Article:
Razsa, M. and Lindstrom, N. orcid.org/0000-0003-2042-2465 (2004) Balkan Is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tudman's Croatia. East European Politics and Societies. pp. 628-650. ISSN 0888-3254

https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325404266939

Balkan Is Beautiful: Balkanism in the Political Discourse of Tuđman's Croatia

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This article examines the role of Balkanist discourse in Tuđman's Croatia. Todorova's concept of Balkanism provides a useful theoretical framework through which to explore the deployment of Balkanist stereotypes against Croatia by Western leaders. Balkanism also illuminates the ways in which Croatians used many of these same Balkan stereotypes to differentiate themselves from their neighbors to the south and east. Through an examination of Croatian newspaper columns, government documents and speeches, and political cartoons from the 1990s, this article analyzes how Balkanist interpretations and representations played an integral role in the construction of Croatian national identity and the mobilization of Croatians around a variety of political agendas. The objective of this article is not, however, simply to document the deployment of Balkanist stereotypes against or within Croatia. The second component of the article suggests ways in which Croatia's liminal position between "Europe" and the "Balkans" might serve as an ideal standpoint from which one might challenge the binary oppositions of Balkanism and begin to reimagine the Balkans, redirecting these categories as a site of political engagement and critique.

Keywords: Croatia; Franjo Tuđman; Balkanism; Balkan

Introduction

When Croatia seceded from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991, Croatians were optimistic that their newfound independence would accomplish two things: Croatia would be recognized as a sovereign state for the first time in its

* For comments and criticisms of earlier versions of this article, we would like to thank Kristina Balalovska, Pamela Ballinger, Dušan Bjelić, Boris Buden, Ana Dević, Gergana Dimitrova, Eric Gordy, Renata Jambrešić-Kirin, Dejan Krsić, Maria Todorova, and two anonymous reviewers. Previous versions were presented at the Kokkalis Graduate Student Workshop at Harvard University in February 1999 and the Brown University Watson Institute's "Whose Self-Determination?" Workshop in February 2000. Maple Razsa acknowledges the support of a Fulbright Scholarship from the Institute of International Education, and Nicole Lindstrom acknowledges funding from the Institute for the Study of World Politics.

East European Politics and Societies, Vol. 18, No. 4, pages 628–650. ISSN 0888-3254

DOI: 10.1177/0888325404266939

national history and would "return" to its rightful place in Europe. Croatia's prospects were encouraging. During the cold war, Yugoslavs' relative economic prosperity and freedom to work and travel abroad made Yugoslavia the envy of Eastern Europe.[1] Jeffrey Sachs selected Yugoslavia in 1989 as one of the first countries to undergo "shock therapy." Its advanced economic liberalization and strong civil society tradition promised a quick and successful transition to a democratic free-market state. Of the six republics that made up the Yugoslav federation, Croatia was, like Slovenia, more integrated in to European networks than other republics due to its Hapsburg legacy, geographical location, and trade orientation toward Western markets.

In less than ten years, Croatia's status shifted from first in line to join the European Union to one of the last. Croatia now lags behind the economically less advanced states of Romania and Bulgaria in European Union accession negotiations.[2] Croatia's unfavorable position in the eyes of the West undoubtedly stemmed in part from Franjo Tuđman's dismal democratic and human rights record in the 1990s. The Tuđman regime suppressed critical media outlets, supported Croatian secessionists in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and fought the extradition of indicted war criminals to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The Council of Europe cited these reasons for postponing Croatia's membership until 1996. The European Union raised the same factors in blocking Croatia's request to start membership talks in 1997. Refugee return, full cooperation with the ICTY, and commitment to regional cooperation are conditions of Croatia signing a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union (a special process created for "Western Balkan" states in 2000).[3]

1. Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1993), 20.
2. Croatia's GDP per capita, in $U.S. at PPP, in 2001 was 9,760 (40 percent of the EU average), compared to 6,290 in Romania (25 percent of EU average) and 6,840 in Bulgaria (27 percent of EU average). Romania and Bulgaria signed accession partnerships with the European Union. *World Bank Development Indicators* 2000 to 2002, cited in *Blue Bird Agenda for Civil Society in Southeast Europe, in Search of Responsive Government: State Building and Economic Growth in the Balkans* (Budapest, Hungary: Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, 2003), 14.
3. Croatia signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union in October 2001. The European Union's relations with South East Europe is outlined at http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/.

The enormous fall in Croatia's international standing did not depend solely on Western perceptions of Tuđman's political failings or its economic performance. Croatia's fall from grace also involved the deployment of Balkan stereotypes by Western leaders and journalists—a phenomenon Maria Todorova terms "Balkanism." In other words, Balkanism proved a very effective method of disciplining states like Croatia with strong European aspirations.[4] The irony, however, is that Croatians deployed similar Balkan stereotypes to differentiate themselves from their ethnic neighbors. Balkanist rhetoric was utilized to legitimize Croatia's quest for independence as a necessary emancipation from its "Balkan burden" and its return to its rightful place in Europe. Croatians presented themselves as more progressive, prosperous, hard working, tolerant, democratic, or, in a word, *European*, in contrast to their primitive, lazy, intolerant, or *Balkan*, neighbors to the southeast.[5]

