

Winter 2-23-2018

# Geopolitics And The Balkan Other: The Uses Of “Balkanism” In NATO Expansion

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## Recommended Citation

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University of San Francisco

**Geopolitics And The Balkan Other: The Uses Of “Balkanism” In NATO Expansion**

An honors thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the distinction of

Honors

in the International Studies Department

in the College of Arts and Science

by

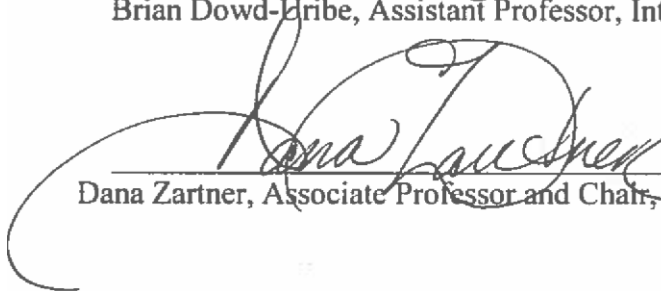
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January 2018

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## **ABSTRACT**

Montenegro's 2017 accession to NATO signaled an increased geopolitical interest in the Balkan region. Since then, governments and news sites have discussed the question of what is next for NATO in the Balkans. Similarly, a number of high-level US officials have recently travelled to the region in order to promote Western integration and NATO membership. Their discourses to encourage NATO expansion problematically coincide with discourses that "other" the region through pejorative representations. This paper interrogates this paradox by examining discourses on NATO expansion to Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia from the perspective of the US, the alliance's largest funder. It does so by analyzing the discourse of the US government-funded news site, Voice of America. It then assesses whether domestic political elite actors adopt the negative balkanist discourses of the US. By exploring the connection between current political discourses on the Balkans and representations identified by previous scholarship, I find that American media as well as Balkan politicians counter intuitively manipulate negative representations of the Balkans and historical narratives as a geopolitical discursive device for encouraging NATO expansion.

## **KEYWORDS**

Othring, Balkans, Voice of America, Representation, NATO, Geopolitics

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

There are number of people who made a significant contribution to my work through their advice, support, and feedback. Firstly, I would like to thank Professor Brian Dowd-Uribe for his guidance on this project throughout the semester. Next, I am indebted to Professor Filip Kovacevic for allowing me to spend countless office hours discussing my project and drawing on his expertise of the Balkans. In addition, I want to thank my family and friends for reading multiple drafts of this paper, including Hannah Bendiksen, Sophia Page, and Chari Bryan. Finally, I am grateful to my parents and siblings for supporting me through the challenging process of completing this thesis.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of “othering” typically infers the construction of an outsider to contrast with the self. This contrast of the “other” is useful as a process of exclusion but also as a means to define the self. That countries in positions of power have “othered” different regions is well-known among academic circles. There is little controversy in saying that Europe historically “othered” various continents followed later by North America as it rose to power. However, not all “others” are outside the usual confines of the West. The Balkans, while geographically in southeast Europe, continue to endure negative stereotyping from western media. These negative representations are not new. Writers since the eighteenth century have employed such tropes that became especially popular later in Victorian Britain. Yet these representations have repercussions in the current political perceptions of the Balkans. Even mainstream academic groups are not free from such discourses on the Balkans.

During a three-month research program in Geneva, Switzerland, I was fortunate to be among highly knowledgeable students of international politics from some of the most selective schools in the US. Their sophisticated critical thinking and attention to accuracy awed me. Hence, I was surprised to find a careless concern for accurately speaking of the Balkans, something I noted as I conducted research on the EU candidates in the Western Balkans. One colleague asked if I was going to visit “Yugoslavia was it?” for my research. I stifled a retort about my ability to time travel to a country that has not existed since the 1990s. Another friend was shocked to learn that my family is Lebanese. He would guess I must be Slovenian or the like since the Balkans were my subject of choice. The comments of my colleagues suggest that the Balkans are too unimportant to be the subject of study for more than personal satisfaction.

However, recent geopolitical events denote that the region is of some strategic interest for western multilateral institutions. On June 5, 2017, Montenegro joined NATO as the 29<sup>th</sup> member of the Euro-Atlantic military alliance after the other 28 members ratified its accession. Major media outlets suggest a reinvigorated focus on the region. As the title of an article published by a foreign policy think-tank says, “Montenegro is in NATO. What's next for the Western Balkans?” (Zeneli, 2017). A plethora of news sources from NATO member countries have explained the significance of these small countries for the alliance. The consensus is that these countries are too vulnerable to the potential influence of their eastern neighbors, such as Russia and China, to

be left outside of NATO's folds. This comes along with a timeline of increased suspicions between the US and Russia, following the charges of the latter's meddling in US elections. As I will later show, the desire to have these countries join NATO is especially evident from the public statements of numerous US and Western European politicians.

What is problematic, however, is that this encouragement to join NATO has in no way diminished the negative stereotyping of the region. My findings demonstrate that western media continues to portray them in terms of exaggerated backwardness, pettiness, and even barbarity. Thus, there is a strange contradiction of NATO "othering" the Balkans while simultaneously urging their inclusion. In this paper, I examine the purpose of negative Balkan representations in the context of NATO expansion. My use of the term 'NATO expansion' refers to discourses that encourage an agenda of expanding NATO membership. By exploring the connection between current political discourses on the Balkans and previously established representations, I find that western media and Balkan politicians counter intuitively manipulate negative representations of the Balkans as a discursive device for encouraging NATO expansion.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study of "othering" is inherently interdisciplinary, spanning multiple academic fields and theories. At its core, the notion of the "other" is a philosophical concept concerning knowledge, identity, and the relationship between the two. A noteworthy departure for understanding theories of the "other" rests in Hegelian philosophy. Frances Berenson (1982) explains how Hegel's philosophy suggests that one cannot understand the self merely through introspection. People do not exist in isolation. Here the "other" is a crucial part of one's knowledge of the self. Thus, the understanding of a self-identity is tied within one's relationships with others. This concept influenced a range of prominent scholars in fields ranging from feminism (de Beauvoir, 1949) to post-colonial studies (Said, 1978). As Andrew Cole says of Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, it "has to be Hegel's most well-known contribution to critical theory, finding a place [...] fundamentally in any critical discourse that wrestles with some idea of the 'other' as that against which you define yourself" (2004, 578).

However, in the defining of the self against the "other," the process of self-identification also impacts the identity of the other. Hence, the frequent uses of the term "gaze" in literature on

“othering” (Mulvey 1975; Derrida and Wills transl. 2002). This idea has roots in Lacanian psychoanalysis, particularly Jacques Lacan’s renowned “mirror stage” whereby a child gazes in the mirror and recognizes itself as also an object in the world (Johnston, 2016). The idea of the influence of the “gaze” is not only about self-awareness but also how a “gaze” influences the identity of the “gazed” upon. Stuart Hall, a Jamaican scholar of cultural studies, exemplifies this in recounting how a child exclaimed “Look, Mama, a black man” and for the first time the man knew who he was (2000, 147). Hall demonstrates how one learns about one’s own identity not just from meeting an “other” but also from how the other perceives him. If one imagines all individuals as “others” to one another, then identity, and knowledge of identity, is a negotiation between mutual, as well as plural, “gazes.” The “gaze” of one can also impose an identity on another and thus gives some control of identity to the “gaze” of others.

In examination of collective identities, the literature increasingly focuses on the connection between knowledge and identity in relation to dynamics of power or dominance. In his influential work on prison inmates, Michael Foucault builds on ideas such as the “gaze,” showing how by possibility of constant observation, the prison guards exercise control over the inmates. He finds similar structures of control and domination pervasive in societal institutions and disciplines (1975). This leads Foucault, within this work and others, to his famous concept of power/knowledge. In essence, knowledge controls its subjects and hence exercises power over them. The two are unavoidably entwined. Institutional discourses are tools of this power/knowledge that produce rules and confines for how people think about a given object and hence the kind of knowledge produced on it thereafter (1976; 1969). It is the connection between institutional or systemic discourse and power that makes a Foucauldian analysis especially salient for geopolitics and for this study. The discourse of the powerful becomes the dominant one and hence the less powerful lose agency over their representations. Edward Said’s influential work explicitly makes the tie between geopolitics and a Foucauldian understanding of the power of discourse. Said establishes that through unequal power dynamics, Anglo-French discourses created representations of an inferior Orient and thus strengthened the European identity (1978, 3). Thus, Said’s research also shows how power in the Foucauldian sense ties into the concept of othering, as he bridges the concepts of Foucauldian discourse and a post-Hegelian “other” to contrast the self. Othering is more than the relationship that results from a contrast. As Mike

Crang argues, the “othering” of identities in geographical terms reveals the *unequal* relationships among groups (2013, 61).

It is the discursive construction of unequal identities that creates a process of othering as a mechanism of geopolitical power. Said reveals that Orientalist discourses were not merely a manifestation of power, but rather in themselves were a method of having authority over the Orient that complemented justification of colonial domination (1978). The Foucauldian influence in this is already evident from the connection between knowledge and power. However, it is important to note Said’s discussion of language as a hegemonic discourse. He claims that however much a scholar might strive for objectivity he cannot separate his human subjectivity from the influence of circumstances around him—in this case for an author in imperialist Britain to write of the Orient without the political knowledge of them as colonies (1978, 11). In this point, one again sees the Foucauldian concept that dominant discourse necessarily restrains one’s ways of thinking and hence the production of further knowledge reinforces the dominant discourse. This leads to a key consideration of intentionality of the discourse. If one cannot separate one’s knowledge from surrounding circumstances, then people may generate discourses of “othering” unintentionally and unconsciously. Said unambiguously states the texts are not a “nefarious plot to hold down” the Oriental world but “a *distribution* of geopolitical awareness” (1978, 12). However, there could be different levels of conscious use of such discourses. For example, a colonialist might well have believed the negative representations and then used them for an argument to expand colonial rule. In this case the person did not consciously use Orientalist discourse but rather spoke as they believed. However, one might say that his discourse was consciously for the purpose of colonial domination.

