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Contesting Europe: The Politics of Bosnian Integration into European Structures

Alex Jeffrey

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The School of Geography, Politics and Sociology

Newcastle University

Daysh Building

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

NE1 7RU

Alex.jeffrey@newcastle.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)191 222 5111

Fax: +44 (0)191 222 5421

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Abstract

This paper explores what is meant by 'being European' in contemporary Bosnia. Over the past two decades, Western politicians have justified interventions in Bosnia through recourse to an Orientalist binary between a rational and progressive 'Europe' against an irrational and retrogressive 'Balkans'. Current efforts to incorporate Bosnia into European structures reproduces this imaginary, though in this instance replacing space with time, suggesting that Bosnia needs to move from a 'Balkan' past to a 'European' future. In this paper I explore the political effects of such imaginaries through two levels of analysis. In the first, I critically examine the ongoing implications of the geopolitical framing of Bosnia as Europe's 'Other'. In the second, I explore how nationalist politicians have deployed European rhetoric in order to stake claims to resources and establish respect. I conclude by arguing that a sovereignty paradox underpins both 'geopolitical' and 'nationalist' European rubrics in Bosnia: while idealising forms of solidarity based on broad social and cultural affiliations such discourses simultaneously seek to promote the state as the primary territorialisation of political life.

Keywords

Bosnia and Herzegovina, Balkanism, The European Union, Sovereignty, Nationalism

Introduction

With the recent expansion of the European Union (EU) into Central and Eastern Europe, scholars have conducted sustained deliberation over who, what or where counts as 'European'. This work has isolated a familiar binary at the heart of such identity formation, citing that the making of the 'European' Self has simultaneously depended upon the casting out of a 'non-European' Other (see Fleming, 2003; Kuus, 2004; Kuusisto, 2004). This paper engages with one site that experienced such abandonment: the Balkans. It is an enduring refrain to identify the Balkans as Europe's internal Other, a liminal space 'on the doorstep of Europe' to use Tony Blair's phrase (see Glenny, 1999: xxi). Historical surveys of European fiction and travel literature have identified the role played by Balkan localities as sites of deviance and criminality, juxtaposed with evidence of European rationality and progress. The identification of a binary between Europe and the Balkans has led scholars to apply the critical tools of Said's (1978) *Orientalism* to representations of the Balkans. In so doing, *Balkanism* has emerged as a distinct form of discursive critique, isolating the power relations masked in representations of Balkan identities and locations.

Over the last two decades Bosnia has acted as a fulcrum for Balkanist imaginaries. In particular, the 1992-5 conflict led to certain observers and combatants explaining the violence as a consequence of 'ancient ethnic hatreds' or 'primordial evil'. There are two key observations to be made regarding such discursive strategies. The first is that these enunciations do not simply circulate within an aesthetic realm, disconnected from political decisions and actions. They are, to draw on Judith Butler's terminology,

performative in that they act as ‘citational practice[s] by which discourse produces the effects that it names’ (Butler, 1993: 2). Thus the labelling of the conflict by politicians in Western Europe as a product of ‘ancient hatreds’ shaped the terms of political and military intervention (see Campbell, 1998; Ó Tuathail, 2002; Jeffrey, 2007). Secondly, the production of Balkanist explanations of the conflict was not restricted to Western Europe. Such practices have been observed within the former Yugoslav republics, for example Močnik (2005) notes the efforts made by Slovenia’s political leaders to present their country’s secession as virtuous, progressive and ‘European’ in comparison with the immoral, retrogressive and ‘Balkan’ nature of attempts to retain the integrity of the Yugoslav state (see also Patterson, 2003). In the case of Bosnia the ‘othering’ of political opponents was not directed at agents acting outside the state, but rather at political opponents operating within Bosnia. For example, politicians and paramilitary leaders deployed Balkanist rhetoric to essentialise Bosnian identities and cast enemy groups as ‘primitive’ in comparison with the enlightened and ‘European’ nature of their own dispositions. Such discourses attached specific character traits to the binary between ‘Europe’ and ‘the Balkans’, varying from religious affiliation (Christian versus Muslim); alphabet (Latin versus Cyrillic) or cultural outlook (multicultural versus mono-ethnic).

The expansion of the EU into the Balkans has led scholars to reconsider the production of Balkanist binaries and their political effects. In Bosnia, the simultaneous embrace of Europe by both international agencies and local nationalist political parties has re-emphasised the role played by ‘being European’ in the construction of the Self. The process of consciously staking out European credentials has been explored in the case of Croatia by Slavenka Drakulić (1996), where she highlights the trend for

commercial buildings previously named 'Balkan' to be re-branded in the mid-1990s as 'Europa'. 'The new name,' she notes 'is loaded with a complexity of positive values' (Drakulić, 1996: 11). While a similar reliance on the virtue of European associations can be observed in contemporary Bosnia, the implications of divergent political groups using European rhetoric requires analysis. Therefore, as claims to Bosnia's Balkan past legitimised particular styles of international intervention during the conflict, articulations of Bosnia's European future are equally performative. And just as such imaginaries were not restricted to external actors outside the Bosnian state, so too has 'being European' become a universal aspiration amongst Bosnian political parties. The question, then, is not whether Europe is perceived in a positive sense in contemporary Bosnian political discourses, but rather what is conceived as 'European' in such rubrics.

