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**The Importance of Being Central European:
Traces of Imperial Border(s) in Croatian
Accession to the EU**

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At one point in her book “Imagining the Balkans”, Maria Todorova (1997/2009), the founding figure of “balkanism”, warns us of the complex role that symbolic geography plays in the political aspect of border-making, by stating that “in the ambiguous relation between geography and politics, the latter seems to have the upper hand” (p. 139). “Europe”, after all, “ends where politicians want it to end” (ibid.), was Todorova’s conclusion in a passage which primarily addressed perils of the ideological usage of irresponsible scholarship, but later became a popular quote in various academic assessments of the relationship between symbolic geography and politics. The research on the symbolic geography of Croatia’s accession to the EU, which I have pursued in the past several years, leads me to conclude that Todorova’s statement that politics is seminal in the creation of symbolic geography, is not necessarily opposed to Liotta’s (2005), apparently divergent conclusion that “the mental maps that decision makers use have everything to do with how and where they draw the line” (p. 69).

The changed political context, as I will attempt to demonstrate in this text, may elicit changes in the interpretations of historical and cultural legacies and it may also lead to the introduction of completely new notions of national/regional identities in the public discourse. But an argument may also be made that certain notions of national/regional symbolic geography demonstrate resilience even in the face of altered political and societal circumstances: sometimes dormant, until a new opportunity arises, which will put them back into public circulation, and, on other occasions, functioning well within the changed framework, albeit with slightly altered or mutated meanings. In this paper, I will focus on the usage of several key notions of regional, South-East European symbolic geography – such are Western and Eastern Europe, Central Europe and the Balkans – in the political process of Croatia’s EU accession, in an attempt to demonstrate in what ways do I consider that the symbolic and the political aspects of border-making are mutually dependent and complementary.

About the research

In the past several years, I conducted three sets of semi-structured interviews with the representatives of different social groups, who were, in various ways,

connected to the European Union. The first set of interviews was conducted at the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008, with six Croatian negotiators with the EU. The second set of both group and individual interviews was conducted from February until May 2009 with fifteen Croatian law students, who attended a class on European Public Law. Finally, from February until May 2010 I interviewed ten applicants to the EU pre-accession funds for agriculture, such as SAPARD or IPARD. I chose these three groups, whose representatives varied greatly in terms of their age, education and social status, in order to avoid focusing the research to the notion of Europe and EU among the elite *intellectuals of statecraft*: journalists, academics, politicians, or government officials. The problem with narrowing the research solely to such groups of undoubtedly eloquent and well-informed people, is that they “tend to draw on and embellish a loosely coherent set of myths about nature, culture, and geography” (Gusterson and Besteman 2005: 2, cited in Kuus 2010: 15), even when they “do not work in the same end of the political spectrum“ (ibid.). My research confirmed such claims: some of the most intriguing (and, also, most difficult to analyze) notions of regional symbolic geography came from students and agricultural entrepreneurs, while the negotiators with the EU exhibited notions of Europe and the Union which were much more coherent and alike, even though they were not explicitly instructed by the government to assume certain stances for political reasons. Since this text is primarily directed towards the overlap of the political and the symbolic, I will mostly use examples from the interviews with Croatian negotiators with the EU.

In all of the interviews, I guaranteed anonymity to interviewees, for many times throughout the conversation their responses – were they not anonymous – could have lead them to embarrassing situations at work or at the university. Sometimes, I also revised those parts of the interviews which could have exposed the interviewees’ identity, for – especially in the case of negotiators – the number of total members of the group they represented was quite limited, so that their identity could easily be revealed.

Theoretical perspective

Several key studies, which analyzed the discourse within and about the Balkans, were published throughout the 1990s, in the context of wars on the territory

of ex-Yugoslavia, and that political context only reinforced these works' academic prominence. For the purpose of this study, I will emphasize the concepts of two authors, whose work has, in the past decade, confirmed its interpretive value in a number of critical analyses of the so-called Eastern enlargement of the European Union. First is the aforementioned Todorova's work on balkanism, in which she traces the genealogy of stereotypes about the Balkan peninsula, as an incomplete, liminal Europe, which is "semideveloped, semicolonial, semicivilized, semioriental" (p. 16).

Geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed as "the other," the Balkans became, in time, the object of a number of externalized political, ideological and cultural frustrations and have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the "European" and "the West" has been constructed. (Todorova 1994: 455, according to Razsa & Lindstrom 2004: 632)

Tracing the representations of the Balkans from the "discovery" of the peninsula in the 18th century writing of Western travelers, throughout the Balkan wars (1912-1913), which incited "news of the barbarities" that upset the neighboring, Western "civilized world", all the way to the more recent accounts of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s, Todorova (1997/2009) comes to a conclusion that the legacy of the Ottoman period has been the most important in the making of balkanism as a discursive formation. And unlike orientalism, which is a "discourse about an imputed opposition" (p. 17), balkanism is a "discourse about an imputed ambiguity" (p. 17): while orientalism deals with "differences between (imputed) types", balkanism "treats the differences within one type" (p. 19), so that, from the balkanist perspective, people in the Balkans were not viewed as essentially different from Europe, but less, or incompletely European.

Unlike Todorova, who insisted that there are important differences between balkanism and orientalism, Milica Bakić-Hayden (1995) draws on Edward Said's work in the examining of the "patterns of representation" within the Balkan region. Within the regional symbolic geography of the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, the author claims, the Western orientalist gaze, with its tendency to instill various dehumanizing stereotypes, such as "primitivism" or "backwardness", is first appropriated, and then

reproduced to the country's first (south)eastern neighbor. Bakić-Hayden (1995) calls this discursive mechanism "nesting orientalism".

The gradation of "Orients" that I call "nesting orientalisms" is a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised. In this pattern, Asia is more "East" or "other" than eastern Europe; within eastern Europe itself this gradation is reproduced with the Balkans perceived as most "eastern"; within the Balkans there are similarly constructed hierarchies. I argue that the terms of definition of such a dichotomous model eventually establish conditions for its own contradiction. (Bakić-Hayden 1995: 918)

Such a symbolic hierarchy in the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, states Bakić-Hayden (1995), revolved around the Austro-Hungarian legacy, so that the inhabitants of the northern Yugoslav republics, which, later, became states, such as Slovenia and Croatia, considered themselves to be more advanced, modernized, Western-like, and apt to "join Europe", and, at the same time, they reproduced the understanding that there is a "Balkan burden" further toward South and East, which prevented the non-Balkan parts of the country "from being what they 'really are' – European" (p. 924). On the other hand, those parts of ex-Yugoslavia which were placed lower on that same scale, invented their very own "'others', whom they perceive as even lower" (p. 924). Thus, for example, "eastern Orthodox peoples perceive themselves as more European than those who assumed identities of European Muslims and who further distinguish themselves from the ultimate orientals, non-Europeans" (p. 922).

The aforementioned importance of Austro-Hungarian legacy in the regional symbolic geography is intertwined with the notion of Central Europe. In 1983 Czech writer Milan Kundera published an essay under the title "Tragedy of Central Europe", in which he named Central European countries "a kidnapped Occident": politically, they were under Soviet domination, but, culturally, they still belonged to the West, which had forsaken them because of its own loss of interest in culture as an expression of highest values. Peoples which were named by Kundera as the ones belonging to Central Europe coincide with parts of Austro-Hungarian Empire: along with Jews, Kundera included Poles, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croats, Slovenes and Rumanians.

Some of the more recent critiques of such an imagining of Central Europe, emphasize the symbolic nature of that region, which was never a “place, but an intellectual and political project that functions to pass alterity further east” (Kuus, 2004, p. 480), and which was, also, based on the “moral superiority of the civilized Central Europe over the less civilized Russia” (ibid.). Attila Melegh (2006), claims that the idea of Central Europe was (re)introduced in the public discourse in the 1980s, and that it played an important part in the political call for the “return to Europe” of the countries of the former Eastern Bloc.

In the analyses of the usage of Central European identity in the discourse of Croatian social and political elites in the 1990s (Lindstrom 2003; Rihtman-Auguštin 1999), it may be noted that the primary call for the “return to Europe” – which, in case of Croatia, failed because of the war that ensued quickly after the declared independence – acquired an even more important meaning of the “escape from the Balkans”. Rihtman-Auguštin (1999), thus, claims that in the 1990s the Balkans were equally abhorred by the ruling as well as the opposition parties, so that, while the ruling party threatened “the people and the opposition with the Balkan black hole” (p. 35), the opposition proved that it was “the government itself that behaved in a Balkan manner”, which “led (...) into that same black hole” (ibid.)

