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Koprivitsa, Chaslav D.

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The Balkans, Europe's Distant Back Yard: Identity – Alterity, Necessity – Arbitrariness¹

Chaslav D. Koprivitsa

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, Serbia

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Abstract

In this paper we are trying to re-examine the importance of role of the Balkans in the imagery of (Western) Europe. We want to shed light on three points. Necessity of Europe's through the Otherness, peculiarities of Europe's perception of the Balkans and influence of this allegedly unitary outside identity construction of the Balkans on self-perception of peoples from the peninsula. In the paper an effort is made, to point out how internal complexity of the European identity directly and inevitably affected of other, not only Balkanic cultural Others, and how specificity of the Balkans is that they are not recognized as sufficiently different Otherness.

Keywords: Balkans, Europe, West, identity, culture, recognition.

1. Introduction

When it comes to the Western perception of the Balkans, one notices a striking tension between geography, testifying to the Balkan Peninsula belonging to the European continent, and culture, which many – in and beyond the Peninsula – tend to interpret as something non-European, semi-European and in any case insufficiently European. In that perception the Balkans are thus established as an blurred and

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Corresponding Author: Dr. Chaslav D. Koprivitsa, Associate Professor, Faculty of Philosophy
Affiliation: University of Belgrade, Serbia
Address: #165, Jove Ilica, Belgrade
e-mail: caslav.koprivica@fpm.bg.ac.rs

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irritating *In-between*, neither Europe – nor Asia. Even today the representatives of the West are often scandalised by the “non-civilised nature” of the Balkan nations, but also by Balkans’ being and simultaneously not being in Europe, as a result of which the Balkans are on the one hand considered to be inner, Europe’s own and on the other outer, alien. This text is about to shed light on the European perception of the Balkans, but mainly to the “Balkan identity” as a corner stone of the Western *Balkanistic discourse*.

Once the Balkans territories were absorbed into the Ottoman Empire, local peoples gradually fell into oblivion of the rest of Europe – as so called “European Turkey”- until they started to return with the beginning of the 19th century. The cause of this historic re-emergence of the Balkan peoples was the success of their resistance to the Turkish occupation (1804, the First Serbian insurrection, 1821, Greek war for independence). Since by then it was no longer possible to ignore the existence of Christians in the Turkish Empire, Europe intensified their interest in those Christians – politically, militarily and culturally. One of the most significant traces of the emergence of the interest is the very “name” of the Peninsula, first used in 1808 by German geographer Johann August Zeune. As it happens, the Turkish word for mountain “*Balkan*” (today *Stara planina* [Old Mountain] in Bulgaria), was shortened to a word denoting a mountain only and then it came to signify the entire Peninsula (previously being named *Emine-balkan*, which meant *Mount Hemos*, Byzantine *Aimos/Emos*, as “Elyria,” “The Greek Peninsula,” or, occasionally, “the Byzantine Peninsula”). Eventually, one outsider (The West) used the word of other outsider (the Turkish Orient) to name the entire territory, where is by the way situated the geographical origin of the European culture. The “non-Balkanites” are in charge of not only directing of the area’s affairs, but also of naming it – as “the Balkans”.

The European discourse on the Balkans ranged between inquisitive, mostly poorly informed exoticism of numerous travellers, impressed and terrified by the peculiarities of this comparatively close and uncivilised region within Europe, and strategically motivated gathering information accompanied by various analyses, assessments of local situation and finally imaginary constructions of local identities. Either poorly known or fully unknown Balkan Other becomes a matter of interest from such point in time when its existence as a particular unit could no longer be neglected. Turkey was namely no longer able to “solve”, often by brutal force, the Balkan Christians issue, thus keeping it away from Europe’s eyes. Concurrently, the existence of such a Balkan factor which continuously, often unpredictably affected local and, increasingly, global circumstances, generated the awareness of the so called “Eastern Question”. Thus the Balkans stepped into European consciousness as a permanent source of instability which could neither be ignored nor solved, which produced a great deal of frustrations for generations of the world’s major politicians and decision-makers. This was utterly important for the psychological-cultural perception of the Balkans.

2. European/Western Need for Otherness

We stand on the position that the European Balkan-discourse, besides its standard and expected aspects – provision of information on the area, handling conflicts, enhancement of own interests etc. – was characterised by one additional major feature. Namely, from modern age on Europe – in its identity building, or even “inner Europeanization” – has been increasingly faced with identitarian-symbolic dependence on an Other.² This understandably was getting even more complicated if that cultural

² This is, as a matter of fact, more or less a commonly shared opinion – “There was a general consensus, nevertheless, that a European consciousness had formed precisely through a sense of separateness from a (varying) ‘Other’.” (Marc Schalenberg,

Otherness was in geographic terms European: *the Balkans' inner otherness*. All the time before the New Age, and especially once the modernity commenced, the cultural identity of Europe was arranged within the Christian world picture, in which World Order's eternity were guaranteed by the power of *cosmological-religious* transcendence. From the cultural-historic point of view, the identity of European "cultural self" was primarily based on that sort of transcendence, and the certainty concerning this was obviously obtained by faith. For a long time that formation was deemed unrivalled, until the Middle Ages order collapsed. Subsequently the transcendence lost its role as a foundation of for beliefs and life. Since the early New Age the man of the time tried to establish himself solely as the basis of knowledge", but the Cartesian attempt to find *fundamentum inconcussum* – which was not only a philosophic concept but also a benchmark symbol of the men's epochal situation³ – was doomed to fail. Inability of the modern man to find the foundation of comprehension within his own self, meant that the humanistic notion of the man as a "measure of all things" was untenable.

But the reply to what in theory turned out to be a failure of anthropocentrism, however unexpected it may seem, was attempted to be sought in colonial conquests, which served not only as bare acquiring of territories and plunder but also having an effect as *colonising other with one's own self*, which by the way Western man himself felt as questionable and groundless. Besides all strategic reasons for the conquests, in symbolic-metaphysical sense they stand for one of the last, we would say, desperate attempts to save the modern anthropocentric project. The very colonialism, as conquer of the "world", conceals the essential background of the entire endeavour: which if the *Man in general* (which is obviously a construction of European humanism) could not confirm his intended role of a benchmark of the entire reality, then the replacement for it needs to be found at least in the confirmation of centrality of the *European man* for other civilisations. The new world order was supposed to be re-established through the Western man, who self-styled himself in the centre of the world, thus making him the guarantor of its existence and well-being. Accordingly, eurocentrism is not the consequence of a successful application of anthropocentrism but, on the contrary, it as a consequence of its failure. Hence, *eurocentrism is a weakened and enforced anthropocentrism*.⁴ One can assume that a successful anthropocentrism also could have produced a sort of eurocentrism, but even though, it is highly probable that its essence would have looked otherwise.