Intentionality becomes important methodologically for examining discourses. More specifically, it is not always possible to access the people who use a given discourse nor are they necessarily willing to share their intentions. This is especially the case considering that politicians are among the most prominent propagators of dominant geopolitical discourses. Hence, they are unlikely to explicitly state any motivations that would not do them political credit. Nevertheless Said’s argument allows us to transcend intentionality or conscious use of a discourse in a number of ways. Firstly, discourses inevitably influence the people’s further use of discourse whether or not they are conscious of it. Thus, the dominant discourses may subliminally affect politicians and other significant controllers of geopolitical discourse.



Considering the case of discourses inventing and informing a Western concept of the Orient, what is more significant than the intentions of people using a certain discourses is rather the impact of the discourse. Moreover, the discourse has real political impacts regardless of the intentions of the discourse or the extent to which one uses it consciously.

Thus far, the literature has established a number of important and interconnected concepts of the “other” and “othering.” Notably, how the “other” is a tool for self-knowledge, or in more self-serving terms, a tool of contrast for building an identity of superiority. This also functions as a “gaze” that imposes identity on the “other,” as in the case of Anglo-French discourses constructing an identity of the Orient. Dominant discourses are in themselves a method of rule, a type of power and not simply a manifestation of such. All of these ideas collude in balkanist discourses and the representations of the Balkans resulting from such discourse. Since the mid-1990s, a number of scholars have examined the conceptualization of both a larger Eastern Europe as well as the specific construction of southeast Europe’s Balkan identity. There is widespread agreement on the negative nature of these conceptualizations. Eastern Europe as a concept evokes a land characterized as backwards, barbarian, obfuscated, and liminal—defying comprehension through its ambiguous situation between the dichotomy of West and East (Wolf, 1994). Situated within the discourse of Eastern Europe, the common depiction of the Balkans further conjures images of a trivial people, inherently unstable, violent, and primitive (Todorova, 2009). This discursive practice of negatively characterizing southeastern Europe is the understanding of balkanist discourses to which I refer in this paper.

A number of initial works on this topic focus on the historical foundations underlying negative associations with Eastern Europe and the Balkans (Wolf, 1994; Goldsworthy, 1998). Essentially, all of the literature affirms the influence of travel-writing from various sources, including diplomats, journalists, and personal adventurers (Hammond, 2005, 2004; Hatzopoulos, 2003; Wolf, 1994; Goldsworthy, 1998). In Larry Wolf’s seminal work, he points out the enigmatic persistence of prejudiced conceptions of Central and Eastern Europe even after the fall of communism and asserts that these ideas are not founded on recent history alone. Wolf argues that Enlightenment Era intellectuals and travelers invented the concept of Eastern Europe, along with its geographically indefinite boundaries, in order to contrast it to a Western Europe. Thus, the conceptualizing of a ‘backwards,’ ‘barbarian’ Eastern Europe supported the construction of a ‘progressive,’ ‘civilized’ Western Europe (1994). The notion of Eastern Europe as the contrast

that enabled a construction of Western Europe has a neo-Hegelian element of the “other” as the defining of the self. Furthermore, it supports Crang’s apt description of othering as the construction of *unequal* identities.

Wolf provides a useful understanding of Western Europe’s processes of “othering” Eastern Europe in general, yet it does not explain the construction of a particular Balkan identity. Vesna Goldsworthy’s research notably addresses the peculiarities of this development. She describes a ‘colonialism of the mind’ whereby British literature exploited imageries of the Balkans for their entertainment industry, starting with travel writers and explorers, and followed by poets, novelists, and playwrights (1998). From Bram Stoker’s gothic *Dracula* (1897) to Graham Green’s thriller *Stamboul Train* (1932), one can easily observe the literary application of misappropriating concepts of Southeastern Europe. Despite their different focuses of region and timeline, Goldsworthy and Wolf’s arguments are similar in their overall structure. Both scholars maintain that the pejorative understanding of these lands is a self-serving construction of Western European foreigners’ imagination. In both cases, the idea of the western imagination foisting an identity on the Balkans functions as the imposition of a western “gaze” inflicting an identity on them.

Although Goldsworthy does not expressly frame her analysis in Saidian terms, the explanation of the historical formation of balkanism as akin to a mental colonization suggests this “othering” process might lend itself well to his analysis. However, there is a significant portion of works on balkanism devoted to inspecting its exact relationship to Orientalism (Todorova, 2009; Fleming 2000; Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 1992; Bakic-Hayden, 1995; Hammond, 2004; Dix, 2015; Buchowski 2006). The most frequently cited of these is Maria Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans*, in which she first coined the term balkanism. Ultimately, she concludes that while balkanism and Orientalism are similar phenomena, the former is not a subspecies of the latter. Todorova bases her argument partially on the differences in their representations. She contends that while Orientalism is about an imputed opposition, the balkanism is about an imputed ambiguity (Todorova, 2009). That it is common parlance to refer to the Balkans as a “crossroads” supports her argument. Thus, I hold that balkanism implies different tropes than Orientalism, more transitory between the East and West rather than directly oppositional. This ambiguity of the Balkans between East and West does not mean they cannot function as a contrast to the identity of those who other. In fact, the idea of the Balkans as

problematically the “East in the West and the West in the East” (Bakic-Hayden and Hayden, 1992, 1) is part of constructing them as an inner “other.” The Balkans still function as an opposing identity to the West. Their ambiguity is a facet of the identity imposed on them.

Despite a difference in the Oriental and Balkan identities, I nevertheless follow Said in maintaining that the negative representations of the Balkans function in a Foucauldian dynamic of discourse and power/knowledge whereby the West controls representations of the Balkans and maintains power over them. Essentially, I hold that the more important question is not whether the discourse on the Balkans is the same as Orientalism but whether it functions correspondingly in relation to power. Presenting an alternative way of examining the debate, K.E. Fleming disputes the utility of a Saidian approach in terms of geopolitical power, reasoning that the Balkans do not share the history of formal colonization that is essential to Said’s Orient. Nodding to the validity of Goldsworthy’s argument on cultural exploitation, Fleming still finds her ‘imperialism of the mind’ analogy an exaggerated approximation to the real domination of colonialism (2000, 1221). Rather than being an exaggeration, Goldsworthy’s argument of imaginative imperialism is merely one part of an argument that requires further development. More specifically, her work recounts this particular process of “othering” yet it does not demonstrate how it functions in geopolitical power dynamics or impacts the subordination of its object. She explains how Britain controlled perceptions of the Balkans without exploring the uses of such misconceptions beyond the literary industry that created it.

While there is substantial research on the origins of balkanism and its place among scholarly theory, fewer works have concentrated on the actual uses of balkanist discourse for influencing the region’s situation vis-à-vis international politics. This is the case both in the beginning periods of balkanist discourse and thereafter. Among the few scholars who address this question, Andrew Hammond’s contribution is especially helpful. While illuminating Britain’s uses of Balkan stereotypes, he simultaneously completes the missing piece of Goldsworthy’s ‘colonialism of the mind.’ Investigating the period of 1850 to 1914, he successfully maintains that textual misrepresentations of the Balkans justified systems of political and economic domination in a manner similar to colonialism. He contends that British balkanist discourse facilitated their political strategy of securing stability in southeast Europe and harmony among Great Powers. In effect, it portrayed the Balkans as a “subordinate culture available for Great Power manipulation” (Hammond, 2004, 605). Thus, while not colonizing the

Balkans themselves, British discourse supported the domination of other powers in the Balkan region. Hammond's work contradicts arguments such as Fleming's that overlook the geopolitical interests of the 'imaginative colonizers.' However, although he connects balkanism to its greater geopolitical and material impacts, his research does not explain why balkanism remains a geopolitical tool in the present day. This is a significant issue since, as I will show throughout this paper, the balkanist discourses are still in evident use.

Academics have published little on the geopolitical uses of balkanism in the twenty-first century. Merje Kuus does analyze an Orientalist discourse surrounding western multilateral expansion, arguing that it presents essentialist differences between an Eastern and Western Europe (Kuus, 2004). However, her research specifically examines Central-East Europe rather than the peculiar circumstances of Southeast Europe. Filip Kovacevic has published the most current article related to my study, focusing on the Southeast European country of Montenegro. Closely preceding the state's accession to NATO, he argues that Montenegro's political elite obscured the neo-colonialist agenda of the military alliance, portraying it as the solution of perpetual peace, civilization, and the future. This is a result of their legitimacy depending on the verdicts of Western capitals rather than the will of the people (2017). Kovacevic demonstrates the reverse effect of balkanism. Rather than focusing on western processes of "othering," he shows the identity such balkanist discourses support by contrast—that of a more enlightened western NATO. Yet, as the previous literature shows, these concepts have a Western European and US origin. Hence, one can think of the Montenegrin political elite as assuming the identity of the Western "gaze" or perspective on them.

