed the words: “God protects Serbia” on their banknotes, whereas the Croats believe that God is with them: “God and Croats”. It is as yet undecided whose side God is going to take. The Serbian or the Croatian.
- I don’t understand. Are there two Gods and one nation or two nations and one God?
- [...] There are two churches and one God. The Croats believe that virgins can give birth to a child whereas the Serbs know from experience that this is impossible. Until today no Serbian virgin has given birth to a child.
- Croatian women can do that? That’s fantastic. What an esoteric sect those Croats are!¹⁵

The Eurocentric point of view is confronted by the Chinese which results in a slightly “tattered” sense of superiority over some other, much older civilizations. By means of this mocking gesture of introducing the “exotic” Other – not only towards the Balkans but entire Europe – we obtain anti-colonial narration that can be included in the post-colonial *instrumentarium* of Croatian literature.

The Serbian creation of Ourness and Otherness

Ivo Andrić (1892-1975)¹⁶ is an example of talking about oneself by means of confrontation with the Other. He discusses the issues of Ourness-Otherness and delicate arrangements of multiculturalism and multiethnicity of the Balkans in many works. The most powerful text (due to the balanced proportion between its small size and the power of its argumentation) is *A letter from 1920*, a story from 1946. The creation of ourness-otherness is different than in Krleža. On the one hand, the Our (comes from Bosnia and is a nameless author-narrator), on the other hand, there is the Other (a Jew, Max Lewenfeld, a doctor, author of the letter from the title). However, this creation of ourness-otherness is very complex – Lewenfeld is a Jew that was born and educated in Sarajevo, which means that he is included in the refined formula of the “our” Other or the “other” Our which is a person of multiple origins. In the story the two protagonists’ narration paths intertwine.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 209.

¹⁶ I place Andrić in Serbian discourse even though he was born a Croat in Bosnia because since 1920 he lived in Belgrade and stopped writing in the Croatian “ijekavica” for the benefit of the Serbian “ekavica”. He used the Cyrillic alphabet more often than the Latin one and was a self-proclaimed author of Serbian literature. The period in which the text at hand was written, was a “Serbian” (or “Yugoslavian”) period in the author’s life.

They are both Bosnian, old friends from secondary school in Sarajevo separated during World War I. They meet accidentally at a railway station in 1920 and Lewenfeld says that he always wanted to leave Bosnia. The old compatriots and school friends represent two ways of thinking about Bosnia which is further underlined by the use of two different languages. The author uses his native language, whereas Max uses German as a form of creating distance between himself and the reality of Bosnia and, simultaneously, as a means of underscoring the area of his country not so long ago colonised by the Habsburg Empire. Andrić uses language structures to show the dilemma of the Other – he alternately uses the pronouns “we-they”, “our Bosnia-your Bosnia”, as if the “our”-Other or “other” Our also had problems with cristalising his identity, whereas his flight from Bosnia and an attempt at finding his own place somewhere else was Andrić’s yet another variation of the topos of the Jew-eternal wanderer. Lewenfeld is in the mental state of ambivalence. The author makes him say heavy accusations that repeat the existing stereotypes of this region:

Bosnia is a land of hatred and fear. [...] None of **you** wants to hear or understand it or see it.. [...] [emphasis mine – M.K.]¹⁷.

Max ascribes the demon of hatred and the passion of destruction to Bosnia, which with its complex ethnic, religious and cultural structure is viewed as the Balkans in miniature and can be perceived on the basis of *pars pro toto*. Max ascribes hatred as an endemic characteristic to the region. The narrator of the letter shows that this region spurs particularly fruitful evil and this is why he sees fleeing as the only way out. In the mean time, the message of Andrić’s text with the Other, a Jew, who tries to escape from the hatred, is far broader. The reader gets to know that many years after leaving Bosnia, Max died as a doctor in the civil-war-stricken fascist Spain in 1937. His death was described with the last, greatly ironic sentence of the story: “This was the end of the man who wanted to escape from hatred”¹⁸. A counterbalance for Max’s way of thinking is the outlook of the second narrator, who in a reserved way comments on the geopolitical opinions of the old friend. Andrić’s creative aim was universal – he showed that there is no geographically located “land of hatred” as hatred is not a geographical notion but an

¹⁷ I. Andrić, *A Letter from 1920*. Transl. M. Znatowicz-Szczepańska, in: same author, *Opowiadania*, Warszawa 1954.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 356.

anthropological phenomenon that pertains to human nature as such. Using the image of a Jew as an accuser of Bosnia was in 1946 of additional significance. The words of accusation and contempt for Bosnia (which, as it should be reminded, formed part of the fascist Ante Pavelić's Independent State of Croatia during World War II) as a “land of fear and hatred” were said by the Other but mitigated by the fact that they were said by a representative of a group with barbarous experiences during the Holocaust.