Instead of the theoretic discourse playing the key role in the process of self-establishment, now the major point of the project has become practical (symbolic, communicative, economic, military etc.) domination over an Other, while the very discourse on the other – as shown by the "Orientalism" of Edward Said and the "Balkanism" of Maria Todorova (apart of certain exaggerations following their convincing criticism) – acquires the roles of an important means to encouraging and ensuring domination. The colonial

"Europeanization and History: Concepts, Conflicts, Cohesion", p. 108). Still, a common agreement could hardly be preserved when one tries to provide reason for that.

³ Hans Blumenberg, *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, p. 440/1: "The relationship between the Middle Ages and the New Age in terms of enlightened understanding of history has traits of dualism to which primarily corresponds Descartes' concept of the absolute and radical fresh start, whose presumptions were solely in the self-ensuring of a rational subject..." Thus the man gets "established as an absolute subject of acting" (100) given that "by dismantling the metaphysical notion of universe" (173) and subsequent "vanishing of telos" (161), the man "lost faith in the world", as a result of which he had to act as a "creating creature" (152).

⁴ Anouar Abdel-Malek, "Orientalism in Crisis," p. 108: "We will have a *homo Sinicus*, a *homo Arabicus* ... a *homo Africanus*, the man –the 'normal man' it is understood – being the European man of the historical period, that is, since Greek antiquity. One sees how much, from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, the hegemonism of possessing minorities.. and the anthropocentrism ... are accompanied by europeocentrism in the area of human and social sciences, and more particularly in those in direct relationship with non-European peoples."

construction of the culturally inferior other serves to justify the dominance over the others. Hence the Balkanistic discourse merely stands for a pseudo-colonial, discourse.

If, besides all the material gains, the colonised party represented *the basis of the rule*, and thus the foundation of the very much needed metaphysical self-establishment, then the historical end of colonialism did not put an end to its *metaphysical, self-foundational dependence on the other*. The Balkanistic, pseudo-colonial discourse of power, which operates by colonising identity of the imagined “Balkan” other with meanings which subdue it, actually represent an example of practice to maintain discursive domination which, besides geopolitical and economic ones, also earns the West, so to speak, “metaphysical” gain. By “arranging” affairs in the Balkans, the West feels the power which represents an underlying element of its “Self”. That is why the “normalisation” of the Balkans, as viewed from Western discursively constructed “abnormality” of the area, should last indefinitely and consequently bring domination which promise to supply the dominant party with pseudo-substantiality.⁵

The need for a (discursive) “Balkan”, but naturally not only Balkan, other is actually the need to have the one who will be manipulated with rather than communicated with. Besides the need for “resources”, it is also an expression of weakness, bad foundation of the “Western identity”. From the failure to provide own self-foundation through the anthropocentric project of re-shaping reality arises the self-concealed endeavour to still constitute own cultural Self – through discursive production of an ill-valued otherness. In comparison with that otherness will own identity, however unfounded it may be, not only *look “better”* but will become a bearer of the “universal cultural”.

If the European cultural subjecthood should be constituted, it requires an object to exercise its domination. It turns out that power is the “substantial” content of Western subjecthood. However, the problem is that in this manner Western discursively produced subjecthood turns to be dependent on the annulled, i. e. never recognized, “subjecthood” of the other, which is objectified mostly through the relation of dominance. The European cultural subject gets its “substantial” content from the objectified Other for as long as it is maintained in the state of submissiveness. It is clear however, that if the “substance” is relation-, circumstances-dependent, it can hardly satisfy the ontological criterion of the substantiality – however the substance-discourse may be outdated, but still – when one speaks on collective identities – it is unavoidable to be resorted to. The emancipation of an subdued otherness would mean the death of its “objectivity”, the “objective” value (to the West), that is discontinuation of the “substantial” underlying element of Western subjecthood. The West cannot receive recognition from the otherness which is totally objectified. This recognition is here the way to obtain certain “foundation”. Nevertheless, if the other, not only the Balkan other, were to be admitted in its specific otherness, i.e. as a certain kind of subjectivity (to some extent), then the West would have to give up its aspiration for the benchmark position of its culture to the entire mankind.

In this regard, it would be interesting to mention a comment by Bulgarian scientist Alexander Kiossev, who mentions the Balkan “semi-other” who prevents the completeness of the Occidental self”.⁶ It appears that the above is a thesis contradicting ours but it only appears to be so. “Semi-other” is the one who with its “differentness” stands for a challenge to the Western idea of its universality due to which such

⁵ On this Rastko Močnik, “The Balkans as an Element in Ideological Mechanisms”, *Balkans as Metahor*, footnote 38: “In the light of our remarks about what follows, it is not likely that “the end of the Balkans” [a criticism of Todorova’s position (Todorova, 1997: 13)] is close at hand: the norm governing the teleology of “Europeanisation” guarantees that the process is never ending – unless radical transformation of the dominance relations between the centre and (semi)periphery occur. But the Balkanistic ideology exists specifically for the purpose of preventing the possibility of such a radical termination.”

⁶ Alexander Kiossev, “The dark intimacy: maps, identities, acts of identification”, (<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2003-05-19-kiossev-en.html>)

a "semi-other" should be "civilised" and "normalised". But for as long as he it exists as such, the West has one against whom to create a relation of power and thus *utilize* it as the basis for the putative self-foundation. To the challenge of the "non-identical", the West must react; but if all the othernesses were "normalised", if the civilised Europe, or more specifically its self-invented replacement called "the West" (Occident, Abendland), became symbolically omnipresent, even then, or even better, especially then the West would get to be faced with the challenge of true establishment of its identity and the very (one) Civilization as a whole. At that point the Western-universal human would be put in the similar situation in which the modern man was when he experienced the boundaries and weaknesses of anthropocentrism. Thus the extended "normalisation" of the other should be a replacement for potentially dangerous, repeated facing with own self. For that reason the process should be postponed for as long as possible and because of that it should never be completed. This is by the way incorporated in the very project of Balkanistic construction of the "abnormal", Balkan other. The point is that because of impossibility to meet the need in question in such a way, the process of its fulfilment must be indefinitely prolonged.

So, the "semi-other" irritates by provoking low spirits, and when need be radical action against it is taken but at the same time its obstruction of Western Self's (unaccomplished) universality is necessary and, even, in a distorted manner, *constitutive*, because that is exactly the initial cause for the demonstration of Western power. Without the "abnormality" of other there is no "normality" of the West, which the ostensible, ideological "normalcy" prevents from facing with its true insufficiency. The "civilisation mission" is more so a replacement for discomfoting realisation of the shortcomings of the very foundation of own civilisation. It is much easier to "civilise" someone else, in a discourse stylised as a "barbarian", than to see how things are with own civilisation and whether it is worth being imposed on at all.