EU as a mentor

In my research on the notions of the European Union in Croatia, I was inspired by the body of work which focused on the symbolic power relations in the political process of the so-called Eastern enlargement of the EU. Such a perspective, among other things, insisted that the issues of culture and history, pertinent to the symbolic geography of the whole continent, should not be extricated from the academic research in this area. And a number of authors, which critically examined the EU expansion toward East, were inspired, or, at least, informed by earlier analyses of discourse on Eastern Europe, and, especially, the Balkans (cf. Böröcz 2001; Busch & Krzyżanowski 2007; Kuus 2004; Melegh 2006; Zielonka 2006). The relationship of the EU towards candidate countries in the accession process evoked colonial metaphors, which, in some opinions, pointed to the imperial past of some of the core states of the Union (cf. Böröcz 2001), a legacy largely absent from the “official”

politics of representation of the EU. More often, though, a more abstract sort of coloniality was evoked, one which does not necessarily imply “territorial occupation and direct exploitation”, but rather a “complex form of domination, including the hierarchical classification of the populations of the planet, the reformulation of local concepts of space and time, the export of sexual energies into the ‘East’, the ‘imperial gaze’ and most importantly the *colonization of consciousness*”, defined as “an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values” (Melegh 2006: 29). From such a perspective, the conditionality which the EU applies in the enlargement process was regarded not only as a pragmatic political tool, but also as a means of assuming the position of a privileged tutor, a licensed interpreter of the advanced practices and civilized behavior.

Thus, Merje Kuus (2004), for example, claims that “approaching EU enlargement through the lenses of postcolonial theory would (...) highlight the dichotomy of Europe and the East” (p. 483) which is seminal in this political process. The author claims that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are still perceived in a manner similar to the orientalist representations of the former imperial colonies. The “implication of inferiority stems from construing Eastern Europe as essentially different from Europe and not yet fully European” (p. 483), and this *inscription of otherness* does not “operate with clear-cut dichotomies but with gradations” (ibid.). Such a discursive mechanism, which Kuus (2004) names “gradation of Europeanness” is present in the discourse in which the enlargement of the EU is embedded, and instead of encouraging the candidate countries to “challenge East/West dichotomies”, it encourages them only to “align themselves with the right side” (p. 484).

Attila Melegh (2006) describes a similar discursive mechanism of exclusion, which he names the “civilizational” or “East/West slope”, which is based on a simple premise: that the level of civilization toward the East gradually diminishes, while the climb up that imaginary ladder is enabled through “gradual Westernization of different areas of the world” (p. 5). Symptoms of such a mechanism, claims Melegh (2006), may be found in the EU enlargement, and especially in the so-called Copenhagen criteria, which, among other things, assesses the readiness of a country to join the EU. The enlargement of the EU is not, asserts the author, imagined “as a

negotiation between the assigned political body of the EU and certain nation states, with a deadline to be met, but a timeless process” (p. 17) in which the criteria such as the “rule of law” or the existence of a “functioning market economy” – are deliberately vague, and “imply processes with no real end” (ibid.).

The ongoing research on the enlargement reveals that the relationship between the *center* and the *periphery* of the continent continues once the country joins the EU, in which members are divided across divisions such as old and new, big and small, developed and undeveloped (cf. Busch & Krzyżanowski 2007). More optimistic views stress that the enlarged EU may offer a better opportunity for the expression of alternative visions of Europe (cf. Blokker 2005; Blokker 2008).

In an attempt to empirically research the importance of symbolic geography in the analyses of political processes, Busch and Krzyżanowski (2007) performed interviews with the members of the so-called European convention, in which the representatives of accession and candidate countries participated in the making of the draft of the EU constitution along with the representatives of the member states. Based on the analysis of the interviews, the authors foresee “that the incorporation of new member states will continue the further reproduction of exclusive visions of Europe” (p. 117), which were previously conveyed by the *core* members of EU. In the “previously excluded” countries of Eastern Europe, the authors claim, such visions often collide with “their own traditional view that they constitute ‘Europe’s last outpost’ and that ‘non-Europe’ starts the other side of their own eastern borders” (p. 118).

Results

In the interviews with the Croatian negotiators with the EU, I followed the line of research which examines, as Liotta (2005) writes, how “divisions and linkages that history, culture, religion, politics and empire have drawn for Europe are still forces at play today in the mental maps that decision makers bring to their policies” (p. 69). The question in my research which elicited most answers concerning such “divisions and linkages” asked my interviewees to place Croatia within one or several regions in Europe.

