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Emotional Spatiality and Critical Geography of the Balkans¹

Abstract

Over the past thirty years the analysis of the Balkan discourse have been raised issues on spatial and symbolic distribution of the affects. Today, the subdiscipline of emotional spatiality provides a new insights into the link between the political, economic and social status of Southeastern Europe and representations that imply affects. Taking into account the knowledge which comes from imagology and postcolonial critics, new question arise: “What is the role of representation in the creation of emotional geography and vice versa?” Namely, these seemingly different and somewhat opposed approaches which are resistant to essentialism, outline a number of key issues which are present in the text on the Balkans. These approaches were exposed and analyzed to indicate the silent presence of emotional geography in earlier studies of the Balkans, and to point out the possibility of their comprehensive application in the future.

Key words: emotional spatiality, critical geography, Balkan studies, space / place, affects, exclusion / inclusion.

1. Discourse Analysis and Human Geographies

Almost thirty years after the early imagological, postcolonial and other anti-essentialist efforts, problems linked to the so called Balkan studies, were presented as unsolvable, while disciplines and subdisciplines initiated by these researches were criticized for their obscure language, reductive character and constructionism. Academic optimism that emerged at the beginning of the first decade of the third millennium has been replaced by a critical tone sent to the account of previous contributions in the area of Balkan studies. At first, the enthusiastic

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phase reveals that the academic circles shared a belief that political and economic crises are over, while the deconstruction of the text on Balkan, and especially on post - Yugoslav space, would end the cultural trauma, heal the emotional wounds, and replace the unpleasant memories with new and peaceful solutions. Despite hopes, researchers have faced no bright social future. Discourse analysis was understood as an academic practice which remains closed in its own space of deconstruction while using postmodern terminology and disabling the comprehensive understanding of the relationship between representation and the social problems. Today, the understanding of the Balkan as an essentialization, construct or insufficiently defined geography requires co-operation of studies that could complement, clarify and make visible the problem of the reality of imaginary and concealing of the real problem. One of them could be critical geography (Agnew 2005: 81-96). Its subdiscipline, spatial emotionality enables analysis of discourses about the Balkans in order to question individual and collective traumas expressed in feelings of fear, shame, guilt, belonging and intimacy. They are organized around different cultural practices. All of them are inscribed into space, both physically and symbolically (Urry 1985: 20-47).

Polemics about the place of emotions in political theory and practice expose in which way emotions are involved in the discourse on international relations and various contexts where they can be interpreted as positive and negative ones. The first includes love, trust and compassion, while the key negative emotion remains shame. Christina Tarnopolsky, Jon Elster, Martha Hussbaum and Toni Massaro consider the shame a most powerful emotion because it causes painful experiences and primary reactions that lead to identity crisis (Tarnopolsky 2008).

2. Politics and Emotional Spatiality

In international politics, language is often used to refer to affective states. Thus, countries are often presented as frustrated, aggressive, frightened, challenging or repentant. Although this practice leaves an impression of anthropomorphization, the representations arising from 'imputed' affects rely on media, and often enter academic discourse. One should not neglect the well-known floscules about traditional friends, brotherly countries, traditional love and understanding or eternal sympathy among peoples, which are frequently used in the Balkans. They mainly come from the need to achieve short-term political and economic solutions and using the evocation of great narratives and political myths.

One of the reasons for neglecting the role of emotionality in political life is based on seemingly incompatible explanations that come from psychology, psychiatry and neurology. The other reason is attributed to general ambiguity to anything that can not be placed in the categories of rational. Emotions are seen as something private, elusive, insufficiently materialized. Actually, we believe that these reasons could be a starting point for theorizing emotions as institutionalized, incorporated and deeply embedded in the human geography and therefore processes and structures of world politics (Crawford 2015: XX). One of the problems come from the inability to use classical definitions of emotions and resistance of contemporary psychologist to define emotions as simple and universal. Various individuals and groups experience the same emotions in different way. Psychologists trying to compare and to elucidate emotion concepts have used, primary features of meaning. For certain purposes, parameters of this kind may be helpful, but also complex and obscure as any emotion concepts which one might be trying to elucidate. A number of emotional dimensions have no clear, intuitively graspable meaning whatsoever. Others are non-technical and their meaning can be intuited through natural language, but they are not less complex than happy, sad, angry or worried (Wierzbicka 1992: 2).

