

DEPICTING THE BALKANS IN TRAVEL WRITING: PAST AND PRESENT PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the representation of the Balkans in travel writing through two perspectives. The first one looks at the colonial discourse and gaze of the earlier 19th century travelogues. The second looks into contemporary travelogues to see if they moved away from the colonial/orientalist logic of the superior, Western, enlightened traveler who observes the passive, inferior cultures and places. To do this, the paper analyzes several earlier, mainly 19th and early 20th century travelogues about the Balkans predominantly written by women. It then compares them with contemporary travel works, the main focus being placed on the writings of Chris Deliso. His travelogues of Macedonia (since February 2019 referred to as the Republic of North Macedonia after a long name dispute with Greece), abandon the pretentious, colonial and orientalist approach of earlier travel literature and instead show enthusiasm to engage with local narratives and histories. In that sense, the paper argues that the contemporary travel accounts part with the colonial logic of a superior traveler who observes the wild, undeveloped places and people, very characteristic of the earlier travel literature. Yet, at certain times they also fall in the same trap of siding with one culture or ethnic group while stereotyping others. Secondly, this paper questions the concept of ‘women’s travel writing’ as naive and politically disengaged, and shows that both men’s and women’s travelogues are prone to bias and partiality depending on the geopolitical agenda that the traveler favors or represents. As such, they have and still continue to play an important role in creating and perpetuating particular images about the places they write about, in this case, the Balkans.

Keywords: *colonialist, identity, Balkans, contemporary travelogue, global politics, women travellers.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Balkans is a historically contested region resulting in a number of controversies including the problem of defining the borderline between the peninsula and ‘mainland Europe’. The Balkans has the misfortune of being represented in the context of violence, barbarism, and backwardness. One of the central aims of this paper is to look at the processes of creating a particular (often biased) image of the Balkans, and in particular, to analyse the role that travellers (women in particular) had in the description and representation of the Balkans. The greater focus on women travellers in this paper comes from the fact that in all the writings about the Balkans “a very significant portion of it had been written by women” (Allcock and Young, 1991, p. xxiv). Such an approach can help better understand the processes that helped create negative stereotypes about the Balkans, and compare them to contemporary Balkan travelogues. It seems

that the newer travel writing production tends to be neither or, that is, it moves away from, but also perpetuates the colonialist logic, and adheres to certain political agendas often present in travel writing.

By looking into earlier travel writings of women with the focus being mainly on British travellers, this paper also intends to show that women were not politically neutral in their perception and commentary on the countries they travelled to. The different stereotypes and support of various causes of these travel writers has certainly had an impact on the further perceptions of the Balkans and its peoples that resonate even today.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology and the dynamics of this paper are as follows. A literature review of some of the most important works dealing with the concept of Orientalism and *Othering* of the Balkans is represented in the first part. Following is a content analysis of some of the most popular and influential travelogues written about the Balkans, ranging from the late nineteenth until the early twentieth century, and written predominantly by women. In doing so, it tries to see the bias and partiality of what is often naively believed to be a neutral female gaze. The content analysis of these works will serve as the backdrop against which several contemporary Balkan travel writings will be discussed. The primary work for this purpose will be the work of Christopher Deliso's *Hidden Macedonia* and a recent guidebook on Macedonia by Thammy Evans. This comparison and analyses should help diagnose if the contemporary travel writings about the Balkans bring forward a new discourse or if they repeat the same mistakes of earlier works, perpetuating stereotypes and playing an important role in the creation of a certain image about the region.

3. THE BALKANS (MIS)REPRESENTED

Edward Said's pioneering work *Orientalism* (1978) has laid the foundation of the greater part of postcolonial studies by giving a systematic critique of the West's historical, cultural, and political perception of the East. Some later authors, while appreciating and using the concept of Orientalism, have also turned towards criticising it from multiple perspectives. In her study of the Balkans as the *Other of Europe*, Todorova (1997) analyses the multiple discourses that created specific images about the Balkans from the eighteenth century on. Her initial concern is to erase the frequently drawn parallel between the Balkans and its 'othering' with Said's Orientalism. She comments that, if Said was circumspect, precise, and truly devoted to the notion of historical specificity, then "he would not have written *Orientalism*" (p. 12). Todorova also argues against Milica Bakić-Hayden's (1995) proposition that Balkanism is just another form of Orientalism. She argues that Balkanism evolved independently of Orientalism for various reasons, the most important one being geopolitical, as well as the "absence of colonial legacy" (p. 21).