This article examines the discursive processes through which Croatian leaders framed their so-called exit from the Balkans and return to Europe throughout the 1990s. The first section provides a brief review of the work of Todorova and others who critically examine the external and internal symbolic representations of the Balkans. The second part traces Croatia's fall from grace, from the euphoric declarations of returning to Europe in the early 1990s to lamentations by the late 1990s of being relegated to the status of a small, marginal, autocratic state. The third part examines three discursive strategies by which Croatian leaders define their respective visions of Croatian national identity based on quite different conceptions of what they see as essential European norms and values. We show that the Europe-Balkan dichotomy is an important element of national self-understanding in all three cases; yet Europe always stands outside the nation, as an identity to be achieved.[6] The concluding section considers how

4. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88.
5. Milica Bakić-Hayden and Robert Hayden, "Orientalist Variations on the Theme 'Balkans': Symbolic Geography in Recent Yugoslav Cultural Politics," *Slavic Review* 51 (Spring 1992): 1-10.
6. See Susan Gal, "Bartók's Funeral: 1991 Representations of Europe in Hungarian Political Rhetoric," *American Ethnologist* 18:3(1991): 440-58. Gal suggests the rhetorical slogan "return to Europe" implies such a duality, for one must return to a place where one currently does not belong.

negative representations of the Balkans might be critically examined to reimagine the Balkans as a site of positive engagement and critique.

Imagining the Balkans

The burgeoning literature on Balkanism provides a useful framework in which to examine the forms and processes of representation through which Croatian leaders negotiated their so-called final exit from the Balkans and return to Europe. Maria Todorova and other scholars seek to critically examine how a geographically and historically defined place—the Balkan peninsula—has become a symbol imbued with a host of derogatory meaning.[7] To varying extents, these scholars are all indebted to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a seminal critique of Western knowledge and representations of the East. They hold differing opinions, however, over the extent to which Balkanism can be interpreted within a general Orientalist or postcolonial frame.

In *Imagining the Balkans*, Todorova traces the genealogy of Balkanism through the travel writings of Western authors to explore how the term "Balkan" has been negatively constructed over the past three centuries. Todorova divides the evolution of Balkanism into three stages:

1. The Balkans were first "discovered" in the late eighteenth century by Western travelers. Although these first Western accounts of the Balkans contained some geographical inaccuracies, their treatment of the Balkans was primarily classificatory and descriptive.
2. After a series of Balkan wars and with the advent of World War I, the Balkans were increasingly imbued with "political, social, cultural, and ideological overtones," and "Balkan" was increasingly used as a pejorative term.
3. Today the term "Balkan" has been almost completely disassociated from its object, as journalists and academics utilize the con-

7. Other works in this tradition include Dušan Bjelić and Obrad Savić, *Balkan as Metaphor* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); K. E. Fleming, "*Orientalism*, the Balkans, and Balkan Historiography," *American Historical Review* 105:4(2000): 1218-33; Patrick Hyder Patterson, "On the Edge of Reason: The Boundaries of Balkanism in Slovenian, Austrian, and Italian Discourse," *Slavic Review* 62:1(Spring 2003): 110-41; Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

> struct of the Balkans as a powerful symbol conveniently located outside any spatial or temporal contexts.[8]

"Balkanization" has now come to signify more generally the disintegration of viable nation-states and the reversion to "the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian."[9] These Balkan stereotypes were reinvigorated by the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia, which were often termed Balkan wars despite the fact they were confined to former Yugoslav republics.

Todorova's archaeological approach to the study of the Balkans and Balkanism shares much with Edward Said's analyses of *Orientalism*. Said explores how European culture managed and produced the East "politically, sociologically, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively" through discourses on the Orient, or what he has termed "Orientalism."[10] By construing the "Orient" as the essentialized "other," through a dichotomous and essentialist system of representations embodied in stereotypes, Western writers have strengthened the West's own self-image as the superior civilization. Todorova shows how a similar phenomenon exists between the Balkans and Europe. She writes,

> Geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as "the other," the Balkans became, in time, the object of a number of externalized political, ideological and cultural frustrations and have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and "the West" has been constructed.[11]

While Orientalism is a "discourse about an imputed opposition," Todorova argues that Balkanism is a "discourse about an imputed ambiguity."[12] Here Todorova differs from other Balkan theorists in the Orientalist tradition such as Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, who argue that Balkanism can indeed be viewed as a "variation on the Orientalist theme," since the Balkans were long under

8. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 7.
9. Maria Todorova, "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," *Slavic Review* 53 (Summer 1994): 453.
10. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 3.
11. Todorova, "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," 455.
12. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 17.

Ottoman rule and, hence, have since been considered part of the "Orient."[13] Todorova argues that the Balkans *are* a part of Europe, albeit a provincial or peripheral part for the last several centuries. Balkanism, according to Todorova, treats the differences *within* one type—"Europe"—rather than the difference between imputed types (i.e., the "Occident" and the "Orient"). The Balkans, in other words, despite its geographical status as European, has become Europe's shadow, the structurally despised alter ego, the dark side within.[14]

From Europe to the Balkans: Croatia's "fall from grace" in the 1990s

Balkanism has been a common discursive tool deployed by the West to explain and justify Croatia's enormous fall in international standing. When Croatia and Slovenia declared independence in June 1991, a consensus existed among the international community that Yugoslavia should be preserved to guarantee stability. By the end of the year, with nearly one-third of Croatian territory under Serbian control and medieval Dubrovnik under siege, Western leaders and media now portrayed Croatia as an emerging European democracy to be defended against Slobodan Milošević's expansionist aims. Germany took the lead in recognizing Croatia in December 1991. By April 1992, the international community recognized Croatia as a sovereign state.