In this paper I will seek to address this question through an examination of the political effects of European discourses in contemporary Bosnia. Using case-study material from 'geopolitical' and 'nationalist' discourses, I will look to explore the forms of solidarity and territorialisation on which contemporary Europeanization depends. In doing so I will argue that a sovereignty paradox underpins both 'geopolitical' and 'nationalist' European rubrics in Bosnia: while idealising forms of solidarity based on broad social and cultural affiliations such discourses simultaneously seek to promote the state as the primary territorialisation of political life. Though notionally cosmopolitan in its invocation of an ethical and political community operating beyond the particularities of an individual state, the evidence from Bosnia suggests that European ideals look to solidify forms of citizenship and territory firmly rooted in the state.

This argument draws on qualitative ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Bosnian towns of Brčko and Sarajevo between July 2002 and August 2003, with follow-up visits in 2004 and 2007. This research focused on the role of civil society actors in post-conflict Bosnia, and their relationship with political parties and international organisations. Using qualitative methodologies of participant observation and semi-structured interviews I explored the ambiguous position of civil society organisations within networks of patronage in post-Dayton Bosnia. In the process representatives of international organisations and Bosnian political parties firmly rooted Bosnian politics in the wider historical drama of European enlargement. Such discussions provide qualitative evidence of the political imaginations underpinning European discourses in contemporary Bosnia. In the following argument this interview data is corroborated and compared to two archives of textual material: documentation connected to political parties and reports produced by the international organisations supervising and observing Bosnia. It is not my intention to use this data to draw expansive conclusions regarding the Bosnian state, but rather collate these different forms of evidence in order to explore a number of situated European vocabularies in Bosnia.

The argument in this paper is made over three sections. The first surveys the recent history of Balkanist interpretations of Bosnia's past. This theoretical work stakes out two particular points for critique within Balkanist interpretations of Bosnian history: first, the notion of a coherent, democratic Western European polity that is required to intervene and 'correct' social failings in Bosnia; and second, that this binary can be spatially delineated between West and East. Building on this material, the second section traces how international agents in Bosnia have relied on Balkanist binaries to shape

international interventions both during the conflict and in the post-conflict period. In particular, the notion of ‘transition’, suggesting that Bosnia must travel from its Balkan past to a European future, has become normalised within international discourses. But through analysis of the political effects of such enunciations, I argue that European aspirations mask the preoccupation of intervening agencies with strengthening the power of the Bosnian state. In the third section I contrast such international invocations of Europe with the narratives of local Bosnian political party activists and civil society organisations. Recalling Bakić-Hayden’s (1995) notion of *nested orientalisms*, this material highlights the multiple scales and locales of Balkanist imaginaries. In particular I illustrate how Serb politicians have staked claim to their European credentials while simultaneously stressing the centrality of cultural difference in structuring social life. Again, I focus on the political effects of discursive strategies. While challenging the notions of ‘transition’ present within the discourses of international agencies operating in Bosnia, discourses of Serbian Europeanism legitimise the continued Serb state project in Bosnia: the Republika Srpska.

Balkanism

The land was wild, the people impossible. What could be expected of women and children, creatures whom God had not endowed with reason, in a country where even the men were violent and uncouth? Nothing these people did or said had any significance, nor could it affect the affairs of serious, cultivated men (Andrić, 2000: 24).

In *The Days of the Consuls*, originally published in 1941, Nobel Laureate Ivo Andrić describes the reaction of a young French consul on arrival to the Bosnian town of Travnik at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. The author uses irony to expose the pejorative preconceptions of the Western European diplomat; since Andrić originates from Travnik, this is a self-description through the eyes of an agent of colonial rule. This ‘Othering of the Self’ animates a key theme of Andrić’s writings, namely the quotidian conflicts and traumas caused by the foreign occupation and colonisation of Bosnian territory (see Longinović, 1995). Thus Andrić highlights a central aspect of postcolonial critique, that colonial power is not derived solely through practices of government, but is formulated, legitimised and reproduced through representations and discourses of the Other.

In drawing attention to the importance of imaginary geographies within projects of colonial rule in the Balkans Andrić’s work serves as a relevant starting point for an exploration of the role of Balkanism within the enactment of foreign and domestic policy in Bosnia. For Maria Todorova (1997) critiques of Balkanism draw attention to the multiple mechanisms and registers through which the Balkans have served as a ‘repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the ‘European’ and the ‘West’ has been constructed’ (Todorova, 1997: 188). Within this discourse ‘Europe’ stands for modernist ideals of rationality, morality and consensual politics while the ‘Balkans’ are cast as a place of barbarism, irrationality and ‘ancient hatreds’. In critiquing this binary, a series of studies have explored the representation of the Balkans within philosophic geographies of Western European travel

writers, novelists, scholars and politicians. Vesna Goldsworthy's *Inventing Ruritania* (1998) serves as a key example of this literature, where she suggests that authors such as Bram Stoker, Anthony Hope and George Bernard Shaw locate their narratives in the Balkans as a means of 'subverting a variety of taboos and satisfying hidden desires' (p. 126). Goldsworthy is clear that these representations, which she argues amount to 'imaginative colonialism', have a performative force: 'a cultural great power seizes and exploits the resources of an area, while imposing new frontiers on its mind map and creating ideas which, reflected back, have the ability to reshape reality' (p. 3).

