

Re-imagining the Balkans: The Other Side of a Periphery

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Abstract

Instead of looking at the Balkans through a negative prism, and viewing the region as an “incomplete self” of Europe and as a region permanently short of modernization, this paper suggests a different, more balanced perspective. It intends to explore the creative or at least revelatory dimensions of the recent cultural and political history of the Balkans, summed up in the notion of *productive periphery*. The Balkans, as a region is defined by its peripheric situation; by a distant, yet tight relation to a center; by a clearly subaltern, yet somehow decisive position. While being peripheral to historical trends, Balkan nations were also paradoxically very close to the political and educational centers (Istanbul and Vienna) but still relatively free from other historically weighty centers (Berlin, Cairo and Moscow). Several developments have played out in which Balkan states have taken a belated, imitative route towards modernity – nationalism, Islamic modernism and communism. Yet, during the unfolding and (according to this analysis) also thanks to its position as a liminal periphery, those routes have developed into hybrid and original phenomena attesting to the fact that the periphery may be a productive space and that the productiveness of periphery should be studied.

Key words: Balkans, ideology, periphery, modernization, Balkanism, nationalism, communism, Islamic reformism.

The Balkans as a Periphery

There is no end of texts, discourses and papers, both naive and critical, dealing with the Balkans and their destiny as a periphery. Obviously, the Balkans are situated on the periphery of Europe, sometimes reaching the rank of a semi-periphery, sometimes doubling as a periphery of a periphery. Surprisingly, the word “periphery” almost never gets a serious look: periphery of what, when and how? It would be short-sighted to invest the term of periphery uniquely with a negative connotation of dependency and backwardness: first of all, periphery should always be defined explicitly with regards to a particular center or centers and secondly, it should be looked at in the entirety of its complexity. For, a position of multiple periphery might also mean a position of a multiple centrality in the sense of entertaining relations to multiple centers. The argument wants to draw attention to ways in which hybridity can in some cases be made productive by circumstances.

Since the Balkans were discovered as an object of political and economic interest, the region was considered a place defined by a position of someone else’s periphery: a region economically dependent on a (West-European) core and controlled, and exploited by the geopolitical logic of far-away centers; a region always in a direct, vertical relation to imperial and post-imperial capitals, rather than connected regionally and horizontally; a region always in process of modernization but ever in default of a stabilized, mature modernity; a region always bleeding its populations towards some other part of a continent, without the capacity to maintain an enclosed identity, where “non-development is the rule rather than the exception” (Wolff, 1994, p. 9).

Hence, it would not be surprising that since Wolff’s book in 1994, from the time of renewed expectations, the peripheral Balkans seem to be continuously represented by a “rapport de non-progrès”. Parts of the Balkans seem not to be just a periphery of the EU (that would be the EU Balkan member states of Romania and Bulgaria), but rather a periphery of the periphery, (Belchev, 2012), ever seen in a state of “secular stagnation” (Bartlett, 2016).

Notions of Periphery

Even before Wallerstein’s economy-based conceptualizations of center-dependency, the idea of an ever-delayed and reactive periphery as a political destiny was deeply rooted in the construction of Balkan history. So the Hungarian historian Ivan Berend spoke of “a communist rebellion, another form of revolt of the periphery” against “peripheral backwardness”. For him, the communist experiment was part of a twentieth century rebellion of the unsuccessful peripheries, which were humiliated by economic backwardness and the increasing gap which separated them from the advanced Western core. “The ‘dual revolution’ of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had no roots in this area and was unable to elevate these peripheral nations to the exclusive club of the rich, industrialized nations, with their well-functioning market automatism and nation states with stable parliamentary democracies.” (Berend, 1996, p. xiii)