Despite little explanation of the current geopolitical uses of balkanism, this is an increasingly pertinent question for several reasons. To begin, the discourse of balkanism is far from confined to its original British perpetrators or even Western Europe. As Goldsworthy demonstrated, the US inherited balkanist discourses from British entertainment (1998). Furthermore, as western countries and multilateral organizations such as the EU and NATO expand throughout Central, Eastern, and now Southeast Europe, involvement in the region is overt rather than "imaginative" which strengthens its connection to Hammond's argument that representations of the Balkans have real political impacts. This does not mean that the discourses are more consciously used as some conspiracy. I do not intend to argue that each political statement I examine in this paper intentionally follows a template of balkanist discourse; rather,

the discourse is a blend of degrees of consciousness. A certain statement may unknowingly reflect balkanist discourse but consciously use discourse for encouraging NATO expansion. Similarly, news sites may present a story that is unconsciously balkanist and not specifically intended for a NATO agenda. Nevertheless both the intentional and unintentional balkanist discourses blend together to contribute to the representation of the Balkans that justifies their subordination.

Understanding the dominance of discourse on the Balkans to be pervasive rather than particular to individual intentions, I aim to fill a small portion of the unexplored connection between balkanism and its geopolitical uses in the twenty-first century in three ways. First, I focus specifically on the US perspective of the Balkans as the present-day inheritors of balkanist discourse. Second, as Hammond did of early periods, I investigate how representations of the Balkans are a discursive form of power over the Balkans in a highly current time frame. Finally, I analyze the connection between the western use of balkanist discourses and Kovacevic's explanation of how the Balkan political elite represent the image of a superior NATO to their people.

## **METHODS AND ANALYSIS**

In examining the modern geopolitical uses of balkanist discourses, I chose to review the discourses surrounding NATO expansion. NATO is a Euro-Atlantic military alliance founded in 1949 at the instigation of the Truman Administration. Originally, it served as a North American and Western European defense collective to protect against Soviet Union expansion. Today NATO has expanded to include many European countries previously part of the Soviet Union. In addition, a number of states that were part of the non-aligned former Yugoslavia acceded to the organization as well. These are symbolically significant additions in consideration of NATO's history with the region and its multiple interventions in Balkan state relations. During the breakup of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s, NATO conducted airstrikes against Serbia. Purportedly this has left bitter feelings among parts of the population. I chose NATO expansion in the Balkans as a case study due to the timely nature of the topic. June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 marked the accession of Montenegro, a former Yugoslav republic situated on the Adriatic coast, as the 29<sup>th</sup> member of NATO. This event signals its current interest in the region. Furthermore,

Montenegro's accession has sparked questions about the pending expansion for the alliance and the future of the Balkans.

The Balkans is an indefinite term for certain southeast European countries. Typically it includes all of the former Yugoslav states, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo, and Slovenia. Additionally it includes Bulgaria, Albania, sometimes Romania and Turkey, and occasionally Greece. The Western Balkans is a term that developed not long ago to describe those countries in the region seeking EU membership. I selected Serbia, Macedonia, and BiH for the focus of this study. While Macedonia's name in the United Nations is the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), I will refer to it by its shorter name for the sake of brevity. Likewise I will refer to BiH as Bosnia. My reason for selecting these three countries is simple. Surrounded on all sides by NATO, these three countries are the only states on the Balkan Peninsula that are not members of the alliance. Kosovo presents the one exception. However, since Kosovo has not achieved international recognition as a sovereign state even from all of the NATO members, it is not able to join in the near future. Macedonia and Albania have declared their aspirations to join NATO and are working with the alliance on their respective NATO Member Action Plans. Serbia on the other hand has declined to seek membership and declared military neutrality. As I will argue later, NATO does not consider this the last word on Serbia's Euro-Atlantic integration. In fact, Serbia has conducted joint military exercises with NATO.

Furthermore, I focus particularly on the United States' contribution to balkanist discourse on Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. My motive for this choice is the US's longstanding position as the leading power of NATO. As mentioned above, the US was the original coordinating power during the Cold War as the other countries rebuilt their infrastructure post-World War II. Having never relinquished this role, the US is by far the most significant funder, providing just over 22% of the budget. This is in comparison to the next largest, Germany, at about 14% (Funding NATO, 2017). In addition, numerous scholars acknowledge the US as the controlling interest of NATO (Goldgeier, 2010; Zoran, 2002; Walker, 1995). Finally, the US has signaled a recent focus on the region in tandem with NATO as signified by Vice President Mike Pence's visit to the Balkans this summer.

As this study is discursive, I analyze the qualitative data of written documents and verbal comments. In order to answer my research question, I examine the discourse of a news outlet, and several government actors quoted therein, in regards to NATO expansion in the Western Balkans. I analyze the US government's employment of balkanist discourse by investigating Voice of America (VOA), a government-funded news site founded in 1942 to provide the US perspective of current events for foreigners. Due to the role of the US government as their funder, I consider them a more explicit expression of the government's perspective than other US media. This choice is supported by the fact that other scholars, such as David Krugler (2000) and Steven Casey (2008), have used this medium in discussions on US propaganda. Using the names of the countries as three separate search terms, I read all the results from March of 2017, the month when the US ratified Montenegro's accession to NATO, through mid-October. I examine how the US, through VOA, depicts these three countries and whether their constructions of them constitute balkanism. To accomplish this, I look for whether or not they construct images similar to those established by previous scholars. This could include direct use of pejorative descriptions such as 'backwardness,' 'volatility,' 'barbarity,' and 'liminality.' I also assess if one might reasonably consider any depictions as implicit balkanist constructions. For example, if in discussing an issue in one of these countries, an article harks back to the country's history of issues, it may denote balkanist discourse of blaming the region's problems on an inherently unstable character. Furthermore, I consider how these articles relate the balkanist discourse to NATO.

Additionally, I analyze the Serbian, Macedonian, and Bosnian governments' positions on NATO. I collect this data through the public statements of government officials as well as press conferences. These I collected from the NATO Newsroom and the official websites of each government. The particular individuals include presidents and prime ministers, as well as foreign and defense ministers. I determine if and how these government officials reflect the balkanist perspectives in their own discourse of their countries in relation to potential NATO membership. I do this in order to examine whether the US balkanist discourses affect the discourse of the Balkan political elite. More particularly, this allows me to determine what connection there is between the Western "othering" of the Balkans and Kovacevic's explanation of how the Montenegrin discourses support NATO and alienate the political elite from the will of the people. I do so by comparing the domestic political elite's statements with the content I analyze

in the news sites. I examine their commitment to NATO and how they portray their own countries in relation to it. For example, I ask whether they stress negative or positive developments in the country and whether they state that NATO will help or hinder progress. In determining the US/NATO's uses of balkanism and how it connects to the domestic governments, I show whether domestic political discourses assume the dominant discourse of the West. This would both demonstrate another way in which balkanism functions for the expansion of NATO with the transferences of US balkanist discourses to the domestic political elite.

While I believe the process outlined above will amply demonstrate a current use of balkanism, it has two main limitations. Due to constraints of time, I have only focused on one governmental news site. This study could benefit from an examination of other government-funded news outlets, such as Radio Free Europe. Furthermore, a study on the current uses of balkanism in a more widely-read, non-governmental newspaper would help to show the pervasiveness and dominance of balkanist discourses. Finally, there is a limitation in my collection of sources that may bias the outcome. I am only able to use sources that are in English. This limited my access to the discourses of the domestic political elite. In particular, this renders Bosnia's official website inaccessible for this project. However, given my particular focus on the US and the widespread use of English in multilateral affairs, I was able to find data on Bosnian discourse from the NATO newsroom.

## **FINDINGS**

### **The Balkans as unstable**

In the past months, Voice of America (VOA) continually emphasized a sense of deeply disturbing volatility in the Western Balkans. Notably, they measure the supposed extent of volatility against progress made towards integration in western institutions. This places particular focus on those countries that have yet to join either the EU or NATO. VOA impresses the reader with the mired confusion of the region by highlighting Euro-Atlantic centric statements from the US, NATO, and EU officials, and sometimes those of local politicians as well. Stressing the negative circumstances of the region, they cite political tension, radicalism, and backwards conditions in Macedonia, Bosnia, and Serbia. Thus, they help disseminate a negative image of Balkans to the rest of the world. However, they do not rely solely on modern issues of Bosnia,



Serbia, and Macedonia. Rather, VOA manipulates historical narratives to complete the depiction of incorrigible Balkan instability. This in turn produces a justification of the need for western multilateral expansion as a historically-grounded answer to a historical problem.

When considering VOA's frequent spotlight on Western officials' opinions of the Western Balkan region, the instances of derogatory discourses are manifold. One article announces that "the defense chiefs of NATO member countries were holding their annual conference this year in the Albanian capital of Tirana to discuss fighting terrorism, the situation in the Western Balkans and the new U.S. strategy on Afghanistan" (Associated Press, 2017). Vaguely referencing the 'situation' of the region, the article implies that this situation requires no defining. The fact that there is a 'situation' in the Western Balkans, existing within the scope of NATO's agenda, is apparently so commonly understood that there is no need to specify or justify. Whatever the dynamics of the situation are in the Balkans, it is obvious enough to be lumped in with terrorism.

Among the myriad officials who feature in VOA, US Congressman John McCain provides a typical example of their perspectives in his comments after a tour of the region in April, 2017:

"In the Baltics we are doing some very interesting and useful things," McCain said, referring to U.S.-NATO troop rotations, the stockpiling of military hardware and the formation of a rapid-reaction force designed to counter Russian military aggression, such as Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea. "And yet, to a large degree, we seem to be ignoring arguably the most volatile place in Europe [the Western Balkans]" (Djurdjic, 2017).

Referring to the Western Balkans as the "most volatile place in Europe," McCain "others" the region even as he claims it for Europe and following from that, the West. He implies that the other issues claiming NATO's attention in Europe are mere distractions from the real issue—the Balkans. His comments lead to the impression both that this region is trivial and simultaneously in dire need of oversight. The Western Balkans are easy to ignore, yet they urgently require supervision and control over their violent tendencies.