Croatia's image as a victim of Serb aggression was soon tarnished by its involvement in the 1992 to 1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tuđman and the Croatian armed forces supported the Bosnian Croats against the Bosnian Serbs, then against the Bosniak Muslims. Television footage of the Croatian armed forces' shelling of the Muslim quarters of the Bosnian town of Mostar, and the collapse of the historic bridge across the Neretva, soon supplanted footage of Serbian shelling of Croatian targets. Croatia now assumed a more ambivalent role in Western media

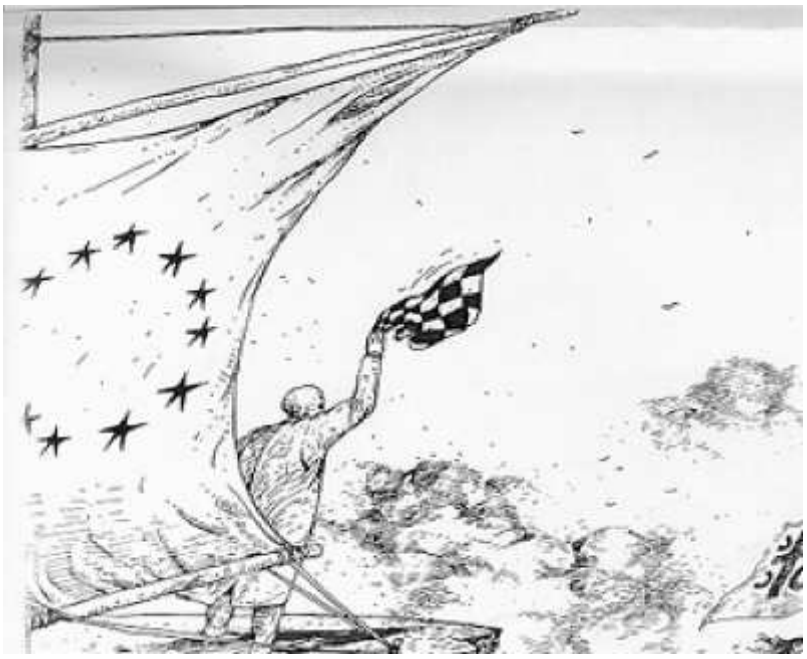
13. Bakić-Hayden and Hayden, "Orientalist Variations," 8. Milica Bakić-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of the Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54 (Winter 1995): 920.
14. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 18; Todorova, "The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention," 482.

accounts as both an aggressor and victim. In the summer of 1995, the Croatian army retook most of Croatia's occupied territory, forcing thousands of Croatian Serbs to flee to Bosnia and Serbia. Soon after, Tuđman signed the Dayton peace accords ending the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tuđman's long-term aspirations to return Croatia to Europe were thwarted when the European Union decided in 1997 not to invite Croatia to start membership talks, criticizing the Tuđman regime's authoritarian tendencies. By the late 1990s, many Western leaders viewed Croatia as another autocratic and expansionist Balkan regime.

An episode during a 1997 conference in Zagreb, "Post-Dayton Croatia," typifies how Balkanism became an effective means of disciplining states like Croatia that aspire to be recognized as European. In front of an audience of luminaries including the Croatian minister of defense and other prominent representatives of Croatian political and academic communities, the U.S. charge d'affaires of the U.S. embassy in Bosnia-Herzegovina stopped in the middle of a biting critique of the contemporary Croatian political situation. He remarked, pointedly and with obvious calculation, "In the Balkans . . . and when I say Balkans I mean here in Croatia." Clearly aware of Croatian pretensions to join a more prestigious civilizational camp, the U.S. official let the assembled Croatian elites know that their inclusion in the European Union was currently unfeasible. He also reminded them that Western leaders ultimately decided who was European and who would be kept out of the club.

Western policy makers are not the only ones to use Balkanism as a discursive tool to reprimand Croatia in the 1990s. Balkanism has also played an important role in the construction of Croatian national identity during the period. In the period prior to and subsequent to the outbreak of war in July 1991, Croatian leaders aimed to promote an identity that would be maximally differentiated from its Yugoslav identity and other constituent nationalities that made up the former Yugoslavia, most significantly, Serbia. Serbia and Croatia have historically been closely linked: more than 10 percent of Croatia's population is ethnically Serb, the Serbian and Croatian languages are linguistically very similar, and Croats and Serbs are both considered "ethnically" Slav. Serbia

Figure 1: *At the beginning of the conflict with Serbia, many Croatians were optimistic they would sail into Europe*

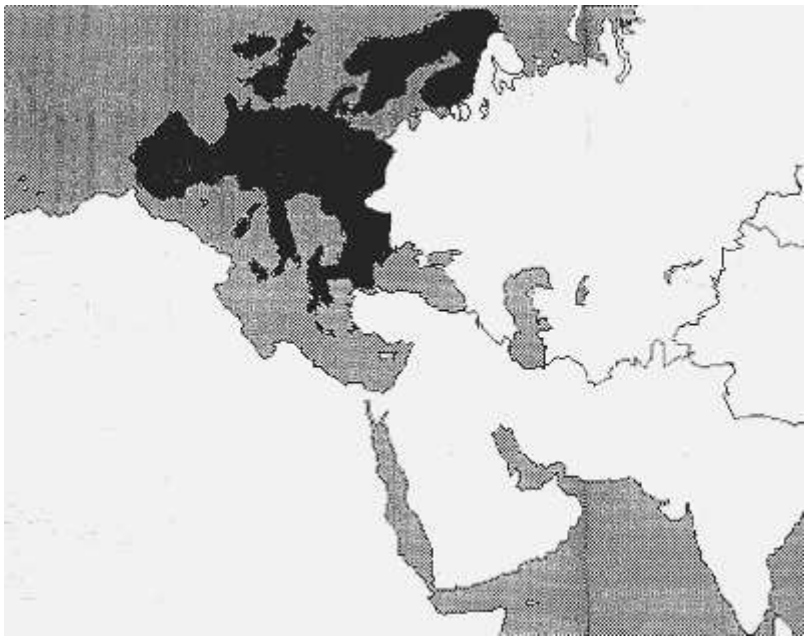


Source: Croatian Ministry of Information, 1992.