More than economically peripheral, Balkan marginality was construed as cultural. According to Larry Wolff, a historian of the concept *Eastern Europe*, the “identification of Eastern Europe as economic periphery involves, to a certain extent, taking the culturally constructed unity of the eighteenth century and projecting it backward to organize an earlier economic model liminality” (Wolff, 1994, p. 8). Liminality is a matter of back-projection. Since the 1990s, a critical discourse has risen against such conceptual closure or a “frozen image” in which the Balkans were seen primarily through the prism of dependency and inadequacy. A new, post-colonial perspective suggested by Maria Todorova in her *Imagining the Balkans* (1997) has proposed to call this perspective “balkanist”, denoting a system of representations, value judgements and dichotomies, as it was gradually built and used by colonial powers. Rather than representing the Other of Europe, the Balkans in Todorova’s perspective would have been constructed through ambivalence, and “balkanism” would be “a discourse about an imputed ambiguity.” (Todorova, 1977, p. 14). In this perspective, the Balkans was a region that was part -European, part -Asian, part -civilized and part -barbarian, and always in process of Europeanization, yet with a tendency to remain ambiguous, and to “balkanize” its modernity. Periphery is nevertheless not a self-explanatory notion. It includes a vantage point; there is a periphery from a certain point of view. Parts of the Balkans were of course a double periphery: a margin of the Ottoman Empire as well as margins of Europe or of European colonial projects at the same time. The Ottoman Balkans were also a controlled periphery of the imperial South. Ottoman historiography reflected the Ottoman state-centric, center-periphery vision that saw the province as being dependent on the central government in Istanbul, without having a proper, independent existence. The center thus imposed control, order and stability and its “honour” on the periphery. As Ebru Boyar attests, one of the expressions of such a perspective was the Ottoman tendency, so similar to today’s European view, to see local Slav uprisings “not as stemming from the inner dynamics of the periphery but as being incited from ‘outside’ the periphery” (Boyar, 2007, p. 57). A periphery in this perspective is by definition denied proper interest, a subjectivity, inner dynamics and is always under the influence: of that or another center. As a result, during the last century of Ottoman power, the center came to intervene in more forceful and “obtrusive” ways into the periphery in order to keep it tied to the center, sheltered from “alternative centers of power” (Boyar, 2007, p. 58) – represented by roaming Great Power consuls, nationalistic societies, and the press.

Double Periphery and Double Centrality

Periphery is first and foremost a contextual concept: a place can be peripheral in relation to one (or more) centers from a certain point of view. The Balkan Ottoman provinces were peripheral and dependent upon the centralizing political system based in Istanbul. The Sublime Porte denied them political independence, but feared the attraction of certain autonomist, nationalist forces within those provinces developed towards other centers. Hence, the Balkans were and are not just *a mere* periphery, but most often *a double periphery*, a place combining relations

of a peripheral kind with two or even more centers. Furthermore, a periphery can at the same time be a center of its own with its own arrays of peripheries.

The notion of periphery is therefore above all an expression of a certain perspective and it is itself also a projection: the question is which perspective, which “periphery” imposes itself at a particular point in history and which perspective solidifies one of many center-periphery relations into the destiny of a permanent periphery.

If we recognize the ambiguity of a periphery, and if we take another step and return the perspective of a double periphery, we gain a different view, that of a double centrality. The peripheries, constituted by a relation to a center, were also constituted by a relation to another center. All the more so when the periphery in question occupies a liminal position between two or more centers. Even more, when relations of control and influence are distant and when penetration by other centralities is possible.

This perspective of a double centrality downplays the dependence or one-sidedness of a peripheral relation and highlights a room for manoeuvre, a space for agency. Arzu Boyar attests to this again when she writes that in Rumelia, the Ottoman Balkan provinces, “in a nowadays familiar pattern”, the peripheries entered into the logic and “tried to play off all the ‘centers’ that were available to it” (Boyar, 2007, p. 60) against each other. Indeed, nothing is more banal than this trope in the Balkans of tendencies to outweigh and “play against each other” the political and cultural attractiveness of the EU and Russia, and even the EU and Turkey. In a recent political speech in Sarajevo, Turkey’s minister of foreign affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu laid out this double-sidedness of periphery and centrality: “... when we speak of the Balkans, we say it’s the periphery of Europe. But is the Balkans really a periphery? No. It is the heartland of Africa-Eurasia. Where does this perception of periphery come from? If you asked Mehmet-Pasha Sokolović, he wouldn’t have said that Sarajevo or Salonica were the periphery, whether of Europe or the Ottoman state. Look at history. The only exception in history is the Ottoman state. During Ottoman times, in the 16th century, the Balkans were at the center of world politics. That was the golden age of the Balkans” (Öktem, 2010, p. 26).

There are of course various types of dependence, influence and periphery-center relations: political in the *hard* sense of administrative and military on the one hand, and political in the *soft* sense of cultural and ideological on the other, and also all sorts of in-between relations, such as in clientelist or economic. Hence, a region, a nation, or a group of people, can be placed in a position of a double periphery (Ottoman state as opposed to nationalist attraction and the meddling of Western consuls) or double centrality (the political allegiance and sovereignty of the Sultanate in contrast to an allegiance to modern political ideologies and forms of governance). A double centrality can lead to inner conflict (for example for the critical, reformist subjects of the Sultans) or to a larger space of manoeuvre, or the increased agency of minority groups within the Ottoman sphere who are also represented and defended by outside powers and can play both centers off.) A double centrality would also mean a larger freedom from the centralising forces that are at their strongest, right in the center. A certain marginal position can, in certain circumstances, mean openness and a greater degree of agency.