In the previous parts of interviews, negotiators mainly expressed pragmatic notions of the EU, according to which, for example, Union is not a “magic wand”, which will make things right at the moment of Croatia’s accession. The European Union was, as one of my interviewees said, a community of common people, made of “flesh and blood”, who have their faults and weaknesses, and Croats should feel equal to them. Or, as another negotiator pointed out, since Croatia cannot remain isolated from European integration, it may be a better choice for its citizens to “participate in the making of these decisions, than to be left out, and simply apply” the decisions, which are decided upon elsewhere. In these notions, there were no traces of discursive mechanisms which essentialize differences and turn them into values (cf. Melegh 2006). As it turned out, these mechanisms were not inexistent, but inactive, and the question regarding Croatia’s regional affiliation clearly revealed that, underlying the politically pragmatic notions of the EU, there was another level of completely different, hierarchical notions of culture and identity.

A typical example of this change of levels in the notions of Europe and the EU was an interviewee, who first stated that the EU was founded on a mutual interest of its citizens to survive on the cruel global economic market, and that Croatia’s interest in joining the EU should be similar: as a small country of five million people, it could only strengthen its economic position by joining. Later in the conversation, though, the same negotiator explained that Croatia is placed on the crossroads of different cultures, and that its future success depends upon the country’s ability to “move away” from the Balkan part of its identity, and “apply the way in which the organized states of Central Europe” function.

C: In this, we were greatly helped by Austrians and Hungarians, when they enslaved us a couple of hundred of years ago, so that... It did leave a deep trace, and especially in the perception of culture, and so on.

X: The perception of culture?

C: In our people, no?

X: Oh. And how do our people perceive culture?

C: Culture, the meaning of culture, regardless of the fact that material poverty, which lasted here for a long time, did make a lot of impact here. But, our people are inclined to consume

culture, even the one (...) traditionally Austro-Hungarian, no? There are a lot of people who want that, no?

X: What do you mean by that concretely?

C: Well, theatre, such fine things, no?

The question of regional affiliation induced my interviewees to talk about culture and history, and it is in his realm that this negotiator switches from the pragmatic rhetoric of “mutual interests” to a clear example of a “civilizational slope”. Suddenly, Croats are not all that equal to other EU members, but placed somewhere in-between the more civilized nations of Central Europe and its more barbaric, Balkan surrounding. These statements point to the importance of the imperial legacy in the current political context: faced with the discourse of EU enlargement, in which historical ties with the West are highly valued (cf. Kuus 2004), even the *cultural enslavement* by the civilizationally more advanced nations may be interpreted as a lucky twist of Balkan fate.

Most of negotiators that I interviewed placed Croatia in the region of Central Europe, which they perceived as the most “European” part of nation’s identity on the path toward the EU. When asked the same question about regional affiliation, another negotiator answered that Croatia could simultaneously belong to three different regions: the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and Central Europe. But, in the part of the interview in which she explains the symbolic importance of the accession to the EU, she only mentions Croatia’s belonging to Central Europe, a region which is part of the “Western culture and civilization”. In the following answer, the same negotiator reveals how the supposedly strictly political process of accession intersects with symbolic geography, for – as she said – in the negotiation process, Croatia’s belonging to Central Europe is often underlined.

D: We always try to emphasize that we are part of Central Europe, that we are part of that Western culture and civilization, that we are significant and important - which we are - and it [Croatia’s accession to the EU] will be that icing on the cake, I would say. So that: yes, the answer is definitely yes. We deserve to be in the Union because we are like that, and we will be, in a few years, even better, and that definitely is (...) merit for the people, no? You

know... The formal recognition of Croatia as a country that we recognize already to be, and on that symbolic-cultural, culturological level that date will definitely be... It.

While joining the EU is a matter of “formal recognition”, belonging to the Western civilization is linked to the perception of Croatia’s cultural and national identity as “significant and important”, which reminds me of the *generative doubts* that Kiossev (1999) identifies in his historical examination of the cultures of European periphery: “that they have appeared too late and that their life is a reservoir of lacks of civilization”.

