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War, Religion, and the Production of the Ottoman Other: Orientalist Representation in the First Balkan War Correspondence

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Abstract

The First Balkan War was not merely a military defeat but also a crisis of knowledge production. Although there is a vast body of academic literature in Turkey focusing on the causes, consequences, and military failures of the war, the discursive dimension of Western correspondents' narratives has not yet been sufficiently analyzed. This research examines correspondent narratives within an integrated religious-civilizational framework that combines Edward Said's concept of "Orientalism," Stuart Hall's concept of "Representation," and Maria Todorova's concept of "Balkanism." Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the article investigates how reporter texts—often accepted as "transparent" primary sources in Turkish historiography—function as symbolic instruments of construction. By analyzing recurring representations of Turks as "fatalistic," "pre-modern," and "alien to European values," the study reveals how these narratives legitimize a civilization hierarchy by exploiting the "Cross and Crescent" dichotomy. By revealing how these boundary-producing discourses transform military events into evidence of barbarism, the article challenges the claim of neutrality in archival records and contributes to the literature in this regard. By distinguishing between Orientalist representations of the Ottoman Turks and Balkanist representations of the Balkan nations, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Western discursive hierarchies during the geopolitical crises of the early 20th century.

Keywords: the First Balkan War; Turkish historiography; war correspondence; Orientalism; representation theory; Balkanism; religious-civilizational narrative

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1. Introduction

A substantial number of Turkish studies that emerged in the wake of the First Balkan War focus on the causes of the defeat. These reasons included military operations, strategic and logistical errors, and the inadequacy of the command structure. However, beyond the Ottoman Empire's territorial losses in the Balkans, the First Balkan War also marked a renewed process of Western-centric knowledge production about the Ottomans. Western correspondents, reporting on the war from both the front and behind the lines, reproduced images of Ottoman society using the patterns of representation inherent in Orientalist discourse. Accordingly, this article aims to demonstrate the systems through which the First Balkan War was conveyed to Western public opinion and to fill the theoretical gap in Turkish literature, which predominantly consists of descriptive studies.

Relevant research identifies several key themes: international origins of the conflict, mobilization errors, command echelon dysfunction, officer incompetence, and the politicization of the military. Nevertheless, Western memoirs and war correspondent texts should not be regarded as mere sources which describe events. In contrast, they serve as exemplars of representation, illustrating how the war was communicated to the public. Despite the cultural codes inherent in these representations, shaped by the value judgments of the societies in which they were produced, memoir-based studies frequently treat Western journalists' texts as objective sources of information. The ideological, symbolic, or linguistic patterns of meaning employed by Western correspondents regarding the First Balkan War constitute the core of this analysis. The approach to Orientalism espoused by Edward Said, Stuart Hall's theory of representation, and Maria Todorova's concept of Balkanism form the theoretical framework of this article.

This article centers its analysis on the texts of British war correspondents who reconstructed the war for the Western public. Significantly, the primary sources consist of the accounts of Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett (*With the Turks in Thrace*) of *The Daily Telegraph*, Lionel James (*With the Conquered Turks*) of *The Times*, and H. C. Seppings-Wright (*Two Years Under the Crescent*) of the *Illustrated London News*, all of whom observed the war from the Ottoman front. In contrast, Herbert F. Baldwin (*The War Photographer in Thrace*), a correspondent for the *Central News Agency*, followed the conflict from the front of the occupying powers.

Furthermore, this study includes the following texts: *The Inner History of the Balkan War* by Reginald Rankin and The *Balkan War Drama* by Cyril Campbell (both correspondents for *The Times* who covered the war from the Bulgarian front), as well as *The Balkan War/Adventures of War with Cross and Crescent*, (co-authored by Philip Gibbs [Bulgarian front] and Bernard Grant [Turkish front] for *The Graphic*) from different fronts.

In order to expand the scope of the research and demonstrate the prevalence of a similar dominant discourse across continental Europe, the following works were analyzed: Hermenegild Wagner's *With the Victorious Bulgarians*, written by an Austrian *Reichspost* correspondent embedded with the Bulgarian forces; Wilhelm Feldmann's *İstanbul'da Savaş Günleri: Bir Alman Gazetecinin Balkan Savaşı Hatıratı* (*Kriegstage in Konstantinopel*), authored by a *Berliner Tageblatt* correspondent assigned to the Ottoman side; and Georges Rémond's *Mağluplarla Beraber: Bir Fransız Gazetecinin Balkan Savaşı İzlenimleri* (*Avec Les Vaincus: La Campagne de Thrace, Octobre 1912–Mai 1913*), a field account by a representative of the French periodical *L'Illustration*.

Finally, the following sources constitute the conceptual foundation of this article: William M. Pickthall's memoir *Harpte Türklerle Birlikte* (*With the Turk in War Time*), an English writer opposed to the Western discourse, and Sir Charles Eliot's *Turkey in Europe*, which reflects the theoretical infrastructure of the discourse produced by English correspondents regarding the First Balkan War.

As illustrated above, among the works listed, the reporter narratives of Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett and Lionel James have received the highest number of citations in Turkish literature. The prominence of these two figures in Turkish scholarship is partly attributable to the availability of Turkish translations of their books and their journalistic background.

However, despite the rich historical material these texts contain, discourse analysis has not been applied to either text. This analytical gap is further substantiated by the examination of prominent figures such as Herbert F. Baldwin, H. C. Seppings Wright, and Reginald Rankin, whose works have not been translated into Turkish, along with Bartlett and James. Lev Trotsky's *Balkan Savaşları 1912–1913* (The Balkan Wars 1912–1913) is a crucial text due to its unique position, as it challenges the conventional discourse of Western memoirs and has been evaluated for its characteristics as a counter-narrative.

The research analyzes the portrayal of the First Balkan War within the analytical lenses of Orientalism and Balkan studies, while highlighting the pivotal role of religious imagery in the representational process. The persistent dichotomy between "the Cross and the Crescent," accompanied by notions of fatalism, nomadism, and marginalization from modernity, fosters a profound moral and historical divide between Europe and the Ottoman world in Western public discourse. Europe was associated with progress and order, whereas the Ottoman presence was configured as transient and backward. In this mode of narration, religion, while not invariably overt, played an integral role in delineating the boundaries of civilizations. The war correspondents employed a secular language; nevertheless, the images and metaphors they deployed reproduced a vision of civilization shaped by religious connotations. For this reason, the article's approach to war journalism is twofold. Firstly, it is regarded as a record of events. Secondly, it functions as narrative field in which the symbolic relationships between religion, politics, and violence are constructed.

2. A Look at the First Balkan War Memoir Literature

A large proportion of the First Balkan War correspondent narratives and memoirs, encompassing numerous texts, consists of works by local and foreign correspondents, writers, or travelers who covered the war for their newspapers from the front or from Istanbul. Works by officers in the command hierarchy, which, on the one hand, explained the reasons for the defeat and, at times, turned into self-defense texts, have taken their place in the literature as examples of an insider perspective on the war. Drawing upon the aspects examined in extant research, the thematic intensity identified in bibliographic studies (Bacanlı 2003; Duman 2017; Zamacı 2013) guided the determination of this article's scope. A substantial body of academic studies on memoirs is typically analyzed within the context of military history (Feyzioğlu 2016; Toker 2018). In these studies, memoirs have been analyzed in the context of a variety of subjects, including unplanned mobilization, disagreements within the command hierarchy, the lack of merit among young officers, and the interference of politics in the army.

