



UDC: 327::911.3(497)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22182/spm.7042020.11>

Original research article

Serbian Political Thought

No. 4/2020, Year XXVII,

Vol. 70

pp. 205-225

*Sanja Lazarević Radak***Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade*

SPACE AND PLACE OF THE BALKANS: A GEOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Abstract

The literature that explores the representations of the Balkans is based on the assumption that the Balkans were constructed, imagined or invented. This claim is usually accompanied by the attempts to highlight the discrepancy between physical and imaginary geography and to point out the gap in semantics between the Balkan Peninsula and the Balkans. While the first one functions as physical geography, the other one refers to a place populated by representations, rather than people. Following the trend of linguistic and spatial turn, they hold the binary logic that insists upon the duality of the spatial. Some of the most important studies in this field can be read and interpreted as another in a series of texts about the Balkans. Thus, the aim of this paper is to: 1. Point out the places and passages where academic discourse on the Balkans separate physical and symbolic geography; 2. Highlight the political implications of this approach; 3. Suggest a geocritical aim that provides a sort of ballance between the material geography („real“) and imaginary spaces.

Keywords: The Balkans, space/place, symbolic geography, geocriticism, academic discourse, discursive practice

* sanjlazarevic7@gmail.com

** The paper has been developed within the research activities of the Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade, supported by the Ministry of education, science and technological development of the Republic of Serbia.

THE BALKANS: AN EMPTY SPACE

During the 1980s political and economic crisis of Yugoslav society has been brought to public awareness through discussions in the mass media, both within Yugoslavia and outside of the country (Bakić-Heyden 1992: 1-15). While seeking for answers, academics, writers and journalist testified popularization of texts from the 19th century, 1920's and 1930's.¹ Mentality, national character, and various other modernist concepts became subject to spatialization, while the Balkans were explained with a help of metaphors and symbols that connoted liminality (Lazarević Radak 2011: 255-269). There was something inherently mystical, "something dark, exotic, and left unspoken" about its people, history, political life, which had to be understood in order to explain the crisis (Žižek 1991).

While recalling the role of popular culture in creating the image of the Balkans, academics took the position of a neutral observer, whose scientific engagement was aimed at deconstruction of stereotypes and raising the awareness of their negative impact. The invisible text on European periphery and marginalized region, was recognized in literature, film and political discourse. The papers and books to mention here are numerous, but noteworthy among them are Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), Vesna Goldworthy's *Inventing Ruritania* (1998), Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić's edited volume *Balkan as Metaphor* (2002), Božidar Jezernik's, *Wild Europe*, (2004) and in addition to earlier, seminal articles by Milica Bakić-Hayden.

Starting from the assumption that there is no consensus about where the Balkans extends, researchers problematize the relation between symbolic and physical Balkan. According to this group of researchers, the formulation, "The Balkans" is related to representations, identities and political discourse, while the term Balkan Peninsula indicates physical geography which similarly to "the Balkans" share the imagined complexity. All the "questionable" and "unconcrete" geographical determinants such as Southeast Europe and the Western Balkans, in 20th and 21st were understood

1) See: Vladimir Dvorniković, *Karakterologija Jugoslovena*, Prosveta: Beograd, 2000; Jovan Cvijić, *Balkansko poluostrvo i južnoslovenske zemlje*, SANU: Beograd, 1991; Arčibald Rajs, *Čujte Srbi, čuvajte se sebe*, Grafid, Beograd, 2008.

as euphemisms created to counterbalance the negative political connotation of stereotypes about underdevelopment, backwardness, primitivity and xenophobia (Lazarević Radak 2014: 45)

Indeed, the extensive insight into travel accounts published in 19th and early 20th century speaks in favor of producing these and similar representations and stereotypes, and therefore, the significant progress to criticism of stereotypes on the Balkans cannot be denied to this group of scholars. Despite their undoubted scientific contribution, these studies had an ambivalent role in the search for “authentic” stereotypes, and today they open the path to new forms of geocriticism. This approach should involve not only exploring place / space as presented by different authors, but also examining the impact of representations on the space being written. Thus, the influence of literary representations on the Balkans goes back to studies which renewed interest in the representations on the Balkans from the 18th and 19th centuries. These books and papers encourage reflection upon the impact of deconstruction, reconstruction and potential, unintentional revitalization of stereotypes. Nowadays, results of the Balkan studies can be read as another in series of clichéd texts about this part of the world. The text about imaginary, invented, produced or constructed Balkan is situated in a political context and retains its own logic. It relies upon the analysis and deconstruction of stereotypes and modes of interpretation that can be re-interpreted in the light of current social context and geocritical approach.