Todorova traces the history of the terms 'balkan' and 'balkanisation' and the processes through which these terms began to have political and negative implications. The widely accepted origin of the term 'balkan' connects the emergence of the name and its entry in the peninsula with the arrival of the Ottoman Turks. Her chronological study of the processes of discursive invention of the Balkans leads Todorova to the conclusion that the early years of the twentieth century played an important role for the phenomenon to take place. During that period the Balkans became associated with violence and political unrest.

Among the body of scholarly work on the stereotypical images about the Balkans, Goldsworthy (1998) analyses what she calls the imperialism of imagination that pertains to Britain's impact on the way the

Balkans are seen and imagined throughout the world. She focuses on British literature and the works of Byron, Durrell, West, Stoker, and Greene. According to her, the exploitation of Balkan history and geography for the purposes of Western literature and the entertainment industry had a strong impact on the perceptions of and the attitudes towards the countries of the region, as well as the political involvement of the West. These studies of the Balkans give a good overview of the history and the processes of 'othering,' the Balkans. According to Todorova, travel literature had a very important role for the construction of various images of the Balkans in particularly among the British audience. As she points out "there is no doubt that in Britain travellers' accounts were the preferred reading after novels in the course of several centuries" (p. 89).

4. WOMEN'S JOURNEYS TO THE BALKANS – 19th AND EARLY 20th CENTURY

According to Allcock and Young (1991) the travelogues about the Balkans have to a great extent been written by women. These travel writing and the images they created about the Balkans are compared to the contemporary travel literature of the region. The comparison should serve as the basis for the analysis of whether the contemporary travel literature still perpetuates the colonial gaze or if it tries to engage more with the local histories and narratives. We will start by looking into the works of several British travel writers who travelled through south-eastern Europe in the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. We will then look into contemporary travelogues with a focus on Macedonia, now referred to as the Republic of North Macedonia. Two English women travellers, Georgina Muir MacKenzie and Adeline Pauline Irby, set off in the early 1860s on their Balkan journeys, which included Bosnia and Hercegovina. They recorded their experiences in several books in 1861 and 1877. According to Hadžiselimović (1991) Bosnia and Hercegovina figured prominently only in the fourth edition of their *Travels in the Slavonic Provinces of Turkey in Europe*, published in 1877 after G. M. MacKenzie had already died. Paulina Irby continued her travels with her new friend Priscilla Johnston, and was the sole writer of the Bosnian chapters in which she portrayed a rather negative view of Islam, the Turkish rule, and its domination over the Christian population.

The main aim of these two English ladies was to reach Sarajevo and establish a school for Serbian girls. Irby finally accomplished her goal in 1870, when she established the school in Sarajevo. A strong condemnation of Turkish rule in the Balkans, with a strongly Christian bias, is presented in MacKenzie's and Irby's *Introduction* to the first 1866 edition, later re-published in 1971. In it, they point out that "the exceptional misfortune of these conquered nations lies in the character of their conqueror, in the solid barbarism of the Mahometan Turk, and the tendency of his rule to make barbarians of its subjects" (xviii). Irby even refers to the Serbs as the "younger children of the European family" (Hadžiselimović, 1991, p.6). Todorova (1997) maintains that these two women travellers discovered the South Slavs for the English public, which in 1860 still believed that the inhabitants of the Balkans were Turks or Greeks. According to her it was they who "introduced the British public to a virtually unknown subject: the plight of the subject Slavs" and became staunch supports of the South Slavs (p. 97).

Edith Durham who travelled in the Balkans in the early 1900s, had a different perception of the region and its people, and shifted from sympathising with the Serbs to campaigning strongly for the Albanian cause. Durham made her first trip to the Balkans in 1900 at the age of 37, travelling along the coast of what is now Croatia, which further attracted her to Montenegro, and finally to the mysterious Albanian highlands that fascinated her. Following her initial trip in 1900, Durham kept returning to the region on numerous occasions with varying purposes including relief work in response to the appeal from the Macedonian Relief Committee after the 'Ilinden' uprising in Macedonia against the Turks in 1903. Durham wrote numerous books about her visits to the Balkans. One of her most famous works is *High Albania*, where she describes