The texts of officers in the army's command hierarchy have been extensively utilized in academic studies. The works of commanders such as Abdullah Paşa (2012), (Mahmut Muhtar Paşa (2003), Mehmed Nihad (2015) and Zeki Paşa (2012) have been scrutinized as primary sources in studies focusing on the reasons for the war's defeat. These works meticulously reveal the discussions concerning the challenging conditions under which war decisions were made and the war strategies that should have been implemented.

An extensive corpus of existing research consists of the writings of Western correspondents and travelers. News texts sent simultaneously to their newspapers from the front or the rear lines by war correspondents, most of whom were British, serve as primary sources that informed European public opinion. These chronicles not only delineate the trajectory of the war but also serve as discursive platforms that explore how the Ottoman Empire was perceived from external vantages, both during the period in which they were composed and in subsequent historical discourses. A significant gap in the extant literature rigorous scrutiny applied to these correspondent texts; they are frequently utilized without critical analysis. Consequently, these sources have not been adequately evaluated through the codes they produced regarding the East. This results in a secondary deficiency, namely, the tendency to treat war correspondents' texts as objective sources, devoid of a critical lens. Another salient issue, despite its pertinence to the extant literature, is the limited or complete absence of engagement with works not translated into Turkish. As established earlier, these texts serve as sources that reproduce a Eurocentric perspective on the Ottoman and Balkan geographies.

The impact of First Balkan War reportage narratives derives not only from their content but also from the networks of expertise and legitimacy within which they were produced. As Eugene Michail demonstrates, an "expert consensus" formed among correspondents, writers, academics, activists, and the Balkan Committee, all of whom contributed to shaping public opinion about the Balkans; this consensus consolidated a particular regime of knowledge regarding the region (Michail 2011, pp. 36–43). As Ross Cameron further emphasizes, the relationships established by war correspondents with London-based propaganda and advocacy networks indicate that the narratives of the First Balkan War functioned not merely as observation but also as instruments of political orientation (Cameron 2024, p. 122). Notably, Aram Andonyan's reconstruction of the Ottoman defeat through the account of a Western witness such as Stephane Lauzanne is particularly significant, as it demonstrates how Western journalistic texts had already acquired primary epistemic authority at the time (Andonyan [1913] 2002; Lauzanne [1913] 1990). Within this analytical trajectory, Lev Trotsky's text occupies a privileged position within the corpus; although it addresses the same war, it stands out for its counter-narrative quality, distancing itself from cultural essentialism and foregrounding economic, political, and historical processes (Trotsky 1995, pp. 7–8, 27).

Western journalistic texts, which initially characterize the modernization of the Turkish army as inadequate, but their focus subsequently shifts. These narratives no longer merely address technical issues; rather, they have transitioned to encompassing cultural judgments. While positive portrayals of Turks are often constrained to characteristics such as bravery, resilience, or patience, the prevailing discourse accentuates the perceived deficiencies in their capacity to effectively govern the state and the army, the pervasive presence of corruption across all societal strata, and their perceived retardation in various domains. It is imperative to distinguish this representation of the Ottoman Empire separately from the individual approaches of the correspondents. A thorough examination of the relevant texts reveals traces of the East–West dichotomy that had become established in the West during that period.

When the literature comprising memoirs and correspondence narratives of the Balkan War is evaluated from the perspective outlined above, it becomes apparent that these texts have not been sufficiently addressed through the lens of orientalist discourse or representation theory. A survey of the extant literature on the First Balkan War reveals that military activities, administrative challenges, and the underlying causes of defeat are thoroughly delineated in pertinent sources, with scholars emphasizing military modernization, command discord, and logistical deficiencies (Kılıç 2012). Current research, meanwhile, increasingly analyzes the conflict through the lens of Western balance-of-power policies and diplomatic dynamics, investigating its evolution into a global issue with regional ramifications. These diplomatic studies are being conducted in parallel with established military history research.

In addition to these themes, it must be added that research on the publications of the Turkish and foreign press during the First Balkan War, such as the studies by Aydın (2013), Dorn Sezgin (2013) and Şallı (2023), examine censorship mechanisms, and propaganda. These publications are instrumental for demonstrating how the domestic press conveyed the course of the war to the public and for examining the discursive approach of the foreign press towards the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans.

A second group of studies within the existing body of literature addresses the effects of the war on social and civil life. While the work of aid organizations, meetings and marches, and the conditions of refugees due to migration are discussed within this thematic scope, attention is drawn to how daily life was affected behind the front lines, particularly in Istanbul, under wartime conditions (Aktar 1990; Halaçoğlu 1995; Kurnaz 1993;

Uzuner 2024). Furthermore, publications that explore the war as a matter of identity construction from the perspectives of the Balkan nations and the Ottoman Empire should be noted. Such works include those by Ahmad (2014), Güvenç (1995), Taştan (2017), and Dorn Sezgin (2013).

In conclusion, while the extant literature on the First Balkan War has been predominantly centered on military history, it is evident that issues such as international politics, Ottoman modernization, the causes of the war's loss, banditry activities, and war crimes in connection with migration and refugee problems also constitute a notable part.

3. Theoretical Framework and Method

3.1. Representation, Discourse, and the Production of Meaning

This research approaches correspondent narratives on the First Balkan War not as transparent records of historical reality but as active representational practices that produce meaning. Drawing on Stuart Hall's conceptual apparatus, representation is understood as a constructive process that renders the world intelligible through specific cultural codes and linguistic configurations (Hall [1997] 2017, pp. 10–13). Thus, these texts do more than report events; they articulate hierarchical meanings regarding civilization and European identity. By offering cultural interpretive grids, they shape perception of the war rendering these narratives not neutral transmissions, but sites of discursive construction (Hall [1997] 2017, pp. 33–37).

3.2. Orientalism and the Construction of the Ottoman/Turkish Other

Building upon this understanding of representation as a constructive practice, Edward Said's conceptualization of Orientalism demonstrates that the West constructs the East not merely as different, but as irrational, backward, disorderly, and in need of governance (Said 1978, pp. 2–3). In this sense, Orientalism is far from being simply a collection of cultural prejudices; it is a historical regime of representation in which knowledge production is intrinsically linked to power. The coding of the Ottoman/Turkish figure in the First Balkan War correspondent narratives around themes such as military defeat, administrative inadequacy, disorder, fatalism, and historical backwardness can be read as late manifestations of this representational logic. Occasional and limited positive depictions of the Turkish soldier—emphasizing qualities such as bravery, patience, or endurance—do not disrupt this overarching discursive structure; rather, such praise often functions within a broader hierarchy of civilization. As a result, the Ottoman world is represented not just as one of the parties to the war, but as a civilizational sphere positioned in opposition to Europe and one that is historically destined to be superseded. As Said's concept of "topos" suggests, the East operates here less as a concrete geography and more as a discursive space onto which specific attributes are consistently projected (Said 1978, p. 177). In this study, Said's framework is employed to elucidate how the Ottoman/Turkish image is culturalized and how military defeat is transformed into a narrative of civilizational inadequacy.

3.3. Balkanism and the Representation of the Balkans

Maria Todorova's conceptualization of Balkanism argues that, within Western discourse, the Balkans are represented not as an absolute external other like the Ottoman world, but as Europe's "other within", an incomplete, belated, fragmented, and problematic internal other (Todorova [1997] 2010, pp. 17, 33). Accordingly, Balkan peoples are portrayed as not entirely foreign to Europe, yet simultaneously coded as politically immature, prone to excess, unstable, and susceptible to external influence. The distinguishing feature of Balkanism lies in its representational logic, which operates through the simultaneous articulation of exclusion and proximity, familiarity and condescension, belonging and

hierarchy. As Todorova suggests, the Balkans function less as Europe's opposite than as its "incomplete self," or as an internal other incorporated within a hierarchical schema (Todorova [1997] 2010, p. 45).

