

## INTRODUCTION

This book deals with the image of the Serbian ‘other’ in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century. ‘The Balkans’ in the title refer to independent Christian Balkan states since there can be no qualitative analysis of the British image of any single Balkan country without comparing it with the British image of other Balkan countries.

The period from 1903 to 1906 was very significant for the development of British perceptions of Serbia and the Balkans. As R. W. Seton-Watson pointed out: ‘in 1903 the Macedonian insurrection on the one hand and the Serbian revolution on the other, ushered in a new era in the Balkan Peninsula’.<sup>1</sup> This new era began with the brutal murder of the Serbian Royal couple in June, 1903 (in May according to the old style) known as the May Coup. The Belgrade regicide and the subsequent rise to power of the regicides turned the image of Serbia in Britain into one of an ‘oriental’, non-civilised state. This image persisted during the crisis in Anglo-Serbian relations (1903–1906) and was shortly revived after the Sarajevo Assassination, in 1914. What is even more important is that this image as well as the negative image of Macedonia which developed in the same period, paved the way for what Maria Todorova recently baptised ‘balkanism’.

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<sup>1</sup> R. W. Seton-Watson, *Britain in Europe 1789–1914. A Survey of Foreign Policy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1938), p. 614.

The simultaneous uprising in Macedonia in August 1903 and the subsequent clashes between proponents of Bulgarian, Greek and Serbian national ideas led to terrible atrocities that Christians committed against other fellow Christians. Soon some British journalists drew parallels between Balkan ‘bloody-mindedness’ and ‘centuries of Asiatic rule’. These events (the May Coup and the Macedonian Uprising) led to the creation of a negative image (which has recently been revived) of both Serbia and the Balkans. However, the image of the Balkans and Serbia in Britain was subject to many changes and it fluctuated between admiration and contempt. For this reason I have also undertaken an analysis of the image of Serbia as it developed during the nineteenth century (chapter one). My research is restricted to the image of the Serbian state. The image of the Serbs, especially those living under the Ottoman yoke, was somewhat different and I shall only occasionally refer to them. In chapter two I analyse images of Bulgaria and Macedonia and offer an introduction to the situation in Serbia on the eve of the May Coup. The period between 1903 and 1906 was not of such crucial importance for the shaping of the images of Greece and Montenegro. Therefore they are only occasionally mentioned. Chapter three deals with the perception of Serbia in the Foreign Office, and chapter four with the reaction of public opinion. In chapter four *The Times* and *The Westminster Gazette*, two leading London quality dailies have been analysed for this purpose. The main ideas of leading British opinion makers regarding Serbia and the Balkans are given in the same chapter. Chapter five analyses the causes of the British reaction, emphasising the relevance of the British value system. Polemics on the Balkan ‘Orientalism’ are analysed in the same chapter, which is followed by the analysis of the occidentalisation and re-orientalisation of Serbia and the Balkans. In the Conclusion the main issues, raised

in other works dealing with Western perception of the Balkans, are analysed.

The British image of Serbia and the Balkans is of twofold importance. Historically this image was created within the world greatest empire. Therefore, during the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth centuries it was of utmost importance for the Balkan countries, all of which tried to improve their image in Britain. Secondly, British perceptions often served as a basis for the creation of the American image of the Balkans. Since nowadays the USA is a predominant world power, and English is the most important language in the world in political and economic terms, the image of the Balkans created in Britain a century ago sometimes projects into presence.

In 1937 Svetozar Spanachevich, Director of the Balkan Institute in Belgrade, sadly remarked that as a result of rivalry between the great Powers ‘the Balkans became a “barrel of gun powder” and the general opinion was established that the Balkan nations were unruly barbarians. Indeed, so general was this misconception, that it affected even many Balkanians, especially those among educated classes.’<sup>2</sup> At the end of the century this negative characterisation of the Balkans has been revived as a consequence of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia.

There are various suggestions as to the roots of the negative image of the Balkans and Serbia in the British and American press which include: political interests, conspiracy theories, the theory that Asiatic orientalism was implemented to the Balkans, and the theory of British cultural imperialism which created a ‘mythical “Wild East”’.

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<sup>2</sup> Svetozar Spanačević, ‘The Real Balkans and an Old Misconception’, *The Anglo-Yugoslav Review*, vol. IV, Nos. 7–8 (July–December 1937), p. 34.

Although I have collected data confirming the re-orientation of the image of Serbia in this period, in my opinion it is the British value system that dominantly contributed to the image of Serbia and the Balkans. Here I understand a value system in the terms of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) meaning that I apply his theory that social order depends on the existence of general, shared values which are regarded as legitimate and binding, and act as a standard by means of which the ends of actions are selected.<sup>3</sup> The British value system was recently analysed by the British historian Norman Davies. In an effort to identify the key elements of late Victorian British mentality he described the following five characteristics: loyalty to the Crown, patriotism, self-restraint, a sense of duty and a God-fearing attitude.<sup>4</sup> In order to explain this British perception I have applied the above-mentioned categories of Victorian mentality to British perceptions of Serbia.

There are several works dealing with British perceptions of the Balkans. The oldest is a very useful paper written by Wendy C. Bracewell<sup>5</sup> which is restricted to the two decades preceding the Eastern Crisis. Maria Todorova wrote recently a book dealing with Western perceptions of the Balkans, and covering a huge period of the modern age.<sup>6</sup> It gives brilliant

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3 Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* /With a New Preface by Bryan S. Turner/ (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 36–51.