the most remote and inaccessible territories of the Albanian highlands. During her first extended journey through Albania in 1904 she became impressed by the fact that what Albania really wanted was independence, recognised by Europe. As a result, Durham saw herself as being the advocate for the Albanian cause and has passionately identified with Albania's struggle for self-determination. Her work, like that of MacKenzie and Irby, became charged with political aspirations, making her become "an ardent champion of the Albanian cause in Britain" (Goldsworthy, 1998, p.165). She became very critical of the Serbs and Montenegrins, whom she thought of as hostile towards the Albanians. The political dimension of her travels become even more significant due to the fact that Durham's views were thoroughly opposed to Irby's, who was a Slavophile of long standing. Durham's relentless fight for Albanian independence brought her the title of 'Kraljica e Malesorevit' (Queen of the Mountain People), and in addition, in 1918 she became a prominent member of the Anglo-Albanian Society.

Durham's approach to the Balkans, as Goldsworthy (1998) points out, was that of a "sympathetic schoolmistress for whom the Balkans recreated the lost world of childhood" (p. 179). It seems that Durham ([1909] 1985) observed the Balkans from an implicit superior, 'grown-up' standpoint, perceiving the Balkans as the place where "time has almost stood still" (p. 20) and its people as children whose voices needed to be heard. Durham's 'essentialising' perspective on the Balkans stems from her belief that hatred was something inherent to the Balkans, "'natural', rather than created and fostered" (169). Her writings and travels contained her own political visions and what she hoped would be the best political solution to the Balkan question, which she believed rested in giving each nationality "its own territory" (1905, p.20). It seems logical to conclude then that what often stood in the background of those women's travels writings was a firm political aim and support for a particular cause.

Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* first published in 1941, received very enthusiastic reviews. The New York Times Book Review called it a paragon of travel writing. West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* is her only book that deals with the Balkan region and its complexity. As such, this extensive 1150-page-long work offers an intensive interaction with the region and a strong political platform that West supported. West's initial journey to Yugoslavia took place in 1936, when she was on a British Council tour, followed by two subsequent visits in 1937 and 1938. West travelled through the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, also known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. It was born on 1 December 1918 in the aftermath of the First World War and the succeeding breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. It is of the utmost importance for the understanding of the political dimension of West's work to emphasise that her companion and guide through the country, its history and people, whose name she altered into Constantine, was a Serbian Jew, Stanislav Vinaver. Vinaver was an official of the Yugoslav Ministry of Information. West displays very negative feelings towards Germans, Croats, and mostly towards Islam and the Ottoman Empire while strongly siding with the Serbs. This premise plays a very important role in her perception of Bosnia, as well as Macedonia, Kosovo, and Montenegro where she encounters elements of strong Muslim presence. West consider the Serbs as the guardians of Europe against Islam.

Her journey begins in the train from Salzburg to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. The political platform of her writing already starts revealing itself in the cabin of the train that she shares with two German tourists. Her intensely anti-German orientation comes to the surface in the very first pages of her work. Here she ridicules them for their opinion about the awfulness of the food in Yugoslavia as opposed to the quality of German trout, and especially for them lying to the ticket inspector that they had first-class tickets, while actually they had only second-class ones. She is also very unsympathetic towards the Croats mainly due to their interaction with the West, and more specifically Germany. In addition, she expresses strong resentment towards the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Her approach to the region has a strong political engagement, which follows the trajectory of support for the Serbian cause and the small emerging states free from the rule of empires. She uses history extensively in order to support her political views, and is often selective and non-

objective in her reflection about the region. Throughout her writing she remains a devoted advocate of the Serbian royalist forces in Yugoslavia during the Second World War, and a friend to many Yugoslav exiles in London. Obviously, many of those writings, Durham's in particular, were infused with a powerful and profound feeling of love and attachment for the Balkans. Nevertheless, it is enormously difficult, if not impossible, to deny that what often stood in the background of those women's travels and their writing was a firm political agenda and support for a particular cause. West's was heavily opinionated and according to that, she distinguished the good people, empires, and religions, from the bad ones. These inconsistencies clearly appear in the contemporary travelogues as well, an example of which will be discussed further below.

5. NEW PERSPECTIVES OF CONTEMPORARY TRAVELOGUES

Contemporary travel has been criticized for having lost its originality and the exploration of wondrous places and people, and it's often been noted that the rise of tourism "has made the experience of genuine travel impossible" (Fussel, 1980, p. 24) As Cooke (2013) observes, many of these approaches claim that travel writing in the contemporary period and the era of tourism is epistemologically obsolete (5). Huggan and Holland (1998) stress the need to criticize the white, male, heterosexual myths and prejudices produced by the writers, who sell to the readers' exotic, culturally "othered" goods. The manifestation of an ethnically superior attitude on to other cultures is something that these authors notice in the contemporary travelogues. Some of the travelogues analyzed in this paper show that they are also a representation of the traveler's deep inquiry about the place, its history, personal conflicts and struggles.