The information that the text of this story was politically “colonised” and ideologically manipulated in the 1990s by “Our”, the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, the war criminal Radovan Karadžić, who commissioned the text of the story to be translated into “the languages of the world” in order to support and justify his ethnic cleansing in the region by the authority in literature and the only Southern Slavic Noble Prize winner, seems of great importance in this context.

The Bosnian creation of Ourness and Otherness

The third, most contemporary and literarily attractive creation of ourness-otherness is the novel by Nenad Veličković (1962) *Sahib. Impressions from depression* (2001). The work was written after the collapse of Yugoslavia and presents the reality of the new country that came into being after 1995. The author used the figure of the Other in order to show the neocolonialism of present superpowers of Europe in contemporary Bosnia. He created a sort of subversive double opposition: We (the Balkans) - They (Western Europe /USA) but also an opposite arrangement We (the West) - They (the Balkans). This epistolary novel of the new generation written only by means of emails sent by the nameless English man from Sarajevo to a friend, George, to London, refers in yet another way to the creation of otherness-ourness as an *instrumentarium* of the post-colonial discourse. We receive an image of Bosnia as perceived by a foreigner, the Other, but also simultaneously a representative of a contemporary democratic European superpower burdened with a deep colonial tradition. This Other is an English civil servant who works in Sarajevo for an international organization that carries out peace missions in Bosnia. We get a traditional civilisation clash based on the opposition of Western Europe – the Balkans. Veličković builds this opposition on the basis of a lexical game and a play on the Bosnian local language with a witty humorous touch. He uses Turkish notions

such as “Sahib” and “Sakib”/sakib. Sahib means: sir, lord. Sakib is a Muslim male name. However, there is a common noun “sakib” – written in small letters which in everyday language means used merchandise of no value. The English man is the eponymous Sahib twice. On the one hand, he is the representative of European administration which administers money and military peace forces which introduce “civilisation” and “Europeisation” into Bosnia. This is why the English man occupies the position of the “better”, higher, more contemporary neo-coloniser - Sahib. He says *expressis verbis*:

I am constantly surprised when the locals think that they are our equals. It will take a long time before they realise that you don't have to be black to be a slave.¹⁹

His second role as a “coloniser” is only literary and consists in the fact that he is the only commentator on the Balkan world in the text. He is the narrative's “Sahib” because it is from his perspective that we observe the contemporary Bosnian reality with its paradoxes. He is the author of the eponymous “impressions from depression”. Sakib is the counterbalance for the Sahib. It is a symbolical name of the English man's Bosnian driver, a professor. There is no demand for academics, so he works as a driver to maintain his family. Another feature of the otherness is the fact that the English Sahib is gay and is in love with his driver. This is how Veličković, using bitter irony, shows the clash of liberal views of the western life style with the traditional, patriarchal culture based entirely on heterosexual normativity. In the clash of the West with the South, the “better” Europe with the “worse”, the (neo)colonising with the (neo)colonised, Veličković in a satirical way of political incorrectness shows problems in Bosnia but also exposes the cynicism and incompetence of the Western “civilisers” or, in fact, new colonisers. The English Sahib sends the last emails from Belgrade and not Sarajevo, where he was delegated, thus we can talk about a wider Balkan picture and not only about the Bosnian situation:

When I say “country” I mean such a country as ours. Bosnia and Hercegovina is independent and sovereign on paper, but we all know that this is some kind of **transitory form between a reserve and a colony**. Elections take place on every level, but on the highest – we count the votes. If the government that we choose, turns out to be disobedient, we call the Hague [emphasis mine – M.K.]²⁰.

¹⁹ N. Veličković, *Sahib. Impressions from depression*. Transl. D. J. Ćirlić. Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec 2007 p. 103.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 75-76.