While there is often little differentiation between countries in discourses on the Balkans, the lack of membership in either the EU or NATO render the three countries of this study particularly apt examples for VOA to draw upon. Hence, these three countries are most frequently mentioned in the context of Balkan volatility. One article claims "the Western

Balkans now appear to be at their most tense in at least a decade,” citing an “unresolved political crisis in Macedonia” as well as “growing discord between Bosnia's ethnic leaders” (Associated Press, 2017). Another points out “relations between Serbia and its former war foes Bosnia and EU member Croatia have soured in recent months, while political instability threatens Macedonia to the south” (Associated Press, 2017) With words such as ‘unresolved,’ ‘growing,’ ‘threatens,’ and ‘tense,’ VOA constructs an image of a region fueled with the flammable material of instability, ready to erupt into a fire of volatility.

VOA particularly, though not exclusively, stresses the volatility of the region through discourse on their political situations. One report discusses Russian President Putin’s promised gift of a “delivery of fighter jets, battle tanks and armored vehicles to Serbia, the Balkan country's defense minister said Tuesday, in what could worsen tensions with neighboring states and trigger an arms race in the war-weary region” (Associated Press, 2017). Although the report already specifies Serbia as the country in question, which should imply its geographic position, it unnecessarily and redundantly stresses its Balkan location. However, it is not the location but rather the ‘war-weary’ Balkan *character* that the comment evokes. The news site shows Serbia as a country with anti-western foreign policy decisions fueling an already frictional atmosphere. Despite fewer sources on Bosnia overall, it nevertheless failed to avoid similar censures of its political environment. Following the Dayton Accord in 1995 that ended the Bosnian war, international mediation kept Bosnia as one country but with separate Bosniak-Croat and ethnic Serb regions. Regardless of NATO and the US’s involvement in the region, VOA expresses concern that “postwar Bosnia's two highly autonomous regions [...] largely eclipse a weak central cabinet in Sarajevo. This has meant that economic reforms and development often become hostage to ethnic politicking and conflicting visions of the nation's future” (Reuters, 2017). Connecting the conflict and the weak central cabinet, the comment claims that politics are trapped by a squabbling-people.

VOA most noticeably and effectively connects volatility to Macedonian politics. A plethora of articles followed violence in the parliament, accompanied with photos of angry people and bloodied politicians. VOA asserts that “European Union leaders and analysts say the mounting political confrontation could spin out of control, adding to increasing ethnic tensions across a destabilizing Balkans” (Dettmer, 2017). Again with words such as ‘mounting,’ the news source creates a sense of impending explosion. This is not to say that Macedonia does not have

political turmoil. Nor is the point that criticism of true political confrontation is inherently discriminatory. However, as before, they worry about the effect on the Balkan region as a whole. Political uproar in a country would conceivably have adverse impact on any neighbors. Their phrasing of adding tensions “across a destabilizing Balkans” shows that the concern is less about the issue of politics in Macedonia itself and more related to its potential as a fuse in the perceived power-keg nature of the Balkans. Similarly to the case of Bosnia, the news implicates the character of the people in addition to its more vague disapproval of the country: “Macedonia is in a deepening political crisis, sparked by a massive wiretap scandal two years ago that put the two main political parties at each other's throats” (Associated Press, 2017). The vivid imagery of violent body-language portrays the barbarity even of the country’s elite.

The US’s agenda in Macedonia becomes more apparent in the news stories after a change in government. After a government wiretapping scandal in 2015 undermined the administration of Nikola Gruevsk from the VMRO-DPMNE party, Macedonia has struggled to form a new government. Zoran Zaev who became prime minister on a confidence vote at the end of May 2017 runs on a platform of NATO and EU integration. On this topic, VOA writes approvingly: “the government of Prime Minister Zoran Zaev has placed its highest priority on reforms aimed at preparing Macedonia for integration into the Euro-Atlantic community” (Mirceski, 2017). The article continues to report that “political life has largely stabilized in the former Yugoslav republic since supporters of the previous conservative government stormed the parliament three months ago to try to prevent the transfer of power to Zaev's Social Democratic party” (Mirceski, 2017). Regardless of the dubious ability of a country ‘deep in political crisis’ to recover so completely in three months, the difference in their presentation of a country led by a US-favored politician is clear.

The representation of Zaev contrasts with “Macedonia’s former prime minister, Nikola Gruevski, [who] built his nine-year rule on nationalism and a rejection of Greek demands” (Reuters, 2017). Here the news source refers to a dispute between Macedonia and Greece over the former’s name. Essentially, Greece fears that the use of this name implies expansionist ambitions since the ancient kingdom of Macedonia included parts of Greece. There is a certain importance attached to this in terms of NATO as the dispute has led Greece to veto Macedonia’s accession for years. Hence, Gruevski’s unwillingness to concede to Greece’s demands for a name change de facto represents a greater separation from NATO. In this way the US shows

their preferred Prime Minister as a heroic figure amongst a country of generally barbarian politicians and people. In effect the presentation of the country closely relates to its accommodation of US interests.

While political discourses are more frequent in the data and hence provide a greater number of balkanist discourses, a general sense of Balkan undesirability is prevalent in other discourses as well. As Goldsworthy writes: “when not a theatre of war, the area (Balkans) seemed to inhabit the misty edges of perception” (1998, xi). Only considered worth attention during times of war, the Balkans maintain a mysterious quality. Similarly, Hammond identifies obfuscation as one of the qualities most enduringly associated with the Balkans (2005, 136). This perception of mistiness is evident in a VOA story about Fatima Bakhshi, a refugee migrant along the Balkan route (Associated Press, 2017). The report recreates the setting as Bakhshi “stays close to her mother and two sons, afraid she might lose them as they trudge through the cold Balkan darkness”. Through the coldness the reader feels her physical discomfort, but the mental fear comes from the “Balkan darkness.” The vague use of the Balkan adjective produces an impression of obscurity. Somewhere “on a road in southern Serbia, the 26-year-old's dream turns into a nightmare.” The article continues to tell how she was badly wounded and brought to a hospital. The article informs readers that Bakhshi represents the dangers facing women who travel through Eastern Europe, hoping to find “new lives in more prosperous countries to the west.” All she wanted was a life in Ireland. VOA tells how the international community saved her:

The United Nations refugee agency in Serbia, the UNHCR, has declared Bakhshi a refugee and offered to help resettle her in an as-yet-undecided third country where she can have access to better treatment than in impoverished Serbia. But the agency cannot guarantee it will be Ireland (Associated Press, 2017).

Hence, by stating that Bakhshi may not be able to go to Ireland but she will at least be removed from the ‘impoverished Serbia’, the article, through the UN, implies that anywhere is better than Serbia, the dark place where nightmares invade our hopes.

Another contribution to the emphasis on volatility in the region is the focus on rising radicalism. This is especially the case in discourses on Bosnia, where the Czech President warns there is “a risk Islamic State may form its European base in Bosnia” (Reuters, 2017). As an article on terrorism titled “Srpska Mufti: Acute Poverty, Jobless Youth Imperil Stability”

suggests, it is one of the many ways they accentuate pictures of instability. The article maintains “IS leaders tailored their propaganda to lure impoverished young Muslims affected by the small Balkan nation’s high youth unemployment rate and intermittent political paralysis” (Stegic, 2017). Through the Czech president’s comments, the VOA portrays a Bosnia of nesting terrorists. From the later article on jobless youth, it appears that the Balkan ‘situation’ of instability made populations vulnerable to radicalism, a point which easily combines with the sense of Balkan volatility. A violent unoccupied people will be more susceptible to terrorist recruitment. The US implicates the other non-NATO countries as well. For example, VOA asserts that “as one of the top recruiting centers for the Islamic State group, Macedonia is plagued with a growing risk of terrorism and violent extremism” (Mirceski, 2017). More explicitly, this line connects the terrorism and perception of violent Balkans. The use of disease language infers that terrorism and other Balkan issues are spreading contagions for which these countries lack a proper immune system. Goldsworthy likewise notices a tendency for the West to depict balkanism as a disease (1998, xi).

The purpose of this paper is not to deny the existence of challenges for the region. There is always the question of what truth there is to these depictions of the Balkans. However, what makes the focus on instability in the Balkans exceptional is the VOA’s consistent reference to recent and long-term history. The articles, whether directly or through quotes, connects all of the issues in the Balkans to their history. In the article on McCain, the congressman warns:

“It’s not in anybody’s interest to see the breakup of Macedonia. No one should ever, ever forget that two world wars were spawned at a bridge in Sarajevo, with the assassination of [Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria],” he said. “...I’m not predicting a world war or even conflict, but I am saying the tensions are rising and the situation is deteriorating” (Djurdjic, 2017).

Thus, he draws upon the less recent history of the Balkans to understand the dangers of the current ‘Balkan situation.’ This is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, he implies a connection between the beginning of the World Wars and the current challenges in Macedonia. The issues by this account are the children of the conditions that led to war in the first half of the twentieth century. The historical reference is irrelevant and exaggerated. In reality, there is no direct connection to be made between present political scandals and the world wars. VOA provides no explanation for how a wire-tapping scandal or ethnic and political disputes in present-day Macedonia relate to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Serb

nationalist in the current Bosnian capital at the outset of World War I. In this sense it is irrelevant.