While the "incomplete self" analytical model helps explain the special treatment accorded to the Balkan nations, it is vital to acknowledge that the discourse of Balkanism did not emerge suddenly during the crises of the 20th century. As Todorova ([1997] 2010, p. 48) argues, this discourse is rooted in a long-standing tradition of representation dating back to the 19th century, and concepts such as the implicit "hybridity" or "racial mixing" of that period gradually evolved into the overt racial denigration of the 20th century. Given this historical continuity, the texts of British correspondents during the 1912–1913 Balkan Wars reflect a "moment of crisis" in the transition of this discourse.

In correspondent narratives on the First Balkan War, the language employed particularly in relation to Bulgarians and Serbs makes this logic of hierarchical proximity explicitly manifest. These actors are associated with Christianity and the idea of Europe, yet they are also framed as excessive, immoderate, hasty, or semi-civilized communities. For this reason, the present study employs Todorova's conceptual apparatus to analyze representations of Balkan societies, distinguishing this methodological approach from the Orientalist representational logic applied to the Ottoman/Turkish figure. In doing so, it demonstrates that Ottomans and Balkan nations are constructed not within the same discursive dimension, but within two distinct, yet interrelated, hierarchical systems.

3.4. Methodological Note: Critical Discourse Analysis and Text Selection

The article applies critical discourse analysis to examine journalistic texts, adopting a procedural approach inspired by Fairclough's three-dimensional model. Purposive sampling serves to select war reporting texts from influential British newspapers—such as *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*—that shaped Western public opinion, during the 1912–1913 period. Subsequently, recurring discursive themes, including "civilizational hierarchy," "fatalism," and "religious-civilizational otherness," are coded to establish analytical categories. The study finally unpacks linguistic markers, metaphors and binary oppositions to facilitate a transition from textual observation to ideological interpretation. By situating these discursive structures within the socio-political context of the era, the analysis reveals how they legitimize a civilization paradigm centered on the "Cross and Crescent". The unit of analysis comprises primary English-language accounts, journalistic dispatches, and observational narratives produced during or immediately after the First Balkan War. The analysis delves into lexical choices, religious imagery, and positioning of actors within political and cultural grids.

The analytical categories are derived partly from the theoretical underpinning and partly from the texts themselves through close reading. Within this scope, representation, Orientalism, and Balkanism constitute the primary interpretive axes of the article, while patterns such as the Cross/Crescent opposition, order/chaos, civilization/backwardness, maturity/deficiency, and loyalty/betrayal are treated as the principal discursive clusters emerging from the texts. The aim is not to assess the accuracy with which these narratives represent the war, but to reveal the symbolic and ideological mechanisms through which they construct meaning about it. For this reason, the research approaches correspondent narratives not as neutral testimonies of historical events, but as textual practices that produce the cultural and political significance of the war.

4. Modes of Representation in Correspondent Narratives

War correspondents are arguably the most influential actors among the experts cited by Eugene Michail. A considerable portion of the correspondents who covered the First

Balkan War from the Turkish front subsequently published their dispatches as books contributing to the British press. One of the most distinguished members of the group present in Istanbul on 16 October 1912, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, had been in war zones since childhood, accompanying his father, who bore the same name and was known as a friend of Turkey in the British cabinet. At seventeen, he witnessed the 1897 Greco-Turkish War as a guest of Abdülhamid II (Roth 2010, pp. 15–16; Archives Hub n.d.). While reporting for *The Daily Telegraph*, Bartlett faced his most formidable rival—whom he nonetheless referred to as his 'old friend'—Lionel James of *The Times*. Despite being a pioneer in the use of wireless technology and matching Bartlett's professional accomplishments, James has notably been overlooked in British press history (Beaumont 2005).

In their respective accounts of their journey from Istanbul to the front, Bartlett and James offer parallel assessments, aligning with those of other foreign correspondents and writers, including Feldmann ([1913] 2024), von Hochwächter ([1913] 2009), and Rémond. The initial positive impression of the *redif* soldiers, many of whom were elderly, infirm, or had never held a weapon before, was short-lived, as a closer examination of their condition quickly revealed their lack of military readiness.

The majority of correspondents presented narratives that aligned with official historical accounts concerning the logistical failures within the army, such as shortages of provisions and ammunition. The analytical divergence and the site of discourse production become evident when the narrative shifts from individual praise to societal criticism. According to Bartlett, the Turkish soldier embodies qualities of self-sacrifice and resilience. However, the Turkish army is characterized by disorganization, ineffective command, and inadequately trained soldiers. Moreover, from this perspective, the Turks remain uninformed regarding the grand war strategy (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, pp. 51, 99). This phenomenon is elucidated through the theoretical lens of ambivalence: while admiration for the East or the Turks is fostered on the one hand, in the final analysis, they are marginalized by a discourse that declares them 'incapable of civilization'.

A similar attitude is particularly evident in the sections describing Istanbul. A thorough examination of this overarching discursive configuration is imperative to facilitate the multiplication of the examples under the category: "Forms of Representation of Turks and Minorities."

4.1. Representation of Turks: Theatrical Narrative

As noted earlier, the narrative style adopted by the correspondents is highly influential. The representation produced by Bartlett and Wright, who employ a more dramatic language, is substantiated by a theatrical narrative style. This approach is reinforced by a rhetorical style that emphasizes dramatic tension. The framing of the soldiers' conditions during their retreat and the dire situation faced by the civilian population is particularly vivid.

The passage in which the author renders Abdullah Pasha as a commander-in-chief, blindfolded and desperately searching for his enemy, is particularly striking; this scene serves as a compelling example of the theatrical narrative in question (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, p. 161). When describing the plight of the *muhajirs*, Wright employs descriptive imagery such as "anxious night," "hopeless day," "sorrowful eyes," and "trembling crowds" which reinforces this dramatic narrative (Wright 1913, p. 197). In the context of war-torn Istanbul, a similar dramatic tone is employed to describe soldiers returning from the front, wounded or suffering from cholera. This dramatization serves to accentuate the failure of Turks and the inadequacies of their administrators. The populace experiences hardships resulting from the irrational, unplanned, and unprogrammed practices of these administrators-characteristics frequently ascribed to Eastern societies.

4.2. Construction of Modern Alterity: Nomadism and Fatalism

The predominant approach among war correspondents involves the utilization of culturalist codes to elucidate the phenomenon of spatial decay, thereby engendering a topos of decline that is inextricably linked to the concept of perceived corruption. For instance, Bartlett characterizes Istanbul as a labyrinthine network of sewer systems, composed of mosques devoid of originality, constructed upon its ostentatious refuse (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, p. 7). The author's preoccupation with the city's neglect, reorienting the discussion from a governance issue to a culturalist generalization concerning the decay of Eastern identity, exemplifies the supersession of representation over reality. Bartlett's critique of the city intensifies, as he alleged that its "dishonorable and idle atmosphere" had even led to the onset of "moral anemia" among Europeans. He advocates for the use of incendiary tactics as a means of achieving this objective (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, p. 68). This destructive language of violence, which exceeds its intended purpose of spatial description, unveils the underlying objective of Orientalist discourse: the subjugation or eradication of individuals.

In the reporters' texts, the distortion of space via an Orientalist construct manifests not only through architectural and moral decay, but also by framing a chaotic, diseased space where boundaries become indistinct. Wright projects Istanbul as a deadly site of bacteria as part of an effort to code the East as the source of disease. The reporter describes the migrating people as an extraordinary mass, recast through the evocative imagery of a "thicket of cattle horns" (Wright 1913, pp. 254–55). The chaotic tableau peculiar to the East, as conveyed by Wright, in which everything is intertwined, also expresses the crisis of rationality encountered by the modernist mind that seeks to place boundaries between nature and man.