Veličković shows between verses the problem of contemporary neocolonialism or military peace missions on a wider global scale. Similarly to Andrić, he does not present Bosnia as the only “area of disintegration” and evil on earth.

Pablo and Van der Klift go to Chechnya. The pay is better because the risk is greater, but they leave reluctantly. To be in Europe, **even at the very bottom**, is a pleasure not easy to renounce in comparison with the Philippines, Afghanistan, Somalia. The people there at the bottom, in the streets, with plastic bags in their hands, in awful shoes, **are** – whatever else you might say about them – **decent and white**, among them you don't feel that you're that far from home [emphasis mine – M.K.]²¹.

The novel is clearly written from modern post-colonial positions. The tools of (auto)irony, grotesque and omnipresent humour only spice up the message and make the novel paralyzingly funny and painfully sad for the contemporary (post)colonial discourse.

The post-colonial voice of the Balkans at the advent of the 21st century

At the turn of the 20th century a relatively new phenomenon in the Balkan discourse can be observed. It is based on opposing the claims of the dominating Western cultures and a slow dismantling of the stereotypical oppositions and perceptions of the Balkans by means of using the tools of post-colonial discourse. We can hear more and more often the ever so distinct voices from “there” inspired by Edward Said – his *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). I would like to recall merely three important voices though there are far more²², who turned into a visible signal of the new modernised Balkan discourse. The authors are the Bulgarian Maria Todorova (1949), Serbian Vesna Bjelogrić-Goldsworthy (1961) and Slovenian Božidar Jezernik (1951). These people were born and thoroughly educated in the Balkans. They managed to achieve good academic positions at Western universities and were recognised as highly competent experts on Balkan issues. Todorova studied history and English philology in Sofia, and since 1988 she has lived in the USA and is one of the most important people in American Balkan studies. Bjelogrić-Goldsworthy studied philology at the University of

²¹ Ibidem, p. 119.

²² E.g. the works of M. Bakić-Hayden *Nesting Orientalism: The Case of Former Yugoslavia*. “Slavic Review” Winter 1995, 54, nr 4, p. 917-931 or the text by M. Bakić-Hayden and R. Hayden *Orientalist Variations on the Theme ‘Balkans’: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics*. “Slavic Review” Spring 1992, 51, nr 1, p. 1-15.

Belgrade and has lived and worked in London since 1986, where she has taught English literature and drama at the university (UCL) since 2000. Jezernik is a recognised professor of the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), a great ethnologist and cultural anthropologist. His books are translated into English. Owing to their cooperation, a specific “intellectual resistance” against the stigmatizing, often contemptuous Western metaphors was born. It aims to demetaphorise in a scientific and documented way the metaphors and show the varied, non-homogeneous image of the Balkans. Of utmost importance is the fact that this voice – from the Balkans about the Balkans – became noticeable and understandable due to the medium of the English language in which the above mentioned author’s publish. As it can be assumed, it is a signature of our times to break the sad rule of “*Slavica non leguntur*”²³, as Slavic languages are not read and one’s own problems have to be written in a global language. These books aim at rectifying and, simultaneously, widening the perspective on the region, and re-analysing and verifying the perspectives of the western authors who have been perceiving the Balkans in a schematic and subjective way as a periphery from the point of view of the omniscient centre. This approach allows to change this optics.

*Imagining the Balkans*²⁴ from 1997 by Maria Todorova is the first breakthrough book in this respect. The author tries to define anew what the Western ideas of the Balkans were and are. Inspired by Said’s *Orientalism*, she analogically created her own notion of “**balkanism**” which was widely recognised. However, on the one hand, she continues Said’s approach in some regards, she shows that the Balkans are represented as a European (sub)variant of the East as opposed to the West. Nonetheless, in a general sense, she starts with stereotypes, ideas, and etymology of the name, and goes into a discussion with Said’s view. She highlights that the Balkans do not have the same connotations as the Orient because they have a masculine image of bravery, arms, but also barbarity, ruthlessness, primitivism and lack of civilization, whereas the Orient has a feminine image in the West (because of the presentation of the harem). It is a symbol of

²³ Cf. S. Slapšak, *Trinroduction*, in: *Gender nad Identity. Theories from and/or on Southeastern Europe*. Red. J. Blagojević, K. Kolozova, S. Slapšak. Belgrade Women’s Studies and Gender Research Center, Belgrade 2006. This trend includes the vast and immensely important *Balkan as Metaphor. Between Globalization and Fragmentation*. Red. D. I. Bjelić and O. Savić. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2002.

