Mirroring Europe
Ideas of Europe and Europeanization in Balkan Societies
Tanja Petrović

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PART 1

*De-Provincializing Western Europe*
CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Europeanization and the Balkans

Tanja Petrović

From the Balkans to the Western Balkans

“With us to Europe” or “We take you to Europe” are the mottoes found in advertisements for bus companies operating between Balkan and Western European cities as well as in the campaigns of political parties across the region. While in the case of buses traveling across the continent, this is a metaphor with a history, related to decades and centuries of physical movement westward motivated by a promise of a better and more stable life, education and modernization, the Europe promised by politicians in the Balkan countries is a different kind: going to this Europe does not require physical but rather ideological movement. It refers to accession to the European Union, by which “Europe” should come to these countries (fulfilling all the promises for which people used to go to “Europe” in past centuries—and still do), and simultaneously they should become “Europe” by transforming themselves. The latter aspect—the one of transformation and adjustment in the domains of legislatures, institutions and public policies—is a characteristic of EU accession also in the case of “already European” countries in the continent’s West: in political theory, this process is termed Europeanization and usually refers to the “domestic impact of the European Union” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005, 1). While there is, particularly in anthropology, a body of research that discusses Europeanization within a framework much wider than that of EU-related processes and policies (for an early review, see Borneman and Fowler 1997), this concept is becoming increasingly EU-bound, just as in political discourses Europe itself is increasingly becoming a metonymy for the European Union (Velikonja 2005).1

1 The term Europeanization today refers almost exclusively to EU-related policies and practices in political science, although many political scientists admit its inadequacy (cf. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005: 1, note 3). In parallel, the equation between Europe and the European Union goes so far that it affects purely geographical notions that should be neutral. After Bulgaria joined the European Union, the Austrian daily Der Standard wrote that Europe had acquired a new sea (Markus Bernath, “Das Neue Meer Europas” [Europe’s New Sea], Der Standard, January 5–6, 2006). In spring 2009, the Slovenian Tourist Organization’s billboards in Belgrade advertising holidays in Slovenia featured a photo of Portorož and the slogan “The nearest European sea.”
The notion of the Western Balkans is likewise intrinsically connected with the process of Europeanization understood in terms of accession to the EU: it encompasses countries of the Balkans that are still in the process of accession. Once a country is granted full membership in the EU, it ceases to be part of the Western Balkans. The moment all the countries located between Croatia in the west, Hungary in the north, Romania and Bulgaria in the east, and Greece in the south join the EU, the political term Western Balkans will disappear.

In political discourse, the term Western Balkans has replaced the term Southeastern Europe, which was used during the 1990s to denote the countries plagued by ethnic conflicts. The latter actually functioned as a euphemism for the Balkans, a name that carried a historical burden and one with which most new countries founded after the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia did not want to identify. However, the history of the term Southeastern Europe as a neutral alternative for the Balkans goes back much further than the last decade of the 20th century. Todorova (1997, 28) states, “after 1918, the term ‘Balkan Peninsula,’ under attack for some time because of its geographical inadequacy and its value-ridden nature, began to fade away but not disappear, notably in the German language literature.” In the words of Mathias Bernath (1973, 142), Südosteuropa was to become a “neutral, non-political and non-ideological concept which, moreover, abolished the standing historical-political dichotomy between the Danubian monarchy and the Ottoman Balkans that had become irrelevant.” During the 1930s and 1940s, the term was taken over by the Nazis, so it acquired negative connotations, and with a long-lasting effect: “Südosteuropa became an important concept in the geopolitical views of the Nazis, and had its defined place in their world order as Wirtschaftsraum Grossdeutschland Südost, ‘the naturally determined economic and political completion’ of the German Reich in the southeast” (Todorova 1997, 28).2

As a term to denote the southeast region of Europe with its complex historical trajectories and its own imaginations of Europe and Europeanness, the Western Balkans proves to be inappropriate and difficult to identify with. The scholarly literature provides countless definitions of the region, but their common denominator is the description of a region as a territory or an area that is delimited or defined in some way (Johansson 1999, 4, quoted in Todorova 2005, 83). Some scholars emphasize that a region must have its internal characteris-