What this chapter wants to explore is this second concept of peripheral position: the openness and agency. Obviously, not every and perhaps not even many of peripheral positions bring about such advantages – there is no reason for an uncritical idealization of the ambiguity of the margins. But, it would be short-sighted to invest the term of periphery uniquely with a negative connotation of dependency and backwardness: first of all, periphery should always be defined explicitly with regards to which center and what kind of relations; and secondly, it should be looked at in its complexity. For, as argued above, a position of multiple periphery might also mean a position of a multiple centrality in the sense of entertaining relations to multiple centers.

Changing the Perspective

There is no arguing about the fact that the Balkans - lacking a powerful political or cultural center - are defined by their peripheral situation; by a distant, yet tight relation to a center; by a clearly subaltern, yet sometimes somehow decisive position. While being clearly peripheral to many decisive historical trends such as capitalism and technological revolution, the Balkan nations were also paradoxically very close to the political and educational centers (Istanbul and Vienna) but still relatively free from other historical epicenters (Berlin, Cairo, and Moscow). Several historical developments have been played out in which the Balkan states have taken a belated, imitative route towards modernity, such as Yugoslav communism and Islamic modernism. Yet, during the unfolding and (according to the analysis) also thanks to its position of a liminal periphery, those routes have developed into hybrid and finally original phenomena.

The Balkanist perspective – viewing the periphery solely in one-sided, dependent and negative terms – is a perspective of cultural ascription: viewing the region through a unique, cultural dependable. Pavlos Hatzopoulos has defined his critical view as an ideological perspective: perceiving the Balkans solely through the prism of nationalism. In his own definition of Balkanism he argues that “the Balkans have been rigidly associated with backwardness, with extraordinary violence, with incessant strife. These traits have also been projected back into the history of the region, as if it had nothing substantial to show but them. Nationalism has been posited as the central concept that organises these representations. Nationalism has been considered, in other words, as the quintessential feature of Balkan societies and as the principal explanatory framework through which the past and the present of the Balkans is to be narrated” (Hatzopoulos, 2007, p. 1). In his work *The Balkans beyond Nationalism and Identity*, Hatzopoulos seeks to take up this view in its context, by applying to Balkan history this perspective of political ideologies and seeking empirical evidence supporting or disproving this perspective. In an “attempt to move beyond the nationalist horizon” he looked at alternative ideological directions, the non-nationalist ideologies (communism, liberal internationalism, and agrarianism) in the interwar period. He demonstrated how the existence, strength, and mutual competition of those non-nationalistic ideologies and especially their function as an alternative to nationalism brought about a distinct perspective,

different from the nationalist prism: showing political projects without a primary attachment to the national community.

While the author can never dispute the prevalence of nationalisms, a different look may give the Balkan societies parts of their complex history. He concludes that from the perspective of ideology, the Balkans is a political concept. "The Balkans are never, in other words, 'the Balkans as such'. The meaning of the Balkans is multiple: it changes in relation to how a particular ideology articulates it... The different, multiple meanings of the Balkans are alternatively a function of political ideologies and of ideological struggles. Ideologies are not simply viewpoints, but structures that constitute subjects and social practices" (Hatzopoulos, 2007, p. 185).

We may borrow his ideology-based perspective, and from the same viewpoint of exploring the agency of the periphery lies the old Cold War question, from 1961 concerning another ideology, communism: "Will the Communist empire absorb the Balkans, or will the Balkans absorb and 'Balkanize' communism' – both options precluding the coexistence of communism and the Balkans" (Campbell, 1963, p. 369, quoted in Hatzopoulos, 2007, p. 2). Without going into historical details, Balkan communisms are practical examples of localised ideological praxis for the sake of the perspective argument. Knowing that in the Eastern Block there was no one model of communism; communist states developed their own model of national communism. Yet significant differences prevailed between countries under a more direct influence of the quasi-imperial center in Moscow and those who were able to escape it. Central European states, despite their tendencies to develop nationalism, were not allowed to take a truly national path: the Hungarian experiment ended in 1956, the Czech Spring was put down by an invasion of the Soviet bloc armies in 1968 and Poland's Solidarity agitation was asphyxiated by national forces through a decade-long martial law. Yet, Tito's Yugoslavia, Hoxha's Albania and even, to a lesser degree, Ceausescu's Romania had developed distinctively different models of national communism (Gripp, 1960). Be it in the architecture of state control and development (Albania and Romania) or even through the original ideological model of *radničko samoupravljanje* (workers' self-management) the Balkan states at the peripheries of the communist empire could use a much larger degree of factual geopolitical autonomy than other communist satellites.