also posed a genuine military threat to Croatia's independence and territorial integrity. Thus, this process of differentiation was quite acute, and Balkanist discourse filled an important ideological role.

A political cartoon published in the Croatian daily *Slobodna Dalmacija* early in 1992 illustrates how Balkanism was deployed soon after Croatia's independence. Figure 1 highlights the sense of optimism shared by most Croatians, who believed that independent Croatia would soon "sail" into Europe, leaving their primitive Balkan neighbors and communist past behind. Serbs are represented as primitive cavemen, huddled under their nationalist insignia with their Yugoslav national army helmet beside them. The Croatian figure is donned in an overcoat, waving farewell with a kerchief of the Croatian *"šahovnica"* (a Cro-

Figure 2: *Croatia's position in global symbolic geography proved to be quite changeable*



Source: Croatian Ministry of Information, 1992.

atian national symbol) in hand. A sail made of the European Union flag powers the continental drift.[15]

By 1993, Croatia's quest to rejoin Europe proved to be more difficult than originally anticipated. Figure 2 suggests how Croatians feared being symbolically placed into an entirely different geographical sphere. Footage from the civil war in Yugoslavia shown on Western television screens now associated Croatia not with the states of Europe but with the violence of the wars in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. Croatia's exasperation of the change in fortune is captured in a 1997 front cover of the Croatian political weekly magazine, *Tjednik* (Figure 3) where Croatia is depicted as the fair-haired girl whom no one in the world will ask to dance. The headline poses the question, "Zašto nas ne vole?" (Why Don't the Great Powers Love Us?).

15. Alojz Šešik, ed., *Warikatura Croatica* (Zagreb, Croatia: Hrvatska tiskara, 1992), 122.

Figure 3 captures some of the bewilderment Croatians felt at the change in their fortune. Croatia's reputation shifted from being a promising emerging democracy that European and U.S. leaders pledged to support and protect in the early 1990s to an international pariah by 1997.

Despite attempts to displace or externalize charges of Balkanism, the Croatian case is indicative of Todorova's claim that the "outside perception of the Balkans has been internalized in the region itself."[16] The main way in which Balkanism has been internalized in Croatia is through internal differentiation based on imputed Balkan characteristics; what Bakić-Hayden describes as "nesting orientalisms." An endless chain of differentiation can occur between nations, whereby Croatia is Balkan vis-à-vis Germany, Serbia is Balkan vis-à-vis Croatia, Kosovo is Balkan vis-à-vis Serbia, and so on. Orientalism can also be nested *within* nations.[17] One can perceive a social hierarchy in Croatia that corresponds to the notion of where the Balkan begins and Europe ends. The Sava River serves as one common dividing line, where the less prosperous, socialist-era, southern suburbs of Zagreb are considered Balkan vis-à-vis Zagreb's old "European" center.[18] The former military frontier (or the "Krajina") also creates an internal barrier between northern Croatia and its southern Balkan border region. When Herzegovinian Croatians became an increasing liability to the Croatian government in the late 1990s—politically by obstructing the implementation of the Dayton agreement and economically by siphoning Croatian state

16. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 39.
17. Bridget Bereton argues that in a poly-ethnic hierarchy, the less powerful group undercommunicates its distinctiveness in relation to the more powerful group, while the more powerful group tends to overcommunicate its difference. One could argue a similar dynamic has occurred in southeastern Europe, where Croatians undercommunicate their difference vis-à-vis more powerful Europe but overcommunicate their differences vis-à-vis the less powerful Serbian (or Bosnian Muslims or Roma). Bridget Bereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 32.
18. The cover of a 2000 Croatian tourist brochure declares Zagreb "The New European Metropolis."
19. The Croatian weekly *Feral Tribune* declared, for example, that Herzegovinian Croats were the "new Serbs." Toni Gabrić, "Hercegovci su na?i novi srbi" [Herzegovinians Are Our New Serbs], *Feral Tribune*, 24 August 1997. The nationalist *Hrvatski Obzor* acknowledged that the West now identified Croatia with its less developed counterparts in Bosnia. Its 1999 cover, with white socks hanging from a clothesline (white socks symbolizing gauche, and decidedly non-European, fashion), declared, "Svi smo mi Hercegovci" [We are all Herzegovinians now]. *Hrvatski Obzor*, 21 September 1999.