Now, it is necessary to seriously consider a rebuttal of this thesis which in a discussion with Maria Todorova – who, admittedly, has not always come up with the best of arguments for her statements – were presented by Sundhaussen. He says:

First of all, I doubt Todorova's thesis that the "West" understands the Balkans as an "*alter ego*", as an "*inner dark side*". "West's" *interest* in the post-Ancient and post-Byzantine lands of the Balkans was for centuries marginal and revived only short-term in cases of conflict, only to quickly die off again. Todorova does not provide any empirically convincing confirmation of the "Balkans serving as a warehouse for negative features vis-à-vis which the positive and self-righteous picture of "Europeanism" and the "West" was constructed [Todorova 1997: 188] When did this supposedly occur? Reports on Balkan Wars 1912/1913 or on post-Yugoslav wars of the nineties did not shape the picture of the "West" about itself [...]. Unlike the bipolar orientation patterns "Europe and Russia", "Europe and Asia", "Christianity and Islam", "West and East", "capitalism and socialism" etc... the alleged polarity "Europe and the Balkans" or "West and the Balkans" was not granted a role of establishing identity of "Europe" and "West"... But nowhere in defining and shaping the identity of "West" are the Balkans seen as a negative matrix. Regardless of crises and wars, in the New Age, in the long-term auto-perception of the "Western" societies they played neither a negative nor a positive role.⁷

Sundhaussen appropriately acknowledges an auto-defining need for the Other but it is not only a formal need to demarcate but a co-constitutive role of the Other due to West's own self-understanding and self-foundation insufficiency. However, what strikes as peculiar about the Balkans, which failed to be noticed in other interpretation of the topic, is that they as otherness have the same function, precisely as

⁷ Holm Sundhaussen, „Der Balkan: Ein Plädoyer für Differenz“, pp. 609/10.

not being recognised as otherness, which is a unique case when one speaks on the Western (but not only Western) self-foundation through the others.

In the Balkanistic discourse the “Balkans” play a perverse, largely disguised role by participation in (endless) hetero-centred establishing of Western Self – since the previous attempt of auto-centred establishing has turned out to be a failure. So, the infinite establishing of the Western cultural Self by means of the “Balkans”, i.e. own picture of the Balkans, has been taking place “behind the scenes” on an unlit stage – which is inevitable since the Balkanic otherness, although undoubtedly treated as a different matter, is not recognised in its otherness – due to which that process also remains obscured to many Western scholars, Sundhaussen included. His statement is true to the extent that the Balkans “do not explicitly appear” in the identity of the West as a negative matrix because the process operated exactly thanks to their non-appearance. So it is entirely irrelevant that for the explicit cultural self-awareness of the West, which is represented well by Sundhaussen himself with his inclination to the (stigmatizing) Balkanistic discourse, the “Balkans” do not appear as standing for a “non-alteritary” (Sundhaussen, *ibid.*,611).

3. Where Are the “Balkans”?

The Balkans are set between the Europe “proper” and Orient, and perception of Balkanites as culturally “stuck” between the Western and the Oriental civilizations, make them allegedly insufficiently “civilised”. This is why many Westerners see the Balkans as a region not entitled to its own identity, its aspirations and taking care of own affairs independently. To Europe and the West, the Balkans are often scouted as their “backyard” where the exclusive competences of the West apply. The Balkans are too much in Europe in order for the West *to be able* to let them on have their way and too, supposedly, “savage” in order for it to *dare* to let them have their way. *Interspatiality* – foremost cultural-perceptive one, which sometimes affects also the perception of the Balkans’ geography – produce a sense of the Balkans people being “unfinished” in terms of (“civilised”) identity. The “Balkanite” is an irritating non-Oriental who is not a proper European either but is frustrating to the West because he partly reminds of a European, but not enough so to acknowledge him as an equal, or perhaps as an interesting not-myself. Evil fate of the Balkans’ man – it constantly causing the interference of outside powers – is that to the West he is not Oriental so as to, so to say, “be left alone” nor European so as to be recognised as “one of Europe’s own”.

Being between, being transitory, which is sometimes (as in case of the “Balkans”) only as a Neither–Nor to understand, means therefore not having own self or not having own self to a sufficient extent. This “fact” in itself renders a certain “right” to manage from without this “selfless some-thing”, so to speak “entity without identity”, i.e. one whose identity is void and whose desires and efforts actually do not/should not exist. The construction of the “Balkan identity” is a consequence of the West’s reluctance even to try to understand who is who in the Balkans. Thus are constructed monolite “Balkanites” who are no actually existing, compact in terms of identity, recognizable in archetypal or psycho-typical group⁸ but

⁸ Aleksander Kiossev, “The Dark Intimacy”: “*These efforts at differentiation and at producing distinct national politics of representation (institutional, political, and even military ones) clashed with the stubbornness of Western Balkanism, which was unwilling to see any differences and perceived the region from a macro-colonial perspective. Despite the availability of good, expert, diplomatic, and journalistic knowledge about the differences, the Western mass media repeatedly reproduced the image of an obscure geopolitical and cultural whole, senselessly fragmented, where unrecognizably small tribes and aggressive micro-states staged long forgotten European dramas in miniature: mutual hatred, uncivilized wars under the banner of hysterical and idiosyncratic nationalisms, cultural oppression, ethnic cleansing.*” This apparently well-founded view is not shared by all. The explanation for this claim is in the following: “*The Balkans per se, that is, as a distinct geographic, social, and cultural entity, were*

are, if a negative genealogical reading were to be applied, just the opposite, a correlate of Western *intentional ignorance*. That is why it comes as no surprise that "the Balkans", not only as a term but even more so as the associated discursive-heterocratic construction – are a non-Balkan invention.

4. Interiorizing the Balkanism

In a situation when that "halb measure" of other is recognised, as seen by Europe in the Balkans, it may be possible to make a choice or to strive to transform it and adopt it or to reject it altogether. The West chooses "the middle way" but still in a manner keeping the Balkans closer to Europe than the Orient. This point is also noted by Todorova:

This in-betweenness of the Balkans, their transitory character, could have made their simply an incomplete other; instead they are constructed not as other but as incomplete self.⁹

Nevertheless, here there is no disjunction of the sort suggested by Todorova, and instead in the Balkanic (discursive) unfinishedness supplement in a dialectical means the unfinished nature of the sameness and unfinished nature of otherness. Namely, the Balkans are not only an incomplete Europeanism but also an incomplete Orientalness, because if the Balkans were a success with regard to the latter, if they did not have Christian roots and if in the Middle Ages they did not take part in European – which admittedly, being Byzantine, the West not infrequently does not recognise as truly European – and that therefore the modern time does not strive to "Europeanize", the West might let them continue to the nearest "Middle East". The Balkans are not different enough to enjoy Europe recognizing them the "right" to be as a recognized different. This way, them being close and closeness have not been "forgiven" so they had to become a matter of objectifying, instead of them, by being allowed to cultural distance, being permitted to become Oriental or different in some other manner, but "complete" otherness in own being.¹⁰ The Balkans as in-between-world is destined not to be completed as a self-contained world, but rather to stay in status of *perpetual immaturity of transitional in-betweenness*.