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2 The interdisciplinary academic tradition of “Südostforschung” should be treated along the same lines. As Promitzer (2003, 184) argues, Südostforschung was transformed “from a discipline of Austro-German national revisionism into a tool of National Socialist geopolitics.” For more on Südostforschung in Germany and Austria, see Kaser 1990, Burleigh 1988, and Promitzer 2003.
tics and must be characterized by cohesion if it is to be distinguished from its environment (Ibid.). In the case of the Western Balkans, it would be difficult to argue that it is a region in the traditional sense of the word. It is not that the countries of the Western Balkans do not have anything in common, but there is nothing that sets them apart from the neighboring countries, except that they are not EU members. If we adhere to Maria Todorova and take historical legacy as an important factor that defines a region culturally, historically, and politically, then again it is difficult to define the Western Balkans as a unit, since the countries occupying this region share a common historical legacy with other countries in their neighborhood, be it the legacy of the Habsburg Empire, the Ottoman Empire, or the Yugoslav or socialist legacy. The question of what the Western Balkans are can be answered only if we invert it and ask instead what the Western Balkans are not. The answer is then self-evident: they are not the EU. For this reason, we try to avoid the Western Balkans as a geographical category: the authors in this volume address processes of Europeanization and ideas of Europe that escape rigid political protocols of division and classification. Their focus is largely on the ways the people in the Balkans imagine, negotiate, and make use of the idea of Europe; these images, negotiations, and uses are importantly influenced by the post-socialist condition (and by the legacy of socialism) and are inevitably created through a dialogue with images and ideas dominating in Europe's West.

But before I discuss in more detail the aspects of this alternative, multidirectional and multivocal, culturally based Europeanization as it is negotiated in the Balkan societies, it is necessary to point out two important consequences of the predominant political discourses and practices that significantly condition the (self-) perception of these societies in contemporary Europe. The first concerns the link between the Balkans, on the one hand, and colonialism and postcolonial discourses and metaphors, on the other, which becomes increasingly relevant in the context of the EU accession of the Balkan societies. The second is related to the socialist legacy of the Balkan societies, which they share with Eastern Europe, and the tensions and problems post-socialist societies face within the common political and cultural space of united Europe after the end of the Cold War.

**The Balkans and the Third World: Balkanism and Colonialism**

As Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden argue, “in the post-colonial world, the language of Orientalism still maintains its rhetorical force as a powerful set of categories with which to stigmatize societies that are not ‘western-style
democracies” (Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, 2). In the same vein, many scholars place the mechanisms of the discursive shaping of the Balkan Other within the analytical frame of Orientalism (see Aronson 2007, Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, Bakić-Hayden 1995, Hammond 2004, 2006, Miškova 2006, Močnik 1998, Skopotea 1991). Milica Bakić-Hayden treats Balkan-related discourse as a variant of Orientalism because “it is the manner of perpetuation of the underlying logic (...) that makes Balkanism and Orientalism variant forms of the same kind” (Todorova 1997, 11; cf. Bakić-Hayden 1995). In her book *Imagining the Balkans*, the historian Maria Todorova acknowledges the important place of Said’s concept in the academic criticism of the discursive shaping of the Other and otherness, emphasizing that “there is overlap and complementarity” between rhetoric about the Orient and the Balkans (Todorova 1997, 11). She nevertheless introduced a separate term for discourse on the relationship between the Balkans and the West—Balkanism—and argued “for a substantive difference between the two categories and phenomena” (Todorova 2010, 176). While the Orient is historically and geographically elusive and undefined, the Balkans are a firmly defined entity. The elusive nature of the Orient gives rise to the perception of it as a dream country, a symbol of freedom and wealth, and to the idea of flight from civilization. “The Balkans, on the other hand, with their unimaginative concreteness, and almost total lack of wealth, induced a straightforward attitude, usually negative, but rarely nuanced” (Todorova 1997, 14). In Todorova’s opinion, the decisive difference lies in the fact that the Orient is the unambiguous Other, while “the Balkans are Europe, are part of Europe, although, admittedly, for the past several centuries its provincial part or periphery. (...) Unlike orientalism, which is a discourse about an imputed opposition, balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity” (Ibid., 17).