Figure 3: *A 1997 Croatian liberal weekly,* Tjednik, *asks incredulously, "Why don't they love us?"*

funds—many Croatians began to draw the border of the Balkans between Bosnian Croatians and citizens of Croatia proper.[19]

In sum, critical conflicts in Croatia throughout the 1990s were shaped by the "politics of recognition" whereby Croatians sought, and ultimately failed, to be recognized by Western lead-

ers as authentically European. Balkanist discourse provided one means of dissociating Croatia from its Balkan neighbors and thus reclaiming its perceived rightful place in Europe. Croatia's dramatic "fall from grace" throughout the 1990s can help explain Croatians' often overanxious, even paranoid, response to being identified as Balkan. Boris Buden suggests that Balkanist discourse in Croatia might indeed be an "expression of the deepest frustration caused by the fact that Croatia is never really recognized in the vision of its own European identity precisely in the only place in which that recognition matters—in Europe itself."[20] While Tuđman used Balkanist dichotomies adeptly to secure Croatia's independence and rally Western support in the early 1990s, by the mid-1990s this consensus had unraveled. Vesna Pusić stated in 1995 that the critical issue facing Croatia was determining "who will prevail in defining the character of Croatia, who will determine its identity and on which values, political attitudes, models and strategies its image will be constructed."[21] In the following section, we examine how public debates over the meaning of Croatian identity and Croatia's political and social future were fought within the confines of the Balkan-Europe dichotomy. Although many prominent Croatians sought to identify Croatia as Europe in contrast to the Balkans, they imbued both these terms with different meanings in furthering very different political agendas.

Balkanism and its critics: three discursive strategies

"Tuđman, not the Balkans" was the slogan on which Croatian President Franjo Tuđman based his successful 1997 presidential campaign. The slogan captured what Tuđman saw as his greatest historical achievement: Croatia's extrication from what one writer termed "the Balkan darkness of the so-called Yugoslavia."[22] In the post-Dayton era, the general euphoria following Croatian inde-

20. Boris Buden, "Ne, ne volim hrvatsku!" [No, I Don't Love Croatia!], *Arkzin*, 6 June 1997.
21. Bastard Intellectual Cooperative, "Na grobu živa predsjednika," http://www.arkzin.com/5/pusic.html.
22. Zvonko Maković, *Feral Tribune*, 13 January 1997.

pendence was waning and Croatians faced high unemployment and inflation. Tuđman could no longer rely solely on military or diplomatic achievements to maintain his political power. Tuđman found the perfect solution to this dilemma in the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI). The United States and the European Union initiated SECI to promote economic exchange within Southeastern Europe (including all the former Yugoslavia states, Albania, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria). The slogan "Tuđman, not the Balkans" perfectly articulated his stand on this new crisis. SECI was not intended to create a "new-Yugoslavia"; nor did it legally bind Croatia to the agreement.[23] Nevertheless, it was nearly impossible to turn on a television or radio or to open a newspaper in Croatia in 1997 without learning of the danger of a world conspiracy to force Croatia "back onto the Balkans." Tuđman, once again, would save Croatia from this fate.

A 1997 cover of the Croatian state-run news weekly *Hrvatski Obzor* illustrates how SECI was represented by the ruling regime. The cover, shown in Figure 4, is dominated by a close-up of a Yugo with a headline that asks, "Hoćemo li ponovo voziti 'yugo' " [Will We Drive Yugos Again?]. The Yugo was a symbol of what Croatians viewed as their disadvantaged status vis-à-vis the Serbs in Yugoslav economic relations (not to mention a source of international embarrassment), since the Yugo was manufactured in Serbia but was aggressively marketed among all other republics as Yugoslavia's national automobile. The headline, therefore, by citing renewed economic ties through SECI, reinvigorated the threat that once again Croatia would fall victim to Serbian hegemonic aspirations. In the upper right hand corner, however, the same cover provided the answer to this threat. Beside a picture of Tuđman, the caption declared that, "Croatia still needs Tuđman."

23. Both the EU and the United States insisted that membership in the Southeast European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) would be voluntary. Ivo Banac, professor of history at Yale University and frequent commentator on Croatian politics, stated in an interview for a Croatian weekly, "I really don't see anyone in the West who would force the renewal of Yugoslavia or the creation of some sort of Balkan confederation. That is completely unrealistic." *Feral Tribune*, 13 January 1997.

Figure 4: *The conservative weekly* Hrvatski Obzor *proclaimed in 1997, "Croatia still needs Tuđman"*

During his televised State of the Union Address in January 1997, Tuđman made his stand on SECI official by passing a constitutional amendment banning Croatia's participation in Balkan associations. He proclaimed,

> By its geopolitical position, by all of its fourteen-century history, by its civilization and culture, Croatia belongs to the Central European and Mediterranean circles of Europe. Our political links with the Balkans between 1918 and 1990 were just a short episode in Croatian history and we are determined not to repeat that episode again.[24]

Underlying his political opposition to Western attempts to force Croatia into some new Balkan union, therefore, was the outrage that Croatia could be misrecognized as culturally Balkan.[25] By fostering a sense of crisis, Tuđman could demonstrate he was a strong and vital leader. Tuđman not only would protect Croatia from the Serbian threat; he would stand up to the "Great Powers" who now threatened Croatia's national interests.[26]

Tuđman was not the only politician to utilize Balkanism as a rhetorical strategy. In his 1997 presidential campaign, Croatian Social Liberal Party candidate Vlado Gotovac criticized the "Balkan tendencies" of Tuđman and, in contrast, portrayed himself as a European leader. As part of his campaign strategy, Gotovac capitalized on the fact that Croatia was not invited to the 1997