²⁴ M. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*. Oxford University Press, New York 1997.

wealth, freedom, sensuality, a land of unlimited male sexuality which stirs the imagination of romantics. By means of introducing scientific concepts and referring to historical materials, Todorova “disenchants” the image of the Balkans and makes it more reliable and competent but, first and foremost, she initiates a new and deeper discourse.

One year after Todorova, i.e. in 1998, the book by Vesna Goldsworthy *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*²⁵ appeared in London. It contributed immensely to the interdisciplinary imagological studies on images of the Balkans in British literature from romanticism, through Victorian times until Edwardian times. The author showed that these periods were particularly rich in narrative and textual colonisation of the Balkans carried out by known British authors. She also points to contemporary show business and the role of the film and television in the 20th century in shaping the image of the Balkans. Such a form of colonization did not need any economic or territorial expansion. Only the literary form and the imperialism of imagination carried out by fiction were needed in order to influence the perception of the Balkans among the British and other Europeans, as some of the works Goldsworthy analysed had been translated into many languages. The book shows the process of orientalisation and exoticisation of the Balkans in works by Lord Byron, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and also Anthony Hope, Bram Stoker and Agatha Christie. It analyses the humorous ways of presenting the Balkans in British literature, e.g. in Bernard Shaw’s work. It describes the voices of British travellers – Edith Durham, Rebecca West or Olivia Manning. All this is done in order to reveal the mechanisms of “colonisation” of ideas and the creation of stereotypes through literature.

The third voice in the new discourse belongs to Jezernik and his book *Wild Europe. The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers*²⁶. As opposed to his previous books, this one was not written in English but originally published in Slovenian in 1998 and six years later translated into English. It contains all sorts of texts written by Western travellers (diplomats, historians, politicians) from the 16th to the 20th centuries and shows the mythologised Balkans. It basically reveals the “anatomy” of stereotype birth

²⁵ V. Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. New Heaven and London, Yale University Press, 1998.

²⁶ B. Jezernik, *Wild Europe. The Balkans in the Gaze of Western Travellers*. London 2004.

according to the We-They rule. However, Jezernik views it all through a post-colonial perspective. He treats the traveller's perception as a kind of symbolic mirror in which, apart from the other, there is the image of the traveller's own culture. The researcher shows in the meticulously chosen material that the traveller first of all confirms the stereotypes in order to justify their own "superiority". They "manage" the description, evaluate the "non-emancipated", "primitive" cultures thus controlling the incomprehensible Other. Jezernik proves that these are texts of western culture which create the reality according to their own hidden assumptions and values. They constitute the realization of the colonial discourse which is the representation of the world created by the colonisers.

Summary

There are several conclusions. First of all, during the 20th century the images of the Balkans in Western Europe were built on stereotypes and "colonial" prejudice. They were based on a topography of the imagination or political concepts. The notion of "the Balkans" as a metaphor which colonised the collective imagination of inhabitants of Western Europe is gradually replaced by the term South-Eastern Europe in academic debates, especially after some of the countries from this region joined the EU and others are waiting to join. Secondly, the literatures of the different countries of the region have been and still are responsive to the continually up-to-date problems with regard to their own identity. Thirdly, due to using the tools of post-colonial research, i.e. opposing the practices of a symbolic taking over, we can currently observe the recovery of "their proper voice" in the Balkan discourse and the defence of individual identities of the colonised nations. The intellectual process of decolonization of the Balkans shows emptiness of the "Balkan" metaphors propagated for years. The Balkans are not (and have never been) homogenous. They include many countries of the Balkan Peninsula and as a region are diversified both geographically and culturally. We should actually be glad for the process of eradicating negative ideas of the colonisers on the "troublesome peripheries of Europe" that is taking place at present. We should gladly welcome the process of deconstructing the term Balkans as a stigmatizing geopolitical and cultural label.

ARCHIVE OF „PORÓWNANIA” I

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