Secondly, the statement is inaccurate in the extent of blame placed on the Balkans. By any historian's account, it would be a simplification of World War I to hold that the magnitude of the war was a necessary result of the single event that triggered it. Such a claim would ignore the preset tensions between the Great Powers and their various alliances. To reference the renowned WWI historian A. J. P. Taylor, even a small trigger could produce the explosion of WWI due to the rigidity imposed by the framework of Great Power alliances (1954). Moreover, also connecting the Balkans with the spawning of World War II appears to be a careless tool of rhetorical emphasis since by common understanding it began with Hitler's invasion of Poland. McCain muddles the countries as though there is no differentiating between Balkan countries. By irrelevantly connecting instability in these countries to their history (and each other's), he not only emphasizes a rising danger, but also asserts that this instability is inevitable. His comment reads as though these countries are volatile because they have always been so. This constructs a 'Balkan character' as the culprit of instability. It is the inference of this pejorative Balkan characterizing that particularly gives a quality of discrimination to the discourse.

After emphasizing a Balkans character of inherent instability, the US uses the resulting image of danger and confusion to justify NATO and Western involvement. VOA claims that the US and EU have striven for years "to bring an enduring peace to the Balkans" (Djordjic, 2017). From the discussion above, one can intuit that the US likely does not think these supposedly selfless efforts on behalf of the Balkans are yet over. The US sees NATO at the forefront of this engagement. While they take no credit for failures in the Balkans despite their extensive involvement, they are ready to claim the improvement. Quoting U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Thomas Shannon, VOA reports:

"Over decades, the promise of NATO membership and broader Euro-Atlantic integration has advanced our security, our democratic values, and our respect for the rule of law. It has served as an incentive for nations to pursue difficult reforms. This policy has yielded clear results" (Saine, 2017).

Thus, while they use NATO as a shining contrast to the impulsive Balkan barbarism, they simultaneously applaud the provision of a mirage-like incentive for reform. It indicates that NATO membership is the path out of volatility and towards a civilized democracy.

In other cases the news site states the need for US involvement more explicitly: “the ‘very dynamic and explosive situation in Macedonia’ [is] just one example of where increased U.S. advocacy and mediation will be vital to de-escalating regional tensions” (Djordjic, 2017). The message is that stability in the region entirely depends on outside intervention. An apt example of this dynamic is an article focusing on Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia, Hoyt Brian Yee: “They need our support and we realize that. [...] We intend fully to provide that support, but we need on the other side the political will, the resistance to corruption” (Kostreci, 2017). Yee stresses a kind of dependency relationship that the US encourages in the region. He maintains that if they can resist their ill political tendencies, the US will provide the support of which they are in dire need. In this manner, the US propagates a perception of Balkan instability that forms a wide disparity with the affirmative narratives of NATO and the dissemination of democratic values. This in turn portrays NATO as the civilized alternative to Balkan instability and propels the need for its expansion.

Just as VOA uses history to illuminate an explosive Balkan character, they also reference the past to suggest that Western involvement is the only solution. This includes more recent history as well: “the six Western Balkan nations, still scarred by wars fought in the 1990s and plagued by political and ethnic divisions, all hope eventually to join the EU” (Reuters, 2017). Thus, VOA indicates that the Balkan disease of conflict is the past and the EU is the future—the only way to exit the past is to abandon division and the way to leave behind these scars is to join the EU. Other articles connect NATO to this dynamic in addition, implicating the non-NATO countries more specifically: “the crisis is the worst since Western diplomacy helped drag the country of 2.1 million people back from the brink of civil war during an ethnic Albanian insurgency in 2001, promising it a path to membership of the European Union and of NATO” (Reuters, 2017). This paragraph references a history of NATO intervention to suggest that solutions are only possible through Western diplomacy and military force. Furthermore, in remarking that the situation is at the lowest point since the last NATO mission in the region, it indicates that present conditions may imminently necessitate further NATO military control.

### **The Balkans as threatening**

Although I argue above that the focus on instability itself produces the need for NATO expansion, it also plays into additional dynamics of US discourses on the Balkans. The

representation of the Balkans as inherently unstable leads to different nuances in the reasons for NATO expansion. These arguments go beyond the need to intervene for the sake of the Balkans themselves. The construction of inevitable Balkan volatility portrays the Balkans as a match that sets flame to dangerous conflict. In this sense, the discussion of the Balkans renders them threatening to the West. This is a typical construct of the imaginative colonial discourses of the nineteenth century. Discussing English words of Balkan origins, Goldsworthy exposes this representation, noting these “terms reflect the dread of insidious and - more worryingly - compliant ‘pollution’ of Western Europe by the Balkans, for only by mutual consent can the weaker corrupt the strong” (1998, 74). Thus, the West appropriates this long-standing Balkan trope to claim control of the region out of the necessity of self-preservation.

As with Balkan discourses in general, albeit in an ambiguous manner, history is essential to the concept of the threatening Balkans. The reports create the impression of their threatening nature through vaguely worded references of past experience. While certain ones name NATO specifically others merely present the ‘threat’ as implicating Europe or the general West. Even those that do not directly connect it to NATO nevertheless contribute to the image of the Balkans that then features in NATO-specific discourses. The news site provides the sense of a widespread threat through interviews with, and the comments of, European leaders. Germany’s Angela Merkel comments: “political stability in the region means political stability for us too. [...] We know this from experience” (Reuters, 2017). Similarly, the United Kingdom’s Theresa May warns of “the potential for increased instability and the risks ... to our collective security” (Reuters, 2017). In the same fashion, the German President fears what happens in the Balkans “is going to concern us and is going to have an impact on us. [...] We have not forgotten the conflict. We have not forgotten the violence in this region” (Muratovic, 2017). These comments appear as mere paraphrases of each other. Their uses of unspecified reference to past experience or memory invoke obfuscation and explosiveness, typical characteristics of the Western-constructed Balkan identity. The implication is that they must not ignore the precarious Balkans lest their conflict-prone nature spread violence to the West. In this way they also suggest that the West must not, through complicity, allow the weaker to corrupt the stronger. Similarly these leaders infer that Western Europe and the US must manage the Balkans or they are guilty of allowing the trifling countries to contaminate them with their issues.



While the connection to the historical discussion and current situation remains vague, the references are at times more specific. Reminiscent of McCain's comment above, VOA asserts:

It isn't often a political dispute in a country of just 2 million prompts the alarm of policymakers in Brussels or Washington, but disputes in the Balkans historically have had outsized consequences for Europe — from the 1914 assassination by a Bosnian Serb of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, which triggered the First World War, to the post-Cold War disintegration of the Yugoslav state that kicked off a decade of internecine warfare drawing in NATO (Dettmer, 2017).

In mentioning the diminutive size of Macedonia, followed by the remark of 'outsized consequences,' the report expects surprise on the reader's part at the attention paid such an insignificant country. As if to say, 'don't be fooled by their seeming inconsequence, history will teach you to fear the Balkans.' Thus, it concurrently trivializes the country as it inflates the threat of the Balkans. This image of the Balkans lends itself to external control. With language of Balkan violence 'drawing' NATO's interference, the article implies that the Balkans compelled a reluctant NATO to act in the Yugoslav wars. By connecting a current political dispute with the historical need, NATO appears to be as necessary in the region still today.

The threat of radicalism as a risk of increasing instability as discussed above, contributes to the threatening quality of Balkans in discourses as well. This is especially evident in articles on Bosnia. In one entitled "Bosnia to Pakistan to Prison: Ex-Fighter Reflects on Life," the story follows the life of a man who grew up a "suburban St. Louis kid" (Associated Press, 2017). At the age of 21 he was fighting alongside Bosnian Muslims and by ten years later he was convicted to serve 20 years in prison for helping his friends to join the Taliban. The news article is sympathetic to his plight and devotes several paragraphs to discussing the difference between him and terrorists: "'When I look back at myself, I don't see myself as an extremist,' he said. 'I see myself as being naive, romantic, a Don Quixote kind of guy.'" This focus on his naiveté shows his innocent nature. Thus, it appears natural that his romantic sensibilities would lead him to the mysterious and adventurous Balkans. At age 44, "and out of prison," VOA states, "he remembers Bosnia as both a highlight of his life and the place that launched him on a disastrous path." Stressing his gullibility in contrast to how he lost his way in Bosnia, the article removes any blame for his connection to conflicts. While in prison, he "often found himself as the advocate for moderation and tolerance." While highlighting his mild nature, the article thus leaves Bosnia as the factor of his downfall. If his natural inclinations were pure, the impetus for

following a ‘disastrous path’ had to come from outside—in this case, Bosnia. Thus, the VOA portrays Bosnia as the corrupter of an idealistic US Midwesterner. They use this story as a warning against the influence of the Balkans. The Balkans are apparently capable of threatening one’s conscience.

The references to radical links in the Balkans are not exclusive to Bosnia. VOA relates the recent visit of U.S. Representative Ted Poe of Texas to Serbia. Poe shared his concern with the VOA’s Serbian service that “the Balkans have seen an increase militant activity” and therefore “terrorism is one of the main reasons for a closer cooperation between the two countries” (Djordjevic, 2017). Through Poe’s statements to the VOA, one can observe first how the emphasis on the Balkans as a radical hotspot contributes to their appearance as threatening to the morals of the West. From there, the US uses it as a reason for increasing its involvement.

### **The Balkans as threatened**

VOA shows the threatening aspect of the Balkans as emanating from their foreign relations as well. In an article about a Russian humanitarian center, the US expresses apprehension “about a disaster relief center Russia is operating in Serbia, which some Western groups and military analysts see as a subtly disguised military base set up by the Kremlin to spy on U.S. interests in the Balkans” (Djordjic, 2017). Essentially, VOA identifies Serbia as a back-corridor through which other countries can access the US and underhandedly undermine it. Continuing, the article explains that the concern is this potential Kremlin spy outpost could be “in effect, a command center for Russia's disruptive response to EU enlargement and NATO's expansion in the region” (Djordjic, 2017). Thus, Serbia seems to threaten not only the US through its foreign connections but all of NATO. When VOA connects the danger of the Balkans’ foreign ties to their instability, it generates a discourse in which foreign influences also *threaten* the Balkans. The US presumes this threat comes from external sources, constantly referring to the dangers of ‘malign foreign influence.’ In particular, the US fears the intentions of Turkey, China, and Russia. The combination of portraying the Balkans as simultaneously threatening and threatened creates an urgency for NATO, the US, and the overall West to strengthen control of the region.