The discourse identifying the East with the threat of disease is concretized by the cholera epidemic affecting both sides. Reginald Rankin, an English officer and aristocrat who covered the war on the Bulgarian side for *The Times*, ascribed the deaths of thousands of Bulgarian soldiers from cholera to the 'disgusting habits' of the Turks (Rankin 1914, p. 120). Drawing on Hall's theory of representation, the concept of disease is naturalized by being associated with the Turks, irrespective of objective conditions.

In the context of narratives, the phenomenon of spatial decay is often attributed to social degradation, irrespective of the prevailing conditions. This attribution is typically made through a comprehensive approach. To illustrate this ambivalent gaze toward the East, simultaneously expressing both hatred and admiration, one must witness the city descriptions provided by Mondesir and Wright. In his previous negative descriptions, Mondesir speaks of a general neglect of Edirne, yet he also states that he had observed a beautiful Oriental city with its flowery gardens, stork nests, and flocks of sheep (de Mondesir 2019, pp. 15–16). In a manner analogous to Mondesir, Wright's passages in which he articulates his initial impressions upon first beholding the capital might be interpreted as expressing merely an initial appreciation, despite his overall negative comments about Istanbul. However, from this perspective, Istanbul's aesthetic appeal stems from its ability to satisfy the spiritual dimension of human experience. This is achieved through its rich history, which he characterizes as "romantic," and the artistic fervor it evokes in him. The reporter's observations, as substantiated by his own statements, indicate the presence of a framed oriental landscape. Crucially, the formation of the "frame" and the determination of its boundaries are central to the analysis. The reporter posits that, should he reside in this Oriental landscape for a period, he might unconsciously succumb to what he terms 'lethargic comfort,' akin to that experienced by the city's inhabitants. He further reiterates his culturalist perspective on the relevant geography (Wright 1913, pp. 163–64).

Wright's engagement with Orientalism is evident in his depiction of immigrants through the lens of *One Thousand and One Nights* (Wright 1913, p. 267). The positive evaluations made by reporters regarding the East serve the purpose of reproducing the exotic East are consistent with the Orientalist gaze, which seeks to reproduce the exotic East template. The mystical, romantic, soul-stirring, and thus spiritual characteristics of Istanbul and its people are laudable. The irrational characteristics mentioned are references to the stereotypical features constructed for the East. Wright's reluctance to incorporate the German train station in the landscape is also attributable to the symbolic nature of the train as a representation of rationality and progress. Therefore, this situation engenders a dissonance with the discursively constructed East.

One of the most pivotal conclusions presented by reporters regarding the Turks' inability to be civilized is the constructs of nomadism and innate militarism, based on the Orientalist tradition. According to Sir Charles Eliot, an English Orientalist and a theoretical proponent of this notion, Turks, being nomadic by nature, are inherently closed off to art, literature and commerce, with the exception of military service, animal husbandry and farming (Eliot 1900, pp. 73, 91–92). As Said has previously asserted, Orientalism is invariably predicated on an extensive array of information, which is continually augmented by the accumulated knowledge of preceding scholars and researchers. War correspondents have played a central role in reshaping the discourse surrounding Turkey's national identity by challenging the prevailing notion that Turks are not a constructive nation. Baldwin's reference to "a property consciousness prone to primitiveness" (Baldwin 1913, p. 193) and James's ascription of filth and misery to the nomadic nature of the Turks are reiterations of this discourse. The claim that Turks are innately soldiers or more resilient to poverty than Europeans is not an expression of praise; rather, it is an attempt to foreground their genetic nomadism (James 1913, p. 142). The military virtues attributed to the Turks are employed to ascribe such characteristics as ruthlessness, massacre and plunder. Eliot, operating within the conceptual boundaries that delineate the Turks' limitations, offers an illustration of the naturalization strategy by asserting that the formation of a state or society is contingent upon external support (Eliot 1900, pp. 92–93). The external factor mentioned by the author is the West, or more precisely England, due to its plans for the Balkans, the Ottoman Empire, or Eastern geography.

As with other correspondents, Bartlett employs his reporting activities in the field not solely to convey information but also to direct the war, within the context of culturalist judgments about the Turks. In the context of Orientalist knowledge production, as theorized by Edward Said, Bartlett's adoption of the concept of Western superiority and the imperative to dominate the East is evident. Bartlett's conceptualization of the future of the Turks in Anatolia is characterized by the delineation of boundaries that are influenced by Orientalist frameworks, thereby creating a division between the East and the West (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, p. 326).

Furthermore, he explicitly asserts that every European, especially war correspondents, imagined the moment when King Ferdinand's army would enter Constantinople and the crescent on the dome of Hagia Sophia would be replaced by the cross. The replacement of the crescent with the cross symbolizes the act of Western civilization displacing Eastern civilization from its historical position. The term "War of the Cross and the Crescent" derives from the war manifesto published by Tsar Ferdinand on 18 October 1912. This metaphor also appears in the title of Philip Gibbs and Bernard Grant's book. Gibbs also asserts that the temporal juncture has arrived at which the Turks must be expelled from the European continent. He substantiates this assertion by claiming that the Crescent impedes progress by virtue of its rigid faith, regardless of the geographical location in which it prevails (Gibbs and Grant 1913, p. 108). Additionally, he contends that the Turks are currently facing the consequences of their historical transgressions, which include but are not limited to their ineffective governance, widespread

corruption, and oppressive rule (Gibbs and Grant 1913, p. 6). While the conflict between the cross and the crescent symbolizes the historical animosity between Christians and Muslims, the text also highlights the perceived cultural and practical inferiority of the Turks. This inferiority is discussed in the context of both religious doctrine and the practical aspects of daily life.

Another source of the correspondents' common negative perceptions regarding the Turks is the concepts of being organized and utilizing time effectively. Bartlett's framing of the three-hour wait for Grand Vizier Gazi Muhtar Pasha as a behavior peculiar to Turks (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, p. 12) and Lionel James's account of trains not departing on time as a characteristic feature of the races inhabiting Anatolia are both products of the same discourse (James 1913, p. 5). In order to reduce individual delays to a genetic coding peculiar to the East, both correspondents employ a naturalization strategy by detaching them from war conditions. According to the correspondents' accounts, while the importance attributed to time represents order and rationality—associated with the West—'delay,' which is often seen as indicative of indiscipline, is attributed to the East.

Spirituality in Eastern societies is associated with a remarkable capacity for resilience and adaptation in the face of adversity. This phenomenon is documented by a significant majority of correspondents, who report on the ability of these societies to maintain their way of life, even in challenging circumstances. The accounts vary in their tone, ranging from praise to astonishment and disdain, reflecting a diverse range of perceptions and reactions. As articulated by Wright, the notion of 'kismet,' which he characterizes as the guiding principle of the Islamic world and an expression of fatalism, is juxtaposed with the organized military might of the Western world. The author's claim that this spiritual power is more effective than systematic methods in war conditions could be construed as an attempt to reclaim lost praise. However, in the very next line, the Turkish soldier is represented as a happy child, unaware of his tragedy because of his naivety (Wright 1913, p. 259). It should be noted that, while Wright acknowledges the Turks' virtues outweighing their flaws, he also asserts that the Western mindset struggles to grasp this philosophy of life. In addition, Wright attempts to view the Turks 'from within'.