24. "Address of the President of the Republic of Croatia Franjo Tuđman on the State of the Nation at the Joint Session of Both Chambers of the Croatian National Parliament," 20 January 1997, www.urpr.hr. Tuđman reiterated his opposition to the agreement again in his 1999 address: "It should be noted that certain, influential European and American circles insist on a program of regional Balkan integration. That would actually mean the revival of the former Yugoslavia without Slovenia and with Albania, and that goal should be opposed at all costs and by using all available means." "Address of the President of the Republic of Croatia Dr. Franjo Tuđman on the State of the Nation at the Joint Session of Both Chambers of the Croatian National Parliament," 21 January 1999, www.urpr.hr/ad012099.htm. On 8 March 1999, the Croatian National Parliament passed a declaration objecting to the European Union's "regional approach" and rejecting "all attempts for Croatia to be included in some sort of regional integration of south-eastern Europe and the Balkans." Croatian Foreign Press Bureau's *Daily Bulletin* 36/99, 8 March 1999.
25. The West's gravest mistake, according to a column in *Vjesnik*, the largest state-run daily newspaper, is its failure to recognize that Croatians have a "deep consciousness of their belonging to Western civilization" and a commitment to modernization in contrast to Serbia with "its links to fanatical nationalism, its support for preserving the old socialist system, and its inability to enter the information revolution." Marinko Bobanović, "Duboka je svijest o pripadnosti zapadu" [Consciousness of Western Belonging Runs Deep], *Vjesnik*, 12 June 1995.
26. Dalibor Foretić, in the independent daily *Novi List*, captures this dynamic: "The world would like to push us into some kind of Balkan hole but we will not allow them. We want to be everything—Central European, Mediterranean, Transcarpathian—and not just a Balkan country. The West is constantly inventing some kind of initiative to push us where we do not belong. But we will not let them! Our leaders persistently and bravely shout that Croatia will not enter some new Balkan integration," 6 October 1996, quoted in Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, "Zašto I otkad se grozimo balkana?" [Why, and since When, Are We So Afraid of the Balkans?], *Erasmus* 12:4(1996, 45).

meeting of the presidents of Central European states, the region to which Tuđman repeatedly declared that Croatia belonged. In an article titled "Croatia Excluded from the Central European Milieu," Gotovac wrote,

> The absence of the Croatian chief of state from that kind of a gathering not only sends a message that Croatia does not belong to the Central European geopolitical space. It is also clear proof that Dr. Franjo Tuđman himself, as the key protagonist of Balkan, anti-European politics, does not have access to the company of eight Central European leaders. This is a clear warning that our Republic with Tuđman and his nomenclature has mired us in deep isolation, leaving us hopelessly anchored to the Balkan.[27]

Tuđman's authoritarian regime, in other words, with its violations of human rights and its increasing isolationist policies, not the West, was to be blamed for anchoring Croatia to the Balkan.

Critics of both the ruling regime and the liberal opposition also utilized Balkanist rhetoric. Boris Buden's vociferous and radical critiques of Tuđman demonstrated a certain ambivalence regarding Croatia's relationship to the Balkans. In response to Tuđman's proposed constitutional ban on associations with Balkan states, for example, Buden wrote with alarm, "One of the most important elements in Croatian nationalist ideology—the dichotomous construct of 'Europe-Balkan'—will now be given a place in the basic document of the Croatian state, its Constitution!"[28] In an essay two weeks later on the popular demonstrations against Milošević in Belgrade, Buden put the binary opposition to an ideological use of his own. Buden praised Serbian citizens for finally rising up against Milošević, writing that, in doing so, they had become a symbol of "Europe." Juxtaposing the democratic demonstrations in Serbia with the complacency of Croatians

27. *Novi List*, 6 June 1997.
28. Buden, "Mission Impossible," 9. *Palanka* is a term coined by the Serbian philosopher Radomir Konstantinović, which is related to the English term "provincialism" but carries only its negative connotations of prejudice, close-mindedness, and cultural isolation.

towards the Tuđman regime, Buden argues that Zagreb, not Belgrade, is the true "Balkan *Palanka*."[29]

Neither Tuđman nor Gotovac would call Zagreb Balkan, let alone using the terminology of Serbian philosopher. However, Buden is reluctant to categorically define Zagreb as more "primitive" than Belgrade, conceding that there is a "possible objection that not everyone in Zagreb is a primitive Balkanite and that there are absolutely and relatively far more of that kind in Belgrade."[30] Although his intention is to incite protest, to spark more dramatic resistance to the Tuđman regime, Buden shares the underlying Balkanist orientation that "Balkan" is associated with all that is dark and, conversely, "Europe" with all that is light.

We draw several conclusions from these three cases. First, these examples illustrate how Balkanism pervaded Croatian political discourse throughout the 1990s. Tuđman, Gotovac, and Buden all utilize a Balkanist framework in their political rhetoric, despite their significantly different ideological standpoints and political objectives. As Verdery argues, "To the extent that debate promotes unspoken agreement—however circumscribed—on certain fundamental premises, then one can speak of this as a 'legitimating outcome' or 'legitimating moment.' "[31] The unspoken agreement or "legitimating outcome" of Croatian political discourse in the 1990s, in other words, was defining Croatian identity as European in opposition to the Balkans. This fundamental construction was also evident in academic analyses of the phenomena. For example, when an interviewer asked Ivan Siber, professor of political science at Zagreb University, "How do you comment on the slogan of the HDZ 'Tuđman, and not the Balkan?' " Siber responded, " 'Tuđman, and not the Balkans is a distinctly Balkan slogan. . . . The *kontrapunkt* to the Balkans is Europe not Tuđman."[32] The point here is not to simply expose the