Another recurrent theme in the interviews was the notion of Croatia as more advanced and adjusted to “Western culture and civilization” than its South-Eastern neighbors, which is reminiscent of the overlap of symbolic geography and politics that Busch and Krzyżanowsky (2007) point to: the reproduction of the „exclusive visions of Europe,“ which is present in “core EU voice” (p. 117), is often compatible with the national myths of the newer members of the Union, according to which “‘non-Europe’ starts the other side of their own eastern borders” (p. 118). References to Croatia’s Austro-Hungarian legacy exhibited examples of such an overlap in my interviews, as well.

One of my interviewees, for example, explained that, regardless of the negotiations with the EU, Croatia always belonged to the “circle of Central European countries”, and because of that, it should not be compared to the countries of ex-Yugoslavia, or countries such are Romania or Bulgaria. The same negotiator hopes that, once it joins the EU, Croatia will regain its place on the “civilizational slope” that it has, apparently, lost with the “dissolution of Austria-Hungary.”

A: We have no use in making comparisons with Bosnia, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Bulgaria and Romania, which will, in nine out of ten analytical showings, demonstrate that Croatia is in the first place. That was clear to me even before somebody started such an analysis. But, through its economic structure and history, economic position even in the time of Yugoslavia, Croatia is somewhere close to the countries of Central Europe, so that the membership in the European Union will, in a way, close that chapter which was started with the dissolution of the Austria-Hungary.

In many other instances, regional affiliation to Central Europe evoked imperial ties of Croatia with the Habsburg Empire. One negotiator, for example, declared that Croatia is similar to Austria and Slovenia because “solutions which we have are, in fact, the same as Slovenian and Austrian”, and then she went on to remark that, in one of the areas of expertise that she is in charge of, Bosnia falls behind Croatia some “300 years”.

Another negotiator pointed out that, in the accession process, it is most important that Croatia applies the accession criteria. But, at the same time, he mentions Croatia’s “mutual history” with Austro-Hungarian monarchy and Italy as something of potential value in the process.

B: So, that probably a land-registry which we use since - which was great - since Maria Theresa, qualifies us to have some, I don’t know, maybe to have books in a better order than, maybe, Serbia or Bosnia or, I don’t know, maybe, Greece. I don’t know how much it can contribute. But we definitely are in that South European surroundings, and there are no question marks about it, we are here.

Apart from the mechanism of “nested orientalism”, which, in this case, uses Croatia’s Austro-Hungarian legacy in the essentializing of differences between Central Europe and the Balkans, the aforementioned land-registry is even more interpretatively challenging as a historical trace deployed in the regional border-making. Therefore, in the following analysis, I will apply the understanding of borders as tidemarks, an idea proposed by Sarah Green (2009), which opposes the traditional understanding of border as line – “a static entity, fixed in place, without time” (pp. 6-7). Tidemarks should be thought of as a beginning of a concept which “combines space and historical time, and envisages both space and time as being lively and contingent” (p. 17), they are “what is left after some kind of past activity has occurred, and often implies more activity to come” (p. 7). Tidemarks do retain some sense of line, but “in the sense of connection and relation, in the sense of movement and trajectory, and in the sense of marking differences that make a difference” (p. 17), and, unlike the common notion of borders, they are not necessarily located on the territorial edges.

The example of land-registry cited above points to the “irreducibility of historical *time* in borders”, because “time is crucial to experiences of border, and an element that makes clear that border is something best thought as an active entity” (p. 12). It could be argued that the border-making potential of a simple land-registry was dormant, next to non-existent until the political context changed in a way that valued the adjustability to the EU, and, even more generally, Western criteria. *Having books in a better order* than Bosnia or Serbia, or having them in an order which makes Croatia more similar to the current EU members, such as Austria or Hungary, may be an advantage in the accession process. The rise of an older, Austro-Hungarian tidemark, which included Croatia, may also be interpreted as a call for reshaping the current, political tidemark, which divides Croatia from the European Union. Such an understanding, though, is possible only if historical time is viewed as inseparable from space in the examination of the nexus between political and symbolic border-making.

A similar overlap of the symbolic and the political I found in another set of interviews, which I conducted with Croatian law students. Statistical surveys often reveal that Croatian students are eurosceptical above-average, and my interviewees confirmed those results in that their general political stance was against European Union. One of the primary targets of their critique, though, was not the EU itself, but the dominant political representation of the Union as a political goal *per se*, a matter without real choice.