As alluded to earlier, this exploration of the representative mechanisms through which Self and Other are mapped onto Europe and the Balkans draws on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). But as a number of scholars have argued, there are specificities to the intellectual and imperial histories of the Balkans that preclude unproblematic transpositions of Said's reflections on the portrayal of the Orient (Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Fleming 2003; Todorova, 1998). As Fleming (2003) suggests, both Balkanism and Orientalism focus their critique on a 'system of representation' but 'this system is based on different referents -- historical, geographical, and conceptual' (p. 13). Specifically, despite Ottoman rule, the Balkan countries were not colonized in the same fashion as the Orient. It is argued the absence of Western European colonial rule cannot be adequately replaced by an 'imaginary colonialism' of the style articulated by Goldsworthy above (*ibid.*). Thus despite the clear parallels between Balkanism and Orientalism in the field of knowledge production, the specific history of the Balkans renders the distinction between a colonial West and a colonised East more difficult to delineate. Indeed, one of the strengths of Balkanist critique is its encapsulation of the hybridity and dynamism of

relations of domination, in a situation where Balkan people perceive each other as ‘both colonial rulers *and* colonial subjects’ (Bjelić, 2005: 6). Recent studies of political discourses within the Former Yugoslavia have drawn attention to this appropriation of Balkanist tropes by local politicians in order to demonstrate ‘Western’ credentials while orientalisng political opponents as betraying ‘Eastern’ cultural or social practices (see Bakić-Hayden, 1995; Bjelić and Savić, 2005). It has thus been argued that Balkanism ‘meanders between *Orientalism* and *Occidentalism*, once as a representational mechanism, again as a *subjectivational* process’ (Bjelić, 2005: 5).

Building on this distinction between the representational and the subjectivational, Močnik (2005) isolates two types of relations of domination encompassed within the ideology of Balkanism: ‘the relations of geo-political and economic hegemony, and the relations of internal domination within the societies geopolitically stigmatized as “Balkan”’ (p. 79). This is an important distinction that highlights the two spheres in which the binary between ‘Europe’ and ‘non-Europe’ is analysed in this paper. In the first instance, I explore the geopolitical making of Bosnia as a site of intervention, cast out as a ‘non-European’ Other. It is not my intention to provide a full exegesis of the cultural foundations of what can be termed ‘Balkanist geopolitics’, but rather to focus on its effects. This discussion thus explores the mechanisms that have been put in place to bring Bosnia ‘into Europe’. In the second instance I build on what Močnik terms ‘internal domination’, the means through which Balkanism is reasserted within Bosnia in order to stake claims to resources and establish respect. The strategies through which European credentials are articulated in Bosnia serves to both mirror Balkanist geopolitics (the

casting out of a Balkan other as socially and culturally inferior) while also deploying a radically contrasting image of European belonging.

Balkanist Geopolitics

Balkanist accounts of the fragmentation of Yugoslavia between 1991-1999 presented an essentialised view of the Balkans, where attributes were temporally fixed and constituted through a pre-existing tendency towards inter-ethnic antagonism and conflict. Silber and Little (1995) lament how foreign diplomats ‘behaved as though the war had no underlying structural causes at all [...]. They behaved as though all they had to do was to persuade the belligerents of the folly of war’ (Silber and Little, 1995: 159). In place of criticising nationalistic political rhetoric in Bosnia, political leaders and strategists in Western Europe turned to trusted Balkanised accounts to explain the conflict (see Major, 1999, Owen, 1998). Crucially, such interpretations of the conflict led to an assumption that the only means of resolution of the violence was the partition of territory down ethno-national lines. Drawing on Jacques Derrida (1994), David Campbell (1998) describes this alignment between territory and identity as ‘ontopological’, as national identities are fused with the particular territories (Derrida, 1994 in Campbell, 1998: 80). Reflecting this logic, the 1995 Dayton Agreement finally ended the violence through the division of the Bosnian territory into two sub-state ‘entities’ divided by the Inter-Entity Boundary Line: the Muslim-Croat Federation¹ and the Republika Srpska (RS), plus a small ‘special district’ in the north-east municipality of Brčko. In doing so, the very measures used to mediate the worst excesses of nationalistic politics created the

¹ Hereafter referred to as ‘the Federation’.

conditions for its continued survival in post-conflict Bosnia. The central state institutions were left with little power and a cumbersome tripartite presidential system consisting of eight-month rotating tenures. Consequently, many of the central Bosnian government powers were devolved to the two entities and Brčko District, loosely federated as they were within the Bosnian state.

