

# The Conception Of Balkanization Within The East-West Axis

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## Abstract

Balkanization, at first glance, is perceived as a conceptualization referring to Balkan geography. This perception is partly valid. Because, the concept is constructed to define the Balkans by the West and it reflects the perception of the West about Balkans. But in the historical process, Balkanization is separated from Balkans and it becomes a way to define any fragmented state or region, especially in the political literature. In a more detailed explanation, the Balkanization conception becomes a division of any multinational state into smaller ethnically homogeneous entities. From this aspect, Balkanization or Balkanist discourse goes beyond the Balkan borders. The main theme of this paper is the construction process of the Balkanization conception.

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**Keywords:** Balkans, Balkanization, Orientalism, East-West Axis

## Introduction

A multidimensional analysis of the conception of balkanization that derived from the Balkans is required since it has certain intrinsic problems. This is due to the fact that the meaning and the references made on Balkans have a complex structure. In this context, the most important issue is that Balkan borders are determined geographically. This problem has two dimensions. The first one is whether the Balkans belong to the West or the East. The second is that it is not clear which countries form the Balkan Countries. But, the focus of the present study is the first dimension. Currently, one of the problems is what is the meaning of Balkans. The uncertainty around the concept of Balkans effects the conception of balkanization directly. Furthermore, it goes beyond the Balkans. It becomes a situation that could not be defined geographically. It turns into a concept construction. In this framework, the conception of Balkanization from the first perspective to its expansion process will be evaluated with a critical viewpoint within the East-West axis. During this evaluation, the process of the concept of Balkans and balkanism will be a tool of analysis in terms of

determining how to deal with its negative meaning that separates it from the geographical meaning. The etymological process will be followed within the historical and social perspectives.

### **Conceptual and Etymologic Framework**

The geographical name Balkans is a relatively new product. Two hundred years earlier the area was not called Balkans. It was called Rumeli, which was conquered from Byzantine Empire by the Ottomans. The Ottomans ruled Christian Orthodox subjects that referred themselves as Romans or Christians (Mazower, 2003:1). But “it has been widely accepted that “Balkan” is a word and name that entered the peninsula with the Ottoman Turks” (Todorova, 2009: 27). Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the name European Turkey was used for Balkans. But by the 1880s, it had become clear that “Ottomans in Europe” were living on borrowed time. Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania and Montenegro had emerged during the nineteenth century as new states. In this process, diplomatic conferences were arranged to whittle away Ottoman territory and to increase the control of the Great Powers. Western travelers, journalists and propagandists went to the region and expanded the use of the new Balkan concept (Mazower, 2003:2). So, Balkans has always been more than a geographical concept. The conception was loaded with negative connotations like violence, savagery, and primitivism (Mazower, 2003: 4). In other words, “by the end of the nineteenth century, Balkans began to be increasingly used with a political connotation, rather than in a purely geographical sense” (Todorova, 2009:32).<sup>48</sup>

While Balkans is a relatively new word and is loaded with negative connotations, balkanization, deriving from it, must be newer and loaded with more negative connotations than Balkan logically. In this framework, some questions can come to mind: ‘When did the conception of balkanization emerge/occur?’, ‘what was the original meaning?’ and ‘when did it derive from the term of Balkan?’

First, it should be repeated that the most important word or concept that derived from Balkans, is Balkanization (Todorova, 2009:32). But the conception of balkanization increasingly obtained a political dimension and transcended geographical borders such as the balkanization of Sudan (Nazemroaya, 2014) or the Middle East. Furthermore, during more recent years, the balkanization metaphor has become increasingly decontextualized, removed not only from its geographical roots but also from any association with *territorial* fragmentation (Ellis and Wright, 1998: 690). For example, in

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<sup>48</sup> Agatha Christie’s *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) is a typical example. See Goldsworthy (2002:33) for detailed analyze.

the title of books or papers balkanization seems to refer to education (Hargreaves and Macmillan, 1995), labor markets (Kerr, 1977), demographic studies (Frey, 1996). “In some works, balkanization acts as a dead metaphor, one that defines a negative form of fragmentation. In other cases, balkanization is more like a metaphor that acts as a relatively value-free synonym for finer social and territorial distinctions” (Ellis and Wright, 1998: 690).

As it is seen, the balkanization conception has a wide range of meanings. But, it is especially prevalent in political and sociological framework. And the political and sociological framework is consistent with the objectives of the present study. Because, the analysis of balkanization within the east-west axis requires the geopolitical, imperial, discursive etc. perspectives. The extent of this study is not enough to discuss the conception of balkanization with all its aspects. So, I attempted to evaluate it in general with an emphasis on the discursive level. Balkanism is a convenient means for such an analysis as a discourse related to Orientalism but different from it. Balkanism is related to political, sociological and ideological research in several respects and it especially contributes to the context from the years of 50's and on.