GEOCRITICISM AND SPACE/PLACE

While novels and newspaper articles propagated and underpinned the construction of Southeastern Europe, travel literature is the most revealing medium for exploring the perceptions of the Balkans. The assumption that British travelers “produced”, “invented” and “imagined” this geography at the time of the colonial rise is common to Balkan studies. The first decades of 19th Century required the use of particular language and style of thought. As an area of underutilized natural resources, Balkan has been designated as a zone of “cultural delay” (De Vindt 1907: 15) The Balkan was inscribed in imperial maps under the different names and geo-political terms like Illyria, Rumelia, the Near East, although

in 19th century, Turkey-in-Europe was considered the most precise and accurate (Lazarević Radak 2013: 35). This inscription was a by-product of British expeditions and missions to the so-called Far East, although, The Balkans, under the same name, have been recognized by other, especially German and Austrian, and rarely by French and Italian travellers. Accelerated industrial development has made possible, but also demanded, a more precise and detailed knowledge of the world. This understanding of progress has enabled creating opposition to such progress or “evolution.”

The fact that most travelers notice the absence of capitals, temples, galleries, institutions, industry, and “rush of civilized life” in the Balkans has become the main representation around which Balkan studies concentrate in the 1990s. Indeed and despite the fact the Balkan was not rich in material objects, flora, fauna, monumental architecture, city scapes, painted textiles, gems, porcelain, mosques and churches, it gradually became the terrain of exotic geography (Schmidt 2015: 8) The exotic could be found in its simplicity, in social relations, uprisings, wars, social instability, poverty or lack of formal education of its inhabitants. This new geography delivered new ways of exotic and produced another kind of pleasure – knowledge about national and confessional; it was „hybrid“, „dangerous“, but most of all adventurous place. The pleasure was not of material kind, although it was original in its own way.² The Balkans or European Turkey was not an administrative unit, and with the instruments available in the 19th century it was not possible to define the physical boundaries of this peninsula. Geography emerged in the early nineteenth century characterized by environmental determinism and historicism, and at the time, it was still developing its instruments (Warf, Arias, 2009: 1-17) One century later, the Balkans were defined as geographic area also

2) Tomas Forester, *Danube and the Black Sea*, London: Edward Stanford Charing Cross, 1857, p. 98; Parnauvel Omney Tcherson, *A Trip to Turkey and Travellers Guide to the Turkish Capital*, London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1855:IV; Harry de Windt, *Through Savage Europe*, London: T.F. Unwin, 1907:15; Howard Douglas Bart, *Excursions in Albania: comparing a description of the wild boar, deer and woodcock shooting*, London: W.H. Allen and Co. Leadenhall Street, 1842, p. 54; Alexander Kinglake, *Eothen or Traces of Travel from the East*, New York: Goerge P. Putnam, 1848, o. 3; Theodor Child, *Summer Holidays*, London: Harper and Brothers, 1893, p. 18;n Andrew f. Cross, *Round About the Carpatians*, Edinburgh, London: William Blackwood and Sons, p.2.

known as Balkan Peninsula with various definitions and meanings including geo-political and historical.

THE MEANING OF SPACE/PLACE

The development of human geographies made it possible to understand how spaces are produced (Lefebvre 1994: 70). The spatial turn allows this gap between the physical and the imaginary to be understood as the logical consequence of the social production of space (Unwin 2000: 11-29) This is not a unique phenomenon, nor can it be related to a kind of Balkan exclusivity. Nonetheless, with purpose or unconsciously, researchers separate The Balkans as an empty geographical space from what the traveller imagines by projecting their own ideas and cultural discourses into place.

In the frames of human geography one come across the concepts of place (physical space that people naturalize through patterns, behavior and communications) and place (the representation of any area, as produced and defined by social process (Campbell 2018: 23-45). Space has traditionally been considered empty abstraction within which existed a set of interrelated events of objects. Linking together humanistic tradition in geography, Yi-Fi Tuan broke from contemporary studies of environmental perception and prepared the ground for the emergence of cultural geography. According to Tuan, space and place are familiar words denoting common experiences (Urry, Tuan 2011: 426-431). While space is an abstract term for a complex set of ideas, places are centers of emotions and values where biological needs are satisfied (Tuan 2001: 4). Place, on the other hand always refers to a physical location but its existence can be either real or imagined (Sen, Silverman 2014: 1-18) As spaces are used and made by human beings, they become places (Xiangming, Orum, Paulsen 2003: 18) Henry Lefebvre claimed that social space is a social product and introduced the distinction of spatial practice (the experienced and used space), representation of space (the space of knowledge, signs and codes) and spaces of representation – the imagined space of image and symbols (Rohkramer, Schulz, 2009: 1338-1349) The discussion of space/place relation resembles the strategy of radically polarizing time and space, and of defining space by the absence of temporality to the broader mode of dualistic thinking which has