29. Referring to the recent display of Serbian civil disobedience, Buden writes that "until such demonstrations and things like it happen in our city, Zagreb will not be symbol of freedom, democracy, Western culture and European civil identity, but will remain a small, shitty, beat-up, Balkan '*Palanka*'." "A tko to Zagreb šini palankom?" *Arkzin*, 14 January 1997.
30. Buden, "A tko to Zagreb šini palankom?" 24.
31. Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu's Romania*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 11.
32. Martina Stažnik, "Kontrapunkt balkanu je europa, a ne Tuđman" [The Alternative to the Balkans Is Europe, Not Tuđman], *Studentski List*, 24 February 1997.

use of Balkanist rhetoric in public discourse but to show how Balkanism was a key discursive means of articulating Croatian national identity in the 1990s.

A second insight from these examples of Balkanism lies in the tension between the insistence of concretizing Croatia's place in "Europe" and awareness that its status as European is ontologically insecure. For instance, Tuđman repeatedly insisted that Croatia's fourteen-century old European cultural heritage ensured that Croatia would quickly return to its rightful place in Europe. At the same time, however, Tuđman pursued an aggressive lobbying campaign at home and abroad to promote Croatia's Europeaness and to resist being identified as Balkan by European leaders. Similarly, Gotovac frequently asserted Croatia's Central European identity, yet noted Croatia's absence from meetings of Central European states. Buden claimed that while Belgrade is symbolically more European, there are numerically more primitive Balkanites in Belgrade than in Zagreb. All three figures, in other words, insist that Croatia belongs to Europe in a secure ontological sense, yet none can ignore Croatia's fall from grace throughout the 1990s. Each knows that those on the periphery of Europe are particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of the changing social and political map of Europe. They are aware, like Todorova asserts, that " 'Europe' ends where politicians want it to end."[33]

Finally, while all three of these political actors share the same discursive Balkanist frame of Europe/Balkan, each imbues these categories with different meaning. The positive attributes that Tuđman, Gotovac, and Buden attribute to "Europe" vary. Tuđman clearly focused on the cultural cachet of Europe as well as the political and military security that comes with European membership. Gotovac mobilized his opposition to Tuđman around a liberal conception of Europe that entailed a respect of the parliamentary rule of law, democratic norms, and the sanctity of rights. Buden evoked the European tradition of antiauthoritarianism and political protest to inspire resistance against the Tuđman regime. Each construction of Europe

33. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 139.

reflected each man's respective vision of Croatia's future. All three political agendas were imagined within the confines of Balkanism. In the following section, we suggest how this Balkanism framework might be challenged or "reimagined" as a site of political engagement and critique.

Concluding remarks: Reimagining the Balkans

As we have shown above, Balkanism—a dichotomous and essentialist system of representations embodied in stereotypes around which Europe has set itself apart from a Balkan "other"—has served a discursive means by which Croats would liberate themselves from their perceived Balkan burden and return to Europe. When Croatia found itself in the position of being both a recipient and purveyor of Balkanist stereotypes, it spurred a number of different responses. It stimulated anti-Western backlash, intensified efforts to distinguish Croatia more aggressively from its Balkan neighbors, and resulted, in some cases, in an internalization of these stereotypes, either through a kind of self-hatred or through the promotion of an internal hierarchy based on Balkanist criteria. This change in fortune provoked little critical inquiry in Croatia as to *why* the discourse of Balkanism developed and continues to have such salience in Europe and its periphery. Most criticism directed toward the West stemmed from resentment at not being recognized as European—or for being misrecognized as Balkan.

Todorova and others in the Balkanist tradition have taken up this task. Many analysts attribute the extreme nationalism and ethnic violence that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia to primordial hatreds and a proclivity toward violence unique to the Balkans (and, subsequently, antithetical to the Western Enlightenment tradition).[34] Todorova suggests that the Yugoslav conflicts in the 1990s, wrongly attributed to some Balkan essence,

34. Notable examples include Robert Kaplan, *Balkan Ghosts* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); George Kennan, "Introduction: The Balkan Crises: 1913 and 1993," in *The Other Balkan Wars: A 1913 Carnegie Endowment Inquiry in Retrospect with a New Introduction and Reflections on the Present Conflict by George F. Kennan* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1993).

actually marked the ultimate Europeanization of the Balkans.[35] Similarly, Slavoj Žižek suggests that what Europe may be afraid to recognize in the recent Yugoslav war is the violent origin of its own system of nation-states. The modern European system of sovereign states, Žižek reminds us, is "the result of several centuries of social engineering—ethnic and religious war and expulsions accompanying the process of centralization—triggered by a fundamental hostility to heterogeneity. Which in the end brought about relatively homogeneous politics produced by the development of modern nation-states."[36]

When Yugoslavia disintegrated, what some might term its "Ottoman legacy"—characterized by multinational statehood, decentralization, and regional diversity—was finally reorganized into the nationalist rubric of a centralized state system and a single unified national culture. Since Croatia was recognized in 1991 as an independent state, Croatia has been engaged in such a nationalizing project. Tuđman placed the Dalmatian and Istrian regions under Zagreb control. His regime also promoted a single unified culture through institutions such as Matica Hrvatska that work to "preserve" the purity of Croatian language and culture. In general, official Croatia has systematically worked toward the production of an exclusively Croatian nationhood and its historical imaginary into the institutional tissue of its state, a project that most European states have long since "achieved." This issue certainly warrants further study, not simply to better understand the particularities of Croatian nationalism; one can consider how the project of radical nation building is embedded in the very project of modernization and Europeanization.[37]