Despite these problems, emotion takes place. They can be attributed to squares, parks, states, regions, parts of the world, such as Balkans. Geography, like many of its disciplinary siblings, has often had trouble expressing feelings. The difficulties in communicating the affective elements at play beneath the topographies of everyday life have meant that, to a greater or lesser extent, geography has tended to deny, avoid, suppress or downplay entanglements. Perhaps the recent 'emotional turn' in geography results from recognition that emotions have an important place as vital ingredient in the very composition of the world. They are something more than a concatenation of causes and affects, as those places, people and incidents, which become meaningful to us. Without emotions we might indeed survive in a world that resembled the empty space measured by Cartesian coordinates. This 'formal and quantitative' understanding of space erases distinctions which derive from nature and history that claims to be neutral, universal, apolitical, value and emotion free, despite the fact that emotions are inseparable from our daily lives and even places we live in (Davidson, Cameron 2008:1-17).

For most political geographers, understanding of place and context has moved away from geometric or 'Cartesian' view; this move now considers relational understandings of the settings in which people live their lives. Relative interactive measures of

places, locales, and regions can be defined by the links which are related to social identity, political economy, or migration (Linke, O'Loughlin 2016). During the sixties and seventies of the last century, geography went through a sociological and cultural turn. At first, social cartography has demonstrated a critical potential by avoiding the rigidity of traditional mapping practice and shifting focus to the efforts of individuals and groups to redefine their own socio-spatial relationships and the ways in which they are represented (Pickles 2004:30). The cultural turn has many manifestations. The following list is hardly exhaustive: a revivification of traditional areas of interest in cultural geography under the influence of new theoretical ideas; the textualisation of subfields such as political geography; the revival of interest in historiography of geography under the influence of theories of colonial discourse and postcolonialism; understandings of the construction of social relations of gender, race and class; a focus upon cultural constructions of environment and nature. Perhaps one common thread connecting these and other myriad projects is a commitment to epistemologies, often loosely labelled poststructural, that emphasise the contingency of knowledge claims and recognise the close relationship among language, power, and knowledge (Barnett 1998: 379-394). Thus, Balkan studies which take into account the relation between power and space/place are inseparable from this approach.

The shift in social and human geography is preceded by David Sibley's concept on geography of exclusion. He recognizes the reason for studying the social and psychological aspects of geography in the invisibility of social control (Sibley 1995: 548). Here is a starting point for rethinking representations, geographies and emotions. Relying on Paul Rabinow's understanding of the importance for critical approach to hegemonic cultures, Sibley seeks to make visible the oppressive practices and assumptions about the inclusion and exclusions through which Occident organizes places and spaces. Geographies of inclusion and exclusion opens questions like: "Which places have attributes of power?"; "Whom they exclude and how the prohibitions are maintained in practice?" (Trudeau, McMorran 2015: 20). In this case, they can be identified in the form of the question: "Should Balkan expect European future?" One of the aspects that support this selection are emotions. Similar questions are posed in subdisciplines that derive from the synthesis of comparative literature, discourse analysis, and philosophy.

The problem of the emotional spatiality of the Balkans becomes inseparable from the production of emotions attributed to its potential reference frame. Therefore, if Europe adopts / integrates the geography of happiness and security, it excludes / rejects emotional geographies which oppose its self-representation. Indeed, parallels between the previous studies on representations of the Balkans and the emotional spatiality as subdiscipline of critical geography become more visible.