The publication and reception of *Imagining the Balkans* secured for the concept of Balkanism an important place in debates dealing with the relationship between the Balkans and the West and influenced the shaping of a new, critical academic tradition within Balkan Studies, although the concept of Orientalism did not quite disappear from scholarly works dealing with Balkan societies. The historian Diana Mishkova hence concludes that a dialogue with Edward Said’s approach to Orientalism is very productive for Balkan historiography (Miškova 2006). The anthropologist Elissa Helms emphasizes the difference between Balkanism and Orientalism in relation to techniques of subordination: “while Said’s orientalism was tied to (histories of) direct western colonization, balkanism was built on much more diffuse and indirect relationships of domination and subordination vis-à-vis ‘the west’” (Helms 2008, 90). She also argues that in the case of the Balkans, “western dominance has been evoked
and constructed in relation to the Balkans through the language of orientalism" (Ibid., 90–91; see also Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992, 3; Fleming 2000). Andrew Hammond draws attention to the similarities between the discourse of nineteenth-century British travel writers writing about the Balkans and the discourse in Great Britain on its colonies, and he exposes the obvious continuity with the discourse accompanying European Union enlargement—all these discourses “share a sense of the Balkans as a borderland that requires Western supervision” (Hammond 2006, 8). In her study of the representations of the Balkans in British literature, Vesna Goldsworthy argues that “the process of literary colonisation, in its stages and consequences, is not unlike real colonization” (Golsworthy 1998, 2) and that the images of the Balkans in English-speaking countries contributed significantly to the perception of this part of Europe elsewhere around the world. “The current, predominantly right-wing perception is of the Balkans as a contagious disease, an infectious sore in the soft underbelly of Europe, best left to fester in isolation. The opposing, mainly left-wing—but unconsciously neo-colonial—notion is of Balkan conflicts as revolting departures from the ideal of cosmopolitanism which could and should—to everyone’s benefit—be solved by mature and responsible powers wielding a big stick and a few small carrots” (Ibid., xi). Alexander Kiossev writes on the peripheral societies of the Balkans as self-colonizing (Kiossev 1999).

In the post-1989 (1991) Europe, however, colonial patterns and (post-) colonial discourses obtained new meanings and acquired new forms. After the end of socialism, the process of Europeanization, understood in Todorova’s terms as getting rid of the Ottoman legacy, was accelerated in the Balkans. This process was followed by another kind of Europeanization, namely the process of accession to the European Union. This is happening in a political context in which Western Europe expropriated the category of Europe with concrete political and moral consequences (Todorova 2010, 190). The Balkan countries’ increasing self-perception as being colonized is doubtlessly the same sentiment shared by all Eastern Europeans in the process of European Union accession, frequently disqualified by those from “core Europe” as self-marginalization (since, politically speaking, the accession process is the same for all and ends as soon as well-defined criteria are fulfilled). Merje Kuus also sees a reason to observe political accession discourses from the perspective of postcolonial

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3 For a detailed review of authors who have been trying to critically analyze the relationship between Eastern and Western Europe or between Europe and the countries that have not yet become European Union members, relying on concepts borrowed from postcolonial theory, see Obad 2008.
theory in the fact that the countries that want to join the European Union are treated as “essentially different from Europe” (Kuus 2004, 483). József Böröcz (2001) discusses the colonial background of the eastward enlargement of European Union in a similar vein.

In this new context defined by European Union membership, the well-established discourse of Balkanism promotes several specific colonial traits in the sphere of politics and the economy that frequently exceed mere metaphorical usage of colonization discourse.

First, colonization as self-perception goes beyond intellectual debates in the Balkans and takes on more tangible forms. One of the more obvious forms is the presence of the international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (and police units in Albania and Macedonia), whose institutions, discourses, and political practices show many explicit neo-colonial traits (see Majstorović 2007, Tatlić 2007/2008). The idea that some kind of colonial administration in the Balkans is indispensable for maintaining peace and enabling the development of the entire European continent was frequently echoed in journal articles, essays, and pseudo-academic literature dating from the 1990s. Andrew Hammond gives a number of examples of such discourse (Hammond 2006, 20). For Robert Carver, the only solution for endless unrest in Albania is “European-enforced order and industry” and a reinvigoration of “the centres of ultimate power” that pertained “in the old colonial days” (Carver 1998, 133, 169). Robert Kaplan, the author of Balkan Ghosts, which is today cited as an example par excellence of Balkanism, claimed during the NATO air campaign against Yugoslavia in 1999 that “[o]nly western imperialism—though few will like calling it that—can now unite the European continent and save the Balkans from chaos” (Kaplan 1999). Writing during the early 1990s, Michael Ignatieff, a Canadian, saw the absence of any great powers as the reason for conflict in the Balkans, saying that in the “Balkans—populations find themselves without an imperial arbiter to appeal to. Small wonder then, that, unrestrained by stronger hands, they have set upon each other for that final settling of scores so long deferred by the presence of empire” (Ignatieff 1993, 12–13). In an article written for the Guardian, Julian Borger stated that a “‘benign colonial regime’ was necessary for democratic development in Bosnia” (Borger 1996, 19). As Rajko Muršič pointed out, the idea that the supervision of the Balkans is necessary is related to its image as a