However, this sense of in-betweenness is not characteristic only of the Balkans hetero-discourse but also of the auto-discourse:

It is well-known that one cannot live on a bridge or on crossroad... The bridge is only part of the road, a windy and dangerous part at that, not a human abode.¹¹

This poetic parable, which are abundant in intellectual, artistic even political discourse in the Balkans, is interesting as a cause to shed light on the true background of such self-understanding. Therefore it appears that the perception of own geographic interspatiality is linked with the perception of

'discovered' by European travellers only from the late eighteenth century on..." (Todorova, 1997, pp. 184, 62). If something has been "discovered", which the author herself put in inverted commas, thus suggesting that actually this entity is invented, constructed – and so it cannot be seen in reality in the "per se" status. Secondly, with this sentence the author unintentionally confirms that she holds the position on the inseparability of geography, social structure and cultural identity (the Balkans as "fate"), which already was a guiding line of the simplifying-stigmatising Western Balkanistic discourse, which she tries to deconstruct in her works. Her position, putting aside her mostly justified criticism of Western Balkan discourse is a sort of inverted Balkanism, i. e. Balkanistic discourse supplied with positive self-perception of the "Balkan identity". In this respect, being dependent on the original Balkanism, this sort of "counter-Balkanism" is equally troublesome.

⁹ Todorova, 1997, p. 18.

¹⁰ Todorova, 1997, p. 15: "The West and the Orient are usually presented as incompatible entities, anti-worlds, but completed anti-worlds."

¹¹ Tsvetana Georgieva, "Khora i bogove na Balkanite" [Chora and Gods in the Balkans], *Balkanistic forum* 2/1994, p. 33 (quoted according: Todorova, 1997, p. 59).

own cultural *in-betweenness*. Still, seeing own existence as being-in-between, even more: recognising in it one of the most important features of own identity, actually means to replace “essential/”cluster’-features” – by putting into the focal point of own identity the outside circumstances. Then the “substantial” is replaced with the occasional, the chance (geographical position) and transient (historic) circumstance, in such an auto-construction acquires a character of something unchangeably-permanent, of “fate”. Therefore we can speak of the Balkanites’ self-fatalyzing of own historical-cultural identity, as an important testimony of *interiorization* of the Western Balkanistic discourse. If on the level of an unbiased historical analysis it may be established that the “backwardness” of the Balkans nations stems from the “loss” of several centuries due to the Turkish occupation of the Peninsula, then with this perception of sheer circumstance the alleged *fate* of the “Balkans region” not only becomes interior but also virtually petrifying, as ostensibly invincible.

Insurmountability of backwardness, i.e. lasting the dominance of past and all future “circumstances” vis-à-vis all present and future efforts of the “Balkanites” means that they are immature because in their identity there is nothing (and hence that it is a “void”) that could overcome the detrimental given. To live instead own history – a pitiful, ruthless “fate”, inevitable means that circumstances – that do not include just the chance given, but a continuous “interference” of outside powers, which by the “Balkanites” create a sense of own powerlessness due to experience of permanent prevailing of alien powers over own desires and acts – are always more important and more prevalent than own existence. That means that own identity may not exist otherwise but just as a permanent repetition of undesired events, as suffering them and eventually an involuntary, fatalistic (hence a sort of pseudo-Oriental!) coming to terms with them. So, the Balkanite is the one who is continually prevented from becoming *someone* in full capacity – and in that sense the Balkanistic auto-perception and hetero-perception are complementary. The “Balkanistic” auto-perception of the Balkanites is not only *interiorization* of the West’s Balkanistic *discourse* but also the consequence of centuries-long history of foreign (Western) interfering in Balkans’ affairs which at least partly, for sure, created the reality which is in conformity with the Balkanistic interpretation of the Balkans. If Balkanites appropriate the “Balkanistic” self-consciousness, then the self-fulfilling prophecy – of “confirmation” of Balkanistic discourse with the “creation” of a “Balkanistic” reality – will remain concealed.

If one can interiorise other parties’ constructions about him – as if they were really his true identity, that is self-explanatory of his immaturity, of his identity being unfounded and unfinished. Nevertheless, on the meta-level as well, the acceptance to construct own self by means of imperialistic Balkanistic discourse also represents a certain confirmation of his main thesis on the Balkanites’ immaturity and incapability to take their decisions independently; because if they were mature, would other’s ill-meaning and arbitrary constructions be able to replace their own self-reflection? So, the Balkanistic discourse is confirmed on two levels: with a discursive but there is also economic and eventually military overpowering the Balkanic other, it forces (“uncivilised”) behaviour which is consistent with “forecasts” of Balkanistic discourse,¹² but in the way that it begins to see itself in a manner constructed in the discourse, thus confirming that it is just an object because other’s semantic slavery can be accepted as true about self.

¹² Bogoljub Šijaković, *A Critique of Balkanistic Discourse. Contribution to the Phenomenology of Balkan-“Otherness”*, p. 39, Toronto 2004: “The forming (or deforming) of Balkan identity as Otherness, from the position of power, attributes undesirable qualities to it, subjugates the general context, forces Otherness to re-affirm its own disqualification, thus representing those ways by means of which the desired perception of Otherness is transformed into the reality of that Otherness. The natives of the Balkans act ‘as they were expected’ to act, that is, according to the roles prescribed by the Balkanistic discourse of power.”

5. "Otherness" of the Balkans – Hermeneutics of Balkanism

In the Western Balkanistic discourse it is always presumed, and frequently, whether directly or indirectly, the Balkans' otherness the subject of repeated "proving". Nevertheless, light should be shed on the manner in which the mechanism of discourse alienation of the Balkans works. The area of the Balkan Peninsula is in some major features different from the rest of Europe but it becomes problematic once the idiosyncrasy is artificially, often in an interested, biased and ignorant manner presented and canonised as an alleged *pure, radical and irrevocable otherness*. It needs to be mentioned that in the sense of cultural perception it represents an idealisation not allowing communication – because it is a pure otherness and cannot even enter into a dialogue (with myself); it is entirely inappropriate, incomprehensible and ultimately it is not deserving to be understood – if there is anything there worth of understanding. Hence, there is an essential difference between the "real otherness", whereby differences and similarities are acknowledged, but which one strives to understand and still understands, and discursive-communicatively constructed, controlled, isolated and stigmatising, conditionally speaking, "pure otherness". When some real otherness is in a discursive sense set as a "pure otherness" a presumption is created of it being tossed in the semantic dustbin, in which the unacceptable otherness is disposed, and then, when so wished in line with own interests, it is invested with any kind of narrative since the constructed void while the "whiteness" of the form of its discursively created "identity" generally allows that.¹³