3. Literature, Geography and Emotions of Orientalism

A review on previous contributions reveals three key approaches in the research of the representations on the Balkans: imagology, Orientalism and the Balkanist paradigm. While they provide resistance to essentialization, they all outweigh the affects involved in building the overall image of the Balkans. Affects arise as a result of (most often) passenger's observation, literature, film imagination, or taking the "second hand narrative", and their precipitation along historical discourse. At last, these representations make the platform for the construction of a contemporary media image of a city, region, state or continent.

Imagology is dedicated to the metadiscursive quest, because the concepts studied within its framework, are considered intellectual product whose truth is not measurable, or a reliable unit of information on objective reality (Leersen 2009: 83-97). In recognizing the ideological character of images and drawing attention to their sociocultural differences and similarities, imagology considers reciprocal characterization as pivotal in understanding national perception and representation in terms of the self/other dichotomy, which also underlies the dialectic of identity and alterity. As its name asserts, image is the main working concept in the field. It is understood as a mental picture or idea. In this, it resembles a cognitive knowledge structure or schema that controls our opinion and behavior towards the Other. A fundamental distinction is made between self-image and hetero-image: the first one refers to a characterological reputation current within and shared by a group, the latter to the opinion that others have about a group's purported character (Mohor, Praisler 2007: 69-74). According to imagologists, popular literature became a source of dissemination of the representations on the Balkans (Goldsworthy 2005). The future understanding of the relationship between representation, daily life, political life, and the state of the economy rely on these theoretical basis. Orientalism, balkanism and postcolonialism, thus have a common ground in the idea that mental

images are able to create political relations. They are further reflected in the whole space, making the Balkans one in the series of emotional geographies.

Some of the first studies of the Balkans were based on the Edward Said's Orientalist paradigm. Inspired by Marxism and post-structuralist theories, Said managed to wage a frontal attack on orientalism as a subject of the orientalists, scholars versed in the cultures, histories and languages of the so called Orient. Said understands orientalism as a cumulative and hegemonic discourse and the West's eternal Other. The West stands for rationality, progress and modernity, while the Orient stands for backwardness, tradition, and following the logic of developmental thinking, the West possessed therewith the right to conquer, suppress and rule. Orientalism is a way of thinking about Orient as Other - servile, exotic, erotic, dark, mysterious and dangerous, and has helped the West to define itself through this contrasting and dichotomous image. (Said 2008:16). In spite of criticism, most often justifiably addressed to the account of essentializations that, paradoxically, arise from the efforts to resist them, Said's research is considered to be the basis for post-colonialism, and a starting point that has allowed the authority of the binary logic to be challenged. Latter, it gave the results in the field of ecology, gender studies, the fight for human rights.

According to Orientalist paradigm, frequently used in the field of Balkan studies, from its beginnings, texts about this part of the world have been following a logic that link Islam and the Ottoman Empire, and thus, create emotions that reproduce stereotypes on Turkey and European Turkey in its referent frame (Said 2003). Affects are determined by the established political relations that continue to reproduce and enable this mechanism to work backwards. The very first records on the Balkans, bring affects to its geography. Certain issues are attributed to its population, while simultaneously depicting human geography and determining the course of foreign policy on the relation Occident-Orient / the Balkans. Orientalization does not imply exclusively the designation of the Balkans as a part of the Orient, but brings the insistence on its exclusion from Europe as a synonymous of development, excellence and freedom. The feeling it causes comes in conjunction with inferiority.

One and a half centuries later, these meanings got an affective form and, as sadness, enter a public discourse. It turned out to be a long lasting image. Attempts have been made to determine the relationship between the early representations and what followed one and a half centuries later. Namely, after the end of the turbulent nineties of the twentieth century, the emotions of grief, hatred, lost, hostility towards neighbors

found their place in the popular culture of post-Yugoslav societies. Public discourse, and research show interests in topics about tragic losses; cultural products which are closely related to sadness like *sevdalinke*; new releases of characterologies on the alleged innate and genetically transmitted South Slavic practice of grief and wailing; magical realism in the film² as a thematization of nostalgia for a country that no longer exist. Geography of sadness becomes both psychological and political analytical tool.