been widely criticized. It is just one in series of numerous dualities and dualistic formulations but also one of the numerous forms of dichotomies which might be challenged (Massey 1994: 7) A less common position is that space and place are separate constructs, but overlap such that, there is an area where they intersect and come together (Low 2017: 12). In daily use, they are synonyms to region, location, region (Rohkramer, Shultz 2009: 1338-1349). Both sides, frequently fell into reductionism claiming either that space can not be taken as an objectively given, or that space is no longer purely the domain of geography, but a topic for humanities. Space was constructed as neutral, fixed and immobile, unrelated to the social and without impact on the formation of subject identity and biography (Edwards, Usher 2008: 36) Places and spaces differ and these differences have important consequences for people's lives. Although implicit, creating a space and place dichotomy remains a Balkan studies background. Instead of claiming that the object of the research cannot be the objective reality of the Balkans, because of its relativity, researchers were denying its ontology. This problem enters the domain of prolonged debates on the territoriality of the Balkans, dating back to the creation of independent Balkan states. Such deterritorialisation of the Balkans at the academic level became a step forward towards resolving the political issues. Due to the problems posed by the creation of borders, territorial and other divisions, studies of representations make it possible to find simple answers to complex questions. The conclusion that the Balkans, due to its negative imagination, tentative description and almost systematic creation of stereotypes, has become "inhabited" or "overpopulated" by the Occident's imagination, becomes one of the humanities' responses to the political problem. But let us take an insight into conclusions given by the academics in this area.

A PLACE WITHOUT A SPACE: SPATIAN TURN AND TEXT ON THE BALKANS

Academics in Balkan studies draw from some of the basic notions about stereotypes that originate from social psychology and literary theory. First, they understand stereotypes in the manner of social psychologists – the stereotype is, generalized belief of particular group of people. They also rely upon theories of Daniel

Henry Pageau and Jan Marc Moura's and their understanding of imaginary, alterity and identity. Whereas the issues of alterity and identity were born in relation to persons, they were transferred by analogy to the realm of abstract entities such as nation states (Czarniawsaka 2009: 49-67). During the 1980's and 1990's academics made step forward by introducing the term discourse as Michael Foucault defined it. The next step was discursive formation, and finally image or representation. Their work can be summed up as a research of literary image of "foreign countries" through confronting imagined reality and researching historical traits which produce certain context and thus certain image. Thus, representation or image, especially the one about the Balkans is always political or it has political implications, so the final goal is deideologization of representation.

The Balkan studies were strongly influenced by Edward Said's study *Orientalism*. In this groundbreaking book, Edward Said defines orientalism as the acceptance of "the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for theories, epics, novels, social descriptions and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, 'mind,' destiny and so on" (Said 2009). Despite the influence, one can easily spot the differences in approach to Orient and the Balkans as geographies. Said explained how the imagined Orient represents different spaces and types of space according to the arbitrary distinctions made by individuals or groups assuming that Orient is symbolic geography, but in the meantime, a space inhabited by real people, ideas and lifestyles (Tally 2005: 1-16). Said notes that the division between East and West was not just imagined but lived through many centuries, suggesting, that physical passage of Europeans through foreign landscapes and cultures had impact on the process of their writing and representation of those spaces. Unlike its theoretical successors in Balkan studies, Said does not seek to establish the physical boundaries of the Orient, nor does he insist on immateriality of the Orient. He does not deny its ontology but, keeping in with the academic climate and context, lingers on the representations of the Orient. At the beginning of his study, Said points to the countries and geographies that are considered Oriental – the Far East (India, China), Egypt, Syria, Arabia, Persia and India (Said 2009: 29). In literary era, writing about space did not include rethinking of the

relationship between so called objective referent and its representation, between the so-called real and fictitious world. Despite these claims, which come from the very beginnings of the analysis of representations, the authors deconstruct the Balkans with an attempt to determine the physical geography of this part of the world, pointing to the gap between the physical, spatial and symbolic. Several pages or passages of these studies occupy repetitive conclusions about the early records of the Balkans. Until the early 18th century, the part of the world now called the Balkan Peninsula had no name. During 18th century, the names Hemus (Rhodopes) and the Balkans were used interchangeably and alternately (Todorova 1999: 20). In 1930's British travelers used this term to designate mountain range in Bulgaria. German geographer Zeune, introduced the term the Balkans in the natural sciences taking it from the French traveler Ami Boue who used this term to mark the Old Mountains, taking this name from Turkish sources (Lazarević Radak 2013: 33).