“crossroads” or “contact zone.” Only such places produce not clearly defined notions for building of the well-defined discourse of hegemony. Yes, if somewhere is the place where things are not yet settled, then ‘our’ way of organisation is worth defending and Our order (or, simply Our
way) has to be developed further and strengthened. It is easy, because the border zone of instability has always been understood as the bridge or a crossroads (Muršič 2007, 91; see also Todorova 1997, 15).

Second, and more generally, numerous scholars concur with the view that the “representation of the Balkans as the ‘European third world zone’ helped create the impression of so urgently needed collective identity and the sense of the European Union” (Erjavec and Volčič 2007, 124; see also Mastnak 1998). European Union accession for the Balkan states, although it should mean moving closer to “Europe,” pushes them into the “third world zone.” This is done by means of a set of security-related discourses—about organized crime supported by corrupted political elites, drug smuggling, illegal immigrants, terrorism (because the Muslim population is “autochthonous”, both in the Balkans and in North Africa, this area can be associated with Al Qaeda and “global terrorism”) etc.

Third, economic control of the Balkans is certainly a part of the global process of “spreading world capitalism.” Here, foreign (European Union members’) economic presence and “mastering of the Balkan markets” go hand in hand with two characteristic sets of discourses that inevitably recall postcolonial relations, namely discourses of aid and expertise, on the one hand, and discourses of administration, on the other.

The Balkans and the Eastern Europe: The Socialist Legacy

According to Maria Todorova, in the post-1989 condition, “contemporary East European intellectuals (…) increasingly see themselves in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the centers of knowledge production and dissemination in the West, and some explicitly speak of intellectual neoimperialism, neocolonialism or self-colonization, whence the identification with postcoloniality” (Todorova 2010, 177). In this intellectual domain, Todorova sees a potential for “a genuine and fruitful confluence of aims between postcolonial theory and anti-balkanism”, while maintaining that “this is nothing specific to the Balkans, but an overall East European phenomenon” related to its socialist legacy (Ibid., 190).

The socialist legacy, therefore, unites most of the Balkans and Eastern Europe4 into a common area in the post-1989 symbolic geography of Europe,

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4 Eastern Europe, just like the Balkans, is a category perceived as problematic to identify with: Todorova (2005, 94) writes that in 1997 the US State Department issued an official directive
making it *less European* then the continent’s West. In this framework, socialism is regarded as an essentially non-European legacy that hinders Eastern European societies from fully integrating into “democratic Europe”. The socialist past of these societies accounts for their paternalistic treatment by “core Europe”, even in cases where they are members of the EU.\(^5\)

Such perception of post-socialist Europe poses serious problems not only in regard to the regimes of knowledge production and dissemination mentioned by Todorova (see also Obad, this volume), but also to political legitimacy and agency both within post-socialist societies and in the international arena. “Eastern Europeans” (including citizens of post-socialist Balkan societies) are treated as children who cannot be fully responsible for their own behavior; therefore, they are irrational and urgently need assistance, supervision, and education. This is a recognizable image of Eastern Europeans in post-socialism to which Boris Buden points, stressing that the expression “children of communism” is not a metaphor, but a symptom of imagination in which *transition to democracy* as a radical reconstruction starts from scratch: “Eastern Europe after 1989 resembles a landscape of historical ruins that is inhabited only by children, immature people unable to organize their lives democratically without guidance from another” (Buden 2009).

The wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s made such treatment even more radical; the international community approached these postwar societies with the presumption that they need to be built from scratch and was generally uninterested in what was before (Helms 2003). The logic of post-socialist transition also hugely contributed to the erasure of the socialist past and inability of post-socialist subjects to refer to their experiences of socialism in a politically legitimate way. Within this logic, transition is perceived as not only a necessary, but also as a well-defined, clearly directed process at whose end the former socialist societies should fully implement

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\(^5\) For example, the President of the European Parliament, speaking in 2008 at a conference held in Ljubljana in the framework of Slovenia’s EU presidency, said, “The current Slovenian presidency of the EU is the best testament to the fundamental change that has taken place in this region over the past two decades. This is an extraordinary achievement, when you consider that less than 20 years ago Slovenia was part of communist Yugoslavia.”
ready-made models coming from the West. The same is true for the process of accession to the EU, which is largely equated to Europeanization when it comes to the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. All this has important consequences for several domains of public, political, and cultural life in Europe. The socialist legacy is largely absent from dominant cultural memory and heritage narratives (see Petrović, this volume), while in the field of memory politics, such Europeanization oddly contributes to the process of historical revisionism and the reinterpretation of events and involvements in World War II, since in post-socialist societies the antifascist legacy cannot be separated from the succeeding decades of socialism. Rejection of the socialist legacy combined with revisionist reinterpretations of the history of World War II have significantly contributed to strengthening of nationalism in Eastern Europe (Petrović 2013).

From a One-Way Street to a Room of Mirrors

As Héritier (2005, 199–200) stresses, there are three notions of Europeanization used in the political sciences: according to the first, Europeanization is equivalent to European integration; under the second notion, “Europeanization is defined in a more restrictive sense, conceived of as an impact of clearly defined, individual EU policy measures on the existing policies, political and administrative processes, and structures of member states” (Ibid., 200); and the third notion defines Europeanization in terms of the influence of EU policies and values on the “rest of the world,” i.e., non-member states. Focusing on the second notion and discussing the difference between Europeanization East and Europeanization West, the author outlines profound differences among them, stressing that in case of Western European countries “Europeanization is a two-way street when it comes to shaping EU policy measures, whereas Europeanization East, at this stage, seems to be more of a one-way street” (Ibid., 207). This one-directionality is even more salient in the case of those countries of the Balkan Peninsula that are still striving for EU membership—in the part of Europe called the Western Balkans in political discourses. Research already done on discourses and images related to EU expansion to this part of Europe has persuasively shown that these processes are perceived as oriented from the center toward periphery, with the “degree of civilization and Europeanness” decreasing in this direction: peripheral societies are perceived as mere passive receivers of patterns and values coming from the center (cf. Hammond 2006, Majstorović 2007, Obad 2009, Petrović 2009). These discourses and the political practices that they accompany also suggest a clear
and stable division between East and West, “Europe” (EU) and “still-not-Europe” (candidate countries), “old” and “new” Europe, where Western Europe perceives itself as a model for Europeanness and simultaneously a normative arbiter deciding who and what are European.

Such one-directionality, of course, is not limited to political discourses, nor is it a recent phenomenon. It also concerns interpretations of historical processes and notions such as modernization and democracy, whereby Balkan and Eastern European societies are interpreted as mere (and often unsuccessful) receivers of ready-made models from the West. Within the last two decades, historians have articulated a strong and well-argued critique of such perceptions and have highlighted their political consequences (Wolf 1994, Todorova 1997, 2005, 2010, Bugge 2002, Melegh 2006). In this regard, Diana Mishkova indicates that “Balkan visions of Europe cannot be understood as simply mirroring the imagination of the Western hegemonic discourse about the Balkans. To understand these visions, more attention needs to be paid to local dynamics in the production of ideologies and self-narrations” (Miškova 2006). Discussing historiographical trends that have shaped the image of Eastern Europe, Tara Zahra (2011, 787) stresses the need to “think more how Eastern Europe and Eastern Europeans have shaped the political culture of Europe in general, as well as international institutions and norms” and outlines several fields in which Eastern Europe conceptually contributed to European and global developments.