In considering this ‘threatened’ facet of the Balkan identity, a closer view of articles on Serbia is especially illuminating. As the country with the least aspirations regarding NATO, it

would naturally appear the most vulnerable to outside influence from the US perspective. A handful of articles detail a visit by the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to Serbia. VOA informs the reader that his visit is part of recent “efforts by Ankara [the capital of Turkey] to increase its clout in the Balkans” (Associated Press, 2017). Thus, the paper presumes there is no ambivalence in how one should understand Turkey’s intentions. VOA thus unsubtly declares it a power move. Considering that Turkey is a member of NATO, this may not seem problematic for NATO strategic interest. Furthermore, its connection to balkanism is not immediately apparent.

However the contents of the article become problematic on both accounts. Continuing, it explains: “relations between Serbia and Turkey have improved in recent years after decades of mistrust between the two nations. Serbia was ruled for almost 500 years by the Ottoman Empire” (Associated Press, 2017). The connection made between Serbia and the Ottoman Empire accords with a longstanding process of “othering” Turkey. Numerous scholars note that current discourses of EU politicians appropriate the former “othering” of a once militarily threatening Ottoman Empire in a process of “othering” modern Turkey (Diez, 2010; Tekin, 2010). Thus, by connecting Serbia to Turkey, the discourse creates an intersectionality of several negative associations. Connecting Serbia’s current and historical relations with Turkey, Serbia seems tainted by association with the larger Ottoman “other.” Moreover, by invoking the Ottoman rule, the article covertly reminds Serbia that Turkey has a history of geopolitical interest in the region. In this way, the article seeks to substantiate its earlier claims of expanding Turkish ‘clout.’

Moreover, Turkey is not free from Balkan associations. As Klaus Dodds demonstrates, popular western media draws upon Balkan stereotypes for representing Turkey (2003). With this consideration in mind, Turkey becomes not only the ‘Ottoman’ other but a return to a Balkan past verses a Western future. Another quote mentions this with slightly more explicit wording: “Erdoğan pledged gas, investment and support for the Balkans on Tuesday, in an apparent bid to expand influence in a region frustrated by the slow pace of EU accession” (Reuters, 2017). Here the VOA sets up the visit as Turkish opportunism, an oppositional alternative to EU integration. In the words of a Serb citizen shrewdly interviewed by VOA: “(Turkish) relations with the EU are not that great at the moment; the Balkans is the closest they (Turks) can get to Europe” (Reuters, 2017). By this account, Turkey can only expand as the EU seems to retreat in the minds of the Serbs. Thus, the VOA writes of Erdoğan’s visit in terms of power dynamics and it suggests that Turkey threatens Serbia’s EU focus, and hence its western mindset.

I will now explain why VOA posits that Turkey's expanding influence is threatening despite its NATO membership. I have already maintained above that NATO interests are most significantly aligned with US interests. Due to troubled relations with the US at the time, VOA had an interest in portraying Turkey in this light. The articles cited as examples in this section are dated just two or three days after the US and Turkey mutually suspended visa services in a diplomatic row. The diplomatic standoff followed Turkey's arrest of a US consul employee. This is part of a longer issue of US and Turkish relations in the past year or two. In 2016, Turkey witnessed a failed coup, attempting to undermine President Erdogan. The Turkish government named Turk Fethullah Gulen as the orchestrator of the attempted coup. According to VOA, Turkey claims Gulen has US backing (Associated Press, 2017). Consequently, the articles that pose the threat of expanding Turkish influence coincide with a timeline of increasingly tense relations between the two countries. This suggests their disputes render their allied status less significant within the US-led military alliance.

Although China features less frequently in VOA than Turkey, the mention it receives subtly aligns the idea of a threatened Balkans. The paper discusses a company once owned by the US, who all but gave it to the Serbian government, and now Chinese investors possess it. With evocative language, the article laments "a giant Chinese red flag flutters on a pole where an American flag used to fly at a steel mill in this dusty industrial Serbian town. The company logos of U.S. Steel are faded on the huge chimneys stacks, replaced by those of a Chinese company" (Associated Press, 2017). Describing a shift from what 'used to be' to a Chinese dominated present, the language appeals to nostalgia. The contrast between a 'fading' US presence and Chinese 'replacement' implies that a US retreat will enable Chinese takeover. VOA asserts that the Serbian plant is "irrelevant" as an investment for China but the deal "gained Serbia's political favor," (Associated Press, 2017) as though VOA would warn Serbia of China's real intentions. Similar to the articles on Turkey, the report conveniently quotes a dimly specified Serbian political, economic analyst, who agrees that everything China is doing in investments "also has a political background and connotation" (Associated Press, 2017). The picture created by the history of the Chinese company faintly yet perceptibly reinforces the ideas discussed in connection to Turkey. Like Turkey, able to expand where confidence in EU membership is low, China invades spaces where the US presence withdrew. Turkey stirs cultural ties to plant seeds

of power while China stealthily buys political favors under the veneer of economics. Thus, China is the covert threat of political manipulation in the Balkans.

VOA poses Russia as the greatest threat to the Balkans by far. A significant portion of the articles reviewed were on the topic of a ‘malign’ Russian influence. Similarly to the others, the US depicts the Russian ‘threat’ as an opponent to western institutions and an ambitious exploiter of the Balkan situation. The difference is in the scale and volume. With neo-cold war rhetoric, Russia appears not only to exploit instability and Western withdrawal but to increase them. VOA’s warning of dangerous Russian geopolitics interests permeates numerous articles from different months, often pointing out Russia’s manipulation of “fellow Orthodox Christians” in Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia, (Reuters, 2017) referring to Serbia’s “traditional ally” (Associated Press, 2017).

A group of articles on the US Vice President, Mike Pence, exemplify the accusations against Russia. They report on his comments during a visit to the Balkans at the beginning of August, 2017, where he attended the Adriatic Charter Summit in Montenegro. Speaking to leaders of NATO members as well as Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia, he avers: “as you all know, Russia continues to seek to redraw international borders by force and, here in the Western Balkans, Russia has worked to destabilize the region, undermine democracies and divide you from each other and from the rest of Europe” (Reuters, 2017). Referring to it as common knowledge, Pence assumes that the devious nature of Russia’s involvement in the Balkans requires no proof. Pence’s remarks follow recent accusations of Russian meddling in Balkan countries. Most notably western media and the administration of Montenegrin (now former) Prime Minister Milos Djukanovic accuse Russia of backing the attempted coup d’état in 2016. Furthermore, the comment on forcefully redrawing borders is likely an allusion to the annexation of Crimea. With such references and their purported association to divisions in society and the deterioration of democracy, Pence seeks to warn the non-NATO leaders both of extreme Russian expansionism and their own greater vulnerability.

The US strategically relates the emphasis on the Russian threat to NATO opposition and hence to the yet-to-be NATO countries. VOA indicates “that efforts to isolate Macedonia from Western influence are part of a broader Russian campaign to stop all republics of the former Yugoslavia from joining NATO and succumbing to Western political interests” (Muratovic, 2017). Similarly, it cautions that Serbia, “under political and propaganda pressure from Moscow

has steadily slid toward the Kremlin and its goal of keeping the countries in the Balkan region out of NATO and other Western integrations” (Associated Press, 2017). Since the US assumes the main purpose of Russian interference is NATO opposition, it portrays Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia as the most vulnerable to the Russian threat because they are the target, the last ‘unprotected’ region. Their overall portrayal of the Russian threat contains elements of the both Turkey and China described above: the overt, historically and culturally alleged demonstrations of intentions to control observed in the Turkish example, combined with devious stealth of China’s techniques. This, in effect, encourages the reader to conclude that Russia is the ultimate threat to Balkan improvement.

Posing foreign threats to the Balkans becomes part of the discourse to support NATO expansion. In regards to Erdogan’s Serbian visit, VOA claims it “could help grow Turkey’s role in a region that spent centuries under Ottoman rule and remains susceptible to big-power rivalries” (Reuters, 2017). Once again reminding the region of its history with various imperial rulers, the news site encourages the perception that this region is necessarily a power vacuum waiting for one of its more important neighbors to fill. They treat the Balkans as an agency-less orphan with rival candidates for guardianship. Oddly, they do not include the US themselves or NATO in this group of big-power rivalries.

Reports on Russia create the same impression. Senator Ron Johnson (R) informed VOA’s Serbian service that “we’ve got a great opportunity to integrate those nations into the EU and Western democracies. [...] If we don’t show leadership, if we don’t pay attention, they could just as easily slip under Russia’s domination” (Djordjic, 2017). Likewise, McCain opines that Russian control is “a result of a lack of American and European leadership” (Djordjic, 2017). While they speak of foreign ‘domination’ they contrast themselves as ‘leaders.’ This is as much as to imply that other powers manipulate and control while the West influences merely through examples and suggestions. In this manner, they distance themselves from the type of power-plays for which they charge others. This disguises, albeit thinly, the Cold War reminiscent discourses that lead one to suspect US treats the Balkans as so many pawns in a game of containment. Thus, the US sends a clear message of urgency to join with western institutions. First it claims that their instability leaves them open to long-standing geopolitical dangers of foreign oppression. Subsequently, they extend the hand of western institutions as the only way to avoid this scenario.