Since this text focuses on the traces of imperial borders in Croatia’s EU accession process, I will only discuss one example from these interviews, in which a female student recounts her visit to Budapest with a group of friends. In front of the Hungarian parliament, the guard informs them that tickets are free “for Europe,” while “for the other ones it’s not free”.

I: So, he only said: “for Europe.” Now, we are looking at whether to ask him is it the European Union, or what? All in all: Europe, Europe. (...) And in front of us Italians, Germans, French, all different languages. OK. He bumped in, I don’t know, a friend of mine, as if he will go, so that the five of us don’t have to. And he returns: Fuck... Europe, and this,

and that. Now each one of us has to pay 15 euros. And what? We are not European community, we are not European Union, we are the Balkans. Then we teased them: ‘Come on, we have the longest border with you, we are neighbors. So what? We signed the Stabilization agreement,’ this and that. Nothing. It does not work. We entered inside, and everything there was made of wood, was made of Slavonian oak. Then we teased each other: Do I have to come to Budapest, and pay 15 euros to watch Slavonian oak?

Another nexus of space and historical legacy emerges here. An older, imperial tidemark, whose material trace is Slavonian oak, once used as building material, serves to emphasize Croatia’s belonging to Europe. A newer tidemark is materialized at the entrance to the Parliament building, and it both physically and financially separates the EU from non-EU citizens. In this example, the older tidemark is used as a decentering and destabilizing tool, when juxtaposed to a more recent border, which is, in this account, regarded as less substantial, even provisional and arbitrary. Similarly to the aforementioned land-registry, Croatian oak in the Hungarian parliament emerges as a “solid” proof that Croatia’s place is within the EU, while the current exclusion of Croatian citizens from the rights that the EU citizens have becomes the object of mockery.

Conclusion

In this text, I attempted to examine how the symbolic geography of the region, which the EU now names Western Balkans, overlaps with the political process of EU enlargement.

Most of the interviews I made with Croatian negotiators with the EU, shared a common feature: underneath a politically pragmatic rhetoric, which stressed rational reasons why Croatia should join the EU, there was another level of completely different, hierarchical notions of culture and identity.

Some of the key notions of the regional symbolic geography – such as the Balkans or Central Europe – retained their previously established meanings (cf. Razsa & Lindstrom 2004; Rihtman-Auguštin 1997) in the face of the changed political context, in which Croatia is in the process of accession to the European Union. Thus,

the negotiators mainly interpreted Central Europe as a metonym of “Western culture and civilization”, while the country’s Balkan identity was dominantly portrayed in the interviews as a burden, an unwanted part of national identity. And, although the discursive mechanism of “gradation of Europeanness” was used in order to differentiate Croatia from its South-Eastern neighbors, the interviewees placed more importance on demonstrating that Croatia’s Central European legacy makes the country more similar to the present members of the EU, such as Hungary or Austria. From the “return to Europe” in the 1980s, via the “escape from the Balkans” in the 1990s, Central Europe in Croatia in the 2000s came to mean the nearest, “neighboring EU”, and this is, in my opinion, the primary reason why the imperial, Austro-Hungarian legacy regained its importance in the “ambiguous relation between geography and politics” (Todorova 1997/2009: 139). In my research, the symbolic and the political were mutually intertwined in a manner which prevented me from discerning which one has *the upper hand*: it was clear, at least from some of the answers, that negotiators emphasized Central European part of Croatia’s national identity in the negotiation process, even if they were not politically instructed to do so. But it could also be argued that they did so because the discourse in which EU enlargement is embedded highly values historical ties with the West (cf. Kuus 2004).

I also attempted to demonstrate that the understanding of borders as tidemarks (Green 2009) is useful in the examining of the overlap of the symbolic geography and politics because of the importance it places on the nexus between space and historical time. While tidemarks bear traces of past activity, they also announce “more activity to come” (p. 7). In the examples I outlined, tidemarks which denote Croatia’s imperial legacy were used as a means of destabilizing and decentering the current political border, which separates Croatia from the EU. In the discourse of the negotiating elite, as well as in some of the students’ accounts, the old, imperial tidemarks were used in the reproducing of derogatory, orientalist stereotypes further towards East, a mechanism which Bakić-Hayden calls “nesting orientalism”. But even more so, they were used to reinforce the European aspect of Croatia’s national identity as well as to demonstrate that the current EU border is arbitrary, not much more than a provisional line which only proves that “Europe ends where politicians want it to end” (Todorova, 1997/2009:139).

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