The sub-division of Bosnia into the two entities and a 'special district' has served to both limit the power of state level institutions and entrench support for nationalist political parties in the ten years since the Dayton Agreement. The elections in late 1996, held to demonstrate to American and Western European electorates that progress was being made in Bosnia, only served to entrench the power of nationalist political parties in the immediate post-war period (Donais, 2000; International Crisis Group, 1996). Despite fluctuating backing for the more moderate and multi-ethnic *Socijaldemokratska Partija* (SDP), support for the three main nationalist political parties (the Serb *Srpska Demokratska Stranka* or SDS, the *Stranka Demokratska Akcije* or SDA and the Croat *Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica* or HDZ) remains relatively strong across the country; in the 2004 election these parties gained 71 percent of the popular vote (OSCE, 2004). The fractured nature of the Bosnian state has been masked through intense international supervision and intervention. The Office of the High Representative (OHR), the international body established to implement the civilian aspects of the Dayton Agreement, has provided supervision of political processes, with other international agencies focusing on security (NATO, EU-For), democratization and elections (OSCE), police reform (UN and EU) and financial structures (World Bank, IMF).

Somewhat counter intuitively, the powers of the OHR have increased since the Dayton Agreement, a response to intransigent local political parties and growing international impatience at the slow rate of Bosnian state reform. In the initial post-conflict period the OHR felt that conditionalities and indirect influence could shape the reform of the Bosnian state. But in light of the failure of this strategy to enact reform or establish the basic rule of law the High Representative was granted, at the Bonn Peace Implementation Conference in 1997, wide ranging executive and legislative powers to intervene in Bosnian political processes. These ‘Bonn powers’ have been criticised by certain scholars as constituting imperial ‘rule by decree’, where policies enacted in the name of ‘Bosnian democratization’ have been passed behind the closed doors of OHR meeting rooms without consultation of the Bosnian public (see Chandler, 2000). This aspect of Bonn Powers has been demonstrated on numerous occasions, for example by the sacking of the President of the Serbian Radical Party Vojislav Šešelj in March 1998 by High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch, or High Representative Lord Paddy Ashdown’s decision in March 2005 to sack the Croatian Bosnian presidential candidate Dragan Cović for charges of serious corruption. These powers have also been used to intervene in more symbolic matters of Bosnian politics, such as the decision in October 2005 to block the renaming of Sarajevo airport after the wartime leader of the Bosnian Muslim (or Bosniak) orientated SDA, Alija Izetbegović (see OHR, 2005a).

Just as the conflict in Bosnia was used to justify Balkanist readings of the region’s history (see above), so the use of Bonn Powers has only served to validate nationalist political rhetoric branding the West as imperial invaders, particularly in light of the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 or the death of Slobodan Milosevic in the custody

of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in March 2006. The continued strength of nationalist political parties means limited progress has been made in Bosnia in establishing a meaningful and universally accepted Bosnian citizenship. Instead, solidarities still appear to be shaped by ethno-national identity. Perhaps the most significant element of the denial of the past in contemporary Bosnia is the lack of attention by the international community to issues of reconciliation between ethno-national groups, leading to the proliferation of memorials commemorating mythologised nationalist events and figures (Jeffrey, 2006).

The notion that Bosnia must ‘find its feet’, break its ‘culture of dependency’, or even ‘let go of nurse’, is prevalent across Western commentary on the post-conflict political landscape of Bosnia (see Conces, 2001; Intermedia, 2005; International Crisis Group, 2003). In the decade following the Dayton Agreement, international observers have been keen to point to the growing independence of Bosnia, citing that the country is no longer ‘post-conflict’ but is now confronting similar challenges to other post-socialist states². These comments would suggest that the challenges of fitting the remnants of Bosnian industrial production into international circuits of capital and labour have come to take precedence over issues of keeping belligerent parties at peace. Certainly, it was the preoccupation of local government officials surveyed during the research in Brčko to conform to budgetary norms set out by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded ‘District Management Team’³. But more recently, this neoliberal transformation has been encapsulated in stark geographical terms: that Bosnia

² This shift was given the shorthand ‘from emergency to transition’ by a United Nations Development Programme official in Sarajevo, 29/05/03.

³ Interview with Brčko District Mayor, Brčko 08/05/03.

must move ‘from Dayton to Brussels’ (see Ashdown, 2005a; Judah, 2000; Ó Tuathail, 2005).

This Balkanist concept of ‘transition’ (from a Balkan past to a European future) was neatly captured the then High Representative, Lord Paddy Ashdown, in a speech in late 2005:

[...] EU membership will lock this country firmly into the democratic mainstream. It means access to EU development funds that can help turn the economy around. It means more foreign investment, creating more jobs. It means European standard justice. It means that – in the run up to membership – Bosnian politicians will have to show common sense and legislate the huge number of laws that are required to bring Bosnia into line with European standards. Each of those laws will help initiate improvements in living standards (Ashdown, 2005b).

In setting EU membership in these terms, Ashdown makes a connection between accession and the establishment of democratic norms and values. The close articulation between Europeanization and democratization is understandable given that within EU enlargement documentation Europe is presented as “an area of freedom, security and justice” (Commission of the European Communities, 2004). Where the Bosnian state has failed to act as a locus of citizenship or democratization, Ashdown’s invocations of supra-national sovereignty looks beyond the nation-state to the protective and democratizing values of EU. This rhetoric conjures an image of democratic cosmopolitanism, where membership of the EU establishes an accountable structure of

governance ‘above’ the scale of the state (see Held and Archibugi, 1995). In contrast to OHR-led practices of Bosnian state building, where a large percentage of the population (predominantly Serb and Croat constituencies) did not consent to the project, there appears to be universal support from Bosnian political parties for integration into Europe (Commission of the European Communities, 2003; Hayden, 2002).