As a militarily neutral country, the discourse on Serbia acutely highlights the US's manipulative discourse as it relates to NATO expansion. Serbia has declined to seek membership in NATO, preferring military neutrality in order to maintain relations with both the west and Russia. VOA frequently mentions the difficult 'balance' that Serbia currently attempts between East and West. Again the VOA uses Poe's perspective: "I appreciate Serbia's position of being a neutral country, but we should be concerned of the Russian 'bear' looking for more places to gobble up, and the Balkans may be one of those places" (Djordjevic, 2017). With vivid metaphoric language, he presents Russia's threat to the Balkans even more vigorously. By telling Serbia that its neutrality leaves it in the height of vulnerability, he tries to pressure Serbia into joining NATO and hence abandoning its amicable relations with Russia. James Hooper, a current analyst and former State Department official, makes the same point less dramatically yet more explicitly. Commenting on Serbia's neutrality policy, he states that "a non-alignment policy may not be sustainable in a globalized world" (Kostreci, 2017). Taking a tone of aloof objectivity, he compels Serbia to rethink its neutrality policy by suggesting that it is neither practical nor possible.

Such US representations of the Balkans as caught between the spheres of its more powerful neighbors borrow from older British balkanist discourses. After reviewing British travelogues from the late 1800s and early 1900s, Hammond concludes that representations predominantly "fed into, a pronounced refusal to grant the Balkan region the possibilities of independence. [...] there was rarely any doubt that the Balkans required governance from an external source, whether that source was an individual power or a collection of Western European states" (2004, 603). The Balkans as an area of subordinate peoples is thus a time-honored characterizing of the region. From the discourses discussed above it is apparent that whether in the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, this consensus on the Balkans endures with remarkable continuity. The change is merely where the duty of governance lies—in this case, with NATO. Hence, the discourse that asserts the impossibility of Serbia's neutrality originates from this understanding of the Balkans as necessarily governed by another. The scenario becomes then that these non-NATO and EU countries must necessarily choose. VOA tells them that their choice is either to accept the fate of control by a threatening neighbor or allow the West to selflessly accept this burden.

## **The Balkans as the Internal Other**

Throughout this analysis I use textual evidence that includes discussion on Western European leaders' perspectives in addition to US officials. Furthermore, statements quoted often address both NATO and the EU. However, it is not my intention to argue that their roles in the Balkans are synonymous. Rather, it is the discourse of the news site itself that renders them interchangeable. Following Pence's European tour, the VOA ran a headline of "Go West, US Vice President Pence Tells Balkan Leaders" (Reuters, 2017). This imprecise imperative is typical of the kind of essentialist identity the VOA constructs of a unified west with inherently strong stable democracies. Throughout the previously cited textual examples, the lines are a jumble of the "West says," "Western integration," "Western diplomacy," and frequent mentions of the EU and NATO with the same breath. The use of this simplistic Western civilization identity serves two particular purposes.

Broadly, it obscures differences between Western entities to enhance a utopian image of the West. This falls into the classic dynamic discussed by Wolf of the construction of a backwards 'Eastern Europe' as a tool for contrasting with and building the concept of an enlightened Western Europe (1994). In this case, while speaking of a West that supports the instability and "fragile democracies" of these Balkan nations, the West appears to be uniformly liberal, stable, and in agreement with each other. The term Euro-Atlantic integration epitomizes this. Thus, they can criticize countries like Bosnia, Serbia, and Macedonia for static "tensions" with neighboring states, while they offer their alternative with this image of a single, progressive West. The essentialist Western identity accomplishes this because it allows them to ignore the many disagreements and consequent volatilities within and between western nations. The current division between the Spanish government and the Catalonia separatist movement is a case in point. Furthermore, divisions between EU countries have scarcely been more apparent than in the dialogue of refugee quotas. However, VOA loses these intra-western instabilities within the depiction of a cohesive West. Hence they can present the imperative of 'going west' as a supposed solution to a Balkan country's issues.

The discourse of a simplistic 'West' not only creates a binary contrast between the backwards Balkans and a progressive West, it also crafts a correlation between NATO and EU membership. VOA speaks of them synonymously: "countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Macedonia, and Serbia are stumbling on the path to European and NATO integration"



(Muratovic, 2017). Aligning NATO thus as part of the European identity, it becomes a precursor to the EU: “what may compound the situation in the Western Balkans is the fragility of its democracies. Reform benchmarks required for NATO and EU accession have so far been mixed” (Kostreci, 2017). This quote suggests that the process of joining NATO and the EU is the same and perhaps intertwined. One can see the success of this idea in the past in the fact that, typically, most countries do join NATO a few years in advance of EU membership. It has become a stepping stone to Europe.

The synonymy of the EU and NATO allows the latter to leverage any positive attitudes towards the EU to its advantage. Returning to a previously noted quote will help illuminate the usefulness of this dynamic:

The U.S. and the European Union have spent years working to bring an enduring peace to the Balkans, and to integrate the region into the Euro-Atlantic community of nations. Every country around Serbia is currently either in NATO or wants to join the Western alliance (Djurdjic, 2017).

In this overt manner, VOA synonymizes the US, the EU, and NATO. By integrating their identities in relation to the Balkans, the US and NATO thus claim to be a derivative source of any reform that the EU has also encouraged. While the EU’s ability to further democracy is arguable, some scholars show a lack of correlation between NATO and democratization (Reiter, 2001). Furthermore, the EU is the largest provider of foreign monetary assistance, giving NATO greater reasons to claim equivalency between them although it is merely a military alliance.

In blurring the divide between NATO and the EU, the military alliance also attempts to gain from its greater popularity. As mentioned above, Serbian society reportedly harbors resentment against NATO for bombing the country during the wars of the 1990s. This seems confirmed by their reluctance to NATO membership. However, Serbia has committed to strive for EU membership. Throughout the articles of the last several months, VOA continuously stressed that Serbia was the only country in the region not intending to join NATO. In one such case, the new site ponders that “although it wants to join the European Union, Belgrade has adamantly refused to join NATO” (Reuters, 2017). The structure of this sentence reveals the dynamic of NATO riding on the EU’s more affirmative position. Rather than merely wondering at Serbia’s disinterest in NATO membership of its own accord, the US always places it in the context of its EU candidacy. By stressing that Serbia does not want to join NATO *although* it seeks EU membership, the US implies a sense of incongruence in Serbia’s policies. Although the

EU and NATO are separate entities with distinct purposes (mainly economic in the former and military in the latter), the sentiment of puzzlement in this quote acts as if Serbia has opted to join only half of just one organization. In this way, the discourse tries to coerce Serbia into rethinking its stance on NATO by conjoining it with the EU.

Despite the many times VOA instructs the Balkans to embrace a Western future, it nevertheless maintains old practices of exclusion and “othering” of these countries. This seems counterintuitive to NATO’s interest in integrating them within a western-orientation. One article reports on the research of a US based “pro-democracy watchdog” organization. According to this, “democracy scores declined in 2016 in more than half of the 29 countries surveyed in Central and Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Eurasia” (Diallo, 2017). Confirming Todorova’s argument of the imputed ambiguity of the Balkans, the US neither considers them part of Europe, not even Eastern Europe, nor Eurasian. They felt the need to exclude them although by geographical position, historical, cultural, and political ties one could place them in any of the three categories. Geographically speaking, unambiguously European countries surround these countries on all sides. Those countries that are not in the EU nevertheless have EU candidacy status. On the other hand, while they curiously avoid enclosing the Balkans in Europe, neither are they willing to allow Eurasia a claim. This is despite the US’s frequent worries about Russia and Turkey’s historical and cultural ties, whether through a reference to the Russian sympathies of Serb Orthodox Christians or a reminder of some lingering connection between the region and the former Ottoman Empire.

I have argued previously that the specific way in which the US “others” the non-NATO Balkans is to treat them as necessarily a power vacuum. This is in line with Hammond’s description of nineteenth century Britain’s use of balkanism. Where my analysis of twenty-first century US uses of balkanism differs from Hammond’s nineteenth century Britain is in the perpetrator’s intentions behind the discourse. Hammond describes the British uses of balkanism as portraying as a place that must be ruled by a great power but preferably not the British. He describes them as pitying the empire faced with such a duty (2004, 605). Contrarily, the US uses balkanist discourses to bring them closer towards itself. The same article on democracy scores continues, mentioning that an exception to this trend is Montenegro, whereas “Macedonia's score is nearing the low point of 2001” and “Serbia's score reached its lowest point since 2003, despite its progress in the European Union accession negotiations” (Diallo, 2017). This contrast between

Montenegro and its neighbors favors NATO as a means to escape the “othering.” Considering this othering in line with idea of the Balkans as threatened by its eastern neighbors and hence its own potential for “eastern-ness”, the US counterintuitively “others” the Balkans to provide the necessity of urging their western integration.

### **The Balkans as candidates of the West**

Turning from Voice of America, I will now discuss discourses on NATO membership among the political elite in Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia. Due to the language barrier, I had limited access to domestic discourses surrounding NATO. However, in the cases I found, the level to which the domestic governments shared these discourses varied expectedly according to their degree of cooperation with NATO. Hence Serbia’s government website revealed a somewhat more balanced presentation of NATO (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012). Western media has often criticized Serbia’s attempts to maintain relationships both with western multilateral institutions and Russia. The VOA says repeatedly that Serbia tries to uphold a difficult balancing act. Yet while it appears that the balancing act for Serb officials is between western institutions and Russia, it is also between western leadership and their own people. While approval from the US and EU can bring international legitimacy and security to their administrations, their people have a strong affinity for Russia (Szpala, 2014). Bosnia matches parts of VOA’s dialogue while Macedonia, sometimes hailed as the next member, most closely resembles the West in its discourse on NATO. All three of the countries mention the need to work with or join NATO to bring stability. The Bosnian and Macedonian governments do so by disparaging their own progress. As noted above, the VOA greatly changed its tune on Macedonia after the rise of Zoran Zaev as Prime Minister. He as well as others in his government offer statements singularly reflective of the US perspective. As Kovacevic notes, the political elite of Central-Eastern Europe are “dependent for their legitimacy not on the popular will of the people [...] but on the laudatory pronouncements of the political and economic representatives” of the neo-colonial capitals of Washington, Brussels and others in the western world (2017, 44). The discourses of these governments, particularly Macedonia, suggest supporting evidence for such a connection, as they curry favor with NATO.