The "pure other" is something that is entirely incomprehensible whose no in-built features oblige to be accurately understood, which needs not be understood at all and which may be, can be and ultimately, depending on needs, should be rejected. Not in itself but also for itself, the "pure other" exists as *nothing*. With a disallowed equalling of other reality with the ideal-typical, "pure otherness" we create a presumption that from it a *humanly nothing* is created. So, it is always possible for the cognitive and semantic void, which is a formal feature of this discourse, to be filled with a moral nullity, without running the risk of making a mistake or being punished (say for in other cases the politically incorrect racism, which is widespread in the Balkanistic discourse).¹⁴

The discursively constructed "Balkans" stands for a "semantic prison" in which are (certain) Balkans peoples arbitrarily dragged or from which are released, when so required by interests. In this sense, those "Balkans" are a discursive prosthesis which replaces, fakes and ultimately conceals the real Balkans. Because of this Balkans nations, once and when they agree to this discourse – and as a rule they have, and mostly still do – often demonstrate a desperate effort to escape in any possible way from this field of semantic coercion field, at times even seeking commendations from the ones they, in their infantile actually Balkanistic "Balkans" ways, deem competent for running this punitive-semantic institution – that they do not belong to the imaginary "Balkans".¹⁵

The Balkanistically shaped other form the Balkans is that other which is entirely incomprehensible and so, contrary to expectations of philosophical hermeneutics (Hans-Georg Gadamer) in interpreter's attitude towards it, no interest in self-comprehension would emerge. But still, with it being something

¹³ Unexpectedly enough, the recognition of this fact comes from Sundhaussen, who is an ardent opponent of the thesis on the Balkans being co-constitutive of Western subjectivity: "The Balkans are a void place which is in the event of conflicts filled with stereotypical explanatory patterns which are used to a greater or lesser extent..." (Holm Sundhaussen, „Der Balkan: Ein Plädoyer für Differenz“, p. 610).

¹⁴ Plenty of testimonies on this, when it comes to Yugoslav case at least, can be found in a book by Slobodan Vuković: *Kako su nas voleli: antisrpska propaganda i razbijanje Jugoslavije* [How They Loved Us: Anti-Serbian Propaganda and the Destruction of Yugoslavia].

¹⁵ "We have been given strong assurances and support of the USA that Croatia belongs to Central Europe rather than the Balkans." (Croatian president Franjo Tudjman upon return from Washington, 3rd August 1996).

different, even if it is “savage” and entirely incomprehensible something, the Balkans have been to the West a *cause* for self-mirroring, self-confirmation but also compensation for the West’s own shortcomings. Commensurately with the alleged complete absence of transparency – in a synchronic aspect – the Balkans are in the historical sense as well seen as *irrevocably* belated. They supposedly cannot make up for their belatedness (at least not as the *Balkans*). The “Balkanite”, once when it is decided that such a role should be given to him, is not *recognised neither as a foe* (which is, or occasionally was the case in history with an Oriental or a Russian); due to his “complete”, vague, intimidating, but in terms of identity not-recognized otherness he has been turned into a mere object which is feared as if it were a sort of human-alien threat, which should be curbed so as for it not to be seen as human, even a hostile subjectivity. The Balkanite – or the one from among them who has occasionally been chosen as a foe, then is not a hostile other human but becomes an inhuman “other-thing”.

If some other Balkans nations stand out from others – especially the ones who do not fit into this dehumanising pattern, it is not because they are recognised for what a particular nation actually is but because any and all things can be projected into them, since they are a pure void, *semantic nullity*.¹⁶ As an object of uncontrolled reading into (germ.: Hineinlesen), which does not try to comply with the reality of who is being discursively fabricated – because truth be told for the one reading into and the relevant audiences, he is *nothing*. Therefore, to give an quite familiar example from the recent Balkanistic discourse, there is no *essential* difference between, a “barbarian-villain” (a Serb) or a “civilised victim” (a Muslim from Bosnia and Herzegovina) – because they have not been taken into account in any way in their *actual* identity itself nor (almost) anybody in the West wants to know anything about them – beyond the discursive constructs. They are but a pure, dehumanised, abstract pattern into which already cast roles are entered. Thus is confirmed that also the constructed “victims” (not only those stylised as “butchers”), which, as a matter of fact, at least in this sense, actually were the victims –of objectifying, dehumanising Balkanistic discourse.

In the Balkanistic, discourse its loose reading (into) is not an act like, a hermeneutically legitimate interaction between own preconceptions, conceptual schemes, which are ultimately an expression of interpreter’s identity – which is an inevitable starting point of every reading of what the other is about. This excludes any a priori intrinsic, pre-discursive content of otherness which would not be in advance pre-shaped by the occidentocentric approach. Beyond the domain of meaning nothing belonging to an alien culture bears weight in what in itself it means or, we will dare to say, *in itself* is. Although one of the intentions of post-structuralism – into whose theoretical matrix fits such an understanding – is deconstructive and emancipatory, it could be pointed out that Western cultural imperialism, and the postmodernist, anti-imperialist discourse are in fact close allies. The latter namely *claim* that outside a pre-given realm of Intelligibility nothing can produce a meaning, while others *operate* on the basis of this pattern, striving for this given general realm of meaning to continue to remain the one produced in the West. So their ideological controversy is in fact pretty seemingly and superficial. Therefore, there is no culture, there is no man outside the West, because Western culture is the Culture, and the Western man is the Man. This is about the content of otherness of the Balkan other in thus set relations of discursive power being *a priori excluded* so that the perception of it is *entirely the result of a construction*. *Instead* of an

¹⁶ During the nineties Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who were in the Western discourse assigned the role of a victim, were stylised into Europeans, Arians even, while the Serbs were assigned the role of a barbarian, hence Balkanic, semi-Asiatic otherness. How far that went is evident from what French media intellectual Bernard-Henry Levy used to say that “Bosnia is our Spain,” (Timothy Garton Ash, “*Bosnia in Our Future*”). He even compared the wartime leader of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims Alija Izetbegović, a confirmed Islamist fundamentalist (in 1970 he wrote *The Islamic Declaration* which envisaged a reform of Bosnian-Herzegovinian society on the basis of Islamist principles), who never abandoned his ideas, with the President of the Spanish Republic at time of war against Franco!

interaction of the Western perspective and the phenomena themselves, the picture of the Balkans here transits to a *pure perceptivum*, to an uncontrolled, fictitious and not infrequently a wildly facts-avoiding imagination. The pure otherness and the pure perceptivum have to be interdependent. Here perception does not interact with a specific given but it has been prompted, catalysed and fulfilled with itself, i.e. own wishes, needs and interests. The Balkans are thus reduced to a mere occasion for their obsessive, narcissistic need for self-mirroring,¹⁷ which, in a way is proof of a thorough frustration resident in the very core of the Western identity.