4 See: Norman Davies, *The Isles. A History* (London: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 812–820.

5 Wendy C. Bracewell, 'Opinion-Makers: the Balkans in British Popular Literature, 1856–1876', in *Yugoslav British Relations. Reports from the Round Table Held from 23–25<sup>th</sup> September 1987 in Kragujevac on Occasion of 150 Years of the Arrival of the First British Consul to Serbia* (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1988).

6 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995).

insights into the patterns of the Western perception of the Balkans, but offers limited details about the period that this thesis is concerned with. Finally, Vesna Goldsworthy has published a useful book on the perception of the Balkans in British popular literature, which is only indirectly relevant for my thesis.<sup>7</sup>

There are also several historiographic works dealing with the May Coup and Anglo-Serbian relations, mainly covering the political and economic aspects of these relations. Lyilyana Aleksich-Peykovich in her substantial work *Relations of Serbia with France and England 1903–1914*<sup>8</sup> has provided a very detailed account of these relations (in 956 pages) but the book is focused on political and economic relations only, and is sometimes obscured by pseudo-Marxist interpretation. Several other works of Anglo-Saxon historiography are perhaps more relevant as reference for this work. Wayne Vucinich paved the way for this research. He was the first to give a detailed account on foreign reactions to the May Coup in his book *Serbia Between East and West 1903–1908*.<sup>9</sup> The fifth chapter of his book, entitled ‘Foreign Recognition’ (pp. 75–121) is dedicated to this topic. David MacKenzie has written several books and papers dealing with the May Coup and its aftermath. He has written a biography about Colonel Dragutin Dimitriyevich Apis, one of the most active conspirators in the May Coup. His recent contribution to

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7 Vesna Goldsworthy, *Inventing Ruritania. The Imperialism of the Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

8 Љиљана Алексић-Пејковић, *Односи Србије са Француском и Енглеском 1903–1914*, Историјски институт, Београд 1965 [Lyilyana Aleksich-Peykovich, *Odnosi Srbije sa Frantsuskom i Engleskom 1903–1914* (Belgrade: Istorijiski institut, 1965)].

9 Wayne Vucinich, *Serbia Between East and West 1903–1908* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1954).

this field is a book dealing with secret societies as well as several articles dealing with this topic.<sup>10</sup> MacKenzie has been trying in his works to exonerate the regicides portraying them as patriots.<sup>11</sup> Of the works in Serbo-Croatian a very valuable one is the biography of King Peter, written by Dragolyub Zhivoyinovich, particularly its second volume.<sup>12</sup> There is, as far as I know, only one monograph dealing with the question of the regicide. It is the doctoral thesis of Francis Radovich,<sup>13</sup> entitled *Aftermath of*

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- 10 David MacKenzie, *Apis: The Congenial Conspirator. The Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijevic* (Boulder, Colorado, 1989); *Idem, Violent Solutions: Revolutions, Nationalism, and Secret Societies in Europe to 1918* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996); *Idem*, 'A Military Coup which Succeeded: May 29, 1903', *Serbian Studies*, VI, No. 2 (Fall 1992); *Idem*, 'The May Conspiracy and European Powers: The Diplomatic Boycott Against Serbia 1903–1906', *South East European Monitor* (Vienna, Austria), II, No. 2 (1995); the last two articles have been reprinted in: David, MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians* (East European Monographs, No. 459, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
  - 11 Vouislav Vuchkovich gave the opposite view, dealing with the disastrous effects that the regicides had on Serbian parliamentarism. See: Војислав Ј. Вучковић, „Унутрашње кризе Србије и први светски рат”, *Историјски часопис*, Београд, том 14–15 (1963–1965) [Vouislav Y. Vuchkovich, 'Unutrashnye krize Srbiye i prvi svetski rat', *Istoriyski chasopis*, vol. 14–15 (1963–1965)].
  - 12 Драгољуб Р. Живојиновић, *Краљ Петар I Карађорђевић, животи и дело. У оцаџбини, 1903–1914*, БИГЗ, Београд 1990 [Dragolyub R. Zhivoyinovich, *Kraly Petar I Karageorgevich, Zhivot i Delo. U otadjbini, 1903–1914* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1990)].
  - 13 Francis Radovich, *Aftermath of the Regicide: British Policy and Serbian Conspiracy Question, 1903–1906*. The thesis includes the following chapters: 1. The regicide of Alexander and Draga, precedents and causes; 2. Europe and the regicide: British reaction; 3. The continued suspension of relations; 4. The role of King Edward; 5. British terms and Serbian non-compliance; 6. The Macedonian question: urgency for renewal; 7. The Austro-Serbian customs crisis: new aspects in Balkan politics; 8. The final obstacles to renewal; 9. The reorientation of British policy: diplomatic relations established and 10. Conclusion. At least two extracts from

*the Regicide: British Policy and Serbian Conspiracy Question, 1903–1906*, presented in the History Department of the University of Santa Barbara, USA, in 1975, under the supervision of Prof. Dimitrije Djordjevic. This thesis is of utmost importance for my work, and it represents a very thorough analysis of the May Coup and its aftermath. Although the thesis concentrates mostly on the political aspects, it presents a number of material facts that can help explain the official perception of Serbia in Britain. The works of Vucinich and MacKenzie are even more concentrated on political and economic aspects.<sup>14</sup>

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her dissertation have been published: Frances Radovich, 'The British Court and Relations with Serbia', *East European Quarterly*, vol. 14 (Winter 1980), pp. 461–468; Frances Radovich, 'Britain's Macedonian Reform Policy, 1903–1905', *The Historian*, vol. 43 (August 1981), pp. 493–508.

- 14 MacKenzie has given very useful review of the historiography of the May Coup. MacKenzie 'A Military Coup which Succeeded: Serbia, May 29, 1903', and MacKenzie, *Serbs and Russians*, pp. 309–311.