

Centre for the Study of the Balkans Seminar

Dusan Bjelic (University of Southern Maine), 'Geopolitics of Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry: The Case of the Balkans'

Paper abstract

Following the historical patterns of colonial psychoanalysis and psychiatry in British India and French Africa as well as Nazi psychoanalysis and psychiatry, the psychoanalysis and psychiatry of the Balkans during the 1990s deployed the language of psychic normality to represent the space of the Other as insane geography and to justify its military, or its symbolic, takeover. Freud's self-analysis, influenced by his journeys through the Balkans, was a harbinger of orientalism as articulated by Said. However, whereas Said intended Orientalism to be a critique of the historical construction of the Orient by, and in relation to, the West, for Freud it constituted a medical and psychic truth. Freud's self-orientalization became the structural foundation of psychoanalytic language, which had tragic consequences in the Balkans when a demonic conjunction developed between the ingrained self-orientalizing structure of psychoanalysis and the Balkans' own propensity for self-orientalization. In the 1990s, in the ex-Yugoslav cultural space, psychoanalytic language was used by the Serb psychiatrist-politicians Drs. Raskovic and Karadzic as conceptual justification for inter-ethnic violence. Kristeva's discourse on abject geography and Zizek's conceptualization of the Balkans as the Real have done violence to the region in an intellectual register on behalf of universal subjectivity. Following Gramsci's and Said's "discourse-geography" I transmute the psychoanalytic topos of the "imaginary geography" of the Balkans into the geopolitics inherent in psychoanalytic language itself, and takes to task the practices of normalization that underpin the Balkans' politics of madness.

Dusan I. Bjelic is Professor of Criminology at the University of Southern Maine, USA. He holds degrees from universities of Belgrade (BA, MA) and Boston (PhD) and has taught courses in social theory, film, and ethnomethodology at Belgrade, Boston, and Tufts. Prof. Bjelic's publications include *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (The MIT Press, 2002, co-editor) and *Normalizing the Balkans: Geopolitics of Psychoanalysis and Psychiatry* (Ashgate, 2011).