What are some of the political consequences of entangling this nation-building process with Balkanism and within a cultural hierarchy that privileges all that is "European" over all that is "Bal-

35. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 29.
36. Slavoj Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment* (London: Verso, 1994), 13.
37. Examples of research on this relationship include Petr Drulák, ed., *National and European Identities in EU Enlargement: Views from Central and Eastern Europe* (Prague, Czech Republic: Institute of International Relations, 2001); Lene Hansen, "Slovenian Identity: State Building on the Balkan Border," *Alternatives* 2:4(1996): 473-95; Merje Kuus, "European Integration in Identity Narratives in Estonia: A Quest for Security," *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (2002): 91-108; Mikko Lagerspetz, "Postsocialism as a Return: Notes on a Discursive Strategy," *East European Politics and Societies* 15 (1999): 377-390.

kan"? For one, any organization of Croatian identity along dichotomous Balkan/European lines masks Croatian ethnic preoccupations with the Serbs. Among many Croats, Serbs are seen as the epitome of a Balkan people. Defining "Croatianess" in opposition to "Balkaness" fosters animosity toward Croatia's largest minority and important neighbor. Moreover, by deploying Balkanism against those to its south and east, Croatians accept a social hierarchy based on cultural characteristics that, as we have shown, has hindered Croatia's own European membership aspirations. In other words, although Croatia might define itself as more European vis-à-vis Serbia according to cultural and geographic criteria, it is ultimately the European Union that determines Croatia's geopolitical status. This strategy of differentiation appears increasingly problematic given that Croatia is destined to remain with Serbia in the European Union's "Western Balkans" group of applicant states for the foreseeable future.

Croatia's perceived failure to be recognized as European does not necessarily have to result in an externalization or internalization of cultural hierarchies. We share Žižek's cautious optimism that by being forced to live out and sustain the competing and often contradictory demands of the national and transnational, the inside/outside, Central and East Europeans are located in a privileged position to invent creative ways out of this dilemma.[38] Croatia has an ideal vantage point from which to articulate such a narrative, for Croatia has long been placed on both sides of important historical and geographical divides: classified as both Byzantine and Catholic, Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian, Eastern and Western, Balkan and European. At times, Croatians have embraced this in-between position, causing Croatian nationalist Eugen Kvaternik to proclaim in 1868, for example, "Croats are the most magnificent nation in Europe. They took possession of this blessed country and forever developed a true way of communicating between the Christians of the East and the Christians of the West. Show me a feat such as that in any other contemporary nation!"[39] More typically, Croatians have either enthusiasti-

38. Slavoj Žižek, *The Spectre Is Still Roaming* (Zagreb, Croatia: Arkzin, 1999)
39. Eugen Kvaternik, *Istoćno pitanje i hrvati,* (Zagreb, Croatia: Dom i svijet, 1999 [1868]), 3.

cally or grudgingly accepted their role as the "defense walls of Christianity" *(antemurale christianitatis)*, tasked to defend Western culture against the East.[40] For the most part, they have considered this border identity as an obstacle to achieving their own autonomous nation-state and privileged place in Europe. Croatians might turn to the experiences of other peripheral European states to begin to explore the "radical ambivalence" of being situated in this middle ground.[41]

Todorova suggests that it may be hardly realistic to expect nation-states designated as Balkan to create a "liberal, tolerant, all-embracing identity celebrating ambiguity and a negation of essentialism" in the face of "persistent hegemonic discourse from the West, continuously disparaging about the Balkans, which sends out messages about the politicization of essentialized cultural differences."[42] What is genrally true of nation-states in general is perhaps more true of Croatia given the trauma of its recent past. Much of contemporary cultural studies focus on the potential for cultural resistance in the appropriation and redeployment of dominant discourses or the search for organic counterhegemonic articulations. The notion that individuals—or, by extension, nations—can shape their own processes of signification fails to examine the degree to which this process is bound by larger historical and structural factors. It is important to consider Sherry Ortner's reminder that "culture controls the definitions of the world for actors, limits their conceptual tools, and restricts their emotional repertoires."[43] Acknowledging these constraints, it is always possible for those objectified by categories to reappropriate them, make them one's own, give them new meaning, and thereby redirect them as forms of political engage-

40. Đurđa Knežević, *The Enemy Side of National Ideologies: Croatia at the End of the 19th Century and in the First Half of the 20th Century*, History Department Working Paper Series II (Budapest, Hungary: Central European University, 1995), 107.
41. Stephen Slemon, "Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World," *World Literature Written in English* 30 (1990): 30.
42. Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, 59.
43. Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Social History* 26:1(1984): 126-66, quoted in Mattijs van de Port, *Gypsies, Wars and Other Instances of the Wild: Civilisation and Its Discontents in a Serbian Town* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 93.

ment and critique.[44] Therefore, just as many African Americans worked to turn racist representations on their head, Croatians might one day declare that "Balkan is beautiful."

44. David Theo Goldberg writes of race, but which could be true of the Balkans, "although race has tended historically to define conditions of oppression, it could, under a culturalist interpretation—and under some conditions perhaps—be the site of a counterassault, a ground or field for launching liberatory projects or from which to expand freedom(s) and open up emancipatory spaces." David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 211.