### **Balkanism and Orientalism**

Balkanism as a rhetoric or discourse refers to Balkanization and it is investigated in this context. Bjelic, considers balkanism in interchangeable meanings. Accordingly, sometimes it corresponds to the body of knowledge about the Balkans, and sometimes to the critical study of Balkanism (Bjelic, 2000:5). Mocnik “analyze balkanism as an ideology of domination, demonstrating that within Balkanism, two types of relations of domination are articulated: the relations of geo-political and economic hegemony, and the relations of internal domination within the societies geo-politically stigmatized as Balkan” (Mocnik, 2002: 79). In the academic literature on balkanism, which has emerged the recent years, was inspired and referred by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, first published in 1978. Most of the Balkan authors have observed that balkanism and orientalism are similar or close, at least at related intellectual category level, although they differ from each other on certain issues. Maria Todorova, MilicaBakic- Hayden, Vesna Goldsworthy and Dusan I. Bjelic can be regarded among these authors. Few others have evaluated balkanism as a highly different category from orientalism. For example, Andrew Hammond, and K.E. Fleming.

According to Bjelic, balkanism, similar to orientalism<sup>49</sup>, “has been organized around a sense of binaries (rational/irrational, center/periphery, civilization/barbarism) arranged hierarchically so that the first sign (“Whiteness or Europe”) is always primary and definitional of the second (“Blackness” or “Balkans”), and so that the second is always a grammatical, internal effect of the first. For example, “Byzantium” (referring to the Byzantine church) is not represented today in the same way as Protestantism and Catholicism” (Bjelic, 2000: 3). Bjelic, after his superficial evaluation points out that Balkan scholars agree with Said’s political humanism and at the same time the consideration that “Balkanism is not a subspecies of orientalism”. By following this direction Todorova summarizes the reasons for the differences between orientalism and balkanism. She emphasizes that the balkanism doesn’t deprived from the Saids’ orientalism:

Balkanism evolved to a great extent independently from orientalism and, in certain aspects, against or despite it. One reason was geopolitical: the separate treatment, within the complex history of the Eastern question, of the Balkans as a strategic sphere distinct from the Near or Middle East. The absence of a colonial legacy (despite the often exploited analogies) is another significant difference. In the realm of ideas, balkanism evolved partly as a reaction to the disappointment of the West Europeans “classical” expectations in the Balkans, but it was a disappointment within a paradigm that had already been set as separate from the oriental. The Balkans predominantly Christian character, moreover, fed for a long time the crusading potential of Christianity against Islam. Despite many attempts to depict its (Orthodox) Christianity as simply a subspecies of oriental despotism and thus as inherently non-European or non-Western, still the boundary between Islam and Christianity in general continued to be perceived as the principal one (Todorova, 2009:20).

Indeed, the expression of the differences themselves indicates Said’s Orientalism. Bakic-Hayden and Hayden are closer than the others on the similarity of Orientalism and balkanism. He thinks that Orientalism can be adapted within Europe, between Europe proper and the rest of the continent that were under Ottoman rule. Thus, in the level of rhetoric, the dichotomy can be applied to Balkans in various manners: Balkan mentality, Balkan primitivism, Balkanization, Byzantine, Orthodoxy (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 1992:3). As Fleming asserted Bakic- Hayden and Hayden viewed orientalism as a cultural and geographical category (Fleming, 2000:1224).

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<sup>49</sup> According to Said, orientalism refers to pervasive patterns of representation of cultures and societies that privilege a self-confidently "progressive," "modern" and "rational" Europe over the putatively "stagnant," "backward," "traditional" and "mystical" so-called cities of the Orient (Bakic- Hayden and Hayden, 1992:1).

As I mentioned above, Fleming does not agree with the premise that orientalism and balkanism are similar categories. Balkans as a whole has a different historical background when compared to that of Said's Orientalism. The political and historical conditions in the Balkans, especially as it has been influenced by external powers, have been shaped by factors unlike those at play in the Orient mentioned in Said 's Orientalism (Fleming, 2000:1222). Balkans under the Ottoman rule for four centuries could not be compared to the historical circumstances that provide the substantial basis for Said's argument. Balkans had distinctive imperialistic characteristics as Catholicizing Habsburgs and the laissez-faire Ottomans shaped different Balkan territories in different ways and dimensions (Fleming, 2000:1222-1223). Goldsworthy, in this framework, situates the Balkans closer to imperialism and "seeks to explore the way in which one of the world's most powerful nations [Britain] exploited the resources of the Balkans to supply its literary and entertainment industries" (Goldsworthy, 1998: 2). At that instance, Goldsworthy's approach reminds of Said's Orientalism. The last point about the relationship between Orientalism and balkanism could be put using Flemings' words:

"...may not lie in any interpretive contribution to Balkan study per se, but rather in the possibility that through testing (and perhaps ultimately rejecting) Said's model, Balkan historiography will be brought into dialogue with other, more established and dominant fields. In the process, the case of the Balkans may prove uniquely equipped to interrogate, expand, and elucidate the theoretical categories of inquiry first developed by those fields" (Fleming 2000: 1220).