The apex was of course the relatively liberal and at least formally more democratic Yugoslav communist ideology and the usage Marshall Tito made of his autonomy and popularity to play the two blocs against each other within the non-aligned movement. Here, a double centrality was at its highest point: Tito's Yugoslavia built its 40-year-long inner homogeneity – unprecedented for a supranational federal system in the Balkans – on the prestige from the anti-Nazi victory, not only on the ideology of communist Yugoslavism, but also on the favours coming from the West in terms of support, investments, loans and prestige.

While Yugoslavia's leftist and liberal alternative to Stalinism exercised a strong attraction on smaller developing nations and on the European left well into the 1990s, it clearly does not

cut a good example any more. Not only because nationalist mobilization and the subsequent violent dislocation of Yugoslavia have shown how much of a hollowed system Titoist Yugoslavia was: It was through its usage of its marginality and by playing the Great Powers off against each other so successfully that it managed to gain a dangerous amount of cash and mask structural inefficiencies, social conflicts and regional disparities under an illusion of ideological prosperity. But above all, the ideological hybridity had lost its attraction: a national or a supra-national ideology may be intellectually intriguing but needs to be buttressed by an institutional basis and a workable governance praxis to function as an example to investigate and follow. When we ask ourselves how to bring about a different perspective on periphery – may be akin to the history making Titoist ideology and foreign policy – we need better examples that just some interesting ideological figures.

Balkan Peripheries of Islam

While the 19th century gave the Balkans a role of coveted periphery between the Ottomans, the Russian, the Austro-Hungarian and the German Empires, the 20th century has introduced the bipolar model. Within this framework, by using the cunning of a uniquely peripheral position, Titoist Yugoslavia was able to emerge as a largely autonomous agent. The 21st century has redefined centrality and peripherality again. Neither the centers nor the relationship are the same. The levels on which center-periphery relations have shifted again, from the anti-colonial movements for national autonomy and passing through the ideologically defined bipolar straight-jacket of the Cold War to today's relations as part of the globalized, multi-polar and connected world. Examples of a productive double centrality must be sought elsewhere, for example at a sub-national level.

One open notion of periphery that makes sense in today's context is the notion of *the periphery of Islam* – that is, at a periphery of so-called civilizations. Whatever the reasons, oppositions are more and more often built in terms of the largely fictional entities of civilizations. Civilizations are complexes of geopolitical alliances, trade agreements, networks, educational and intellectual gravitation, ideological and political affinities and cultural influences that most of the time overlap with other “civilizations” within the same countries. So the Muslim societies of the Balkans are, at the same time, part of a European sphere, yet part of the Islamic world. On the one hand, democratic aspirations, secular statehood, educational and trade relations, migration and labour flows orientate the Balkan countries mostly towards Europe, while on the other hand and at the same time societies become involved in various manners (educational, economic, intellectual) with the larger Islamic world. In both aspects, the Balkan Muslims societies are and have always been peripheral. They do not hold influence over the respective centers but are nevertheless penetrated by them. Still, as this text seeks to show, margins or periphery may not hold only negative contents. The periphery of Islam in the Balkans may actually hold a concrete possibility of an autonomous development just because of its peripheral situation in between centers.

Islamic Core and Periphery

The notion of an Islamic civilizational core and outlying peripheries is as simple and convincing as it can be misleading. In the eyes of religious history and Islam's normative sources, the core lies in the Arabic peninsula: in Mecca and Medina. The Islamic core is Arab and Middle Eastern. Yet Islam's core aside, the centres in terms of civilizations – intellectual and political power – and in terms of imperial structures, those centers kept shifting: from Arabia to Damascus and Baghdad in the early Middle Ages; then to Cairo and Istanbul in 16th century, where they remained until the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. In yet another meaning, “centers” increasingly meant the place from which intellectual, reformist and finally anti-colonial movements propagated to upend old orders. Next to centers of traditional learning, new centers rewrote Islamic geography as a result of various revivalist movements. Their schools, be they educational institutions or loose networks gathered around a journal or a club - Deobandi, Bareilwi, Wahhabi, islahi, ikhwani, salafi – decentred the Islamic world. In the 20th century, the civilizational geography was rewritten once more: Cairo, Damascus, Beirut, Algiers with their reformist agendas ceded place to traditional centers that reclaimed position: the conservative Saudi power, modernising Turkey, or the ideological fighting ground in Cairo.