The historically fixed perception of the Balkans as a semi-European periphery, an area in need of supervision, guidance, and training provided by the West, was additionally solidified after 1989/1991. In the newly shaped symbolic geography of Europe, the former socialist part of the continent was firmly associated with violence, nationalism, and backwardness. It could become Europe only by getting rid of its socialist past and by exposure to normative, one-directional processes, which should profoundly transform them and their citizens. It is this post-socialist context that urged scholars of the Balkans and Eastern Europe to call for the de-provincialization of Western Europe (Yurchak 2006, Todorova 2010). Maria Todorova (2012, 74) argues that

the task for balkanists and East Europeanists consists not so much of “provincialising” Europe but of “de-provincialising” Western Europe, which has heretofore expropriated the category of Europe with concrete political and moral consequences. If this project is successful, we will actually succeed in taking up the challenge posited by Dipesh Chakabarty by “provincialising” Europe effectively for the rest of the world, insofar as the European paradigm will have broadened to include not only a
cleansed abstract version of power, but also one of dependency, subordination, and messy struggles. And with this, we will have succeeded in reimagining Eastern Europe in a dignified way.

In a similar vein, Tara Zahra argues that “integrating the history of Eastern Europe into broader European histories may help to complicate or nuance established narratives of difference” (Zahra 2011: 787).

Making a call for the de-provincialization of Western Europe and pointing to globally relevant consequences of this task, the scholars of the Balkans and Eastern Europe highlight the fact that formation of ideas of European modernity was not an exclusive property of Western Europe, but a process characterized by simultaneous occurrence in different parts of the continent, by mutual influence, inspiration, and dialogue. In a similar manner, we try in this volume to destabilize the opposition between (Western) Europe and the (Western) Balkans by focusing on processes, discourses, and practices of negotiating Europe and Europeanness in the specific context of accession to the European Union, but essentially from the post-socialist perspective of the societies we are dealing with. The contributions to this volume not only show that subjects from the Balkans also act as active participants in the processes of negotiating Europeanness, they also highlight the fact that images, discourses, and practices of imagining and negotiating Europe on various positions on this “civilizational slope” (Melegh 2006) are characterized by simultaneous occurrences, mutuality, and equivalence in function and nature, and very often by unintended consequences. Contributions to the volume will thus not only bring to readers’ attention the so far largely overlooked visions of Europe from its southeastern part, but will also provide insight into the formation and negotiation of ideas of Europe as dynamic, multidirectional, and contested, and not necessarily future-oriented, as current political discourses of the EU accession suggest. In this respect, as an alternative to the one-way street metaphor for Europeanization in the Western Balkans, we opt not for a two-way street, but for a room of mirrors. The metaphor of the mirror already has a prominent position in discourses on the Balkans vis-à-vis (Western) Europe. It is employed by authors involved in the discussion on modernity and modernization in the Balkans (cf. Miškova 2006). It is also in the foundations of discourses on otherness and stereotyping. As Corinne Kratz (2002, 90) stresses, “other” may be an opposition to which their neighbors define their own ideal selves, what Michael Kenny (1981) calls a ‘mirror in the forest’.

The image of the Balkans as the European (half-) other easily resonates in these words: as Maria Todorova puts it, “that the Balkans have been described as the ‘other’ of Europe does not need special proof” (Todorova 1997: 3). In this volume, however, we opted for the
metaphor of a room of mirrors instead of a single mirror, because we wanted to emphasize the multiplicity of reflections and temporalities in negotiations of Europe and Europeanness in domains as diverse as politics, the everyday, cultural practices, policies and memory, and through discursive, visual, musical, spatial, and ritual means of expression. We also wanted to stress that the West was looking at the Balkans as (and for) Europe, too, as well as that ideas of Europe that emerge in the Balkans offer important and new insights about Europe as a whole. In addition, we wanted to draw attention to the fact that the ideas of Europe and Europeanization are often “hijacked” by local political elites in the Balkans, so those who try to resist nationalism and corruption and look for an alternative for transitional reality in this area have to invest a lot of creative energy to reclaim these ideas for their own goals. And finally, multiple mirrored images, ideas, discourses, and power relations, and the complex ways they are being reappropriated, modified, and reorganized to fit one’s needs and self-perceptions, reveal several levels of negotiation that indicate a need to look beyond the usual binary Europe vs. the Balkans and take into account both global processes and very local historical trajectories.