Notably, there is a connection between the US presentations of the Balkans and those of the Bosnian and Macedonian political elite. This is manifest in their press points at NATO

headquarters where current president of Bosnia, Milen Ivanic, stated that he does not expect to be a topic for the Trump Administration “unless we make such a big problem that we become interesting to major politicians which will certainly not be good for us” (NATO Newsroom, 2017). While it is not unrealistic that Bosnia does not top the list of US priorities, he goes beyond this. Ivanic trivializes his own people simultaneously conforming to the western discourse of the Balkans as noticeable only as a flashpoint for spillover problems. Similarly, Macedonian Minister of Defence Radmila Šekerinska Jankovska claims that the reforms NATO membership will bring about are especially needed in such a “volatile region as the Balkans,” (NATO Newsroom, 2017) mirroring the discourse of VOA and US officials. At the same NATO press point, Nikola Dimitrov, the former ambassador to the US and current Minister of Foreign Affairs, paralleled this dialogue. In one case, he spoke of the political crisis in April (as discussed above), by calling it an “institutional and perhaps even [a] moral crisis” (NATO Newsroom, 2017). He provides no explanation for why one should consider a political impasse a moral issue. By naming the political crisis as a moral more than just an institutional failure, he shifts the blame onto the ethical character of the country. This changes the focus of the issue from the political elite to some vague flaw in the nature of Macedonia.

After denigrating their people, Macedonia and Bosnia in turn highlight NATO as the cure for their problems. The first paragraph under the foreign affairs section of the Macedonian government’s website runs thus:

NATO and EU membership are our strategic commitments. They also mean a better standard, modern laws, higher salaries, state security, citizens' security, new investments, free movement. They are also a guarantee of private property, freedom and independence of the individual, legal and economic security. Membership in NATO and the EU will mean the end of the party judiciary and prosecution, party media and oligarchs (Government of Republic of Macedonia, 2017).

Like VOA, they synonymize NATO and the EU, championing their influence while the actual efficacy of their reform plans is contestable. By this account, NATO is indeed a solution to all and any problems, whether they be political, military, economic, or even societal. In this way, they project an image of a utopian NATO. Likewise, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia, Dr Denis Zvizdić, emphasized that the “Euro-Atlantic integrations are the strategic aim of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a basis for a steady economic and political prosperity of the state and EU and NATO integrations processes” (Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

2017). Discussing the case of Montenegro some years before its accession, Kovacevic explains how the political elite implied that “once in NATO, the citizens of Montenegro will live happily ever after” (2017, 49). The same dynamic is evident in Bosnia and Macedonia. In essence, they inform the people that membership will mean the end of problems, a curious perspective to have considering the lack of harmony that exists even among NATO members as argued in previous paragraphs.

No political elite conforms more to the US dialogue than Zoran Zaev. In a letter to congratulate Montenegrin Prime Minister on NATO accession, he writes: “NATO is an alliance of democracies and the citizens of Macedonia, as well as the citizens of Montenegro and the entire region, need to be part of the civilized world which brings stability and security” (Zaev congratulates Montenegro on being admitted to NATO, 2017). If one removed the word NATO, his letter could be from the Enlightenment era discourses discussed in the influential scholarship of Wolf, so readily does it adhere to historical tendencies to other Eastern Europe. If NATO is civilization then clearly these non-NATO countries, including his own, are primitive. The vagueness of discourses on NATO expansion have a function as well, or rather a function by omission. An important note to make regarding these discourses is the continual emphasis on *what* NATO will bring and not *how*. The question of how a military alliance will effect a dramatic transformation of society is an important one to ask.

## CONCLUSION

By manipulating long-established negative representations and historical narratives, the VOA “others” Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia to create an urgent necessity for their accession to NATO. The uses of balkanist discourses for the purpose of NATO expansion have significant implications, both theoretically and practically. In terms of theories of the “other,” it presents an unusual case study of “othering.” Since “othering” involves emphasizing contrasts between groups, it is typically a mechanism of exclusion. However, in the balkanist discourses of VOA, the “othering” functions to compel inclusion in a particular group. This is not to suggest that the “othering” of these three countries is not for the purpose of invoking a contrast as described by Wolf (1994). The discourses maintained the depictions of backwardness and volatility of past discourses on the Balkans without remarkable variation. The negative representations then

followed an expected dynamic of contrasting with and thus defining a NATO of progressiveness, stability, and democracy—a NATO that will cure the disease of Balkan-ness with its all-encompassing transformative influence.

Hence, the contrast encourages these countries to seek inclusion in NATO in two ways. By defining the more positive image of the West, it strives to increase the attractiveness of NATO accession. Moreover, the “othering” creates a false separation between the Balkans and Europe (e.g. the West). If countries within NATO and the EU are indubitably within Europe then there is no geographic basis for “othering” the Balkans in these terms. To the east, west, north, and south, NATO and EU members surround them. Thus, creating this distance between them and the EU coercively compels them to join NATO in order to be part of Europe and the West. The discourse “others” them in order to produce a false need to legitimize their place in Europe, inverting the usual exclusionary purpose of “othering.” This is not to imply that the geopolitical uses of balkanism are homogenous. For example, the EU may well “other” these countries in order to preserve their “outsider” status given that more is at stake economically and politically in integrating them than in the case of a military alliance. Since the geopolitical uses of balkanist discourse have proven malleable across time, it may differ depending on perspective as well. More research could increase our understanding of how and why balkanism continues to be a salient mechanism of geopolitics in different periods and contexts.

The current balkanist discourse has practical implications as well. As Hammond (2004) showed of early balkanist discourses, they have geopolitical uses with real political impacts. The specific purpose of balkanist discourses have changed but not the way they lend themselves to geopolitical power dynamics. Kovacevic claims that Montenegro “becomes a mere pawn in the geopolitical chess game by the antagonistic colonial powers which NATO must win at any price” (2017, 46). The same could be said of the three countries in this study as the US embroils them in their disputes with Russia and other countries. They claim to offer protection to the Balkans yet do not prove that their involvement in the region is any different than the countries of which the US warns them. They are more interested in hindering the advances of the other ‘malign foreign influences’ or rather, countries with which the US currently has disagreements, than helping the Balkans.

By supporting those politicians in Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia who most reflect western discourses, the US may alienate those in power from the people of the country. The

difference in US discourse on the current Macedonian Prime Minister Zaev and his predecessor, as discussed earlier, revealed the difference in how the US discusses the politicians who reflect their agenda. Zaev most emphatically adhered to US discourse. The results are more than merely misguided perceptions of the Balkans. As domestic politicians receive more international legitimacy by adhering to these discriminatory discourses, they become partakers of the balkanist discourse, “othering” their own people. Just as the US does, the domestic political elite manipulate representation of their people to their own political ends. The US uses balkanist discourses to control them at the level of the nation while the domestic politicians serve an image of the Balkans to the West as it prefers to see them.

If the political elite seek NATO membership to strengthen ties with the US, it could be against the desires of the people. As the opinion polls showed in the case of Montenegro, attitudes on NATO accession tends to be far from homogenous in the former Yugoslav states (Citizen’s Attitudes on NATO Integrations, 2015). Its controversial reception in Montenegro is also a point of Kovacevic’s article (2017, 50). It is then possible the US and NATO use balkanist discourses to support regimes in the Balkans that derive their power from the approval of the West rather than the will of the people, negating its supposed aim of truly spreading democracy. This raises the further question of how elite political discourses differ from those of the general population. One cannot assume that because the political elite reflect western balkanist discourses, the population does as well. Differences in their discourse would better reveal the extent to which these uses of balkanism alienate the politicians from the people and whether the encouragement of NATO membership misrepresents the general will.

Finally, my study begs the question of why such blatant balkanist discourse as that found in VOA survives so unchanged to the current day. Said’s seminal *Orientalism* has arguably ruptured the continuity of Orientalist representations. Of course, people may still employ Orientalist stereotypes, but his general ideas have entered mainstream thought. When employed, Orientalist representations are more likely to be in a nuanced form. No such rupture of balkanism is evident. As Goldsworthy notes, writers who would “consider themselves to be advanced exponents of European multicultural ideals” can write of people in the Balkans “with the sort of generalised [sic], open condescension which would appal [sic] them if applied to Somalis or the peoples of Zaire” (1998, xi). The easy continuance of balkanism is not from the lack of an academic exposé as the literature exemplifies. Goldsworthy’s comment suggests that, since the

Balkans are within Europe, Europeans did not recognize their discourse on the Balkans as discriminatory.

Considering my earlier anecdote from the research program in Switzerland, I propose that the continuity of balkansim relates to the perception of the Balkans' unimportance. While the VOA's discourse inflates the significance of these countries' need for NATO, it simultaneously trivializes the Balkans through representations of unsophisticated tropes. The domestic political elite then confirm this triviality rather than challenging it. The emphasis on the Balkans' unimportance allows the discourses to remain unnoticed by the public eye. This is what leads generally well-informed people such as my colleagues in Geneva to dismiss a study of the Balkans. The arrogant trivializing of Balkan countries allows such discriminatory discourse to continue unchallenged among critical circles where it should receive censure.



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