There will never be a consensus over what exactly constitutes a center and which place is a center at a given point in time. Generally, as in previously mentioned theories, centers exercise influence, function as relays between various other parts, set the agenda, and function as places of innovation. But in another times, when linked to a state power, they function as stabilising and even asphyxiating structures. On the other hand, there is no doubt that a periphery can be a place for innovation. Ozay Mehmet, in his *Islamic Identity and Development: Studies of the Islamic Periphery* showed how peripheral Turkey and Malaysia contributed to the dilemmas of modernization in 20th century through their decidedly secularist and nationalizing public policy. The modernization strategy that decidedly took an opposing course to that of the Saudi or Egyptian revivalists, paradoxically led to some development: “While countries in the Islamic Periphery have taken major steps in reopening the ‘Gate of Ijtihad’, the Islamic Core lags behind. It is in the Core that Islamic fundamentalism carries its greatest force” (Mehmet 1991, p. 72). Mehmet refers to the second aspect of center-dependency. In a fast changing, ideological world, it can be asphyxiating, depending on which particular ideology and which political confrontation defines the actions of the core.

In the 20th century, Islam's centres again shifted towards the Persian Gulf. Economically, politically, and even culturally, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates have taken over the position of influence from Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus. All three capitals of independent socialist Arab republics have transformed from relatively liberal, culturally vibrant places to megapolises with a very limited public space. The confrontation between authoritarian states and their Islamic oppositions has played out increasingly over religious matters, in which fundamentalist

efforts to Islamize civil societies led to a total politicization of Islam. Hence, debates and intellectual production, religious and educational institutions were made target of ideological attacks by fundamentalists seeking to impose a new, counterhegemonic Islamist project (Kandil, 2011). As a result, critical and innovative cultural production was subdued.

European Peripheries of Islam

The peripheries of Islam were spared the fundamentalists' cultural war and the ideological control of states that developed in former centers. Dietrich Reetz showed how "a triangular conflict between 'local', revivalist and modernist Islam" played itself out in the Muslim heartlands and their peripheries (Reetz, 2009). In many cases, unlike in the centers, modernist aspirations have had a long-lasting effect in the peripheries of Islam.

The Balkans were one such region. Islamic modernism was imported by intellectuals returning from their studies in Egypt in the early years of the 20th century. Bosnia especially proved a fertile ground for modernism. Since the occupation by Austria Hungary in 1878, Bosnia and Herzegovina underwent rapid social and economic modernization and a process of autonomization. Bosnian Muslims who then constituted a plurality of Bosnian inhabitants, were recognized as an autonomous religious community. In 1882, the Austrian Emperor nominated the Sarajevo Mufti a *reis-ul-ulema* – the head of Bosnian religious scholars, independently from the High Port in Istanbul. Refusing to have the Austrians administer their religious endowments, Bosnian Muslims organised a campaign for religious and financial autonomy. In 1909, the Kaiser accepted the claims and granted the Status of the autonomous Islamic community in Bosnia, making it a self-administered, self-financed and religiously independent Islamic community. The first *reis-ul-ulema* Bosnian Muslims elected was Džemaludin Čaušević, a modernist intellectual and a theological reformer who did not shun from arguing for women's rights and from admiring the modernist policies of Kemal Atatürk.

The fact that Bosnians had an autonomous Islamic community and were free to appoint their religious authorities, judges and teachers themselves (with the official seal being given by the Austrian state) meant that modernism was able to develop serious positions on issues of religious and social reform. The first decades of the 20th century were marked by debates between traditionalists and modernists. Even if Čaušević's modernists did not always have the upper hand, progressive thought in social issues, rationalism in theology and *ijtihad* in legal theory became established intellectual positions (Bougarel, 2017, pp. 22-23).