In alignment with Wright's observations, Baldwin underlines the remarkable resilience exhibited by the soldiers, who, despite the adversity they faced, demonstrated extraordinary patience and fortitude. The rendering of the Turkish soldier using silence and fortitude positions him as a figure resigned to his fate rather than as a rational individual. While reporting on the resilience of wounded soldiers, he also alludes to the absence of adequate treatment methods as a contributing factor to their suffering. At this juncture, Eliot's observation that Westerners equate fatalism with indolence is noteworthy. According to the cited work, 'nomads' who do not strive to alter any situation are regarded from a European perspective as being at the level of animals rather than humans. In a manner consistent with other correspondents, Bernard Grant asserts that he was impressed by the Turkish soldier's profound faith. However, he also criticizes the "incompetent" administrators for their decision to leave matters to fate. The acceptance of Turks as fatalistic functions in a similar manner to other forms of representation, for the more fatalistic the East, the more rational the West.

Examples of a positive outlook on Turks can be found in memoirs from the Balkan War. The favorable assessments of Turks by Pickthall and Rémond—who were in opposition to the West's strategy of dominating the Ottoman Empire—and by Feldmann, a German representative who collaborated with the Empire in Istanbul on military matters, are logical. The salient point, as illustrated by Rémond's example, is that, in addition to the acknowledged merits of the Turks being perceived as peculiar, they are also ascribed to a racial foundation. This concept, often cited in historical and sociological discourse, underscores the notion that the act of sharing one's last meal with others, a practice often

referred to as "Turkish hospitality," is not merely a transient act of benevolence but rather, a deeply ingrained characteristic of the Turkish people. This notion of "lionheartedness," coined by James (1913, p. 258), further reinforces the idea that the Turkish people embody a spirit of generosity and courage.

Considering the preceding analyses by Bartlett and James, it is evident that while the Turks' fortitude in the face of wartime circumstances was lauded, their benevolence and hospitality, even toward Christians and other minorities, were regarded with astonishment by the reporters. The fact that these ostensibly positive characteristics were found to be peculiar is telling as it points to the internal logic of Western discourse. The Turks' maintenance of their conscientious attitudes even under wartime conditions is presented as a subject worthy of contemplation rather than appreciation. Inevitably, given its illogical nature, it is more closely aligned with Eastern thought. In accordance with the concept of Eastern ambiguity, the sentiment is expressed with admiration on one hand, while being marginalized on the other.

4.3. Representation of Minorities: Corruption and Hybridity

In memoirs of the First Balkan War, minorities are discussed with a harsher discourse than the Turks. Armenians, Greeks, Jews, or Levantines become objects of criticism, cast as 'others' who harm society. They, too, are fixed by their unchanging moral characteristics, just as the Turks. This discursive rigidity cannot be understood independently of the broader political context in which regimes of loyalty within the empire were redefined in the aftermath of the Balkan Wars. As Ahmad demonstrates, boycotts targeting the Greek population, population movements, and mutual accusations indicate that communities within the empire were rearticulated not only along lines of cultural difference but also through the prism of security and loyalty (Ahmad 2014, pp. 49–54). Some Western observers displayed particular sensitivity to tensions surrounding the Patriarchate and to the increasingly hardened security discourse under the Committee of Union and Progress; indeed, Ahmad discusses the Patriarchate's closure of schools and churches, as well as the more chauvinistic political orientation concentrated around Enver Pasha (Ahmad 2014, pp. 53–54). Bartlett's observations on the Greek and Armenian populations in Istanbul constitute one of the instances in which this broader discourse of suspicion and loyalty is reflected in correspondent narratives.

Bartlett's reflections on the Greek and Armenian communities in Istanbul are as follows: "We inquired into the reasons why the Turks exhibited tolerance toward them and did not undertake their eradication. An old Turkish proverb states, "To outmaneuver a Greek requires two Jews; to deceive an Armenian necessitates five Greeks" (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, pp. 67–68). Bartlett's conceptualization of minorities as corrupt, shameless, and dishonest communities within weak civilizations is a noteworthy contribution to the field (Ashmead-Bartlett 1913, p. 68). Nevertheless, the primary concern, as articulated in the citation, pertains to the erosion of values within a declining civilization. His statements are indicative of an essentialist Orientalist perspective, which once again attributes the source of decay to the East itself or the social structure of the Turks. It is evident that historical, socio-political, and economic conditions have been disregarded once again. The social structure has been reduced to a mere aggregation of individual characteristics. Notably, Stuart Hall's reference to Mary Douglas's definition of "pollution" in *Purity and Danger* is central to this analysis. According to this perspective, minority groups are regarded as "matter out of place," a term used to denote their disruptive influence on established order due to their hybrid structures that remain undefined. Minorities are often constructed as an "inappropriate, dirty, out-of-category 'thing'" that disrupts

cultural norms, particularly when they are identified as Christian yet belong to the East (Hall [1997] 2017, pp. 307, 333).

A similar set of judgments can also be found in Georges Rémond's memoirs. Rémond, who stigmatizes Greek, Armenian, and Jewish translators as dishonest and thieving, broadens the culturalist scale by likening them to Arabs in Tripoli. The author asserts that the races are eroding Turkey, and if no measures are taken, they will dominate this country in the future (Rémond [1913] 2018, p. 32). The author's negative portrayal of minority groups by drawing parallels with another Eastern society exemplifies a broader generalization about the entire Eastern region. The classification of societies from disparate geographies and cultures within a single category gains its analytical power through the lens of Edward Said's concept of "topos." This is due to the nature of the East as a social construct. Within its epistemological architecture, the East is not a geographical location but rather a "topos" (Said 1978, p. 177).

Furthermore, Lionel James exemplifies the discourse of opportunistic minorities using analogous patterns. The reporter characterizes Armenians as exploitative parasites who prey on the hardships experienced by Turkish refugees. James also notes Levantines departing to greet the invaders in their finest attire, bearing salt and bread. The author characterizes the Greeks as 'heartless' by highlighting an account in which individuals, falling into the water during a panic caused by a Turkish warship's warning shot off the coast of Tekirdağ, are rescued only in exchange for money. (James 1913, p. 226). Reflecting on these witnessed incidents, the author poses the question of how the Turks, during their rule, did not succeed in eradicating these "parasites" (James 1913, p. 167).

James is not alone in framing minorities as parasites. William Pickthall, an English traveler in Istanbul during the Balkan War, exhibits prejudicial attitudes toward minority groups, aligning with the perspectives of James and Rémond in characterizing them as parasites endangering the existence of Turks. The discursive construction of minority groups as biological diseases dehumanizes them. The conceptualization of parasitism as a biological or natural characteristic can be elucidated through Hall's notion of naturalization. The cultural characteristics of stereotypes associated with Turkish, Bulgarian, or minority groups are often perceived as if they were racial or natural characteristics.

Pickthall, who formally adopted Islam in 1917, authored *The Black Crusade*, a work that denounced the Crusader alliance formed in the West in the aftermath of the Balkan War. He engaged in political activities in support of the Ottoman State during World War I and was a member of the Anglo-Ottoman Society, which was established in London (Kahraman 1992, p. 270). Thus, in alignment with his selected stance, he expresses opposition to Western policies. Pickthall's contention was that while Turks endured hardship, Christians engaged in leisure activities in Istanbul, still under the protection of Turkish police. The author posits that ethnic minorities, aligning with the dominant power structure, exhibits an escalated degree of insolence during periods of military conflict. This assertion is supported by Pickthall's ([1913] 2009) research, which indicates that the presence of warships contributed to an increase in insubordination among these groups (p. 12). The repeated branding of ethnic and racial minorities as "parasites" within this explanatory analytical paradigm is a noteworthy phenomenon. This depiction serves to articulate the disapproval of their presence within the Ottoman social fabric.