The connection between the Balkans as a place / space was established by travelers from different parts of Europe, and most of these records occurred in the 19th century. From the moment it was first published in 1997. Maria Todorova's *Imagining the Balkans*, became a must-read for those interested in the history of the Balkans. Her concept of balkanism can be considered congruous with the wider practice of Orientalism through the 19th and 20th centuries and into the 21st. It shows that Western writers have been unable fully to conceptualise this region with that result that their analysis were unable to define a clear object (Hywel 2015: 973-991). Her understanding of the Balkans as unchanging space remained one of the most influential among researchers on this geography. Considering that Balkan requires separate and unique paradigm, she argues that this part of the world is different from the Orient because of its concreteness and tangibility (Todorova 1999: 71). In order to determine the space / place of the Balkans, she points to the possibility that the "Balkan adjective" was torn away from its empirical-ontological basis and recreated as an "abstract demon" (Todorova 1999: 72. Todorova claims that in some spatio-temporal context, the Balkans was a physical geography, a neutral space with no concrete meaning, but its spaceness was torn off for the sake of creating an imaginary world. Instead of The Balkan Peninsula, this part of the world becomes The Balkans – a border that divides and

signifies the cultural and political parts of the world. Her claim that the Balkans possesses an ontology, but that it is repressed, pushed, forgotten in the process of creating a political and spatial order dominated Occident, allows her to create a distinction between the Orient as understood by Edward Said and the Balkans as the boundary between the Orient and the Occident. Thus, The Balkans does not have a legitimate place because this term came into use without being described in the manner required by the rules of 19th Century botanical, zoological, or other nomenclature. The Balkans, according to Todorova, were never standardized because its name was not defined in encyclopedias and dictionaries.

Unlike Todorova, Vesna Goldsworthy assumes that Balkan is a product of Western imagination. In the Balkan region itself, she claims, it is believed that Bakan is actually somewhere else, southeast of where the person is (Goldsworthy 2005: XI). Balkan identity originated in British literature, not in the Balkan Peninsula and therefore it is inhabited by British imagination, transformed by the British and American entertainment industries through films and countless television programs, scattered across the world to an unprecedented degree (Goldsvorti 2005: XIII). Balkan is the product of a publishing and media industry that has claimed to have exceeded South Africa's diamond and gold deposits (Goldsvorti 2005: XIV). As a space, the Balkans resides on the foggy edges of perception (Goldsvorti 2005: 3). In the context of this study, peculiarities from history are less important than representations because the Balkan is an imagined landscape. To substantiate her claim, Goldsworthy reminds for a disagreement on the exact extension of the Balkan Peninsula from the 19th century to the present (Goldsvorti 2005: 4).

In his meticulous research, *Wild Europe* that include over a thousand first-hand reports and comparing narratives spanning nearly 500 years, Bozidar Jezernik seeks to locate the Balkans in the world map. Similar to Goldsworthy, he argues that it was not until the 19th century when books about the Balkans began to be published, but the area remained unrecognized in physical terms. These concerns were followed by comparisons with other geographies instead of precisely defining boundaries: "Balkans is like the interior of Tataria, unknown parts of Asia and part of the world less

known than the top of Himalayas. “ (Jezernik 2007: 24). Jezernik notes that the “West was never prepared to see the Balkans as they really are” (Jezernik 2007: 24). Instead of the geography of the Balkans, the subject his research is the perception of the Balkans - a man who, according to travelers from the West does not classify himself as European and speaks of Europe as a separate area (Jezernik 2007:26). Jezernik points out that for the travelers, the Balkan is a geography that seems too complicated, ethnography full of ambiguity, tangled history and inexplicable politics. Instead of geography of the Balkans, the 17th, 18th, and 19th century books offer images of the Balkans. In stories from the „West”, they are projections of their own nostalgia rather than narratives about real people. Based on travel accounts written by British travelers, he draws on conclusion that Balkan could be considered the “beginning of the Orient”, another imagined geography (Jezernik 2007: 21). If geographic terms are conventionally neutral, then the Balkans is an exception to this rule. Instead of corresponding to physical geography, the term was introduced to produce an ideological prejudice with a negative connotation – dirt, passivity, unreliability, laziness, superstition, slowness, backwardness.

Although he points out that the earliest mention of the name the Balkans dates back to the 15th century, Predrag Svilar argues that physical boundaries of this part of the world are impossible to determine. Any attempt at geographical determination lacks consensus on whether it is a peninsula or a different kind of entity that could be defined by “natural boundaries”. Within its natural boundaries, this author includes rivers and mountain ranges that limit other parts of the world. The Balkans thus, go beyond natural-scientific definitions, remaining probably the unique example of a discursive-imaginary entity that lacks clear boundaries in the West, North and South but not in the east. In these parts of the continent, European identity some are denied, while others are attributed. Although “Non-Western Europeans” live in the East, the West has more than one East. One of them is Orthodox Christian and Slavic, and among others are societies of European Islam. The Balkans are not the East, neither the Eastern Europe, but neither the West, nor Europe could be understood as an equivalent pair, since there has always been at least one other Europe outside the Western origin (Svilar 2011: 99). So this is an issue that is not

physical, but it is bound to the questions of identity and politics. Thus, the geographical, historical and cultural boundaries of the Balkans have never been drawn.