Rationalism and reformism were rooted in newly formed institutions. In 1887, the Austrian state financed and opened a High School for Sharia judges who were taught Ottoman sharia law and European law to be able to serve in officially recognized Sharia courts, incorporated locally to Austrian legal system. Along with modern law conceptions, the students were also taught courses in modern European thought. Several generations of students laid the ground for public intellectuals of Islamic and modern learning. Decades later, when in 1978

the school reopened as a Faculty of Islamic theology, the later leaders made rationalism and modernism their school's main line. Since the re-foundation by Husein Đozo, the Faculty is the most prestigious of Islamic learning in the Balkans and also the bastion of open-minded religious thought, seeking to integrate Islamic tradition and European modern thought.

Recent debates on Islamic tradition have shown just how far reformist thinking became a part of Bosnian Muslim identity. In an influential definition of the Islamic tradition of the Bosniaks, the legal scholar Fikret Karčić included modernism along with 5 other sources of Bosnian tradition: 1) hanafi-maturidi doctrinal belonging, 2) Ottoman-Islamic cultural heritage, 3) islamization of pre-Ottoman practices, 4) the tradition of Islamic reformism in the interpretation of Islam, 5) the institutionalization of Islam in the form of the Islamic Community and 6) the practice of the expression of Islam in a secular state (Karčić, 2006).

The consequences of such rootedness of reformism are not inconsequential. Today's professors, Đozo's students are those who develop today a very European definition of Islamic secularity. The legal scholar Fikret Karčić reflects on a shift in the understanding of Islam from a societal and political order, sanctioned by the state (such as Ottoman Empire) towards an understanding of religion within a secular order, restricted to the realm of ethical and not legal norms. Enes Karić, a professor at the Faculty of Islamic Studies, argues that secular states, that is, religiously neutral states represent a positive framework for traditional religious communities. Rather than ideology, religion gets "interpreted more as a faith, as a morality and as a basis for ethical norms." (Karić 2009).

Bosnian Muslim intellectuals thus keep a lively reformist tradition alive to the extent that Bosnian Islamic tradition is often taken as a possible perspective for a European Islam. Whether the institutions, interpretations and practice can really represent a transferable model for Muslim minorities in Europe is a contested question. (Mieke 2012, Jevtić 2017, Šuško 2017). It remains that Bosnian Islamic thought and institutions have the ability to combine both Islamic values and methods of justification, and a modern European orientation. Such openness is rather rare in the Islamic world. In many countries with an Islamic core, debates such as those held in Bosnia would not be able to develop in the public sphere. Even relatively free and complex countries such as Turkey are currently characterised by a strong ideologization of religious discourse.

What allowed Bosnia to be spared the fundamentalist storms of the Islamic cores was the marginality of Balkan Islam. The Bosnian Islamic tradition developed on a periphery, under the "protection" of the Austrian Empire, where it fought for autonomy at the margins of the Empire and then, it developed behind the Iron curtain. But there was more to it than that. There are other relatively secular, post-communist Muslim societies such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, where Islam sought to survive under the secularist lid, yet where little cultural development attests to its livelihood as a tradition. Bosnia was a different case: it was not only placed on a periphery, but it stood in relation to two cultural and political centers: the

religious center in Istanbul and the rational-political order of Vienna. Hence Bosnia's Islamic tradition developed also in relation to European modernising states.

This double relation, the double centrality of a Balkan Islam in Bosnia, makes it one of the rare countries – perhaps along with Tunisia – where secular state, reformist theology and lively intellectual debate are part of the national identity. Able to reconnect with its reformist part, able to combine modern state and traditional identity, the autonomous tradition of the Bosniaks are now studied as a possible model for another Islamic periphery, that of European Muslim diasporas.

Conclusion

The Balkans are all too often situated on the periphery. While the position at the margins seems undoubtable, there is little thought given to the notion of periphery. Instead of viewing the Balkans through a negative prism, and seeing the region as an “incomplete self” of Europe and as a region permanently short of modernization, this paper suggest a different, more balanced perspective. Peripherality means not just being marginal, but also having a relation to a center. Where more such relations exist – in cultural, economic, administrative, and ideological terms – a region may be a double periphery, with a double centrality and competing relations to centers. Further, a center is not always synonymous with development, dynamism or progress; a center may have a controlling and asphyxiating impact. Consequently, a complex periphery with manifold relations to centers may be a space of agency. The Balkans are an example of such a peripheral space: when we borrow Hatzopoulous' perspective and watch ideologies, institutions and their local logic, there are historical (Yugoslav communism) and contemporary (Islamic reformism) examples of such a productive peripherality. The second example portraying the Balkans as a productive periphery of Islam, may be more consequential today, as it shows the possibilities of an autonomous intellectual and institutional development at the margins of two cultural systems, such as the Islamic tradition and the modern state system.

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