The Structure of the Volume

The volume consists of this introduction and eight chapters and is divided into four parts. The introductory chapter and Chapter 2 by Orlanda Obad both focus on discursive flows in which notions of the Balkans and Europe occupy prominent space and reflect upon the academic tradition of Balkan Studies and the ways it contributed to questioning and reframing the notions of hierarchy, dominance, normativity, and power implied in the relationship between center and periphery. Orlanda Obad highlights the dynamic between center and periphery as a key force that shapes both the relationship between “Europe” and “the Balkans” and scholarship about it. Simultaneously, she emphasizes a need to move beyond well-established dichotomies that traditionally shape the political imagination of “the Balkans” vis-à-vis “Europe”: analyzing ideas of Europe within specific social groups in pre-accession Croatia, she highlights that “there is a wide array of social perspectives that do not necessarily conflict or contradict the dominant political discourse.”

The second part of the volume addresses the ways Europe is imagined and appropriated in the Balkan societies through performative practices and other forms of cultural production. Building her discussion of the Balkan Music Awards, “a Balkan version” of the Eurovision Song Contest, in Chapter 3 Ana Hofman points to the music industry’s and popular culture’s long history in the
Balkans of fostering regional cooperation beyond the context of European integration. Discussing strategies chosen by organizers and performers at the Balkan Music Awards in Sofia, she shows that negotiations of modernity, agency, and cosmopolitanism are taking place in three different frameworks: regional, European, and global. Focusing on performances of Europeanness by two opposed political formations—those participating in the realization of the Skopje 2014 plan of urban renewal and those opposing it, Fabio Mattioli in Chapter 4 shows that they share the common language of “the Dream of Europe,” but in a conflicting way, giving voice to different articulations of the past and the present through aesthetic experiences. The principal difference lies in their attitudes toward the socialist legacy of Macedonia: while the government tries to erase any visual trace of the socialist past in the Skopje of 2014, young protesters insist on incorporating that past into the envisioned European future.

This aspect links Mattioli’s text with the set of articles in the third part, which all highlight the ways negotiation of Europeanness as not so much future-oriented, but strongly linked to the Yugoslav socialist past. From this perspective, Europe is essentially revealed as a metaphor of belonging. Through the analysis of memory practices related to industrial labor in socialist Yugoslavia, in Chapter 5 Tanja Petrović sheds light on post-socialist nostalgia as a narrative tool that insists on including socialist experience in European cultural memory. In Chapter 6, Ildiko Erdei elaborates on an ongoing debate about opening an Ikea store in Serbia, showing that the widespread longing for IKEA’s return is a longing for confirmation that Serbia belongs to the world (and to Europe/the EU, for that matter), but also pointing to a strand of thought that addresses Yugoslav socialist modernity and belonging to Europe long before the current EU-related integration processes. In a similar way, in Chapter 7, Marijana Mitrović presents memories of a series of feminist conferences held in Dubrovnik in the 1980s that gathered former Yugoslav and Western feminists, elucidating former Yugoslav participants’ nostalgic accounts as an expression of being “always—already European” and as a demand “to be recognized as ‘equal but unique.’” As Mitrović stresses, the participants share a leftist utopia among themselves and with “Western” feminists, which enables them to feel “the sense of belonging to a wider world, and participation in wider movements, leftist feminist movements.”

The last section of the volume looks at the ways Europe is imagined and negotiated in political discourses and the sphere of the political in general. Discussing two points of dispute in contemporary Montenegro—the standardization of the Montenegrin language and the recognition of minority sexualities, in chapter 8 Čarna Brković shows that they are heavily informed by the
imagination of “Europe” and the European Union as the location in the future
to which Montenegro is progressing. The normative prism of “lagging behind
Europe” through which these issues are observed “closes off an opportunity to
eversee novel grounds in which political legitimacy of language and sexual
practices could be pursued.” In Chapter 9, Nermina Mujagić discusses the dis-
pute between Slovenia and Croatia over the sea border, showing the mechani-
sm by which European integration in the region is being transformed into a
spectacle capable of generating new conflicts and reinforcing nationalist ide-
ology. She also shows how the lifting of borders in one part of Europe may
cause their solidifying in another part. In addition, Mujagić’s text reveals bor-
ders not as fixed, stable, historical, and unquestionable lines that divide politi-
cal collectives, but rather as highly politicized and relative objects that are
subject to negotiation, shifting, ignoring, or reinventing.

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