While analyzing the development of the Yugoslav crisis, Milica Bakić – Heyden points to the elements of Orientalist discourse that preceded the economic crises and the war in the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia. As used originally by Edward Said, orientalism refers to pervasive patterns of representation of cultures and societies that privilege a self-confidently progressive, modern, rational Europe over the putatively stagnant, backward, traditional and mystical societies of the Orient (Bakić Heyden 2006: 19). The logic on which the debates between the Yugoslav republics were based is broadly understood as an orientalist practice. As she points out in her study, *Variations on the Balkans*, “nesting orientalism” was a rhetorical means to discredit the neighbors (Bakić Heyden 2006: 19). In order to point out the fluidity of the geography of the Balkans, Bakić-Heyden recalls ideological-political concerns regarding symbolic-cultural geography. They come to the fore in the public discourse of post-Yugoslav states in sentences such as: “Do we, the Balkans, belong to Europe”? (Bakić Heyden 2006: 19). According to this author, the Balkan Peninsula belongs to European continent, while numerous cultures of the Balkan people are an integral part of European cultural heritage. Emphasizing that elements of this geography intersect in the space which used to belong to Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, she draws conclusions about the Balkans based on internal and external discourse about this country. The territory of Yugoslavia was therefore, the meeting point of the Eastern and Western Roman empires, the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian, Cyrillic and Latin, Roman Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Islam of Judaism, and the politics and ideology of the war between the Warsaw Pact and NATO (Bakić-Hayden 2006: 25). According to Bakić-Hayden, the Balkans could rather be considered a frontier than a complex geography that corresponds to the Yugoslav territory. Although, one must notice that for the second time, border becomes a dominant representation on the Balkans, Todorova and Bakić-Hayden define the border differently. While Todorova considers this part of the world a concrete area and an opposition to both the “ephemeral” Orient and the “concrete” Occident, Bakić-Hayden emphasizes

the role of discourse and political myth in political life of the most countries located in the Balkan Peninsula. In Yugoslav society, and later in post-Yugoslav countries the representation of the frontier had political connotation of Non-Alignment and neutrality with the respect to both Eastern and Western political blocs. The dominant political myths in Serbia suggest the importance of borderline and non-alignment to the East and / or West dating back to the early Middle Ages.

According to Dušan Bjelić physical ontology of the Balkans is less important than the construct of “the dark side of collective Europe”, the place of Europe’s forbidden desires, of vampires and tribalism (Bjelić 2011: 3). Broadly understood, the Balkans are “other Europe”, a corresponding geography of small Eastern European nations from the Baltic to the Balkans that share more or less the same historical pattern of internally split populations allied with Western or Eastern empires. Although, physical geography is less important than being subjected to normalization, one can trace the frontiers of the Balkans in the broader context of Eastern Europe. Dušan Bjelić is one of few authors in this field who assumes a clear connection between the Balkans and Eastern Europe. In 1994. Larry Wolf published his book *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment*. In his book, Wolf, shows that the distinction between East and the West did not arise by chance but came about as the result of an intellectual agenda, related both to Western European ideological self-interest and to scholars and writers self-promotion in the age of Enlightenment. In Southeast Europe, especially in post-Yugoslav countries, in Bulgaria and Albania this study has gone almost unnoticed. The first impression is the lack of interest in finding the connection between Enlightenment and imagining of the Balkans, although further reflection lead us to the problem of relation between two identities: between East-European / Southeast-European identity. Yugoslav societies have nurtured the aforementioned myth of physical and cultural displacement, both in relation to the East and to the West. The sense of triumph and superiority that these societies had been experiencing since the split between Tito and Stalin led to an increasing distance from Eastern Europe. The representations about Eastern Europe, which Wolf recognizes in the texts of the Enlightened, were in fact accepted in Yugoslavia (Wolf 1994).

Eastern Europe, as another imagined geography was considered economically and therefore socially and culturally inferior to Yugoslav societies that fostered different forms of hybridity. The image of poverty, corruption and dictatorship are among the dominant representations of Eastern Europe in the Balkans.

Kata Kulavkova considers the Balkans to be a geographical, historical, cultural and civilizational part of Europe, while its physical geography remains a subject of controversy (Kulavkova 2009: 9-12) The reason for this controversy is Western perception, which starts from the stereotypical image of a part of the world and associates it with “underdevelopment”, “barbarism”, cultivating political deception, myths with destructive ideologies and political immaturity. According to Kulavkova, Balkan is not a geography, but the result of imagination and mystification, the site of a memory and European axis. If he truly is a physical place, it must be related to a particular geostrategic position. Its intellectual, scientific and artistic potential have to be demystified not by the mere discovery of the space but by the deconstruction of counterproductive stereotypes (Kulavkova 2009: 9-12).