The main focus in the analysis of contemporary travelogues on the Balkans is on the Republic of North Macedonia and the travelogue written by Chris Deliso. This is further extended with the analysis of several aspects of the guide book on Macedonia by Thammy Evans and Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*. Deliso is an American travel writer, journalist and political analyst with an MPhil in Byzantine Studies from Oxford University. He spent more than 12 years travelling in the region. The focus of this paper is his work *Hidden Macedonia* (2008) which is compared to the ways in which the Balkans has been described in the late 19th and early 20th century travel literature, and to more recent travel reflections about the region, such as the work of Kaplan (1994). *Hidden Macedonia* revolves around Deliso's summer trip through three bordering countries: Greece, Albania, and the Republic of North Macedonia. In it, Deliso encounters philosophers, fishermen, archeologists, and Macedonian ethnic minority living in both Albanian and Greek villages bordering Macedonia. Deliso's style of writing and perceptions about the region do not come forward with claims of authority of knowledge over the circumstances in the country. He actually tries to engage deeply with the questions of identity, history and common culture in a country that undergoes deep struggles with these themes. His story of bordering identities is nicely woven out of the fabric of his travels on the borders of three countries.

The book opens with Deliso's description of his idea to make a circular trip around the lakes of Prespa and Ohrid passing through three states. He reveals the plans about his trip while in a small village on the Greek peninsula Khalkidhiki. His friend and philosopher George accompanies him on his journey. Deliso's wish to break away with the colonialist discourse of the superior Western observer of the inferior, often uncivilized *other* emerges already in the first pages of his book. Moreover, he often shows resentment towards the *westernisation* of different authentic cultures. Sitting in a restaurant in the village and watching Greeks eat Caesar salad instead of the authentic, fresh Greek salad, he states:

I felt aversion whenever I'd see a Greek eating conventional Western salad, and I looked at it with the kind of dark fear a Byzantine archbishop would have reserved for the theological innovations of the Catholic Church. It was a sign of the infiltration of western pollution, which threatened the

overall holiness – this threat was even greater since, as it seemed, nobody minded the Lettuce. (p. 12)

He continues by noting that in the past eight years, the city of Thessalonica was becoming less and less Greek and more international, due to several factors including British degrees offered through various university courses in the city, the Starbucks café at the main square and the emergence of the Chinese district. Deliso's journey and his frequent visits to taverns and restaurants where he dines from the local food are often coupled with his narration of various historical segments of the region. When he enters Edessa, a town in Greece very near the Macedonian border, he engages in a thorough historical explanation about the city's Macedonian past and its Slavic name Voden (referring to water as it is a place with waterfalls). He even underlines that the name Edessa resurrected and overtook the Slavic Macedonian name Voden back in 1912, when the Greek army entered the town during the Balkan wars (p. 22). According to him the greatness of Alexander, who was a full-blooded Macedonian, consisted of his ability and openness to become Greek and hence, spread Hellenism to North Africa, the Levant, throughout Anatolia and beyond. It is already in the first pages of his journey that he engages with the name dispute and Greece's insistence on the change of Macedonia's constitutional name. This engagement on the part of the traveler corresponds well with Lisle's (2006) observation that travelogues are incredibly important for understanding issues of international importance, parliamentary debates, media stories, etc, which are all the more revealing due to the wide reading audience of this genre (p. 1). Perhaps in this sense, Deliso's *Hidden Macedonia* is a thorough introduction to the history and current struggle over identity in this country which can reach and introduce the wider audience to some unnerving issues that the country struggles with. The author goes on to stress that the inhabitants of the next village they visited on the Greek side of the Prespa Lake, Psarades, spoke to him in Macedonian and not Greek, and that they told him that the 80 people in the village were ethnic Macedonians. Deliso goes on to discuss the exodus of the Slavic Macedonians, Bulgarians, and ethnically Greek communists from parts of Macedonia that were under Greek control between 1946 and 1949 followed by the statement of his Greek companion Neni, who said, "we did not learn about this in school" (p. 23).