But this virtuous narrative of Europeanization, where increasing integration to European structures affords democratic opportunities for the Bosnian citizen, underplays the conflicts and contingencies that have shaped the implementation of this policy in Bosnia. With particular reference to the paper’s core argument relating to the politics of Balkanist imaginaries, in what follows I will draw out two points that serve to problematise the invocation of a ‘transition’ from an imagined Balkan past to a European future. First, the process of ‘Europeanization’ has not significantly reconfigured the power relations of international intervention: the OHR’s repeated references to ‘European values’ masks the differential power positions of the actors involved in this political negotiation, while the abstract claims to democratization pay little attention to meaningful participation at the local level. Second, despite rhetoric of democratization and cosmopolitan political values, the central political effect of closer integration with Europe has been the strengthening of the Bosnian state. These two points are explored below through an examination of conditionalities relating to Bosnian entrance to the Council of Europe and the opening of Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) talks.

Until the opening of SAA talks in November 2005 the EU had no formal contractual relationship with Bosnia, their contact has thus been “short, but intense” (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 5). But despite the absence of formal

obligations, the EU and Bosnia have been in “structured dialogue” since the Dayton Agreement (see Commission of the European Communities, 2005). In recent years this dialogue has stimulated a number of high profile contacts between the EU and Bosnia. For example, since March 2002 the High Representative (then Lord Paddy Ashdown) has simultaneously held the post of EU Special Representative, to form the central point of contact between the EU and Bosnia. The EU have, as stated in the introduction, also taken over other defence and security competences over the last three years, most notably with the EU police mission and the EU security force EU-For (see Juncos, 2005).

But to reduce the role of Europe to these tangible aspects would be to overlook the patterns of influence and authority European institutions have exercised in Bosnia since the Dayton Agreement. Part of this influence has been mobilised through the lengthy procedures to join the Council of Europe (CoE), an organisation that, while not directly affiliated to the EU, seeks to monitor and harmonise social, governmental and legal structures across its 46 member states (see Council of Europe, 2006). In 2001 the CoE gave Bosnia a series of political, social and economic criteria as conditions for gaining membership of the group. The level of detail within this document indicates how the conditionality of CoE membership was closely embroiled with the objectives of the international supervision of Bosnia. In particular, the first criterion set out by the CoE is ‘[t]o co-operate fully and effectively in the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreements, which notably require the settlement of internal and international disputes by peaceful means’ (Council of Europe, 2001). While further criteria refer to the cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the ratification of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and

Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), other aspects articulate closely with the practices of the OHR. For example, criterion IV(c) states that the Bosnian government must “adopt, within six months after its accession, if it has not yet been done, the laws which have been temporarily imposed by the High Representative” (Council of Europe, 2001). This presents the Bosnian interlocutors with an open-ended conditionality, where membership of the CoE is dependent upon the fulfillment of laws that are yet to be imposed by the OHR. This situation became tautological when the then High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch placed pressure on the Bosnian House of Representatives in 2001 to adopt a new election law, since they were failing in their fulfillment of CoE conditions (see OHR, 2001).

The OHR and CoE conditionalities are thus seemingly entangled, their combined instruments of authority urging the implementation of the Dayton Agreement, while reproducing international authority. Following the adoption of a new election law in August 2001, Bosnia was successful in its accession to the Council of Europe in April 2002, leading the then High Representative Wolfgang Petritsch to celebrate that Bosnia had found a ‘European perspective’:

[n]one of the mainstream parties now dispute the central political tenet that integration in Europe is the overarching aspiration of politics, economy and society in Bosnia and Herzegovina (OHR, 2002).

The penetration of the ‘European aspiration’ to the heart of political, economic and social life in Bosnia was acutely felt through the subsequent conditionalities attached

to opening negotiations on the SAA. Like the CoE criteria, a ‘road map’ was produced for Bosnian accession to the EU, identifying eighteen steps necessary for the opening of negotiations on SAA. The EU deemed these initial steps “substantially completed” in 2002, leading to a broader feasibility study for opening SAA talks. This study grouped the remaining objectives of SAA criteria under three headings: political criteria (democracy, the rule of law, compliance with the ICTY and human rights), economic criteria (fiscal sustainability, privatisation and financial sector review) and criteria relating to the ability to assume the obligations of the SAA (covering issues of the implementation of reform, foreign policy and regional co-operation) (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). The primacy of compliance with the ICTY within this document has led Ó Tuathail (2005) to remark that the ‘the road to the EU runs through the Hague’ (p. 57).

The political and social priorities contained in the SAA feasibility study emerged from Bosnia’s membership of the Stability Pact, an EU initiative established as a conflict-prevention measure ‘aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South East Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity’ (Stability Pact, 2006). The resulting criteria for SAA differ from the CoE in that they purposefully look beyond Dayton, acknowledging its flaws as a cumbersome and inefficient architecture of governance. In particular, the SAA criteria seek to dilute the primacy of ethnic identity with the territorialisation of Bosnia through the strengthening of the state-level Council of Ministers, removing parallel functions at municipal, canton and entity levels and strengthening a professionalised civil service (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). In doing so, SAA criteria have served a useful function

for the OHR as a means of revising the Dayton constitution under the auspices of European integration.