The conclusions about the discrepancy between the symbolic and physical geography of the Balkans can be roughly reduced to the division between the Balkan Peninsula and The Balkans as two incongruous or not-quite-consistent geographies. Unless The Balkans inhabits Balkan Peninsula the usage of both terms is problematic to this day. However, by denying the physical place of the Balkans, these studies have largely closed their own path to developing and incorporating new theoretical and methodological challenges.

A GEOGRAPHICAL ‘TRAP’

While trying to point to the gap between the physical and symbolic geography of the Balkans, these authors, claim that this part of the world is “inhabited” by stereotypes. The analysis of stereotypes begins to resemble to a new production of geography that might be comparable to a museum of imaginary geographies. Denying its physical side, the imaginative side allows the deconstruction and reconstruction of the fluid world of imagination.

For example, while claiming that Balkan is tangible and firmly comparing to the ephemeral Orient, Maria Todorova supports the masculinist stereotype of the struggling Balkans, later recognized as part of the Western representation (Todorova 1999: 15). She also generalizes the myth on liminality on the Balkans as in-between space although different societies in this region hold on different semantics on this representation. Vesna Goldsworthy relies on the Orientalist paradigm, pointing to its relevance through only a couple of sentences. Dracula and other vampires, dark pitfalls, murder of the royal couple Obrenović, murder in Orient Express, are actually images from what she named imaginary travelogues. In the meantime, she neglects the fact that travelogues are the results of imagination and therefore, the author is not obliged to convey specific and accurate information. The place of the Balkans in the text remains tentative, based on the assumption that Hercoslovakia and Ruritania are in fact camouflaged Balkans, and that murder in Orient Express happened somewhere near imaginary Balkans. Božidar Jezernik distinguishes “stunning” representations of South East Europe where people have tails, their eyes are glowing in the dark or they have ability to fly due to the fact they have wings (Jezernik 2007: 97)

The analysis of these stereotypes led to re-creation of a 19th Century map of the Balkans where these parts of the world were mentally inhabited by vampires and murderers; where strange and inexplicable things were happening; an imaginary space with irrational, dark features which cannot fit the “physical reality” of Europe. Such a map had to be rewritten since the political circumstances of the late 1990s and early 2000s required creating the Balkans with new meanings. Thus, the Balkans as a place lost its space. So, does this mean that academics had to abolish the imaginary Balkans precisely because it is densely populated with stereotypes that made it unacceptable for the political, social and economic trends of the postmodern era? After the researchers reinvented their meanings to the world map by analyzing stereotypes, the Other had to be constructed as the creator of this map. Political circumstances that were moving toward democratization, transition, reconciliation of formerly conflicting countries and republics, and it was necessary to provide geographical, literary-theoretical, psychological and other explanations instead of those coming

from the political sphere (Vukasović, 2020:77). The perception of the Balkans as a synonym for the Balkan Peninsula grew out of a somewhat paradoxical desire to present it in a neutral manner. The liminality that the authors are discussing cannot be seen on the map. The Balkans is not an area, in a geographical, cultural or social context. To determine the boundaries of a space means to bring it into a stable position, to attach it to the territory. If the geography attached to the Balkans is unchanging, that part of the world fosters a sense of displacement, rejection, unwantedness and danger, and its symbolic map lacks stability (Lazarević Radak 2011: 277) In doing so, by creating a dichotomy between place and space, Balkan studies entered the trap of their own theoretical and methodological position. This becomes a by-product of the critique of dichotomies that produce new dichotomies.

After this academic decade was over, it was clear that the text has opened an insight into constellations of literary worlds, some real, some less real, some clearly fictious. But in an attempt to continue with this research it is necessary to combine cross-disciplinary inputs, such as postcolonialism, literary theory, third space theory in order to open up a literary approach to spaces, one that is closer to globalization theory than to imagology. According to Tally, geocriticism expresses a capacity to sustain and improve these academic trends (Tally 2015: 1-16). The Balkans and Balkan Peninsula as a place as much as a space are more than mere physical location or imaginary geography. Narratives produce maps of the real and imaginary places represented in them, and the Balkan is just one example of these geographies. Geocritical approach emphasizes the ongoing interplay between text and land, earth and place. It uses the variety of texts to explore not only different geographical sites, but to identify tropes across geographic regions and across media representations (Tally 2001: 1-12). Both space and place, in this context aim to bring together something that cannot be separated. This point of view allows cultural geographers to explore space and place through a network that includes people, practices, languages and representations. Physical and symbolic geography remain in constant interaction for it is inevitably entangled in power relations. Thus, space, place, human geography and representation should not exclude each other, but rather allow for a complementary, mutual understanding of how geography change in particu-

lar circumstances. In the last twenty years or more, the Balkans, like other parts of the world, were exposed to strong changes and adjustments to global trends. The reconstruction of his map of the 18th or 19th centuries actually testifies to the presence of particular discourses during the twentieth century, their slow variability and entry into political discourse.