4. The Balkanism and Narcissism

In accordance to Balkanist paradigm, the Balkans, like their geo-symbolic position, are ambivalent, while the reasons for sympathy with them are in balance with the reasons for its political and symbolic rejection by Europe. Todorova argues that while Orientalism is a discourse about an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity (Todorova 2004: 17). By notifying that the Balkans were viewed, if not strictly Oriental than semi-Asian, semi-Oriental and Other Europe, she concludes that Balkan was always paired in opposition to the West and Europe, whereas its inhabitants were perceived as the inner other of the Western civilization. Balkanization has come to signify the general disintegration of viable nation-states and the reversion to the 'tribal conflicts and hatreds'. It seems that masculinization and the stereotype of belligerence, combined with the geo-symbolic border position, reproduce a representation of a restless and unstable ground. In an affective sense, it could be said that the geography of the Balkans 'suffers' from the excess of aggression that empties through internal conflicts. This representation for more than two centuries influences the overall formation of its media image and therefore produces geography that requires limitation or at least a temporary suspension from the geo-symbolic framework of Europe.

The global geometry of power allows a deeper understanding of the geography of marginalization and enriches the theoretical understanding of individual cases of social exclusion. The geography of Balkanism implies resources similar to those which come from Orientalist paradigm, although attributes them different emotions. The boundary between the East and the West is regarded as a criterion for exclusion/inclusion inside/outside the Europe. Since symbolic liminal position of

2) Examples: E. Kusturica, *Underground*, 1995. Later, dramatic realism, *Circles*, Srđan Golubović. In Croatia, *Karaula*, by Rajko Grlić, 2006.

the Balkans implies displacement from the mainstream of capital and the events that Occident appropriates as cultural property, the defense system against inferiorization appears within the framework of internal Balkanist discourse. On the level of self-representation, the liminality is interpreted as a sort of exclusivity of geographical and geo-symbolic position. In this sense, the dominant emotional geography becomes love for oneself brought to narcissism. Narcissism refers to a fragile and unstable image of oneself. Below one's surface, lies compensation for the absence of security and sensitivity to shame and humiliation. A seemingly grandiose image of oneself is just a cover for trauma and frustration that led to hunger for attention and recognition. In Sibley's terms, the margin space replaces the privilege space.

Symbolic liminality is based on the assumption that the center contains all the positive sides of a society, while the margin is a space of negativity and elements that disturb the harmony of the center. Delinquents and rebels who are expelled from the center usually settle the marginal areas (Zanini 2002: 58). Therefore, the delinquent figure becomes the most prominent Balkan protagonist since the epic published in nineteenth century to the contemporary film.³ The Balkanist discourse of exile, excommunication and equalization with the delinquent, builds and manifest an identity with the meaning of the superior inner Other. If the Balkans is recognized as a margin and an excluded subject, the population that inhabits it through cultural practices, politics and economics strengthens the symbolic value of seclusion and delinquency, and replacing the semantics of exclusion by the semantics of privilege. Symbolics of the boundary with the meaning of division into Us/Others; domestic / foreign; legally / illegally has been inverted to adopt an affirmative connotation of mythic, archetypal, ancient and abstract geography (Mountz 2009: 198-209). At first, his geography arises in the process of what Sibley named space cleansing and defines it as a process of social control through which the dominant Occident constructs social-spatial boundaries and marginalizes everything beyond the mainstream (Sibley, 1996:104). Marginalization enables the reproduction of social identity by linking individual and collective behavior inherent to the process of exclusion. The exclusion, which we already noticed in the image studies, takes the form of a spatial division into people and places. The Balkans do not experience a manifest and striking material division in relation to the rest of the continent. It becomes a symbolic ghetto, while problems with establishing the administrative boundaries and its transition have a dynamic form in the