He engages in discussions with the local inhabitants thus combining historical facts with locals' statements about how they feel and if they consider themselves Greeks, Macedonians or Bulgarians. In this weaving of the wondrousness of the place Deliso will say that "every village and town in Greek Macedonia has one forgotten name and one secret, one history unspoken of, or maybe more"(p. 39). Deliso's clear political engagement and siding with the Macedonian cause culminates in his dialogues with the co-traveler George which goes as follows:

One thing that Greeks do not understand is why is it that the people from Skopje cannot make a compromise and agree upon another name for their country. How can they make a compromise about changing something that they believe they are? Said I. (p. 39)

The dialogue continues with George arguing that Macedonia has territorial claims over Greece and Deliso reassuring him that no tanks will enter Greece, coming up with a witty response to George's argument that Macedonia had the option to call itself Slavo-Macedonia or Upper Macedonia. To this Deliso argues that Greece is actually asking for the exclusive monopoly over the name and that the generally accepted provisional name of Macedonia upon its acceptance in the EU under FYROM would be equivalent to calling Greece 'Former Ottoman Protectorate.' Almost half way through the book, and Deliso is still not in Macedonia, yet he talks about it, through historical narratives and cunning dialogues with his friend, thus building his position – backing up the ethnic Macedonian cause and bringing in issues of immense political importance. The next stop is Albania, again a bordering village, on the other Albanian side of Lake Prespa, called Pustec. Wondrous events follow them here as well, including a miraculous man on a horse, popping out of the darkest nights and woods, just at the moment when they were about to give up their search of the

village and showing them the way. The same elements of discovering a Macedonian minority and talking to the inhabitants in Macedonia permeate this scene as well. In this dialogue, the inhabitants list all the villages in the region inhabited by Macedonians, which continues on the next few pages. Finally, when he enters Struga, the town in Macedonia bordering Albania, thus reaching the lake of Ohrid, Deliso notes that the air was fresher and milder than any other spot on the lake. The last half of the book is in Macedonia. It is here that Deliso succumbs to stereotypes and bias especially when he gives statements which reveal similar dislike of the Muslim presence in the country as the earlier travel writings discussed previously. Soon enough Deliso states that when digging to make a new amphitheatre in the town, the workers found an old church most likely dating from 1895 when the memorial stone for the mean Sultan Abdulhamid had been inscribed. It is not clear with what kind of critical approach Deliso considers the Sultan mean, circumventing other crucial details about his reign such as the fact that during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid, a number of Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian schools were opened. Next to be targeted are the Torbesh, a group of Macedonian Muslims, most likely converted to Islam during the Ottoman period. The author's statement that they have proven to be politically unstable by gravitating from support of Macedonians through support of Albanians, and other political parties depending on who can better serve their interest does not come through with any critique or empathy for the small size of this community, and the necessity to instrumentalize the ethnicity in order to attain access to resources. When it comes to Macedonia and the name dispute, Deliso is very engaged in fighting against the injustices of the process, but when it comes to the Ottoman historical moments, which evoke Islam and the Torbesh minority in the country, Deliso shows an uncritical and partial attitude. A dilemma comes forward then: the question of whether Deliso does what Lisle thinks many contemporary travelogues are doing – bringing in issues of international concern to the wider public and what Cooke noticed was a new discovery of the wonders of contemporary travel writing, or if he conflates both approaches. That this is no accident can be proven by his next comments where he notices that in the beautiful village of Vevcani near Ohrid, by a spring with natural water, bottles of Slovenian and Macedonian beers were being cooled off and they were clean, not covered in garbage and filth as in Ljubaništa, a Muslim village further north. There is little likelihood though that Muslims would be cooling off beer publicly or any alcoholic beverage for that matter, so the questions of bias cannot be ignored.