While the OHR may enroll the powerful imagery and vocabulary of a decisive break from international supervision through Europeanization, the conditionality of CoE and SAA reforms seem to suggest significant continuities in the exercise of international authority in Bosnia. Thus I would suggest that three key points can be made in relation to emergent European rubrics in contemporary Bosnia. First, the deployment of Balkanistic rhetoric by international agencies (such as the OHR) continued since the conflict, principally through the assertion that Bosnia is a state ‘in transition’ from a past of ancient hatreds to a new European future. Second, though the OHR have connected Europeanization and democratization, the discussion demonstrates that the conditionalities inherent in the process of Europeanization, both through the CoE and the EU, are intricately bound into the priorities and practices of the existing international agencies in Bosnia. When I met an assistant to the High Representative in Sarajevo in 2003, he spoke at length of the importance of European criteria in instigating state reform and integration, acting as a ‘pull’ factor, against the ‘push’ of the OHR⁴. This rhetoric echoes the oft-stated division between ‘hard’ Bonn Powers with the ‘soft’ conditionalities associated with membership of European frameworks. In practice the evidence presented in this discussion suggests that the distinction between these variants of international influence cannot be so cleanly delineated. Third, though bound in rubrics of cosmopolitan affiliation to a European citizenry, the conditionalities of SAA and CoE accession have been firmly rooted in the cultivation of strengthened state sovereignty and citizenship. The spatialities and chronologies of such geopolitical Balkanism can be

⁴ Interview with assistant to the High Representative, Sarajevo 28/05/03.

usefully compared with the emerging European rubrics within Bosnia, where designations of ‘European’ and ‘Balkan’ are flexibly applied between opposing political groups. It is within such Balkanist scripts that radically oppositional concepts of Europe emerged. But despite diverging from the earlier narratives of Balkanist geopolitics, these concepts of ‘Europeanization’ retain an attachment to state sovereignty as the primary unit of political life.

Nested Balkanism

Between 1992-1995 Serb paramilitary groups supported by the *Jugoslovenska Narodna Armija* (Yugoslav Peoples’ Army or JNA) carved the Republika Srpska as an exclusively Serb territory from the Bosnian state. The political underpinnings of such military and paramilitary actions emerged from the ultra-nationalist rhetoric of Radovan Karadžić, founder of the SDS, who outlined the exclusive spatiality of the RS through the blunt refrain that “our territories are ours, we can go hungry but we shall remain on them” (Karadžić, 1991). Such a geographical imagination does not simply outline a set of spatial objectives, but simultaneously emphasises the absolute nature of cultural difference within the political philosophy of the SDS. Echoing the *integralist* rhetoric of the French and British nationalist politicians studied in the work of Douglas Holmes (2000), it was ‘heterogeneity’ and ‘rootlessness’ that was perceived to pose a threat to Serb national interest in Bosnia. An SDS representative in Brčko alluded to this when he stated the key failing of (the multi-ethnic) Brčko District was its heterogeneity, offering the explanation that “we don’t like being mixed, when there is mixing there are

problems”⁵. This notion of ‘mixing’ relies on stable, knowable and essentially different ethnic groups comprising the key social and political cleavage in Bosnia.

The creation of the RS, then, was a process of ‘un-mixing’ the Bosnian population and creating an ethno-nationally homogenous territory. The violence that accompanied this process was both physical and symbolic, from the expulsion of the non-Serb population through to the destruction of references to other ethno-national groups within the built environment. Since Brčko occupied a key strategic location connecting the two halves of the RS the town constituted a particular focus for Serb paramilitary action (see Kadrić, 1995). Such ‘ethnic cleansing’ continued in the post-conflict period in both the RS and parts of the Federation through policies passed at the entity level designed to dissuade returns and solidify the gains of the war (see Coward, 2002; Dahlman and Ó Tuathail, 2005). From 1996, towns that had previously held a Bosniak majority within the RS, such as Brčko, underwent a rapid Serbianisation, involving the renaming of streets, the construction of Serb orientated memorials and the building of Serb Orthodox churches, often on the site of vacated Bosniak homes (International Crisis Group, 1998; Jeffrey, 2006). The intention was to create an ethnically homogenous state-like territory, whilst simultaneously removing the possibility of heterogeneous identities and affiliations.

The violence of the formation of the RS highlights the potential paradox of the current European preoccupations of Serb political parties. Over the last decade the manifestos of the main political parties in Bosnia have converged on the issue of Europe, each stating the ‘overriding value of European integration’ (UNDP, 2002: 4). In the case of Brčko, the political parties contesting the 2002 presidential election embedded their

⁵ Interview with SDS representative, Brčko 14/04/03.

campaign materials in the language and symbolism of the European Union. For example a billboard advertisement for the PDP, a moderate Serb nationalist political party, declared their party's European credentials by exclaiming '*Да, Портале Европска а ортале Српска*' ('Yes, you can be European and you can be Serbian') (see Figure 1). The words are adorned with juxtaposed European and Serbian flags, and a picture depicting a woman standing over a child doing written work, under the phrase '*Да, Учимо*' (Yes, We Study'). Animating what Ó Tuathail refers to as the RS's 'existential crisis' (2005: 59), the wording of this advertisement appears to pose a direct challenge to the image of Serbian nationalism as parochial, traditional or depending on founding myths, and instead offering an alternative vision of a cosmopolitan Serbianism accommodated within the EU. It could be argued that rather than celebrating an established national space, this poster offers an anti-ontopological vision, one where solidarity does not rely on a particular fixed identity but rather a shared modernity.