3) Slobodan Skerlić, *Rage*, 1997, Srdjan Dragojevic, *Wounds*, 1998.

last thirty years. Imposing sanctions, requiring visas and special permissions become material boundaries. They resemble the walls that separate the ghetto from the center. The inner defense system is recognized in the excesses of self-love that leads to aggression in relation to the immediate neighbor, and is justified by diversity, inequality, and historical reminiscences. Such self-love excludes the Other by glorifying hostile feelings and by using rhetorical and discursive means in order to legitimize this process. Self-love functions at the same time as a defense mechanism against negative labeling and relocation outside the reference, physical continent and the culture. If Europe represents civilization, knowledge, rich cultural heritage, the Balkans mobilizes myths to occupy an equally imaginary position, representing itself as older, spiritually rich, and civilized before Europe 'existed'. But this geography of love for oneself, gets a destructive and self-destructive form, which deals with post-colonial criticism since 2000's, in a more complex manner, recalling the breakup of the SFRY, the war and its consequences.

5. Postcolonialism: "Inferiority" as a Reason for Depression and Shame

The question, whether the Balkans can be placed within the framework of postcolonial theory, without breaking the boundary between discourses and crucial historical moments, violent practices such as apartheid, the destruction of material culture and systematic poverty of certain parts of the world, has been opened along with the first wave of polemics over the breakup of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (Lazarević Radak 2013: 45). Postcolonialism is still in the edge of research interest when it comes to Balkan studies, due to the sensitivity of political issues related to the accession of the Balkan countries to the European Union and ambivalent positions of post-structuralist theories in social sciences (Spivak 2005: 18).

Taking into account the influence that geography has on emotionality, Robert Young focuses on the relationship between knowledge and power and the interest of capitalism towards new forms of consumerism (Young 2013: 13). What is true for individuals is valid for peoples / groups. It allows him to continue asking questions that begin to resemble a test to determine the postcolonial state: "Do you feel that your own people and country are somehow always positioned outside the mainstream?" (Young 2013: 13).

In the context of post-Yugoslav societies, the answer is confirmed, which opens up space for further review.

Although critics of the text on the Balkans consider this part of the world colonized at the level of discourse, the fact that since the beginning of the 19th Century it is described in terms that are common in the imperial texts about Asia and Africa, testify on creating the geography of inferiority/superiority. As early as the nineteenth century, the texts about the Balkans speak of 'half-wild population' (de Vindt 1907:15); 'cultural dely', 'dirty half-barbarians' (Tcherson 1855), 'people from the devil's mountains' (Jezernik, 2007:21) Stigmatization begins to function as self-stigmatization, and the inferiorized entity experiences a much deeper crisis than the one Balkan paradigm assume. Considering that the wars between the Yugoslav republics ended in posttraumatic syndrome, guild and disappointment, it becomes clear to what extent, the insecurity regarding symbolic, cultural and human geography is certain (Lazarević-Radak 2014: 46).

The effects of psychological and social scars remain unsettled for years after the end of the war. Criminalization of war accompanied by public condemnation, ensures uncertain and fragmentary justice, while the establishment of war crimes courts enables the profiling of hero, victims, exiles figures (Dahlman 2009: 235-246).

The representation and emotion comes from the outside, affecting only a part of the population that is most likely to seek emigration. While balkanization leads to proud self-love and involves the exclusion of Otherness, the feeling of shame remains equally destructive and self-destructive as it develops the feelings of helplessness and worthlessness (Dahlman 2009). The introduction of a discourse on rationality that opposes the passions of war provides an invitation to rational behavior involving narratives on ignorance, primitiveness and image of lower, underdeveloped political order.