The prevailing critique is that minorities are frequently relegated to a status subordinate to that of the Turks. The ambiguous view applied to Turks or the Balkans is not extended to minority groups. Except for Trotsky's primary sources, minorities are generally characterized as cunning and unreliable communities. These communities are perceived to have become inherently corrupt due to their longstanding subjugation under Eastern

domination. At this juncture, it is necessary to include the war correspondents' views of Bulgarians, as they illustrate the West's hierarchical perspective towards the East.

4.4. The Representation of the Balkans: The Incomplete Self

Despite the paucity of examples in memoirs and war correspondent narratives, it is possible to observe that the West produces similar representational codes concerning the Balkans as it does for the Turks. Philip Gibbs posits that the Balkan alliance constitutes a diabolical mixture, one that will poison the international system, composed of the union of 'semi-civilized' peoples (Kerby 2016, p. 162). The rationale behind the coding of Balkan nations as semi-civilized/semi-Oriental, situated at the threshold between East and West, is elucidated through the theoretical parameters of "Balkanism." In her work Imagining the Balkans, Maria Todorova posits that Balkanism was conceptualized by Westerners in the early 20th century as a notion that articulates profound political fragmentation and a reversion to the past. Todorova's analysis delves into the distinction between Orientalism and Balkanism, exploring the nuances of abstractness versus concreteness in these two phenomena. In contrast to Orientalism's abstract East, the Balkans are a concrete historical geography (Todorova [1997] 2010, pp. 17, 33). Todorova's discourse pertains to the realm of concrete historical geography; however, the conceptual definition proffered by Cyril Campbell, who accompanied the Serbian army in the war as a correspondent for *The Times*, is particularly noteworthy. Campbell determines in 1913 that the Balkans, for the British public opinion of that period, consist of "an uncertain idea where little-known races accumulated" and a mere fiction (Campbell 1913, pp. 1–2).

The discursive tension surrounding Balkan nations stems from their position, being neither entirely of the East nor of the West. Therefore, they cannot be positioned as a complete antithesis to the West, in contrast to the East. Hence, the Balkans have been conceptualized as either as an 'incomplete self' (Todorova [1997] 2010, p. 45) or as an 'insider outsider' that is simultaneously familiar and uncanny (Goldsworthy 2006, p. 33). This ambivalent coding remains evident in British press commentary, where Balkan allies appear as Christian actors yet are cast as immature, reckless, or in need of guidance from the Great Powers (Dorn Sezgin 2013, pp. 466–68). Nevertheless, this condition of incompleteness or foreignness has its origins in the historical development of Christianity, specifically in the division of the religion into two distinct branches: Eastern Catholic and Western Orthodox or Byzantine. In addition to this ambiguity or "in-between" state, Balkan societies are also positioned as Europe's "other"—an insider yet an outsider—because they are assumed to have failed to adapt to the modern world. At this juncture, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of Orientalism in this regard. Operating from a Western perspective, Orientalism is also employed by Balkan peoples who seek to appear Western, yet this is often done in a competitive manner, leading to tensions among the Balkan nations. This phenomenon is referred to as the internalization of Orientalism (nesting Orientalism) by Milica Bakić-Hayden (Bakić-Hayden 1995, p. 918).

The ambiguous gaze, which simultaneously conveys admiration and disdain towards Turks, is also evident in the context of Bulgarians and Serbs, exemplifying a dualistic perspective that simultaneously lauds and denigrates. While Gibbs idealizes the Bulgarian soldier, he simultaneously depicts them as bestial and menacing, likening them to Bulgarian cattle (Gibbs and Grant 1913, p. 49). In a similar vein, the correspondent endeavors to ascribe non-human characteristics to the Balkans by delineating Serbian soldiers as "mute animals" anticipating slaughter (Gibbs and Grant 1913, p. 28) and Bulgarian soldiers as hairy savages (Gibbs and Grant 1913, p. 127).

In contrast, Cyril Campbell presents the low mental level of the Bulgarian peasant as a well-established, documented fact. The reporter's account differs from Gibbs's in

its positive portrayal of the Bulgarian soldier, asserting that contemporary European standards of military training remain unattainable due to such mental inadequacy and poverty (Campbell 1913, p. 134). A common ground exists between these perspectives, as both posit an orientalist hierarchy between Serbs and Bulgarians. Gibbs's coding of Serbs as more passive and resigned to their fate, and of Bulgarians as more active and dangerous, is indicative of a distinct cultural and historical understanding of the respective nations. The reporter ascribes the Bulgarians' perilous nature to the amalgamation of their innate barbarity and Western military strategies. Gibbs specifically notes that both races are characterized by hairiness or hirsuteness, thereby creating a perceived evolutionary distinction between Easterners and Westerners. Consequently, the notions of savagery and semi-civilization become congruent. A comparison of the disciplined and well-equipped Bulgarian soldier to the Turkish soldier, who was struggling with hunger, accentuates the contrast between order and chaos, or between the West and the East (Gibbs and Grant 1913, p. 50). However, both groups deviate from the Western norm due to their distinct construction.

Reginald Rankin's discourse about the well-trained "magnificent" Bulgarian soldiers is notable for its use of derogatory terms to refer to the Bulgarian people as a whole. Moreover, the East/West dichotomy is not only delineated by human beings but also by animals. Bulgarian animals are posited to exhibit greater resilience to pain in comparison to their English counterparts. This phenomenon is attributed to the prolonged period under Turkish rule, during which Bulgarian animals are assumed to have developed a disposition to accept fate (Rankin 1914, p. 92). In this example, the hierarchical positioning of both Turks and Bulgarians vis-à-vis the West is established. Sir Rankin's perspective, marked by an aristocratic sensibility, is further evidenced by his employment of coding systems that categorize individuals according to their typological traits. The author characterizes his Bulgarian driver of Turkish origin as an Indian with protruding teeth. In this manner, Rankin assimilates the Bulgarian or Balkan identity into a colonial framework (Rankin 1914, p. 85). Furthermore, he upholds the orientalist perspective that distinguishes between Eastern and Western cultures by drawing parallels between Bulgarian villages, which he depicts as "hell on earth", and English villages, which he configures as "paradisiacal enclaves". In a comparative analysis of dietary habits, Rankin notes marked disparities between the diets of English workers and those of Bulgarians. He proposes that individuals disliking England might find more positive experiences in countries such as Turkey. The juxtaposition of English and Easterners exemplifies the evolution of national identity into a discourse of superiority. The assertion that the climate of the Balkans is savage and predatory, and that this predatory nature is not limited to people or animals but extends to the very environment itself, reveals an intention to disregard all sociopolitical conditions and attribute the cause of violence to geography (Rankin 1914, p. 136).

The positive accounts of Bulgarians by Gibbs and Rankin center on the Bulgarian army. It is noteworthy that analogous heroic codifications identified in the texts of Wright and Hermenegild Wagner, a correspondent for the *Reichpost*, suggest that these representations are not coincidental. Wright's artistic approach entails a deliberate reference to Lord Tennyson's poem, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, to portray the soldiers' moment of attack. Thereby, the dramatic style is enriched by a narrative of heroism transferred from fiction to reality (Wright 1913, p. 263).

As discussed, it has been noted that journalists such as Bartlett and Gibbs employ sensationalist language in their reporting. Goldsworthy asserts that the West's focus on the Balkan region occurs mainly during periods of war or unrest. He attributes the increase in publications concerning the Balkans in the 1870s to this fact. As a result, the Balkans are predominantly recognized for their historical associations with chaos and violence. Reporters construct the necessary stereotypes to satisfy public expectations. Goldsworthy

further notes that English reporters and travelers, in particular, were influenced by Lord Byron, whom the author identifies as the Columbus of the Balkans, and his 1812 work, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Goldsworthy 2006, p. 27). For this reason, the origins of Gibbs's and others' savage/bandit codifications, as well as Wright's romantic reference to Lord Tennyson's work, become evident.