According to Bertrand Westphal, these symbolic worlds are neither unique nor exceptional. They could rather be considered a rule. Traveling to Ruritania or Poldevia, did not bring a fundamentally different experience compared to traveling to, say, Lemuria, as it was a very similar place which image include mythologizing and derealization. Between the real and the imaginary, one comes across virgin spaces or terra incognita that offer no clear geographic referent that can be reduced to a unique representation (Westphal 2007: 119) Space oscillates between reality and fiction but the levels are not always discernible. The real, material order absorbs all configurations of representation, even those that seem to encompass modification of its structure (Westphal 2007: 91). According to Edward Soja, dualism or binary logic has tended to polarize spatial thinking around such fundamental oppositions as material, vs. mental, real vs imagined, space vs. thoughts about spaces. Therefore, traditional dichotomies require a creative deconstruction. The trialectics of spatiality identifies lived space, and alternative mode of spatial enquiry that extends the scope of the geographical imagination beyond the confining dualism of spatial practices or perceived space, on the one hand, and the representations of space on the other (Soja 1999: 260-278)

CONCLUSION

Geo-criticism associates both geometric and philosophical coordinates of life – time and space in spatiotemporal scheme. It promotes a polysensuous approach to places as concrete and realized spaces (Westphal 2011: XIV). Such an inclusive approach to spatiality could be a way of looking at the spaces of literature, broadly conceived to include not only those places that readers and writers experience by means of text but also examining people and their lives. Balkan studies need to be situated between the geography of the real and the geography of the imaginary - two

similar geographies that may lead to one another. The exploration of the real as much as imaginary spaces of literature is the goal of geocriticism. It certainly does not provide the answers to the question what are physical and what are imaginary borders of the Balkans, but to explore, seek, read, feel space/place. It should use polysensuous approach to places, concrete, imagined or both. These places are perceived with our eyes but it seems most appropriate to diversify sensing to include physical side of a place (Westphal 2011: IX-XVII) No representation is stable and permanent fluidity have to be considered as fundamental representation of identities and referentiality. Therefore, representations are linked with the referential world. Whether imaginary geography or physical space, the Balkan is not unique and unchangable. Representations and physical space remain interdependent while demographic changes, those in climatic and other natural conditions, reflect on the cultural context by changing lifestyles.

REFERENCES

- Bakić-Hayden, M. Hayden, Robert M. (1992) “Orientalist Variations on the Theme Balkans: Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics”, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 51, (I): 1-15. London, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Barney W., Santa, A. (2009) “Introduction: The Reinsertation of Space in the Humanities and Social Sciencies”, In: Warf, B., Santa, A. (eds) *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, London: Sage, pp. 1-17.
- Bjelić, D. (2011) *Normalizing the Balkans*, London, New York: Ashgate
- Campbell, C. J. (2018) “Space, place and scale: human geography and spatial history in past and present”, *Past & Present*, 239 (1):23–45. London: Oxford University Press
- Cvijić, Jovan. 1991. *Balkansko poluostrvo i južnoslovenske zemlje*, Beograd: Srpska akademija nauka i umetnosti.
- Cross, F. A. (1878) *Round About the Carpatians*, Edinburgh, London: William Blackwood and Sons.

- Child, T. (1893) *Summer Holidays*, London: Harper and Brothers.
- Chen, X., Orum, Anthony, Paulsen, K., (2013) *Introduction to Cities: how place and space shape human experience*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Czarniawska, B., (2008) „Alterity/Identity. Interplay in image construction”, In: Barry, D., Hensen, H. (eds) *The Sage Handbook of New Approaches to Organization Studies*, London: Sage, pp. 49–67.
- Douglas H. (1842) *Excursions in Albania: comparing a description of the wild boar, deer and woodcock shooting*, London: W.H. Allen and Co. Leadenhall Street.
- Dvorniković, V. (2000) *Karakterologija Jugoslovena*, Beograd: Prosveta.
- Doreen M. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dix H. (2015) “On Balkanism and Orientalism: undifferentiated patterns of perception in literary and critical representations of Eastern Europe”, *Textual Practice*, Vol. 29 (5):973-991.
- De Vindt, H. (1907) *Through Savage Europe*, London: T.F. Unwin.
- Edwards, R, Usher, R. (2008) *Globalisation and Pedagogy: space, place and identity*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Forester, T. (1857) *Danube and the Black Sea*, London: Edward Stanford Charing Cross.
- Goldsvorti, V. (2005) *Izmišljanje Ruritanije*, Beograd: Geopoetika.
- Goldsworthy, V. (1999) “The last Stop on the Orient Express : The Balkans and the Politics of British In(ter)vention”, *Europe du Sud-Est : histoire, concepts, frontiers*, Balkanologie, Revue d'études pluridisciplinaires, 3 (2): 142-158.
- Graan, A. (2009) “Book Review of Europe and Its Others: Notes on the Balkans”, *Anthropological Notebooks*. 25(2): 85-87.
- Hodges, A. (2017) *Cosmologies in Transition: Science and Politics of Academia after Yugoslavia*, Podgorica: Aquamarine Press
- Jezernik, B. (2007) *Divlja Evropa*, Beograd: XX vek.