The affects linked with shame lead to self-destructive behavior. Groups become objects of negative emotions such as hatred, rejection, scandal, lose the connection to healthy narcissism, which results in a sense of embarrassment and humiliation. For example, social-class differentiations are held through the practice of disgracing the Other, especially when it comes to cultural differences. The shame and anger that arises from it play a significant role in challenging and maintaining internal conflicts and provoking conflicts with neighboring countries

Instead of approaching the past in a neutral manner to resolve the conflicts, there begins a situation of repetitive self-marginalization. This process leads to a complex of superiority / inferiority that occurs

in a colonial situation. The first aspect is related to self-stigmatization, which acts at the level of self-indulgence and marking of one's own cultural practice as inferior to the other, in this case European. Discourses on aggression, backwardness, impurities, internal incompetence for political organization, as well as the conclusions about the necessity of interventionism and the emphasis on internal class, ideological and political divisions, become elements of self-representation in the Balkan countries. The internal tension is rising. Rejecting neighbors, shifting responsibility for economic and social crisis to neighbors as foreigners and the increase of domestic violence indicate the so called psychopathology of the colonized (Lazarević-Radak 2014:47). Newspaper articles, popular culture and the overall media picture reveal the geography of depression.

Balkan is no longer what the representatives of the balkanist paradigm believed in – a space located between the East and the West for which wars were waged. The political crises are peacefully blocked while the largest percentage of the population abandoned ideologies and practical political activism. The reality of unemployment, a high level of poverty, migration, a decline in birth rate, domestic violence and a high degree of suicide reiterate the geography of aggression. In the postcolonial state, previous Balkanist aggression turns to feelings of guilt.

6. Feelings From The Periphery: A Fear And Geography Of Blocked Transition

A distance between the center and the periphery produces a bimodal and trimodal distribution of states, so the understanding of the geography of the Balkans could be contributed by the theory of semi-periphery (Terlouw 1992: 36-45). The societies from 'in-between' are not allowed to move in the other direction – further to the periphery, or closer to the center that could be read in terms of the post-industrial and post-modern era (Arrighi 1985: 243-279). Applied to the Balkan, theory of semi-periphery does not reveal anything new. Transition indicate the the absence of dynamics, and this absence is also reflected on the spatial emotionality. As in the case of postcolonialism, there is a feeling that we are 'nor-there-neither-here' (Hughson-Blagojević 2005), without a chance to achieve affective turn. Confusion brought about by the collapse of educational and cultural institutions, coupled with corruption, creates a sense of impotence. Emotionally, the Balkans remains a geography of exclusion (Zanini 2002:58). During the period of symmetrical

differentiation the political elites choose the isolation of society. The rest of the population begins to feel cutt off and behave in accordance to the cultural, psychological and political price of the new isolation, imposed from the inside. These processes are easily visible in Serbia. The absence of clear, understandable and acceptable political programs provide a fertile soil for the growth of a fear policy. Such a policy becomes useful for political elite. Fear occurs due to the lack of security (Kinvall 2013: 143-166). These feelings come into play with the escape and strongly reflect on society. The problem of escape - continuous immigration in the form of brain drain are present in the public discourse and testify on real problems that society meets. People leave the Balkans in search of healthy emotions – security and well-being.

7. Geography Of Sadness, Agression, Shame And Fear

Emotional geographies are not the specificity of South East Europe, nor can it be claimed that only in its fluid / symbolic borders there is a sense of sadness, shame and fear. Mixed with sadness and fear, aggression, produce conflicts, followed by reconciliation, repentance, or new conflicts. Studies conducted over the past ten years have shown that emotions can be mapped, thus creating colorful world maps that show the degree of racism, fear and aggression towards the Other. The map of the world can be recognized as a map of emotions of mediated events, narratives, discourses, representations, as well as patterns of behavior in crisis and peacetime situations.

The affects that the problematized paradigms point out enable the insight into symbolic and emotional map of the region that include their simplified forms of stereotypes and prejudices determining who will be its neighbors, friends or enemies. The analysed paradigms enable us to percive the Balkans as an emotional geography. They reveal that this part of the world is linked with aggression, shame and fear. This representation leaves a mark on the place of the region in the international politics and thus opens an old polemic about the relation of symbolic geography as self-produced and externally imposed representation.

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