In numerous scholarly texts, the First Balkan War is also framed as a representation of the ongoing conflict between the Christian Cross and the Islamic Crescent, symbolizing the historical struggle between Christianity and Islam. Even if Rankin classifies the Bulgarians as semi-civilized or foreign, he acknowledges that they believe in the same God as the Greeks (Rankin 1914, p. 123). The Bulgarians are depicted as modern-day crusaders, poised to repel the Ottomans, who are characterized as barbarians, back to Asia. Another discourse posits that the progression and civilizational development of the nation are facilitated by its relationship with the West following its attainment of independence. Wagner (1913, p. 85) thus identifies the pivotal role of Western education in fostering the development of Bulgaria. The construction of Bulgarians as heroes serving Christianity would convey the message that a just war was being waged, thereby legitimizing support for the Balkan countries. According to Ross Cameron, to maintain the integrity of the just war image, members of the press observe a limited capacity regarding massacres committed against civilians. According to this perspective, Western observers disregard crimes of violence committed against Muslim civilians, aligning with a strategy of exoneration. Conversely, they utilize the actions of the Turks as propaganda, portraying them as barbaric (Cameron 2024, p. 123).

In the First Balkan War correspondent narratives, the opposition between the "Cross" and the "Crescent" constructs the conflict not merely as a military or diplomatic event, but as a symbolic struggle in which religious and civilizational boundaries are reaffirmed. This discourse represents Europe in association with Christianity, order, and progress, while linking the Ottoman world to Islam, backwardness, and historical anachronism. Religion thus operates not simply as a matter of belief, but as a representational code that renders political and cultural distinctions visible. Through this opposition, correspondents extend the meaning of the war beyond military developments, embedding it within a broader discursive regime that reproduces Europe's modes of self-definition.

In this way, war correspondent narratives position the Ottomans, minorities, and Balkan peoples not on the same discursive footing, but within distinct yet interrelated regimes of representation; it is precisely at this juncture that the weight of counter-narratives becomes most apparent.

5. Counter-Narrative: The Breakdown of Discourse

Texts positioned against dominant war narratives demonstrate that the First Balkan War cannot be understood as a singular and transparent reality, but rather as a phenomenon interpreted in different ways within distinct discursive configurations. For this reason, counter-narratives do not merely offer alternative viewpoints at the level of content; they also generate interpretive possibilities that prevent the dominant regime of representation from appearing natural or inevitable. In particular, observations that resist reducing the Ottoman defeat to cultural or civilizational essences render visible the historical, military, logistical, and political contexts of the war. In this way, the ideological functioning of war correspondent texts becomes more apparent, as the presence of counter-narratives reveals that the represented reality is not pre-given but discursively constructed.

In contrast to the Western construction of discourse concerning Turks, Balkan peoples, and minorities, Leon Trotsky's narrative of the First Balkan War holds a privileged position. Trotsky's approach to the war does not align with the use of cultural or nationalistic lenses.

In his assessment, both the Ottoman Empire and the Balkan states are examined within their historical processes. In evaluating the circumstances of the Ottoman and Balkan regions, it is imperative to undertake objective assessments of the state system, the economy, and international balances (Trotsky 1995, pp. 7–8). In this respect, Trotsky's account is particularly significant, as it demonstrates that the war needs not be explained through cultural or civilizational essences. In this passage, Trotsky refrains from attributing the Ottoman Empire's defeat in the war to fatalism, moral decay, or Orientalist stereotypes. Instead, he offers a nuanced analysis that considers the complex interplay of historical, social, and economic factors that contributed to the Empire's downfall. The inability to effectively govern the state or the army is attributed to underlying economic conditions rather than inherent cultural characteristics. In Trotsky's work, it is argued that the underdevelopment of industry and the absence of a bourgeois class and a working class to support the Young Turk movement hindered the reform movements from achieving their objectives (Trotsky 1995, p. 27). In asserting that the objectives of major powers were obscured by "eloquent rhetoric concerning racial affinity," Trotsky concurrently centers on the jeopardy confronting the autonomy of the Balkan populace (Trotsky 1995, p. 175).

Although an uncommon occurrence, Trotsky's theoretical analytical perspective incorporates a culturalist approach, asserting that the Bulgarians exhibit an absence of emotionality and a deficiency in lyricism and theater (Trotsky 1995, p. 258). However, Trotsky's conceptualizations of "backwardness" and "primitivism" in the context of Bulgarian democracy diverge from the Orientalist discourse on primitivism. The subject's distinguishing characteristic is his pursuit of the origins of Bulgarian democracy's primitivism, as opposed to the concept of "national character." Instead, he attributes this state to the societal underdevelopment and the non-existence of class contradictions (Trotsky 1995, p. 207).

A further problematic issue regarding Western correspondents' accounts of the First Balkan War is whether these works can be used as neutral or objective sources. In his work titled *Defeat in Detail*, E. Erickson assesses the historiography of the First Balkan War in two layers. The initial layer comprises memoirs authored by military observers and medical personnel, predominantly in Western European languages, which were published immediately following the war. The observers were not proficient in Turkish or any of the Balkan languages. Consequently, texts derived from second-hand information remain highly problematic (Erickson 2003, p. xix). Erickson posits that contemporary perceptions regarding the Turks' effectiveness in the Balkan Wars are rooted in these seminal works. One of the preceding criticisms is that the army was poorly managed.

Erickson's analysis of the official historical records of the Christian nations involved in the war over the past twenty years suggests the presence of a secondary layer of historiography. The process of accessing and translating historical texts written in Balkan languages poses formidable challenges. Additionally, the utilization of the Gregorian calendar in select historical texts complicates the direct comparison of events. For these reasons, he maintains that his work is grounded in the perspective of the Ottoman army and is consciously based on secondary sources. He concludes that the information provided by Western observers about the Turkish army, without knowledge of its operational plans or issued orders, is not reliable. Therefore, the foundation of his work is the Ottoman archive, which is consistent with the works of modern historians, such as Richard C. Hall, and the official documents of the Greek army.

Erickson contests the Western discourse, asserting that it does not align with reality. He challenges the portrayal of the Ottoman army as lacking the capacity to meet the demands of modern warfare, contending that this misrepresentation does not reflect the truth. Instead, Erickson contends that the Ottoman army was more advanced than

European armies in many respects (Erickson 2003, p. xxi). Western correspondents posit that the Turks' defeat is inevitable, attributing this outcome to their fatalistic and passive characteristics, as well as their lack of familiarity with modern military methods. In contrast, Erickson conducts a thorough examination of the defeat, meticulously analyzing its underlying causes and implications. In practice, the Ottoman army adhered to German military doctrine, which prioritized an unprepared offensive strategy over a defensive one. Consequently, the defeat was not attributable to factors such as lethargy or a lack of familiarity with established methodologies; rather, it was the consequence of implementing an erroneous approach. Moreover, the state of disorder that the correspondents identified stemmed from the army's incomplete transition to a triple-division structure. A notable aspect overlooked by Western observers is the Greek Navy's pivotal role in constraining the Ottoman army's logistics supply chain. By maintaining control over the Aegean Sea, the Greek Navy effectively impeded the Ottomans from receiving vital provisions and ammunition, thereby influencing the strategic balance of power in the region. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the historical tendency among war correspondents to naturalize starving soldiers as a natural consequence of the "Oriental mind."