If the understanding of the other is functionally related to self-understanding, then in the case of an arbitrary feeding of various interpretative constructions into the being of the other, the being of the one who is, after all, to the Western interpreting Self necessary – then it stands for the reversed face of the West. That is why the "Balkans", especially the fact that the "Balkans" in the Balkanistic discourse is not recognised as a part of *cultural Europe*, represents a *symptom of the West*. The reverse side of a productive relationship between (other-)understanding and self-understanding is a twisted relationship between the mere construction and the symptom. Moreover, the symptom is a disturbed self-understanding just like the mere construction is a self-prevented comprehension of other, its mis- oder *not*-understanding. With that regard, the Balkanistic discourse along with the behaviour which is in accordance with it, represent a demonstration of non-communication with this particular other, but also of numbness before what is acute and troublesome in own identity. The "Balkans" otherness is actually a symptom of the Western identity and it functions therefore as a suppressed interior, but to explicit cultural self-consciousness as a denied, "non-alternative" otherness as well. It turns out that the by interpretation constructed Neither-nor of the Balkans, i.e. neither (true) sameness nor (true) otherness, boomerangs to the West (Western Europe) in the form of the uncontrolled "Balkans", constantly eluding self-mirroring and wandering the realm of Western self-discourse, which precisely because they remain hidden for reflection – but instead manifest themselves as a symptom.

6. The Origin of the Need for Other's Use

The case of the Balkans and its modern discursive „Balkanistic“ construction in the West does require that additional light be shed on it. It would be insufficient to stop at moralising which has bitterly established ruthlessness (both the discursive and the real one) towards the Balkans, as a sad case of the approach of the "great ones" and the "powerful ones" towards the "small ones" and the "powerless ones" etc. One wonders how it is at all possible, which does not aim the issue of the origin of the interest perception of relationships between "us" and "others" – which is almost trivial – but the issue is how the Other can be used at one's discretion in both the mentioned senses, and prior to that, why the use of the Other should be necessary to resort to.¹⁸ This case also underlies the making of actual civilisation distinctions between different parts of mankind, but also of the latter distinction between "us" and "others", that being in particular significant in the "(Western) European discourse of delimitation" (Schenk's term: *Abgrenzungsdiskurs*). Namely, as chance would have it, in (geographical) Europe abide peoples – „Russians, Ukrainians, Serbs, Greeks, and Turks – whose history is not Latin“, „whose history is not ours and whose problems are none of our business“.¹⁹ Admittedly, the latest formulation refers to the "uncouth

¹⁷ Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism", p. 412: "[t]he Eurocentrism of analyses that present the colonial encounter monologically, as a narcissistic projection of the Western will to power."

¹⁸ A part of the answer to the latter question is outlined – but outlined only – in the first paragraph.

¹⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, "Some Europes in Their History", pp. 61, 60.

warring tribes” of Serbia, Albania and Bulgaria, which “are in our minds only marginally European” (*ibid.*, p. 60). But since neither the Greeks nor the Russians nor the Turks know Latin Christianity or “Latin history” so their “problems are none of our business”, although *these* peoples – unlike the other above mentioned, even in author’s rephrasing the colloquial Western consciousness of “near” othernesses, it appears farfetched to call them “uncouth warring tribes”. The point is that with all these, geographically close nations, whether they are traditionally Muslim or Christian, there is a perception of their civilisational otherness in the West, and hence the Westerners “may think of as Europeans or not as we choose”. The choice, or rather, the possibility itself to choose, is the key point here, as Pockok correctly points out: „The point is that we have to choose and do not quite know how to choose.“ (*ibid.*, p. 61) Nevertheless, this “freedom” is the reverse side of a dependence, conditionally called: “non-freedom”, that for self-foundational purposes it is necessary to be referred to some other party. Hence, it was historically speaking imperative, that Western referral to Other over and over seeks its expression in a use (both: theoretical and ideological) of the civilisational Other,²⁰ which repeatedly appears from the High Middle Ages and the conception of the “European ideology”.²¹

Uncertainties where the cultural Other begins and generally: who is the Other is in fact an expression of uncertainties concerning own identity, which is then, psychologically easily explicable, “made up for” by establishing the *A priori*. The *A priori* is the defining factor for each and every future relationship towards the Other, from which frequently arises a sense of superiority which precedes this prospective attempt at acquainting with its Otherness. Others, them being the ones over whom (we, the Westerners) are superior, or the ones – who do not share our sense of superiority – of the “civilized ones” over “barbarians”. It should be noted, that demarcation line between the civilised and the barbarians, which in linguistic and cultural-psychological terms was established by the Ancient Greeks, ever since then until today, by no sheer chance, represents a constant of the European self-understanding and the understanding of others. That is not only because of in various cultures, even irrespective of relative development levels, the ever-present ethnocentric semblance is the orientation “centre”, and consequently the cultural measure of “normalcy”, where dwells a particular, ethnic-cultural *we*; it is so rather because the being of Europe, ever since its Greek origins, which, as shown by Edmund Husserl and Jan Patočka, were merged with a critical, philosophical consciousness. Hence, the Greek-(proto)European identity was decisively and incomparably related to the question *Who are we?*

²⁰ Luisa Passerini, „From the Ironies of Identity to the Identities of Irony“, pp. 201/2: “For many years forms of European identity were built up through contrasts, such as ‘Orientalism’ versus ‘Occidentalism.’ Europe’s ‘Other’ varied from an image of Asia, to an image of Africa, to an image of America – or of peoples of these continents. Europeans’ ambivalence toward these others manifested itself in two different but indivisible relations. [...] The other is the area of the imagination, which created images deriving not from observation or experience but from psychological drives. The Other was therefore both the primitive, considered as a holder of positive values with which to rejuvenate a corrupt civilization and a touchstone for the level of progress reached by Europe, and the savage to be exploited, converted, and ‘civilized.’” Demarcation toward the Other, the above said illustrates, does not have to have the only purpose of pushing it in the domain of backwardness, worthlessness and despise, but could also stand for an escapist-folklore reverse side of belonging to own culture – as an unfamiliar Otherness in which one in one’s imagination can find refuge – from own culture.

²¹ Frithjof Benjamin Schenk, „Mental Maps. Die Konstruktion von geographischen Räumen in Europa seit der Aufklärung“, p. 505). The genesis of the connection between the interest strategy, that ideological construction of own and other’s cultural Self is mentioned in another text as well “Such a strategy has always been as dependent on the externalization or creation of negative others as on the internal dynamics of group formation. It was crucial in achieving a “European self-consciousness,” an understanding of the parameters of its powers through the creation of negative identities and the appropriation of difference for its own. Such consciousness emerged in the fourteenth and fifteenth century [...] long before it appeared as a strategy in Africa, Asia, or any of the other continents.” (John Borneman & Nick Fowler, “Europeanization”, pp. 489/90).