Evans (2004) provides another interesting contemporary guidebook on Macedonia. In addition to the regular information about where to go and places to explore, she opens with a number of pages on the history of the region known as Macedonia perpetuating the same pattern of disdain and ignorance of the long Muslim past, which is merely represented as an invader in the region. Hence, she notes, “whilst the Ottomans encouraged the rule of the Orthodox elite over its millet [...] other churches of particular significance, such as Sveti Sofia and Sveti Pantelejmon in Ohrid were converted into mosques” (p. 11). Evans focuses more on providing accurate information about places to visit, than on her personal exploration of the country, yet she consciously or unconsciously engages in politically charged territory by getting into the name dispute from a very one-sided perspective. She brings to the fore Greece's protest against Tito naming the country the Socialist Republic of Macedonia after World War I, and asking him to change it into Vardar Macedonia or Skopje Macedonia until in 1991, Macedonia's independence “was too much for the Greeks” (p. 23). The author does not mention the fact that Greece started to ‘Macedonia-nise’ its northern province and use the symbols only in the late 90s, just before the break-up of Yugoslavia. Moreover, it is nowhere brought to our attention that the Republic of Macedonia underwent a different if not unique treatment from the EU in its process of gaining independence back in 1991. Both the EU and the UN shaped their attitudes towards Macedonia giving primacy to the Greek discontent regarding the name. Out of these two contemporary Balkan travelogues, Kaplan's (1994) *Balkan Ghosts* stands out as the most controversial one. He opens his book by pointing out that “travel writing should be a technique to explore history, art, and politics in the liveliest fashion possible” (p. xv). The best examples of such an

approach, according to Kaplan, are that of Rebecca West and Mary McCarthy. Kaplan leaves no space for exploration of the region, its culture, and politics, but rather compares Rebecca West and himself with the following words:

So she came to Yugoslavia to investigate the nature of the looming cataclysm, just as I came to investigate the nature of another looming cataclysm. Politics in Yugoslavia perfectly mirrors the process of history and is thus more predictable than most people think. (p. 8)

Some very partial statements come from Kaplan in the following passages:

The Balkans produced the century's first terrorists... Even the fanaticism of Iranian clergy has a Balkan precedent... Twentieth-century history came from the Balkans. Here men have been isolated by poverty and ethnic rivalry, dooming them to hate. Here politics has been reduced to a level of near anarchy that from time to time in history has flowed up the Danube into Central Europe. Nazism, for instance, can claim Balkan origins. Among the flophouses of Vienna, a breeding ground of ethnic resentments close to the southern Slavic world, Hitler learned how to hate so infectiously. (p. xxvii).

It seems that neither West nor Kaplan explored so much history, art, and politics in the Balkans, as much as they have arrived there with already pre-set ideas and opinions about the region, the cultures and places they visited according to which they shaped most of their writing.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper focused on the late 19th, early 20th century travel writings about the Balkans and compared them to the contemporary Balkan travel accounts. Interesting perspectives emerged as a result of this exploration. The first is that of the earlier travelogues' colonialist take on things, while the second is that of travelogues giving primacy to the local voices and narratives. Early 19th and 20th century women's travel literature and its impact on the production of stereotypes about the region were looked at in more detail. Davidson (2001) stresses the obvious and frequent inability of contemporary travelogues to part with the colonial tradition (p. 2). Contemporary travel writing according to him reproduces a dominant Western civilization from which the traveler emerges and then, in a well-known colonial fashion, categorizes, critiques and makes judgments about the less civilized world, which often ends up being a world of wonders precisely because it is dark, mysterious, and at the outskirts of civilization. The discussion leads to the conclusion that contemporary travel writing reproduces much of that colonial tradition and the judgements that come with it about who is more or less civilized, as well as about who has the authority over the knowledge. Against this perspective, it is inspiring to see how some contemporary works, such as that of Deliso write about the travelling to bordering countries so as to bring into focus the centrality and importance of local narratives and of the countries like Macedonia for the Balkan region. Several segments of Deliso's rejection of the 'western gaze' have been noticed throughout his writing. However, it seems that he, just like the earlier travel writes, takes a side, in this case the ethnic Macedonians (and mainly Christian Orthodox) in a country which is extremely complex and multicultural. In this way, he perpetuates the colonialist/western gaze, and his authoritative perspective stems from both his being a 'Westerner' and taking up the side with the ethnic Macedonians. These kinds of writings go against Lisle's argument that much of contemporary travel writing makes deliberate efforts to distance itself from the implications of the *Empire* by favouring cultural difference and recognizing values known to all humanity. While it has been noted that some contemporary travel writings about the Balkans attempt to be the voice of the locals and dismantle much of the principles on which the colonialist gaze of the earlier writings was based, they suffer from the identical problems of

(re)producing that same gaze, stereotypes, and bias upon the cultures and places that they write about. As such, travel literature has and still continues to play an important role in creating and perpetuating particular images and stereotypes about the cultures and places depicted, in this case, the Balkans. Finally, this strongly urges the need for a certain distance and a more critical reception of texts about the Balkans written by foreigners, as well as the need to address the importance of bringing local authors and other more objective studies of the region into the perspective.

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