The predominant issue reported by journalists covering the war on both the Bulgarian and Turkish sides is censorship. Lionel James likens the censorship directive to a death warrant (James 1913, pp. 59–60), while Herbert F. Baldwin inscribes the note "Turkey's first prisoners of war" beneath a group photograph of reporters he sent to London (Baldwin 1913, p. 31). Philip Gibbs also asserts that he is unable to comprehend a substantial portion of the war due to censorship. He indicates that he places a higher value on the human aspect of the war than on military realities. This perspective led *The New York Times* to describe Gibbs's book as a work of aesthetic merit but questionable substance, and the Literary Supplement to define it as "a readable story" (Kerby 2016, pp. 167–70). Due to their distance from the frontlines, reporters are unable to provide firsthand accounts of the war, a task made more challenging by the pervasive censorship. In this regard, as reported by the *New York Times*, the Turkish army's retreat during the Battle of Lüleburgaz occurs without the presence of any war correspondent. A notable exception to this report is the account provided by *Central News* correspondent Angus Hamilton. In a letter to *The New York Times*, Hamilton states that he observes the Turkish retreat independently and that his memoirs are free from "personal gossip" (Michailidis 2020, p. 129).

With regard to censorship, stringent controls are implemented on both the Western and Eastern fronts. Campbell contends that they are "spoon-fed" by official authorities regarding front-line news (Campbell 1913, p. vii), while claiming that the reality concerning the Balkan issue remains obscured beneath piles of brochures and articles from inexpensive newspapers (Campbell 1913, p. 2). Accordingly, Campbell articulates previously established notion that representation supersedes reality.

The points previously mentioned demonstrate that journalistic texts—compiled from second-hand information and lacking extensive firsthand experience—are constructed as regimes of representation under the guidance of political centers. Therefore, given their ideological structures, it is imperative to view these texts not as objective data sources but rather as exemplars of discourse construction, a process that necessitates intensive critical practice. At this point, it becomes evident that the regime of representation constructed around the First Balkan War is not confined to its historical moment but constitutes an early form of a longer-standing discursive structure. This, in turn, raises the question of how similar representational patterns are reproduced across subsequent historical contexts.

6. Continuation of the Discourse: The 90s and Balkanism

As Todorova demonstrates, within Western discourse the Balkans are constructed not as an entirely external other like the East, but as Europe's incomplete, belated, and unstable internal other. For this reason, Balkanist representation operates not through absolute exclusion, as in Orientalism, but through a logic of hierarchical proximity and deficiency. This representational logic did not disappear entirely after the Second World War; rather, it persists across different historical contexts, with its visibility and political function undergoing transformation.

The language employed by the First Balkan War correspondents in relation to Serbs, Bulgarians, and Balkan communities more broadly largely overlaps with the Balkanist semantic field identified by Todorova. In these texts, the Balkans are represented as part of Europe, yet not fully mature, inclined toward violence, and in need of external guidance. In this respect, the texts of 1912–1913 reveal not only the characteristics of contemporary war journalism, but also early forms of a European discursive pattern that is reproduced in subsequent decades.

This discursive pattern re-emerges prominently in Western media during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. The recurrence of images such as "ancient hatreds," fragmentation, and primitive violence demonstrates the long-term resilience of Balkanist discourse (Green 2005, p. 152). Explaining the conflicts not within the paradigms of modern state crisis, nation-building, and international intervention, but through a repertoire of ahistorical enmities, constructs the Balkans as a region removed from the sphere of modern politics and trapped within its own past. This mode of representation also aligns with a broader discursive field in which communities within the Balkans hierarchically "Orientalize" one another (Bakić-Hayden 1995, p. 930).

The concrete manifestations of this discursive repertoire in the press are clearly observed in newspaper and magazine texts of the period. For instance, *Time*'s article dated 12 April 1999, titled "The Balkans' Heritage of Hatred," (Morrow 1999) constructs an essentialist narrative that defines the region through the deadly legacy of its past, while its 19 January 1998 piece, "The Next Balkan War," interprets Kosovo as an eruption of long-standing historical animosities (Calabresi 1998). Similarly, *The Christian Science Monitor*'s report of 17 May 1993 frames the conflict in the Balkans through the lens of "old animosities," explaining a political process in terms of an ahistorical language of enmity (Goodrich 1993).

At the same time, some Western commentators in this period draw attention to the reductive nature of such essentialist explanations. An assessment published in *Los Angeles Times* on 10 January 1993 (Meyer 1993) argues that explaining the Bosnian War through the cliché of "ancient hatreds" obscures political responsibility, while Jonathan Steele, writing in *The Guardian* on 4 December 1999, explicitly objects to the portrayal of such hatreds as timeless and natural phenomena (Steele 1999).

7. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that Western war correspondence on the First Balkan War does not merely report military developments; rather, it actively constructs a religiously inflected civilizational narrative. British and European journalists operate within a representational regime that reproduces Orientalist hierarchies, framing the Ottoman Empire as a religiously marked anomaly whose presence in Europe is temporary and illegitimate. The persistent visual representation of the Cross and the Crescent transcends its role as a geopolitical metaphor, serving as a symbol of broader cultural and religious resonance. It articulates a moral hierarchy in which Europe is sacralized as rational, disciplined, and progressive, while the Ottoman world is depicted as fatalistic, stagnant, and structurally

incapable of modern governance. Religion, therefore, functions as a boundary-producing mechanism, serving to distinguish civilization from barbarism and modernity from decay. Even ostensibly secular categories such as discipline, efficiency, or time-consciousness are embedded within this inherited religiously inflected symbolic order.

The representation of Balkan populations reveals a layered hierarchy. The construction of Bulgarians and Serbs as agents of Christian liberation is intermittent, and they are also characterized as semi-civilized or developmentally incomplete. This ambivalence is indicative of the Balkan region's role as Europe's other within, a perspective that is further illuminated by the prevailing logic of Balkanism. Conversely, ethnic and racial minorities are regarded as biologically and morally inferior, thereby reinforcing a stratified system of religious and civilizational differentiation. According to Trotsky's analysis, alternative interpretive models are indeed available. By grounding his interpretation in economic and structural conditions rather than cultural or religious essentialism, he disrupts the religiously inflected narrative of Ottoman decline. His counter-narrative substantiates the notion that the religious-civilizational explanation of defeat is ideological rather than inevitable.

More broadly, this case illustrates how modern media discourse, even when claiming neutrality, operates through deeply embedded religious semiotics. The Ottoman withdrawal from the Balkans is not merely a military failure; it is also interpreted as the restoration of a divinely ordained civilizational order. Religion functions as an implicit interpretive framework that shapes public perception and legitimizes exclusion. The recurrence of analogous codes during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s underscores the continuity of this religiously influenced Balkanist discourse. This research demonstrates that the patterns of representation established during the First Balkan War are not confined to that specific historical moment but can also be traced in the discursive forms that re-emerge in Western media during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. This continuity indicates that the association of the Balkans with irrational violence, fragmentation, and ahistorical enmities points to a more enduring regime of representation, reproduced across different historical contexts.

Eyewitness accounts of the First Balkan War reveal that religion exerts a profound influence on the symbolic grammar through which violence is interpreted, sovereignty is established, and belonging is defined—even in situations where it is not explicitly articulated. By examining these historical precedents, the present analysis contributes to ongoing debates on religion, media, and violence, and demonstrates how war reporting facilitates discourses that produce civilizational boundaries. Seemingly secular categories, such as discipline, efficiency, and temporal consciousness are embedded within this inherited civilizational hierarchy. Ultimately, this study underscores the notion that the representational patterns established during the First Balkan War are not confined to that historical juncture; rather, they manifest in the discursive forms that resurface in Western media during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. This finding suggests that the association of the Balkans with irrational violence, fragmentation, and ahistorical hostilities constitutes an enduring regime of representation reproduced across diverse historical contexts.

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