Naturally, this question is as always difficult to be answered, especially in many aspects still rudimentary beginnings of (recorded) history and is therefore understandable why this intrinsic difficulty, tacitly and in an un-reflected manner, was answered by a psychologically and value-driven invention of "civilized" us and "barbarian" others. Still, as far as we know, it is only Europe that due to its incomparable and specific feeling of its own (New Age) civilisational incompleteness, identity-openness, felt a dramatic significance of the issue of the Other.²² The "usual" dependence of one culture's identity on neighbouring others (of own perception of their identities) is additionally emphasized and notably changed in Europe's/West's case. As a result of that the West has over and over resorted to its ideological-interested constructions; but, admittedly, it has demonstrated ability and keen interest (rather than mere casual curiosity) in understanding others, which is quite unique in the concert of world cultures.

The construction – particularly if arbitrary and well-intentioned, and not only (possibly) "inevitable" – and the discursive, interest-driven use of the Other is related to a dramatic uncertainty concerning the *Who are we?* The longstanding absence of a reliable answer to this question, especially in modern history, when the issue of West's identity becomes particularly acute, was answered, *inter alia*, with a gradual investigation of spatial and civilisational boundaries between oneself and the spatially not so distant Other. As a matter of fact, one can hardly deny indisputable distinction between West and, for instance, Eastern Europe or "South Eastern Europe" which existed and continue to exist till present day. However, what strikes as problematic is, how the absence of self-acquaintance and insecurity concerning own identity find their expression in arbitrariness and unreliability in drawing boundaries between "us" and "others", and also in the *construction* of the Other as a "dumping ground" for negative features, while the opposite and the desirable ones are reserved for own self. But still, to be honest, the question of self-understanding and the issue of surviving in the never-ending "game" of life played with others, i.e. with the ones who do not see themselves as "part of ourselves", cannot be demarcated that easily.²³

The question of identity, own and someone else's, falls into the "orientation" domain,²⁴ the need for which stands for an anthropological constant. Still, in reality, this orientation normally is not neutral but instead is a part of *mental mapping* by means of which orientation is carried out. This orientation, for her part, is as a rule encumbered with the value aspect, which concealed specific content notions of own self and of others' selves, and not infrequently certain interests and projections. This is proven by the fact that those peoples whose self-denoting and other-denoting was accepted (be reminded of Nietzsche's understanding that instead of truth there are only different interpretations, behind which stands the will for power) from it only in actual relationships, in advance drew a distinctive-discursive-cognitive advantage, and ultimately power and benefit – over other peoples and civilisations which in international relations were more or less mere objects of (other's) labelling.

7. Western and Non-Western Identity Inclusion of the Other

It is once more shown that interest and power are the reverse side of identity vagueness, hence weakness, whereas in the establishing of culturally related and culturally unrelated conglomerates

²² J. G. A. Pocock, already quoted, p. 67: "The lands originally called 'Europa' are those in which 'Europe' experiences a continuing problem in defining itself."

²³ Borneman & Fowler, "Europeanization", p. 489: "The relationship of the European to this [European] entity is a form of identification that works simultaneously as a strategy of self-representation and a device of power."

²⁴ Etymologically, this word comes from the word Orient, where, according to Middle Ages Biblio-centric notion (used to be) is the Garden of Eden.

contingency plays an important role. Not even auto-receptive wanderings, nor (such an) interest arbitrariness and ruthlessness towards others would probably be possible if (Europe's) West knew exactly – to which extent (sufficient) "accuracy" is possible at all – *Who are we?*, what is and where the very core of the European-Western *We* lies. Namely, if it were specifically known *who* and *where* we are, so, where the centre of the *We*-identity is, then it would be commensurately accurately known where and specifically why European outskirts begin and again where the "essentially" indisputably European dwells. *However*, none of these cognitions, from immanent and insurmountable reasons, is not precisely identifiable. Precisely this cracks a door open for numerous *uses* of various instants from auto-reception and hetero-reception in the creation of cultural-perceptive schemes with general applicability. (*Naturally*, it is not the case that the existence of a dominantly prevalent scheme instantly and entirely replaces another one, and so, for example, the old North-South division somehow survived the surge of the East-West identification/division.)²⁵

Nevertheless, the West is not the only one that needs a civilisational (relative) Other²⁶ for "identity" reasons – in order to determine itself. Norwegian Neuman shows that it was done so by "Central Europeans" and the Russians.²⁷ Actually, quite ironically, if Europe's West and Europe's Centre and Europe's East utilise (each) others for self-determining purposes so as to be distinctive and recognizable – "Central Europeans" as a particular part of the West, for the Russians as non-West – in doing so, on the meta-level, they prove that they are actually Europeans (but not necessarily Westerners), even if that was not their original intention – because it is exactly this and such a need that is "typically European". So, the issue here is not only that the regions standing on (Western) European outskirts repeats (Western) European self-demarcation discourse and respective practices – "Central Europeans" as opposed to the Russians, by attributing them similar "characteristics" that Western Europeans used to (and still do) attribute to them, and the Russians with relation to Oriental, predominantly non-Indo-European and non-Christian nations in their vicinity, so as to constitute themselves as "civilised", and accordingly "true" Europeans, by "finding" (or inventing) less civilised ones. In one word, the very *discursive* concern about own identity is a typically European feature which perhaps shows where European and by Europe generated cultural world begins and where ends.²⁸

Uncertainties regarding civilisational differences (among "ourselves" and the others) is linked with an uncertainty related to own identity, but also to the collective identities in general. That is why each separate collective identity requires the Other to understand own self – because all finite identities are

²⁵ John Borneman & Nick Fowler, "Europeanization", p. 495: „General North/South and East/West cleavages are still used to characterize Europe, with the North considered orderly, productive, and largely Protestant; the South spontaneous, fun-loving, and largely Catholic; the East poor and underdeveloped both politically and economically; and the West rich and developed.“ It should be noted that the division into (European) East and West dates back to approximately 1830's whereas prior to this the prevalent the ancient division into the civilised South and the uncivilised North, which "lay" north of the Black Sea and the Danube, and, once the Germans joined the circle of civilised nations– east of German lands. Thus the conflict between Napoleon's France and Russia was seen by contemporaries as a clash between the South and the North. By the way in St. Petersburg as late as mid 19th century still was published a semi-official magazine called *Sever* [*The North*].

²⁶ A convenient formulation thereof is found in a paper by a Romanian scientist: „European border areas, where identities overlap in hybrid cultural products, may offer the ideal starting point for imaginary quasi-phatasmic topographies that usually embody an 'inner alterity,' which is demonized and finally exorcised.“ (Monica Spiridon, "Identity Discourses on Borders in Eastern Europe", p. 384).