Figure 1 PDP Election Poster, Brčko 2002 (Source: Author's Collection)

But an interpretation of the poster, and the political rubrics from which it emerges, as a performance of a ‘new’ Serbian political imagination ignores the extent to which such pronouncements of Europeanism are strategically relational. This point was clear in discussions with Serb political party members and representatives of Serbian civil society organisations in Brčko, where Serbian Europeanism was justified in *relation* to other non-European groups. ‘You need to be realistic,’ said the founder of a Serbian Orthodox youth organisation ‘Serbs are part of Europe, we have a Christian past’⁶. The idea of ‘being realistic’ was often used as a means through which nationalist viewpoints could be raised in the interview setting, presenting the opinion as common sense in comparison to the ‘unnatural’ nature of multi-ethnic Bosnia. In this register of cultural difference Serbian claims to European membership stem from its religious heritage, a trait that sets them apart from the Bosniak community.

Thus a new terrain of Balkanism is opened where a Bosnian Serb claim to Europeanism is structured around the identification of a non-European other. Following Bakić-Hayden (1995), this can be described as ‘nested Balkanism’ since ‘the designation of “other” has been appropriated and manipulated by those who have themselves been designated as such in orientalist discourse’ (p. 922). This Balkanist ideology reflects arguments made in relation to the Battle of Kosovo Polje in 1389, where certain Serbian commentators and politicians have portrayed the battle as a defence of Europe (the Serbian Kingdom) against invading Ottoman troops (see Kalajić, 1995). Echoing strands of contemporary resistance to Turkish membership to the EU, this vision promotes European unity as a Christian affiliation rather than based on the spread of democratic principles of freedom and security. This directly challenges the rhetoric of CoE and SAA

⁶ Interview with the founder of the St. Sava’s Youth Association, Brčko 3/12/02.

criteria, since these political requirements are structured around Bosnian state membership as a multi-ethnic polity, not on the membership of the Serb minority as part of a normative vision of Christian European identity.

While promoting the notion of a set of enduring cultural differences fragmenting Bosnian society, such nested Balkanism simultaneously serves to disrupt the chronology of the geopolitical imaginaries of intervening agencies in Bosnia. Rather than seeing European membership as a claim that is accredited through the recognition of certain criteria by international actors, the SDS representative criticised the process of European integration and simply stated that ‘Serbs have a right to be part of Europe’⁷. Probed further, the representative of the SDS based this assertion of entitlement on the high culture of Serbian society reflecting its inherently civilized nature. Indeed, the central preoccupation of the three Serbian youth organizations in Brčko was the preservation of cultural heritage and ‘developing spiritual identity’⁸, through ‘trips to monasteries’⁹, ‘youth discussion groups’¹⁰ and a range of sporting activities. The conception of an enduring threat to Serbian cultural heritage articulated in these research encounters echoes a strand of contemporary Serbian victimhood, where notions of Serbian identity are mobilised as a means of explaining the marginalised position of Serbs within the European Union. In such accounts, Serbs are again the sole defenders of Europe, as they were in 1389, though this time from the secular and commercialized European values invading from the West (Čolović, 2002). These interpretations of European enlargement have redeployed Balkanist language to suggest that “the shadow of the collapse [of

⁷ Interview with SDS representative, Brčko 14/04/03.

⁸ Survey of the Serb Youth Association, Brčko 21/10/02.

⁹ Survey of the Grčica Youth Association, Brčko 21/10/02.

¹⁰ Interview with representative of the Serb Sister’s Association, Brčko 23/10/02.

Europe] began to spread the moment people in west European countries lost their sense of real values, that is, when money, material concerns and economic interest took the place of philosophy, religion, history and politics” (Čolović, 2002: 39). This concept of a ‘collapse’ of European cultural values seems to reflect the assertions of Milan Kundera’s *Tragedy of Central Europe* (1984) where he explores the disjunction between perceptions of ‘Europeaness’ between Central and Western Europe. Kundera outlines the irony of the cherishing of a ‘European’ cultural identity in then Communist Central Europe at a time when ‘Europe’ was no longer perceived as a cultural value in Western Europe. Through such tropes RS politicians can present intransigence at the requirements of the CoE or SAA as the ‘authentic’ defence of European values against the neoliberal interventions made in the name of the European Union (Kalinić, 2004), a stance that has found fertile ground in some strands of the academic left (see, for example, Johnstone, 2002). Concurring with the study of Holmes (2000), this political project appears to foreground the essential cultural difference of Serbs as a means of mediating the alienation of neoliberal reform. Within this optic, ‘being European’ is stripped of its cosmopolitan affiliations, and replaced with a parochial connection to the Serbian nation.