No matter how Balkanism affected the conception of Balkanization and its load of negative connotations in a discursive, ideological or hegemonic level, these negative connotations have widened within the east-west axis.

### **The Balkans and the East-West Axis**

President of the US Clinton, in his speech on March 24, 1999, urged the American people about the Kosova war in the Balkans, "Kosova is a small place, but sits on a major fault line between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, at the meeting place of Islam and both the Western and Orthodox branches of Christianity" and he continued in his speech: " To the south are our allies, Greece and Turkey; to the north, our new democratic allies in Central Europe" (From Goldsworthy, 2002:25). This speech contains highly meaningful expressions in terms of Balkanization, especially related to the East-West Axis. Balkanization is not only a concept that belonged to the World War I and Balkan Wars years and depended on Great Powers, but it also penetrated to the Great Powers led by America currently.

Balkans, undoubtedly, since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, under either Byzantine or Ottoman rule, emerged as a cultural and religious “other” to Europe “proper.” This older symbolic geography strengthened after the cold war within the context of an ideological and political geography of the democratic, capitalist west versus the totalitarian, communist east. And no matter how different the historical processes were, it is striking to observe that a continuity in the nature and rhetoric of the concept, as well as the images and terminology used to represent that dichotomy was prevalent (Bakic- Hayden, 1992:3-4). In other words, “in this century, an ideological “other”, communism, has replaced the geographical/cultural “other” of the Orient. The symbolic geography of eastern inferiority, however, remain” (Bakic- Hayden, 1992:4).

These axes of European symbolic geography form a hierarchy, revealed also in terms of relative values of religions. Thus, at the most general level, the division between the east and the west is symbolized by the distinction between the eastern Orthodox churches and the western ones. Within these two different parts, hierarchy is again revealed by religion: in the east, Islam is viewed generally less favorably than Orthodox Christianity; while in the west, the Protestant tradition is generally considered more positively than Catholicism. The entire hierarchy may be seen in terms of symbolic geography as a declining relative value from the north-west (highest value) to the south-east (lowest value) axes ( Bakic- Hayden, 1992:3-4). In this direction, it’s noteworthy to mention Huntington’s striking article titled the “Clash of Civilizations?” authored in 1993. He explained that political and ideological boundaries replaced cultural boundaries after the cold war: “As the ideological division of Europe between Western Christianity, on the one hand, and Orthodox Christianity and Islam, on the other has reemerged” (Huntington, 1993:29-30). he continues,

...in the Balkans this line, of course, coincides with the historic boundary between the Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires. The peoples to the North and West to this line are Protestant and Catholic; they shared the common experiences of European history- feudalism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution; they are generally economically better off than the peoples to east; and they may now look forward to increasing involvement in a common European economy and to the consolidation of democratic political systems (Huntington, 1993:30).

Although Huntington claimed that the division of civilizations are based on cultural differences in general, such as Todorova’s fair interpretation, he went on to compose economic and political boundaries between the civilizations (Todorova, 2009). These orientalist dichotomy distinctions could also be stated equivalently as being between “western” and

“eastern” republics. These are not neutral distinctions culturally or politically (Bakic- Hayden and Hayden, 1992:5).

In other words, Balkan is a bridge between east and west and so it's always in- between (Todorova, 2009:18). Perhaps, Balkanization could improve in uncertain context and go beyond the Balkans.

### **Conclusion**

After the fall of communism and Yugoslavian war, the world, especially US led West fixed their attention on Balkans. Similar to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, during the last years of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, new articles, publications and travels about Balkans resurfaced. However, during the historical process, several conditions had changed. But, the perception of Balkans has generally remained the same. Through the history, Balkans has represented the marginal or the “others” of Europe. One indicator of this perception is the conception of Balkanization. Balkanization is loaded with negative connotations, especially in political literature. Despite the changes in historical circumstances, the understanding related to Balkans has not changed. Authors have attempted to explore this understanding with various factors. Some authors blamed the Balkans on Western capitalism. Some of them explored balkanism or orientalism. Some authors evaluated Balkans within the colonial discourse. Of course, these explanations differ from each other. But the source of the problem remains whether the Balkans are in the East or in the West or whether the Balkans are in Europe. This uncertainty provides a convenient atmosphere for the conception of Balkanization as a construction process. Consequently, the conception of Balkanization is the result of this main problem and hence, occupies such a wide range.

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