- Kinglake, A. (1848) *Eothen or Traces of Travel from the East*, New York: Goerge P. Putnam.
- Kulavkova, K. (2009) Civilizacijska oska, In: *Balkanska slika na svetot*, Kata Kulavkova, (ur.) Skopje: Manu, str. 9-12.
- Lazarević Radak. (2014) *Nevidljivi Balkan: prilog istoriji post-modernih geografija*, Pančevo:Mali Nemo.
- Lazarević Radak, S. (2013) *Otkrivanje Balkana*, Pančevo:Mali Nemo.
- Lazarević Radak, S. (2016) *Film i društveni kontekst: o srpskom i jugoslovenskom filmu*, Pančevo:Mali Nemo.
- Lazarević Radak, S. (2011)“Orientalization of Serbia in the Period of Crisis”, *Cultural Changes in Central an South East Europe after 1989*, *Der Donauraum*, 3/4 (I): 255-269.
- Lefebvre, H. (1994) *The Production of Space*, Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Low, S. (2017) *Spatializing Culture: the ethnography of space and place*, London, New York: Routledge
- Marić, J (1998) *Kakvi smo mi Srbi?* Beograd:Grafos.
- Mishkova, D. (2018) *Beyond Balkanism. The Scholarly Politics of Region Making*, New York and London: Routledge.
- Pageaux, H. D. (2009) “Od kulturnog imaginarija do imaginarnog”, U: *Kako vidimo strane zemlje* , (ur.) Davor Dukić, Zrinka Blažević, Lahorka Plejić Poje, Ivana Brković, Zagreb: Srednja Europa, str 172-188.
- Pjanović-Luković, O. (1994) *Srbi narod najstariji*, Beograd.
- Rajs, A. (2008) *Čujte Srbi, čuvajte se sebe*, Beograd:Grafid
- Rohkramer, T., Schulz, R. (2009) “Space, Place and Identities”, *History Compas* 7 (5): 1338-1349. New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Robert T. (1999) “The World, the In the Geocritic” In: Tally, R. (ed) *The Geocritical Legacies of Edward W. Said: spatiality, critical humanism and comparative literature*, (ed) Tally, R.,New York, London: Macmillan, 1-16.

- Said, E. (2009) *Orijentalizam*, Beograd: XX vek.
- Svilar, P. (2011) *Medijska konstrukcija Zapadnog Balkana*, Novi Sad:Mediterranean Publishing
- Soja, E. (1999) "Thirdspace: Expanding the scope of the geographical imagination", In: *Human Geography Today*, Massey, D., Allen J., Sarre, P. (eds) University of Michigan Press, pp. 260-278.
- Schmidt, B. (2015) *Geography, Globalism and Europe's Modern World*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Sen, A., Silverman, L. (2014) "Embodied Placemaking: An important Category of Critical Analysis", In *Making Place*, Sen, A., Silverman, L., (eds) Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, pp. 1-18.
- Tally R. T. (2015) "Introduction: The world, the text, and the geocritic", In: *The Geocritical Legacies of Edward Said: spatiality, critical humanism and comparative literature*, Tally, R (ed) Jr., 1-16. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tally Robert. T. Jr. (2011) „On Geocriticism”, In: *Geocritical Explorations: space, place and mapping in literary and cultural studies*, Tally, Robert (ed) Palgrave, Macmillan, pp. 1-12.
- Tuan, Y. F. (2011) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, London, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Todorova, M. (1999) *Imaginarni Balkan*, Beograd: XX vek
- Tcherson, P. (1855) *A Trip to Turkey and Travellers Guide to the Turkish Capital*, London: Houlston and Stoneman
- Unwin, T. (2000) „A Waste of Space? Towards a Critique of the Social Production of Space”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, The Royal Geographical Institute with the Institute of British Geographers, London, 25 (I): 11-29.
- Urry, J, Tuan Y. F. (2011) „Biographical Details and Bibliographical Content”, In: *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, ed. London: Sage, pp. 426-431.

- Vukasović, D. (2020) *Constructing a (EU)ropean Identity. The Balkans and the Western Balkans as the Other*, Beograd: Institut za političke studije.
- Westphal B. (2011) “Foreword”, In: *Geocritical Explorations: space, place and mapping in literary and cultural studies*, Tally R. (ed) Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-17.
- Westphal, B. (2007) *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, New York: Palgrave, Macmillan
- Wolf, L. (1994) *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization in the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press
- Žižek, S. (1991) *For They Know not What They Do; Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, London, New York: Verso.

* Manuscript was received on October 1, 2020 and the paper was accepted for publishing on November 28, 2020.