²⁷ Iver B. Neumann, "Russia as Central Europe's Constituting Other"; Iver B. Neumann, „Die 'Verwendung des Anderen' in der russischen und europäischen Identitätsbildung“.

²⁸ See in our article: „Moderni ruski identitet u svojem međudejstvu s evropskim identitetom“ [Modern Russian Identity in its Interaction with European Identity].

contextually dependent, intrinsically oriented towards others and otherness in general. The Other, that is, in interactive perception – its identity ("for myself") is something I need in order to understand myself – because, firstly and utmostly, I need others and otherness in order to merely be. Hence, the reason for my need for the Other is double – in order for me to actually survive but also in order for me to be able to self-reflect in it, by perceiving "myself" as I am in Other's discourse – also in self-comprehending purposes. Self-understanding, pinpointing own identity is a life-giving necessity in a civilisation "thriving on" the question *Who I am/are we?* The Delphian *know thyself* demands a plural form – *know thyselfes*. But, on the other hand, the true players in the game with the others, whether they are individuals or communities, find it hard to resist the temptation of not "using" the Other. In the first instance, I need the Other due to my "theoretical" deficiencies – which are related to my finiteness – so as for me to practically "utilise" it for self-understanding purposes, but in interacting with the Other one gets easily tempted to use it for something else, for one's pragmatic interests which are irrelevant for self-understanding. By reversing the focus of interacting with the Other from what is "a matter of life" (to know who I am) – to what for my everyday life more important is (to gain, win over, conquer etc.) – shows volatility of identities (reflection), their susceptibility to not only re-contextualising but also to direct and conscious use.

In order for a community to live, it has to somehow, even to a certain extent knows who it is – because it serves the indispensable self-orientation. That is why in reality are always mixed the (self)cognitive and empirical interests, as well as of self-understanding and perception. Dependence of self-acquaintance on "other-acquaintance" and dependence of knowledge on action but also of action on interaction with the Other – are all features of *finiteness*, that is the finite-entities. The finite beings are exceptionally contextual sensitive and historically changeable, so their identities are mediated through identifications, projections, interests and that frequently means self-blindness. The reason for this continuous, in a certain form probably inevitable danger, is that in this mediatedness of various theoretical, practical, "autonomous" and "heteronomic" aspects, it is not possible to find a solid starting point that would ensure reliability in shedding light on this complexity. And so, for example, our notions of the Other are so inbuilt to our perception thereof and to our behaviour towards it, that it is likely that it will be "confirmed" in reality; then, the notions we have shape us, just like that shaping, when joined in together – performs a feedback shaping... In short, *the actual reflexivity* between various aspects to which we are ever referred prevents us from performing a *rational reflection* of own situation. And, not only is it impossible to separate these issues and aspects, but it is frequent, and as a rule unconscious, that cross-inversions are made, mutual "contaminations" – and it goes as far as fallacies, imputations and maliciousness; and so, what a particular collective subject, on the self-comprehension level, thinks of oneself and the others frequently hides something belonging to the other, pragmatic domain, which is intertwined with the former. That is why communities often cannot "wait" to recognize themselves (to the extent at all possible) – because it is always easier and frequently more "convenient" that instead they take advantage, impute blame on someone else and establish desired opinion/prejudice of the others, which absolves us from the obligation to further critically think not only about ourselves but also about themselves too.

Inextricability of interests, projections, of what wants to be made out of itself, of introspections and inspections of others, leads one to think that there are only interest and constructions in the field, and nothing more – but that is not the case. The problem lies in this practical-theoretical and also cognitive-interest complex which is, being methodologically too complicated, probably impossible to simplify to the extent making it suitable for scientific reflection. Hence this complex also eludes reliable comprehension, but also a reliable practical orientation, due to which close inspection into own identity is often substituted with hypotheses, which are simply unproven.

8. Conclusion

The common denominator for all civilisational “substantialising” of a factually orienting givenness, be that the sides of the world, differences between the centre and the periphery, position on this or that side of mountains, rivers, seas, oceans etc. – is the need for a orientation (in the mental space). As a result of that one resorts to the familiar, well-known orientation marks, which, whether we want it or not (to an extent even when there is no clear ideological intention) somehow still need to be culturally substantiated, if they are to bear an orientation result whatsoever, for which they are actually resorted to. So, the human’s anthropologically conditioned need for orientation – in the historical-civilisational “space” as well, brings with it inevitable simplifications, errors. If such a need is inevitable, ineradicable – and for sure it is, then it must not be “forbidden” with some quasi-theoretical “decrees”; it must not be declared as being indefensible, but instead should be controlled at rational-reflexive level. That is an anthropological constant, as well as Kantian “perpetual”, “metaphysical questions” and so, as an analogy, the real question is not how to entirely eliminate the *orientation we-ideologems* – because that is impossible and even, if possible – harmful, but rather how to make them rationally comprehensible, and therefore – as being elucidated, and to certain extent necessarily changed – acceptable. We believe that in this issue Kant’s model from *Critique of Pure Reason* should be followed, after all because at the latest by the end of the 19th century, up to now – however, with certain break, provided by Marxist movement, the question of ethnic identity has become the most significant “metaphysics” of modern times. Here we would like to remind that Kant wondered how metaphysics was possible as a science, instead of it being banished from the realm of science, as was attempted in 19th and 20th centuries by (neo)positivists, which created an anthropological-identity frustration, and which then, certainly, had to be compensated for in different, non-theoretical fields. If we also do that with the issue of collective identities – as is fashionable among the “deconstructionists” of all possible collective “imaginaries”, then the need for them and ultimately their specific *existence* – will not be abolished but rather continue to survive beyond the ability of understanding by the institutionally established, ideology-impregnate theories, which in a collective, particularly in ethnic-national identity want to recognize as an aberration from “normalcy”, something “marginal”, “dangerous”.²⁹ That sort of theory will therefore not be able to live up to the true problem it is faced with, while its conclusions and value judgments – whose ultimate consequence sometimes, especially in the Western liberal societies, is repression – will only deteriorate the problem.

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²⁹ It appears that one can understand as an appeal in that sense – although insufficiently emphasized – the final words of the following text: “Historic-scientific and social-scientific research into mental maps has shown that the majority of words in current vocabulary of civilisational spaces are not value-neutral terms, but they are rather terms that bear a certain political history. Since human’s need for spatial orientation will not vanish in the future, nor the pressures of geopolitical discourse on our mental and spatial world, it follows that cognitive maps will continue to remain factors in historic processes. [...] Should it in the future be done with a raised consciousness on historicity and political character of terms, and also the constructing character of relative spatial concepts, then the research into mental maps in recent decades will turn out to be fruitful.” (Schenk, “Mental Maps“, p. 514).

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