Mirroring the Balkanist geopolitics of the Bosnian war, this interpretation of Serbian Europeaness creates an idealized Serb (cultured and sacred) against a vilified European (vulgar and profane). But more than a judgement of character traits, this Balkanist binary has political effects. In shifting the debate to questions of essential identities, this register of Europeanization ignores the tangible political necessities of Bosnian accession, such as the reform of the Bosnian state. Indeed, this concept of Europeanism is structured around a competing state project, the defence of the

sovereignty of the RS. This tension between the demands of European integration and the desire to retain the sovereignty of the RS has been demonstrated in the recent protracted negotiations over Bosnian police reform (see DTT-NET.COM, 2006; OHR, 2005b). In the case of Brčko, a number of NGOs felt that operating projects between the two entities (the Federation and the RS) was difficult due to the lack of cooperation from RS authorities. This was evidenced by one youth NGO coordinator, who was responsible for five NGO projects across Bosnia operating on both sides of the Inter-Entity Boundary Line, who expressed frustration at the obstructive practices of RS officials towards reform of the Bosnian state:

[...] there is not a willingness in RS to have projects on their territory that are governed by the state level, because it is seen as a weakening of the powers of RS. They [RS officials] have said to me ‘we are never going to accept the state system you know, the state level has been devised to allow the ethos of the Federation to have its power, and it will weaken the RS to support anything that gives the state level credibility, we would undermine the power of the RS. So we have to hold very tight to RS power and not give anything’ (Interview with youth NGO coordinator, Brčko 07/05/03).

Thus being European, within the optic of Serbian political parties, involves a defence of the RS against the erosion by international agencies seeking to strengthen the Bosnian state. Blurring sovereignty and cultural identity, this motivation to retain the distinction of Serbian cultural heritage allows RS politicians to simultaneously announce

European aspirations while defending the considerable powers of the RS. The evidence from Brčko would suggest caution in interpreting the circulation of European rhetoric within Serbian political parties as a shift to a more cosmopolitan ethos based on the spread of shared values. Rather, this discussion has challenged this image through a consideration of radical cultural Europeanism that does not promote a trans-national belonging, but rather essentialises particular cultural traits as representing 'Europeanness'. In this way, political parties, such as the PDP, create a discursive space to promote Europeanism, while simultaneously blocking constitutional and institutional reform that would assist Bosnian accession to the EU.

Conclusion

One of the darkest moments of the conflict in Brčko was the destruction of the large 19th century Hotel Posavina in the centre of town in April 1992. The hotel's popular coffee lounge and cinema were destroyed, leaving a charred shell overlooking the town's central square. The hotel was not targeted for its military threat, it was not used as a barracks and it held no strategic value within the geography of the conflict in Brčko. Rather the threat posed by the hotel was a cultural one, it symbolised the possibility of inter-ethnic exchange and heterogeneity. The international response to the Bosnian conflict was to subscribe to the central logic of such attacks, explaining the violence as a consequence of intractable cultural differences across the Bosnian state. The solution to the conflict, the creation of exclusive ethno-national territories in Bosnia, served to

sustain this vision and created the conditions within which nationalist political parties could continue to thrive.

This paper has explored how such material and cartographic violence has been inserted into discourses of Europeanization by international agencies and nationalist political parties in the post-conflict period. This discussion has used the analytical tools developed by critics of Balkanism to explore how assertions of 'Europeaness' have relied on a simultaneous casting out of a non-European 'Other'. The paper identified these practices in two arenas. The first, within a geopolitical register, explored the current attempts by international agencies to position Bosnia as a state 'in transition' to European norms, a practice that serves to entrench a Balkanised imaginary of a state confined by its past and in need of expert assistance. But by constructing a purportedly 'undemocratic' Bosnia, international agencies serve to recover an image of Western Europe as a symbol of democratic virtue. This dual identity formation accords with Žižek's (1990) assertion that it is in Eastern Europe that the West constructs its 'Ego-ideal', banishing the 'decay and crisis' of its own democratic practices and looking to the East 'for the authentic experience of "democratic invention"' (p. 50). But the analysis of interview and textual material drew into question the entanglement of 'Europeanization' and 'Democratization'. Rather, the conditionality related to CoE and SAA negotiations suggested continuity in the mechanisms of international intervention and the reliance on building state sovereignty. In the second arena, the paper explored how processes of 'Europeanization' have seen the adoption and redeployment of Balkanist imaginaries by nationalist political parties. This material brought to the fore the 'nested Balkanism' of a

radical Serbian Europeanism, structured around essential cultural differences and founded on the rejection of Bosniak claims to a European heritage.

The mirrored discourses of Self and Other present in these two arenas of enquiry demonstrate the enduring flexibility and political force of labelling social, cultural or political practices as 'European' or 'Balkan'. It is the central aim of this paper to move beyond the identification of scripts of similarity and difference and to focus on their political effects. I have argued that ideas of Europe circulating in contemporary Bosnia do not challenge the primacy of the state, despite the prevalence of references to forms of solidarity beyond the nation state. Rather, the virtue of European association has been deployed to legitimise the strengthening of competing visions of statehood in Bosnia. 'Europe', then, does not act as a marker of virtue, a sign of the benevolent intentions of international agencies or a radical break from the nationalist past of parties such as the SDS. Rather it is a discourse of occlusion, a term that serves to mask the political practice structured around struggles over state power.

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